

THE CRUISE OF THE SALLY D

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THE CRUISE OF THE SALLY D

BY

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The Cruise of the Sally D.

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The Cruise of the Sally D.

CHAPTER I UNCLE BEN'S ADVICE

Uncle Ben picked up a bit of driftwood, and began to whittle it to a fine point. The boy looked at him anxiously.

"Well," said Uncle Ben at last, "I never allowed that a lad had the right to run away from his home, an' I've lived nigh to sixty years, man an' boy, consekently it stands to reason that I oughter know how much trouble is likely to come from sich didoes."

"Huh!" the boy broke in, "you don't call the 'Sally D.' a home, do you? I guess you wouldn't if you'd lived on her a spell."

"No," said Uncle Ben, "after what you've told me I don't. An' Cap'en Doak was only your stepfather at the best of times. Now that your mother's dead it don't appeal to me that he's any relation whatsoever, so, consekently ag'in, an' holdin' that a schooner can't be called a house, which same is necessary to the makin's of a home, what's wrong with your sneakin' off unbeknownst to Cap'en Doak before the 'Sally D.' weighs anchor?"

"But where could I go, Uncle Ben? I haven't got so much as one cent in this wide world, an' there's never a single person who would take me in. Besides, s'pose I sneaked off while the 'Sally D.' is lying here, I couldn't get away from the island, 'less you should set me across to the mainland."

"I wasn't countin' that you would leave the island, Sammy. What's to hinder your stoppin' right where you are, an' helpin' me out in the lobster fishin'? I'm allowin' that Apple Island ain't the worst place in the world, 'specially when you compare it with the 'Sally D.'s' cabin while Cap'en Doak is ragin' 'round findin' a lot of fun in knockin' you fore 'n' aft by way of exercise. Now, I don't wanter be taken as meanin' that I think lobster fishin' is a very encouragin' business for a bright little shaver like you; but it goes way ahead of the lay you've got with that stepfather of yourn. What your mother ever saw in Eliakim Doak to make her willin' to marry him, 'specially after she'd been on what you might call terms of friendly acquaintance with your father, beats me."

"Mother did it all on my account," Sam cried quickly, his eyes filling with tears as he spoke of his "best friend." "You know we had nothin' left but the house when father died, an' Cap'en Doak made her believe that he would give me a start in the world with a good education."

"All of which he perceeded to do by gettin' the little money ye had inter his own hands an' squanderin' it," Uncle Ben exclaimed as he angrily splintered the result of his handiwork. "Speakin' from your mother's end of the trade, it was a mighty good thing she died less'n a year after she hitched up with Cap'en Doak, though it come tough on you. Does he allow that you're to spend your life—or the best part of it—as cook aboard the 'Sally D.,' with never a cent in the way of wages, when you, an' he, an' everybody knows he squandered full fifteen hundred dollars of your money, for I've been told he sold the house at that

figger?"

"He says that he's bound to take care of me," the lad replied, as if anger was rapidly getting the better of him.

"An' he's doin' it by keepin' you aboard that ramshackle old schooner, which is likely to drop inter pieces any minute, an' savin' what he'd otherwise have to pay as wages to a cook!"

"He'd serve me out terribly if I should try to run away from him," Sam said half to himself, with a tremor as of fear. "If I sneaked off while the 'Sally D.' laid at anchor here, he'd know just where I was."

"Well, an' s'posen he did?" Uncle Ben asked sharply, looking down at the lad as if in anger. "S'posen he did, what good would it do him? I don't allow that I own this 'ere island; but I pay rent for it, which amounts to much the same thing, an' Eliakim Doak would soon find out that he couldn't tromp over me! Sneak off inter the bushes this very hour, lad, so's to give me a chance to talk to the old heathen in what you might call a sensible way, an' I'll guarantee he'll up anchor without raisin' any very considerable of a row."

"An' what then?" the boy asked as he looked over his shoulder apprehensively, much as if fearing his stepfather might suddenly have come within ear-shot.

"Why then me an' you'll strike out for ourselves. I own the shanty yonder, the dory on the beach, two hundred or more lobster-pots, with cars an' what lawyers call 'other appurtenances,' an' you shall have a fair share of what money comes in the way of Apple Island. I'm allowin' it would be a favor to you, though that ain't the chiefest reason why I'm makin' it. I'd like to have for mate a decent lad like you, for it's lonesome here sometimes—that much I'm willin' to admit."

"Why is it that you never had a mate, Uncle Ben? I've heard lots of folks puzzle over the same question."

"I reckon you have, lad, for this 'ere coast of Maine is mightily given to gossip. I've had the question put to me time an' time ag'in; but never felt called on to answer it till now, when it may be we're likely to come together as mates. First an' foremost, why did I come off here nigh to forty years ago an' settle down to catchin' lobsters, when it seems as if a man what was put inter this world to help others as well as himself mighter done better? It was all on account of my havin' been the rankest kind of an idjut when I was young, same's you are."

"Oh, come, Uncle Ben, you don't think I'm as bad as all that," said Sam Cushing, smiling.

"Well, you got to prove it," grinned Uncle Ben. "Anyway, I couldn't figger out that book learnin' would do me any good, an' I didn't get it when I might, consekently I wasn't fitted for much of anythin' else. Howsomever, I made up my mind that even a lobster catcher might lead a clean life, an' I never run up

agin any who might be willin' to go inter the business an' at the same time come to my way of thinkin'; therefore an' consekently I never took on a mate; never so much as offered so to do, till you come to me this mornin' with the story of what Eliakim Doak was doin' in his own behalf."

"But I couldn't really be a mate of yours, Uncle Ben!" the lad said with a deep indrawing of his breath, as if the honor was far too great for him.

"Why not? All I ask of a mate is that he shall live, so far as he's able, in the way the good God allowed he oughter, an' from the first time you landed on this 'ere island I've said to myself that you was a decent kind of a lad who wouldn't knowin'ly go wrong. Mark ye, Sammy, I don't set myself up as bein' any better'n my kind; but this you can go sure on: that I don't reckon on bein' worse. I've allers had an idee of considerable weight in my mind, an' you might be the beginnin' of my runnin' it out, so to speak."

"What do you mean, Uncle Ben?" the lad asked curiously.

"That's what I ain't goin' to say offhand, my boy. We'll wait an' see if there's any chance of its workin' out the way I've figgered it in my mind. The question is whether you're minded to run away from Cap'en Doak an' the 'Sally D.,' takin' your chances on Apple Island with me?"

"If you think I won't be a bother an' if you're willin' to——"

"In case I hadn't been willin', or hadn't figgered in my mind how things might turn, I wouldn't have made the offer, lad," and once more Uncle Ben fell to whittling a pine stick as if his very life depended upon fashioning it into a certain shape within the shortest possible space of time. "An' it ain't any one-sided offer, Sammy Cushing, 'cause I'm allowin' that your comin' would be a pleasure an' a profit to me, as Deacon Stubbs would put it, to say nothin' of the fact that you'd be livin' a more decent life than will ever fall to your share aboard the 'Sally D.'"

"It'll be a big thing for me," and Sam looked timidly in the direction of the slovenly schooner which lay at anchor in the little cove near by Uncle Ben's oddly-constructed dwelling. Sam was trying to screw his courage to the sticking point of running away from the selfish stepfather who had abused him sorely since that day when the grave closed over the earthly form of his mother. "It'll be a big thing for me if it can be done; but I'll smart for it if Cap'en Doak ever gets his hands on me ag'in."

"If he does, I'll be there to take a share in the business," Uncle Ben said mildly, his usually mild blue eyes taking on the hue of steel. "Come up to the shanty an' we'll fix you out for runnin' away, which shouldn't be necessary, seein's there's nothin' to run from."

Then the old man closed his knife with a sharp click, as if to show that the important business conference was finally closed, and went with a certain well-defined air of resolution toward that collection of shanties of which he was

the proud architect, and which had served to shelter him from the storms and sunshine such as had visited the coast of Maine during the forty years just past.

The captain of the "Sally D." was stretched out at full length on the top of the cabin, apparently asleep, when the old man and the boy skirted the shore of the cove on their way to Uncle Ben's home, but that he had been keeping a watchful eye on the surroundings could be told when he cried sharply:

"Are you goin' to loaf away the whole day ashore, Sam, or do you count on comin' somewhere nigh to doin' your share of the work? It strikes me things are at a pretty pass when the cook of a schooner can spin yarns here an' there while he should be wrastlin' with dinner!"

"Don't let him rattle you," Uncle Ben said warningly to Sam, and in a louder tone he addressed the half-stupefied captain of the "Sally D." "I'm allowin' that the boy has earned the right to do pretty nigh as he pleases, while you're layin' here when the fishin' oughter be good outside."

"I'll lay here till I feel good an' ready to get under way!" Captain Doak cried angrily, and Uncle Ben replied placidly:

"Then by the same token the boy will stay ashore till he gets tired of decent company."

Captain Doak raised himself on one elbow as if thoroughly astonished that any one should dare speak to the owner and commander of the "Sally D." in such a manner; but evidently did not think it necessary to make reply, for he fell back on the deck once more, and Uncle Ben said to his young companion in a tone of disgust:

"Leave the poor, miserable creeter alone, Sam. If it wasn't for raisin' a row that wouldn't be seemly, I'd advise tellin' him offhand what you count on doin'; but the smoothest way is allers best, so you shall sneak off as has been agreed, till he leaves the cove."

"An' then?" Sam asked in a tone of fear.

"When he comes back, if so be he does, an' which seems likely, I'll be the one to deal with him, for by that time I'm allowin' we'll have the right to count you out of it. But you can make up your mind that he won't raise any great of a row, seein's he's got sense enough to know on which side his bread is buttered. I've got a lease of Apple Island, an' there's no fisherman comes ashore without my say-so, while I pay the rent."

Having thus thoroughly defined his position, Uncle Ben led the way into the odd collection of building, saying as he took from the rude cupboard a generous amount of eatables:

"Here's what'll keep you from bein' hungry for a couple of days, lad. Strike inter the bushes near the spring, an' I'll pass the word when the 'Sally D.' has weighed anchor."

In a timid manner, as if afraid of being caught in what seemed like an act of insubordination against lawful authority, Sam gathered up the food Uncle Ben had laid on the table, and then hurriedly, as if actually fleeing for his life, he ran toward the thickest of bushes which marked the centre of the island.

CHAPTER II

THE RESCUE

There was no idea in Sam Cushing's mind as he ran at full speed in the direction of the thicket which grew very nearly in the middle of the island that he was doing anything wrong in thus endeavoring to hide from his stepfather. Although the lad had not spoken, save to Uncle Ben, of the cruel treatment received from the captain of the "Sally D.," through fear lest people might think he was "whining," he knew full well that if his mother was alive she would advise him much as the old lobster catcher had done.

It was the fear of what Captain Doak might be able to do in the way of punishment that had prevented him from attempting to escape from his besotted, cruel taskmaster; but now, with Uncle Ben to aid him, the situation was changed very materially, and but for the fear that his stepfather would succeed in recapturing him, the lad would have been more nearly happy than at any time since his mother went out from this world into the beyond.

Fear of what Captain Doak would do in case he succeeded in laying hands on him once more served to lend fleetness to the lad's feet and to strengthen his courage, while he took good care not to loiter within sight of the "Sally D." and to make thorough search for the best possible hiding-place.

From a distance the thicket appeared to be dense, but once he was among the bushes there seemed to be a woeful lack of opportunities for concealment in case careful search of the place should be made. Hurrying feverishly forward without coming upon that for which he sought, he passed entirely through the clump of evergreens, finding himself on that side of the island facing the open ocean before it seemed as if he had really begun the search, and then he would have turned in alarm to gain such poor shelter as the bushes afforded, had he not seen, rising and falling on the heavy swell, that which so attracted his attention as to render him forgetful, for the moment, of what the "Sally D.'s" commander might be able to do.

Hardly more than a hundred yards outside the long line of creamy foam which marked the eastern ledge, was what appeared to be a partially shattered boat.

"She's wrecked," said Sam. "I wonder where she came from. Hullo!"

The boy gave a start of surprise, and looked intently at a dark spot among the wreckage. "There's some one there!" But it was not possible for Sam to gain a very good view of the shipwrecked person, because nothing save his head could be seen above the surface, and even that was hidden now and then as a curling wave submerged it.

Now indeed had Sam forgotten that such a man as Captain Doak ever had an existence. He understood in a twinkling that unless immediate aid could be given, the sufferer would be beaten to death upon the jagged rocks, if indeed any life yet remained.

Dropping the food Uncle Ben had given him, he ran swiftly seaward until arriving at the water's edge, and then, throwing off his clothing, he made ready for what must necessarily be a struggle. By wading just inside the reef he came to the point where it seemed most probable the shattered boat would be cast ashore.

By this time it was possible for him to see that he who had fallen into such a sore plight was a lad of about his own age, who waved his hand feebly once, as if imploring aid.

"I'll bring you ashore, never fear!" Sam cried, hoping by such words to animate the boy, who was evidently on the verge of exhaustion. "Don't let go the boat till I've got a good grip on you!"

Once more the lad waved his hand, and even though he had been inclined to speak, there was no opportunity, for by this time his frail support had been caught up by the green waves as they made a dash for the rocks.

"Keep your wits about you!" Sam cried cheerily as he ventured a few paces further into the sea, and the words were hardly more than spoken before the stranger lad was lifted high in the air.

Accustomed as he was to the surf, Sam knew exactly what should be done, and he performed his task as well as Uncle Ben, skilful surfer though he was, could have done it. Bending his body until he was very nearly in a stooping posture, and at the same time taking good care that he had a secure foothold, Sam allowed the wall of water to pass entirely over him, when he stood erect once more, ready to meet the receding wave as it drew back the half-drowned boy.

Defly he seized him by the collar of his woolen shirt, which, fortunately, was unbuttoned at the throat, and then came the struggle for life, when the treacherous undertow tugged at his legs and the weight of the lad he was bent on rescuing, flung seaward by the heavy wave, threatened to overwhelm him. It

was no slight task Sam had undertaken; but thanks to his experience in battling against the surf, he finally succeeded in dragging the stranger beyond reach of the next hungry wave, and then fell on the sand beside him, with not sufficient strength remaining to stand upright.

No longer than while one might have counted thirty did Sam remain thus inactive, and then, still panting from his recent struggle, the lad gave all his attention to the boy whose life he had saved.

"I reckon you're all right now," he said, with an effort to speak cheerily, "an' the sooner you move around a bit so's to get rid of the salt-water cargo you must have taken aboard, the better you'll feel."

"It don't seem as if I'd ever get back the use of my legs," the lad said, but without making any effort to follow the advice given, and Sam replied with a hearty laugh which had in it more of relief than mirth:

"This ain't the time to give in beaten, when you're out of your troubles. 'Cordin' to the looks of that boat you must have been washin' 'round quite a spell."

"Since jest before daylight this mornin', an' it's pretty hard work to make myself believe that I haven't been overboard a whole week."

"How did it happen?"

"My boat was run down by the Boston steamer—leastways, I believe it must have been that. I went out alone to bait trawls, 'cause we was short-handed aboard the 'Flyin' Fish,' an' there was no dory-mate for me—"

"Who sent you out alone in the night baitin' trawls?" Sam cried indignantly.

"Why, Cap'en Moses, of course; he allowed, seein's how it was good weather, that I might do the job."

"How long have you been sailin' with sich a cap'en as that? He'd make a good mate for Cap'en Doak!"

"This was my first voyage, an' I ain't much of a sailor, 'cause I've never been to sea before."

"What's your name?"

"Tom Falonna."

"Where do you live?"

"That's what I don't rightly know, since I cut loose from Mother Sharkey's place. You see, I did chores there for my board, but it seemed as if I oughter earn more'n that, so I got a chance to ship on the 'Flyin' Fish' for a short cruise. I was to get ten dollars a month, if I turned in good shape, so that's why it seemed all right for me to try my first at runnin' trawls alone. Now I'm afraid I shan't find Cap'en Moses again. Where am I?"

"On Apple Island, with the best man, except my father, who ever lived. He'll see to it that you don't take any more chances of bein' run down in the

night by a steamer, but——”

Sam ceased speaking very suddenly. For the first time since sighting the young fisherman he remembered that Captain Doak had an existence, and a disagreeable memory it was indeed.

Hurriedly he told Thomas Falonna of all that had happened within the past four or five hours, concluding by saying as he looked around timidly:

”I’ve got to hide somewhere till the ’Sally D.’ weighs anchor, an’ there’s no tellin’ but that Cap’en Doak is close at hand this very minute!”

The rescued lad sprang to his feet, but with some little difficulty, apparently putting from his mind all thoughts of self as he realized that the boy who had rendered him such great service was in sore need of aid, and followed to the best of his ability when Sam ran back to where he had left the food given him by their Uncle Ben.

”I couldn’t find a place to hide in the bushes, an’ it’s lucky I didn’t, else I wouldn’t have seen you,” Sam said hurriedly when the two were together once more. ”It won’t do for me to hang ’round here very long!”

”Why don’t you go up behind them big rocks? I reckon you could keep out of sight by dodging from one to the other, even if the old brute was pretty close to your heels,” Falonna suggested as he pointed to several huge boulders just under the break of the land, and Sam caught at the idea without delay.

Five minutes later the two lads were hidden fairly well, save in event of a systematic search, and it was Tom Falonna who ate the food with which Uncle Ben had provided Sam, for the rescued lad had not tasted even water since the night previous.

”I tell you this stuff is mighty good; but you needn’t be afraid I’ll take more’n a fair share, ’cause it may be quite a spell before your stepfather gives over huntin’ after you.”

”Take what you want; I’ll get along all right if I don’t have another mouthful till to-morrow, for it hasn’t been so very long since I had dinner, an’ you’re needin’ twice as much as we’ve got here. Tell me where your folks are?”

Tom’s story was not a long one. He had been born in Bavaria, and when only a few weeks old was taken aboard ship by his parents, who were emigrating to this country. Both father and mother brought from their native land the germs of fever; were taken sick during the voyage, and died in the quarantine hospital very shortly after having been brought ashore. Tom did not have a very clear idea of how he, as a small baby, contrived to live; his first memories were of the woman he called ”Mother Sharkey,” with whom he found a home, such as it was, until a few days before being cast up on Apple Island, when he had shipped as a green hand aboard the ”Flying Fish.”

Although the recital did not occupy more than two or three minutes, it had

hardly come to an end when Sam started up in alarm as if to take to his heels; but Tom forced him back behind the rocks as he asked in a whisper:

"What's the matter now? You'll be seen unless you're more careful!"

"Don't you hear that man talkin'?" Sam whispered in a tremulous voice. "That's Cap'en Doak, an' he's after me!"

"There's somebody with him."

"Yes, it's Uncle Ben."

"Then what makes you jump around so much? If the old lobster catcher is half as good a man as you think, he'll see to it your stepfather won't kick up too much of a row."

"I don't know whether he can stop Cap'en Doak when he gets goin' right strong, for he's terrible sometimes."

"Well, keep behind the rock, an' don't leave this place till you're certain he's got his eye on you. I've hid from Mother Sharkey so many times that I know how it oughter be done."

By this time the lads could hear plainly the voices of the two men, and but few words were needed to explain why Uncle Ben was in such bad company.

"I know he's somewhere on the island, an' I'll hunt him out if I stay here a week!" Captain Doak was saying angrily.

"You'll do nothin' of the kind, Eliakim Doak, an' that I'm tellin' you for a fact. I've allowed you to come across here rather'n have an up an' down row; but even if you got your hands on the boy you shouldn't take him away, an' that you can count on. As for stoppin' ashore here any length of time, that's for me to say. So long as I pay the rent, this 'ere island is my private property, an' if you're on it an hour from this time I'll bring suit agin you for trespass as sure as my name's Ben Johnson!"

"I'm allowin' to do pretty nigh as I please," Captain Doak cried in a rage, and Uncle Ben replied in a placid tone as he turned to retrace his steps:

"Cordin' to my way of thinkin', Eliakim, you're makin' the biggest kind of a mistake, an' I'm goin' to take the trouble to prove it before another half hour goes over our heads."

The lobster catcher was some distance on his way to the opposite shore before he ceased speaking, and then, peering cautiously out from behind the rock, Tom could see that the master of the "Sally D." was decidedly disturbed in mind, for he stood irresolutely, shifting from one foot to the other as if uncertain exactly what course to pursue.

"What can your Uncle Ben do if the cap'en turns real rusty?" Tom asked in the softest of whispers, and Sam replied with a sigh of anxiety:

"It seems to me as if he can't do anythin', for there's nobody else on the island."

"Well, he's made a right good bluff of it, anyway, an' has got this pirate of yours guessin' mighty hard," Tom whispered in a tone of satisfaction, after which he turned his attention to spying upon the commander of the "Sally D."

CHAPTER III WAR DECLARED

Captain Eliakim Doak remained as if in deep thought for several moments after Uncle Ben left him with what, from such a placid man as the old lobster catcher, was a most emphatic threat. Bluster as he might, and even Deacon Stubbs had been heard to say that the commander of the "Sally D." was stronger at blustering than he was at fighting, he understood full well that it would be in the power of Uncle Ben to make matters very inconvenient, if not absolutely disagreeable for him.

As a matter of course Uncle Ben as the owner or lessee of the island had no right to forbid vessels to anchor in the coves; but it was for him to say who should be permitted to come ashore, and the fisherman who could not take aboard his water supply from this particular place would be put to great inconvenience. Until to-day Uncle Ben had welcomed any who pleased to visit the island, and was ever ready to lend a hand when it was needed, therefore it can readily be seen that for business reasons, if for no other, Captain Doak could not well afford to seriously offend the old lobster catcher.

The question to be decided in Captain Doak's mind was as to which would be the greater loss, Sam's services, which did not cost him anything in the way of money, or Uncle Ben's friendship, which really meant the shutting out of Apple Island's conveniences from the "Sally D." and her commander.

It was evident that Captain Doak decided he could get along without the lobster catcher's friendship better than he could the cook to whom he paid nothing, for after a brief time of hesitation and thought he said sufficiently loud to be heard by those who were hiding behind the rocks:

"If that old lobster thinks I'm dependin' on him for fresh water, he'll soon find he's mistaken, an' as for his standin' up with Sam agin me, I'll let him know that it's a job he'd better not tackle!"

Then, as if having forgotten that he had crossed the island in search of the runaway, Captain Doak followed rapidly in Uncle Ben's footsteps, and Sam

whispered to his new-made friend:

"There's goin' to be a big row now for sure. The cap'en has got his back up, an' I'm afraid Uncle Ben will get the worst of it."

"It kinder strikes me that we're bound to take a hand in it, 'cordin' to all you've said 'bout both of 'em," Tom replied in a matter-of-fact tone. "If your boss gets the upper hand things are likely to be warm for you, so the play is to put in what licks we can for the other one."

"We couldn't do anything!" Sam exclaimed with a long-drawn sigh. "Cap'en Doak would chew us all up before we'd even winked."

"I ain't so certain of that. I've never seen a row yet, an' I've been mixed up with a lot of 'em in my day, when a boy didn't have a chance to make considerable of a showin', if he was willin' to pitch in. Come on before it's too late! Your boss has got inter the bushes by this time an' won't be likely to know what we're up to if we keep our wits about us."

Sam, not believing it would be possible to lend aid to Uncle Ben, and not eager to come any nearer his stepfather than might be absolutely necessary, would have refused to leave his place of concealment, but Tom had stepped out from behind the rocks as he spoke, setting off at once in the same direction as that taken by Captain Doak.

"Keep close behind me an' I'll show you how to work a trick or two," Tom said, as if to show that he had taken command of the party, and then he walked at such a rapid pace that Sam could not have taken the lead even had he been so disposed.

It was not difficult to follow the commander of the "Sally D." without attracting his attention; the threat made by Uncle Ben had aroused Captain Doak's anger to such an extent that he appeared to have forgotten Sam entirely.

Until the angry fisherman had passed through the thicket Tom kept reasonably close to his heels, but when he came out into the open, on the slope which led to the cove, it became necessary for the boys to hang back until quite a distance in the rear. Therefore, when he turned sharply to the left around the shed in which Uncle Ben stored his fuel, the lads no longer had him in view.

In order to advance with the least danger of being seen Tom had made a wide detour to gain the shelter of a stack of lobster-pots, with no idea in mind that there was any necessity for moving rapidly. But suddenly he heard the voice of Captain Doak, raised high as if in anger.

"Now there will be a row, an' if we don't take a hand Uncle Ben is bound to get the worst of it!" Sam cried, as he urged Tom forward by gripping his arm firmly. "Come on! We've got to help Uncle Ben!"

His own fears were forgotten in the desire to aid the old man who had been so kind to him.

The boys arrived on the scene at the exact moment when their services were most needed by Uncle Ben, for the master of the "Sally D.," apparently half crazed by anger, was rushing toward the lobster catcher with clenched fists.

"I reckon here's where we get our work in!" Tom cried, as if delighted by the evidences of trouble, and catching up the first missile that came to his hand, which proved to be a lobster-pot buoy, with a half-inch rope made fast to one end, he ran between the two men, swinging the heavy weapon in a threatening manner.

So blinded by his rage was Captain Doak that he apparently did not see the newcomers until Sam, armed with a heavy stake, pressed close by the side of his friend, and then, suddenly recognizing the truant cook, the commander of the "Sally D." sprang forward to seize him.

"None of that, or I'll let this 'ere buoy come agin your head!" Tom cried threateningly. He swung his improvised weapon yet more vigorously, and Captain Doak fell back a few paces, for a single blow from the heavy missile would have inflicted a serious wound.

"Why didn't you stay in the bushes?" Uncle Ben asked sharply of Sam, and before the latter could reply Captain Doak shouted:

"Get aboard the schooner, you young idler, an' when I've settled with this Ben Johnson I'll 'tend to your case in sich a way that you won't try to give me the slip ag'in!"

"He'll stay where he is! An' if you raise your hand against him we'll see what the law can do toward makin' you pay over to the lad the money what belongs to him from the sellin' of his mother's house!" Uncle Ben cried, as he pulled Sam toward him, at the same time looking in bewilderment at Tom, as if wondering where he had dropped from.

Angry though Captain Doak was, he could understand without too great a mental effort that the odds were against him.

"If you think you can carry matters with sich a high hand, Ben Johnson, keep on tryin', an' before you're many days older I'll show you what claim I've got on that idle, worthless Sam. You've run agin the wrong man when you tackle me, an' I'll straighten out things on this 'ere island if I never wet another line this season."

"An' I'm tellin' you, Eliakim Doak, that you shall answer to the law for trespass. I've warned you off this place, an' you've stayed to threaten, so it's time I found out who's master here," Uncle Ben replied, his face pale with anger, but his voice calm and low.

Just for one moment Captain Doak lingered, as if to decide whether there was yet a possibility of his overcoming the small army opposed to him, and then, shaking his fist in impotent rage, he walked slowly away to where the "Sally D.'s"

dory lay with her bow on the beach.

Uncle Ben followed slowly, the boys trailing on behind him, and not until the fisherman had pulled off to the schooner was any word spoken by those on the island. Then the old lobster catcher said with a sigh, which might have been one of regret:

"I've lived here nigh to thirty years, off an' on, an' this is the first time I've had a hard word with man or boy. I reckon Eliakim an' I have declared war now, though, an' it stands me in hand to keep my weather eye open, for he ain't the kind of a man who's given to fair fightin'." Then, turning suddenly upon Sam, he asked, pointing toward Tom, "Where did that lad come from, an' what made you try to take a hand in the row?"

"We couldn't stand still an' see Cap'en Doak jump on you," Sam replied quickly, and then, in the fewest possible words, he told of Tom's rescue, giving to himself very little credit for what had been done in the way of saving life.

"It begins to look as if the good Lord was bound I should carry out the plan I've been turnin' over in my mind these many years," Uncle Ben said slowly, as if thinking aloud, and when Sam asked for an explanation of the words he added: "Get inter the shanty, lads; there's no good reason why you should stay outside here where the sight of you will only make Eliakim Doak worse. We'll talk this over later, when we've got more time. Now it stands me in hand to make ready for a trip to town."

"To town, Uncle Ben!" Sam cried as if in alarm. "If you go while the 'Sally D.' is layin' here, Cap'en Doak will come ashore an' serve me out terribly."

"I'm allowin' the two of us could make it mighty hot for him if he tried any funny business," Tom interrupted, and from the tone of his voice one would have said that it would give him no little pleasure to try conclusions with the commander of the "Sally D."

"I shan't go away while that schooner is anchored off here," Uncle Ben said decidedly. "What's more, I'm grieved that I've let my temper get the best of me, even though Eliakim did threaten. Howsomever, it stands me in hand to take the consequences, which are that I must go to town after riggin' up some kind of a plan so's to make sure of findin' you lads here when I get back."

"Is it because of your plan that you're goin', Uncle Ben?" Sam asked as if in doubt as to whether he had the right to raise such a question.

"No, lad, I've got to go, seein's how I allowed to bring suit agin Eliakim Doak for trespass, an' it won't do to break my word now. Besides, if I don't do something of the kind, there's no tellin' how far that man may dare to go for the sake of gettin' his hands on you once more, which is what I'm goin' to prevent. My plan can be talked over after we've settled down peaceably, so to speak, though it does really seem as if it was workin' itself out with no help from

me.”

”I don’t believe that the cap’en cares very much about the law, an’ I’m expectin’ he’ll keep on raisin’ a row till I just have to go back to the ‘Sally D.’” Sam said, with a long-drawn sigh, and Uncle Ben replied almost sharply:

”I’m allowin’ that he hasn’t cared much for the law back along, else he wouldn’t have dared to sell your home an’ put the money inter his own pocket; but it’ll go hard if I can’t bring him ’round to respectin’ what the court says shall be done. It seems as if I was goin’ back on all the principles I’ve held to by gettin’ inter law at my time of life; but it’s too late to draw out now, for neither he nor any other man shall hector a boy same’s he’s been hectorin’ you.”

Then Uncle Ben went into the shanty as if to make preparations for departure, while Sam and Tom stood watching the movements of the two men who could be seen moving about on the deck of the ”Sally D.,” and Tom finally asked:

”Who’s the other feller?”

”Rube Rowe; he’s a real good man, an’ has told me more than once that he wouldn’t sail in the ‘Sally D.’ if it wasn’t that Cap’en Doak pays him better wages than he could get on any other craft. You see, it ain’t easy to find decent fishermen who’ll sail with a man like him,” and he waved his hand in the direction of Captain Doak, ”so he has to give good money, or go without.”

”Would Rube Rowe do anything to hurt you?”

”Don’t reckon he’d think there was anythin’ wrong in draggin’ me aboard the schooner, if the cap’en said to, ’cause he’s my stepfather, an’ a good many people believe I’m bound to hang right by him. If it hadn’t been for Uncle Ben I’d never so much as thought of runnin’ away, an’ perhaps it would have been better if I hadn’t started, ’cause he’ll make it mighty warm for me if he ever gets me aboard the schooner.”

”You’ll be a softy if he does get a hold on you after all that’s been done. I’d like to see the fisherman who could haul me away from this island if Uncle Ben had allowed I might stay with him. It’s time your old schooner got under way.”

”I’m afraid Cap’en Doak won’t leave till he’s had one more whack at me,” Sam replied sorrowfully and then, turning abruptly, he made his way to the shanty that he might take counsel with Uncle Ben.

CHAPTER IV

A MATTER OF BUSINESS

When the boys entered the shanty the old lobster catcher was putting on his oilskins, and Sam said in surprise:

"I thought you counted on goin' over to town, Uncle Ben?"

"That's what I've got in my mind, lad, seein's there don't seem to be anythin' else that's pressin'; but I ain't reckonin' on leavin' while the 'Sally D.' is layin' here at anchor, for it would be much the same as invitin' Eliakim Doak to come ashore an' yank you off. But business is business. No matter how big a row we may have on hand the pots are to be hauled if we count on gettin' a livin', an' seein's how I've got three mouths to feed, it stands me in hand to look sharp after our bread an' butter."

"What shall Tom an' I be doin' while you're gone?"

"Doin'? Why, I was allowin' you'd bear a hand, same's decent lads oughter. If you two have gone inter partnership with me, it kinder looks as if you was needin' to get the hang of the ropes, so to speak."

"Is Tom to stay here on Apple Island with us?" Sam asked in surprise and delight.

"Where else can he stay? 'Cordin' to his story he ain't never known any more of a home than you've had since your mother died, an' seein's how you hauled him ashore, it looks as if we was in duty bound to take care of him, though, of course, it's for him to say if he wants to stay."

"That's what I want to do, if you'll have me!" said Tom, who had overheard the conversation as he entered the single room which served as kitchen, dining-room, bedchamber and parlor. "I ain't soft enough to allow you'll keep me 'round jest so's you'll have somethin' pretty to look at, so if you'll kinder show me how it's done, I'll tackle my share of the work."

"That's the way I like to hear a lad talk," Uncle Ben said approvingly. "I don't allow that I'm needin' two mates, seein's how the work ain't rushin'; but since you're both needin' a home, why it stands to reason that you oughter help run things the best you know how. We'll haul the pots, an' before that's been done I'm allowin' Eliakim Doak will get the 'Sally D.' under way. If he does, there'll be nothin' to prevent my goin' to town an' findin' out 'bout how I stand with the law when I set myself agin sich authority as a mighty poor stepfather has over a boy."

Then the old man, having put on his oilskins, led the way out of the shanty toward the dory, which lay high up on the beach, and Tom said in a whisper:

"Tell me how you go to work haulin' lobster-pots? I don't want to make sich a bloomin' chump of myself at the first go-off that your Uncle Ben won't have me hangin' 'round, 'cause it strikes me that this is a mighty nice kind of a place in which to live."

"You'll see how it's done when the first pot comes up, an' after that you

won't have to ask any questions. All you an' I have to do is row the dory, an' I reckon you can keep up that end of the work if you could go out runnin' trawls before daylight."

"If that's all he wants, I'll pull the bottom out of the dory, an' what's more, do it alone."

"It'll be a long stretch before we get 'round to all the pots, so you needn't jump to it so hard," Sam replied with a smile, which died quickly away from his face as he heard the captain of the "Sally D." hailing Uncle Ben, for by this time the old fisherman had come on the beach directly opposite where the shabby schooner lay at anchor.

"Don't be too brash, Ben Johnson, or you may find your neck so far inter a noose that you can't easy get it out ag'in. It's a serious matter to interfere 'twixt a lad an' them as has authority over him, as you'll come to know if you don't go slow!"

"I reckon there's little need for your cautionin', Eliakim Doak," Uncle Ben replied placidly. "I've been turnin' this ere thing over in my mind ever since William Mansfield told me how you'd been usin' the boy. If you want to see what the law's got to say 'bout it, that'll jest suit me, 'cause I'm countin' on knowin' what Sammy's rights are before we're many days older. I'm no kith or kin to him, but count it my duty, if nobody else is willin' to take up the matter, to see that he has what's comin' to him in this world."

"I'll make you wish you'd never been born!" Captain Doak cried in a rage, and then, much to Sam's relief of mind, he went into the "Sally D.'s" cabin very quickly, as if he had most important business there.

"Eliakim can bark right smart, but I reckon we needn't have much fear of his bite," Uncle Ben said, as he stood by the bow of the dory waiting for the boys to lend him a hand in launching her.

Five minutes later, the old lobster catcher and his small family were afloat, heading, with Sam and Tom each pulling a pair of oars, toward the nearest tiny buoy which marked the location of the first pot to be hauled.

Now, as a matter of fact, there isn't anything particularly exciting in hauling on a long wet rope until the cage-like lobster-pot is brought to the surface; but Tom was intensely interested in the operation so often repeated before the day's work had come to an end. Perhaps it was because he felt a certain eagerness to know how great a catch would be taken, and, perhaps, he was anxious to master all the details in the shortest possible space of time, so that he might be of real assistance to the old man who was offering him what he never remembered of having before in his life—a home.

When twenty or more pots had been hauled in, the marketable lobsters thrown into the dory, while the small ones were tossed overboard to grow a little

more, and the pots baited again with fresh fish, Tom insisted on being allowed to do his full share of the work.

"It ain't more'n loafin' to row from one buoy to another, an' there's no reason why I couldn't bear a hand, now I've seen how it's done," he said eagerly, and after some faint protest, Uncle Ben took up the lad's oars, as he said with a laugh:

"Have your own way, sonny, though the work is a bit heavier than you are counting on. If you two boys are reckonin' on helpin' me build up a family, I allow the sooner you break in at lobsterin' the better. Sammy here knows what little there is to be knowed about it, an' if you get inter the job in good shape there won't be anythin' for me to do 'cept dodder 'round ashore while you earn the livin'."

"I wish that could be the way of it, Uncle Ben!" Sam exclaimed earnestly, and then the conversation came to an end, as Tom made his first effort to catch the mooring rope of a buoy with the short gaff while the dory was gliding swiftly past the small target. It is not strange that he failed at the first attempt, for it requires no little deftness with a gaff to "hook on," and it was necessary for the oarsmen to back the dory here and there until the lad had the rope in his hands.

"Well," he would laugh, "I didn't make any great fist at it that time, for a fact; but it can't take sich a dreadful long time before I get the hang of it, an' when I do, this part of the work shall be my job."

And Tom did "break in" even sooner than Uncle Ben expected. Before he had brought half a dozen pots to the surface it was as if he had had considerable experience in such tasks, and Uncle Ben said approvingly:

"I declare for it, Tom, you're goin' to be a keen hand at catchin' lobsters! You handle them pots easier than I could do it, an' if so be I'm called on to stop at Southport over night, I'll know that you an' Sam can 'tend to the work as well as if I was here to do the bossin'."

Tom's eyes glistened with pleasure because of the praise; but Sam's face lengthened perceptibly at the possibility that Uncle Ben might be away from the island more than a few hours.

It was not yet two o'clock in the afternoon when all the pots had been hauled, emptied, re-baited and set again. The catch, consisting of twenty-two marketable lobsters, was thrown into the floating cage, called by the fishermen a "car," and Uncle Ben and his family were ashore once more.

"Now, if you lads will lend a hand at launchin' the keel-boat I'll get under way for Southport," the old man said as he pulled off his oilskins by way of "dressing" for the voyage. "I've got a fair wind across; but if so be it hasn't shifted long 'bout sunset, I'll stop over night with William Mansfield, rather than tackle the job of rowin' a heavy boat so far."

"But what about Cap'en Doak?" Sam asked, thinking of his stepfather for the first time since Tom had begun the work of "breaking in" at the work of lobster catching. Then he looked quickly around, but the "Sally D." no longer remained at anchor in the cove.

"Eliakim has made up his mind that it won't be safe for him to have any truck with the law after skinnin' you out of your mother's house, an' I reckon he won't show his head on Apple Island ag'in, 'specially after he hears 'bout what I've done—an' you can make up your mind that everybody in Southport will go out of their way to let him know I've been talkin' with the 'Squire, as I count on doin' before you see me ag'in."

"But suppose he should come back to hunt for me?" and now Sam's fears arose so high that it was with difficulty he could control his voice sufficiently to speak in an ordinary tone.

"There's little chance he'll put back right away," Uncle Ben replied without seeming to observe the lad's show of fear. "He's bound to do a little somethin' in the way of fishin', else how can he pay Rube Rowe's wages? I'm allowin' we shan't see him under three or four days, an' by that time I'll have your business fixed up so tight that he can't turn a hair. Leastways, it's 'bout the same as certain that he won't get under way an' come back to anchorage all in the same half day, so we can count on bein' rid of him while I'm away. Better catch a mess of cunners for supper, an' if so be that you're willin', tidy up the shanty a bit, for I've been mighty slack in my housekeepin' this past week."

Then, much as if eager to put an end to any further conversation regarding Captain Doak, Uncle Ben set about launching the keel-boat, and within a very few minutes after she was afloat he was sailing away from Apple Island in the direction of Southport.

Sam and Tom stood on the beach watching this kindly-hearted old man who had given them a home until he appeared to be hardly more than a tiny blot in the distance, and then Sam said, as he searched here and there with his eyes, as if fearing the "Sally D." had already hove in sight:

"It would be mighty tough on me if Cap'en Doak should come back 'twixt now an' sunset!"

"I'm not so certain of that," Tom said stoutly. "He ain't more'n any other man, an' it strikes me we'd be mighty poor kind of boys if we couldn't hold our own on this island. I wouldn't be afraid if your Cap'en Doak an' his Rube Rowe both come ashore at the same time, for with that buoy I had when he was here before I could make a pretty good play at keepin' 'em at a distance for quite a spell."

"But you couldn't stand up swingin' a buoy 'round your head all night," Sam suggested mournfully, and then as he thought of Tom's attempting to perform

such a feat during all the hours of darkness he broke into a hearty laugh, so comical was the picture in his mind.

"When you get through havin' sich a good time I reckon we'd better have a whack at cleanin' up the shanty 'cordin' to your Uncle Ben's orders," Tom said curtly, and without further delay the task was begun, although a careful housewife would have said they were making no improvement in the apartment.

When the shanty was, in their eyes, as cleanly and orderly as it could be made, Sam overhauled Uncle Ben's stock of fishing-lines, and during the half hour that followed they caught cunners and skinned them, until they had ready for the frying-pan as many as half a dozen hungry boys could have eaten.

"I'll cook the supper if you'll bring up from the beach wood enough to keep the fire going," Sam said, and from that time until a few minutes before sunset they enjoyed themselves as thoroughly as if they had but lately left the most pleasant homes in the land to spend a few days in pleasure on Apple Island.

They ate their supper and the shanty was once more set to rights. Near the door was a store of driftwood sufficient to keep a fire going many days, and the two had seated themselves on the cliff which jutted out above the roof of Uncle Ben's home to discuss the future, for Tom insisted on knowing why the old lobster catcher was willing to burden himself with two boys who had no legal claim on him.

Sam had begun to answer the questions by telling what he knew concerning the old man, when far away in the distance, directly in the golden pathway formed by the rays of the setting sun, appeared the outlines of a vessel.

"That's the 'Sally D.!'!" Sam cried in alarm.

"Cap'en Doak is comin' here after me, just as I was afraid he would!"

"How do you know that is his schooner?"

"There ain't another vessel sailin' out of Southport that has a topmast like the 'Sally D.' What am I to do, oh, what am I to do?"

CHAPTER V

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR

Tom was apparently lost in surprise because the lad who had shown so much bravery by saving the life of a stranger at imminent risk of his own was nearly overcome by terror simply through seeing in the far distance that vessel on which

he knew was his stepfather.

He looked alternately at Sam and the "Sally D.," as if fancying that somewhere in the middle distance he might see that which would give him a clue to what was really a riddle, and failing in making out more than the wide expanse of restless waters, he turned toward his friend, asking impatiently:

"What's comin' over you so bad? S'pose that vessel is the 'Sally D.,' what's the use of worryin'?"

"Cap'en Doak is comin' ashore after me. He must have sailed around the island to wait till he saw Uncle Ben headin' for Southport, an' he could get his hands on me without much trouble. What'll I do? Oh, what'll I do?"

"Look here, Sam!" Tom cried impatiently. "If you're willin' to stand here on the beach when your stepfather lands, in case that vessel is the 'Sally D.,' an' in case he's comin' back after you, then I allow he might have a chance of pickin' you up without very much bother; but what's to hinder your makin' things lively for him?"

"What do you mean?" Sam asked helplessly, and it really seemed as if he had lost his wits in the sudden attack of terror which beset him so sorely.

"Mean? Can't you see that the cap'en of that 'ere schooner would have a mighty rough time gettin' his hands on you, if it was a case of huntin' for what he wanted? This ain't any toy island, an' I'd be willin' to bet great big dollars that there ain't the man livin' who could get hold of me if I wanted to keep out of his way! What's to hinder our layin' low in the bushes, if so be he comes ashore? I reckon he would be a good long day runnin' us down, an' before that happened your Uncle Ben would be back to take a hand in the scrimmage!"

The look of distress slowly died away from Sam's face as his companion spoke. He had been so overcome by terror at seeing the "Sally D." that there was no room in his mind for any thought save what Captain Doak would do if it was possible for him to work his will, but now he began to realize that he was showing himself very much of a coward.

"Say, that's so! You must think I'm a regular baby!" he said with a faint attempt at a smile. "Just for a minute it seemed as if I was bound to stand right here waitin' till Cap'en Doak came ashore. I guess we'll give him a good chance to hunt for us."

"That's the way to talk," Tom said approvingly. "We'll give him a run for his money, an' if he gets his hands on either of us I'm allowin' it'll be 'cause we've lost our heads. There's no reason why we should stay up here on the rocks where he'll see us, so let's slip down the other side where we'll be out of the way an' can see what he counts on doin'."

"Why not go straight back into the bushes an' find a hidin'-place?"

"'Cause there's no need of it yet a while. It wouldn't be any very big job to

keep ahead of him, with anythin' decent in the way of a start, an' I want to see how far he dares jump after your Uncle Ben has told him that he's goin' to law 'bout it."

Sam had no desire to linger in the vicinity. So great was his fear of Captain Doak that he would gladly have put to sea in the dory rather than take the slight chance of being captured on the island. But, having once shown himself to be a veritable coward so far as an encounter with the commander of the "Sally D." was concerned, he shrank from any further display of fear.

Therefore it was that the boys crouched behind the brow of the cliff, where a full view of the cove could be had, watching the shabby schooner as she crept nearer and nearer to the land, and Sam found it really difficult to prevent a tremor of fear from being apparent in his voice as he replied to Tom's questions regarding Uncle Ben.

The good people of Southport, where Sam had been born, knew that Benjamin Johnson was a native of the town, and even as a young man had been known as an "odd stick," who, when his father and mother died, earned sufficient to make a home for his two sisters by his labor as a fisherman. When the young women were married, Ben leased Apple Island, and for many years had worked industriously; it was generally believed he had saved considerable money, and there were many who, not knowing him of whom they spoke, called the lobster catcher a miser.

"He's been mighty good to me since mother died," Sam said when Tom had come to an end of his questions, "an' if he can make Cap'en Doak behave himself so's I'll dare to show my head, I'll be in great luck livin' here with him."

"Do you reckon he'll let me stay, too?" Tom asked anxiously.

"He has just the same as said you could, an' all we've got to do in order to have as good a home as any fellow could ask for, is to jump right inter the work, same's you've begun. It's a big lot of help to Uncle Ben, now that he's gettin' 'under old, to have somebody pull the pots, an' between the two of us we oughter tend to the business without his raisin' a finger."

"You can bet I'll do my part of it all right; but perhaps he ain't countin' on stayin' here very long."

"What do you mean?" Sam asked in alarm.

"That plan of his that he keeps tellin' about may have somethin' to do with leavin' the island."

Such a suggestion as this would have caused Sam no slight anxiety at any other time, for the possibility that Uncle Ben's "plan," whatever it might be, would involve his abandoning Apple Island had never occurred to the lad until this moment. Just now, however, while the "Sally D." was slowly but surely approaching the anchorage, he could give little heed to anything save the fear that Captain

Doak might succeed in getting hold of him once more.

Soon the lads could see the two men clearly, and Sam knew only too well that his stepfather was in a towering rage.

"He'll use up more'n one rope's end on me if he gets the chance!" the lad said with an indrawing of the breath, and his companion, trying to speak in a careless tone, replied:

"Oh, he'll have a mighty tough time gettin' near enough to make much trouble, no matter how long he stays. We'll wait here till we see what his game is, for there won't be any sense in runnin' 'round very lively before there's need for it."

The lads were not kept in suspense many moments. Within a quarter hour the "Sally D." was inside the cove; Rube Rowe let the anchor go with a rush, the sails were hauled down, but not furled, and with everything on the deck at sixes and sevens, Captain Doak jumped into the dory which was towing alongside, shouting impatiently to his solitary sailor:

"Bear a hand lively, Rube, for I ain't countin' on wastin' very much time over this job!"

"Lookin' for a boy on this 'ere island, an' the sun within half an hour of settin', is goin' to be a good deal like huntin' for a needle in a haystack," Mr. Rowe grumbled as he obeyed orders, and he was hardly more than in the boat before the angry captain had begun to row her to the shore.

"We'll go straight across the island, for if Ben hasn't taken him along the cub is sure to get as far away as possible, an' once we get our hands on him, it's a case of goin' aboard lively; I've spent too much time on him already."

"I ain't certain as the law will uphold us in takin' him by force, even if you are his stepfather," the sailor replied fretfully, and his employer cried angrily:

"Do what I tell you, an' I'll look after the law part of it. Don't be afraid of knockin' him down if you find that he can run too fast. Now bear to the east'ard an' I'll tackle the other end of the island; there's little chance he can give both of us the slip."

Having thus given his orders, Captain Doak set off at a rapid pace, passing within twenty yards of where the lads were cowering behind the jutting rocks of the cliff, and Tom whispered when the angry man was so far away that there could be no danger his words might be overheard:

"Now you see that it was best to stay right here; they don't count on our hangin' 'round near the cove, an' this is as good a place as we could find. I haven't had to sneak away time an' time ag'in from Mother Sharkey without gettin' a mighty good idea of how the trick can be turned."

During the next thirty minutes the boys remained silent but on the alert, one watching for Captain Doak, and the other for Rube Rowe, and the shadows

of evening were lengthening before either of the men put in an appearance. Then they could be seen coming directly toward the shanty, walking side by side, and Tom whispered triumphantly:

"They've given it up as a bad job, so all we've got to do is lay low here till they look inside the shanty, for it ain't likely they'll leave without openin' the door."

"Hadn't we better run while we've got a chance?" Sam asked tremulously.

"Not a bit of it. They'd be sure to sight us, but if we can keep our distance half an hour longer, it'll be so dark that they can't see an inch before their noses."

Sam literally flattened himself against the cliff, in his effort to hide, and hardly dared to breathe when the two men approached the shanty directly beneath him.

"If it wasn't so late I'd have that miserable cub out of this!" Captain Doak cried angrily as he kicked open the door of Uncle Ben's home, "an' even as it is he hasn't given me the slip, for the 'Sally' shall stay where she is till I've put him aboard."

"If that's the way you're feelin', I'm allowin' that we won't wet another line this season," Rube Rowe said with a laugh which caused Captain Doak to turn with upraised hand as if to strike a blow, and the sailor cried warningly as he put himself in a posture of defense:

"None of that, Eliakim, or you an' I'll part company mighty sudden! I ain't so fond of the 'Sally D.', an' it wouldn't take much of your funny business to give me my discharge."

"Don't talk crazy, Rube! What we're after is that young cub, an' this ain't the time to cut up rough."

"You're doin' the rough part of it, 'cordin' to my way of thinkin', an' I want you to understand that it won't take much to put me out of the job altogether. I ain't so certain that you've got the law on your side, an' then ag'in, I've allers felt sorry for the little chap, 'cause there's no denyin' but that you've led him the toughest kind of a life, an' he savin' you the wages of a cook."

"Hold your tongue! I know more 'bout law than that drivelin' old lobster catcher can tell me, so don't get the idee that I'm leadin' you inter any trouble. The boy is my stepson, an' he's bound to dance to my pipin' till he's twenty-one, or I'll know the reason why. Got any matches?"

"What do you want of 'em?"

"I'm goin' to set this shack on fire. Ben Johnson shall be made to understand what it means to buck agin me. If he was here, I'd give him a lesson that wouldn't soon be forgot; but seein's he ain't, I'll let him have a taste of what's comin'."

"If I had any matches you shouldn't have 'em to use on that shanty!" Rube Rowe cried angrily. "I know what it means to set a house on fire!"

"This ain't a house, you bloomin' idjut; it's nothin' but a fisherman's shanty, an' the law won't be troubled 'bout it. Besides who's to know we did the job, if we get under way lively—I can come back after Sam to-morrow."

"You'll get no matches from me," Rube growled as he walked rapidly up the shore, and Captain Doak, seemingly incited to yet greater anger by the opposition of his "crew," said hoarsely as he ran toward the "Sally D.'s" boat:

"I'll go aboard an' get what I want. When that's been done, you an' I'll have a settlement!"

"I reckon here's where we've got our work cut out for us," Tom whispered as he crept slowly to the top of the cliff. "That cap'en of yours won't set any shanty afire while I've got life enough to roll a lot of these rocks down on his head!"

CHAPTER VI A PITCHED BATTLE

In strict justice to Sam Cushing it must be set down that he was not a coward in any sense of the word, and certainly he proved himself to be brave when he saved the life of Tom Falonna at risk of his own, yet the idea of opposing the commander of the "Sally D." to the extent of provoking a personal encounter frightened him. More than once since the death of his mother had he attempted to resist when his stepfather was unusually cruel, and on each occasion had he suffered severely.

Therefore, it was that Tom's preparations to defend Uncle Tom's shanty against Captain Doak seemed to him an extra hazardous undertaking, more particularly since the chances of his being captured by his angry stepfather would, apparently, be increased, and, following Tom up the side of the cliff, he whispered entreatingly:

"Don't get us both into the worst kind of a muss! The cap'en an' Rube Rowe can surely get the best of us if it comes to a fight, an' then I'll be carried off on board the 'Sally'!"

"I ain't countin' on lettin' that villain burn the only home your Uncle Ben has got, 'specially while there are so many rocks layin' 'round here loose," Tom replied grimly, as he began gathering missiles where they would be ready for use. "'Cordin' to what he said, Rube Rowe ain't likely to take much of a hand in this

'ere row, 'cause he's got sense enough to know that settin' a man's house on fire is a mighty dangerous thing to do."

"He may not help start a fire, but he's bound to lend a hand if Cap'en Doak gets inter a row with us!"

"Then it'll be so much the worse for him, 'cause I'm goin' to make a mighty big try at keepin' that villain at his distance, an' if I can get one crack at him he'll be down an' out for quite a spell. There he goes for matches, an' I reckon he's too wild by this time to really know what kind of a sore he's breedin' for himself. Folks get sent to jail for what he's aimin' to do——"

"Then he'd be out of my way for good an' all," Sam said hopefully, and Tom replied in a tone of reproach:

"Yes, you'd be all right; but your Uncle Ben wouldn't have any shanty to live in, an' then what about our plan of stoppin' here with him?"

Sam had no reply to make; he was not a little ashamed at having thought only of himself and, as Tom had stated the case, he would be injured as much as benefited by such disposal of his stepfather as he had suggested.

The situation not only alarmed but perplexed him, and, not knowing what else to do, he watched the movements of Captain Doak, who could be seen only as a dark smudge against the lighter sky. The commander of the "Sally D." was standing erect in the dory as he pushed at the oars with a force and haste which told of the angry storm that was raging in his mind, and while Tom made ready his ammunition for the battle which was evidently so near at hand, Sam announced to him the movements of the man who was eager to work so much mischief.

"He's in a terrible hurry; perhaps because he's afraid Uncle Ben will come back before he can start the fire. Now he's alongside the schooner, an' jumpin' aboard. My, my! but ain't he movin' spry!"

"He'll jump 'round worse'n ever if he gets one of these rocks side of his head," Tom replied as he ranged the missiles in front of him with exceeding care.

"Now he's comin' out of the cabin, an' I s'pose he's got matches enough to set the whole island on fire. See him jump inter the dory! I tell you, Tom, he's mighty ugly by this time!"

"I ain't feelin' much like a lamb myself," Master Falonna said placidly as he brought up from the foot of the cliff yet more rocks. "I reckon I've got enough here to keep him at his distance quite a spell."

"He's comin' ashore—now he's on the beach! Look out for yourself!"

"Get up here where you can take a hand in this business! I'm countin' you'll do your share!"

"Of course I will!" Sam cried. If the battle had to come, he was quite as determined as his friend to prevent any mischief being done to Uncle Ben's property.

The lad had not yet gained a position by Tom's side when Captain Doak could be heard shouting to the "crew" of the "Sally":

"Hi! Rube! Come up here, you skulker, an' see what Eliakim Doak can do to them who try to tread on his corns!"

From far away in the distance came the reply:

"I ain't comin'! I hired with you for a season's fishin', an' when you go to runnin' your head inter jail tricks, I don't train in any of it!"

"You're a coward, that's what you are!" the angry fisherman cried, and the boys on the cliff could see him coming toward them swiftly. "If you're 'fraid of your own shadder, stand by to go aboard, for we'll weigh anchor as soon as this job is finished!"

Captain Doak hardly more than ceased speaking when he had come near the shanty; but before he could enter it, a warning cry sounded from the cliff, and a huge rock rolled swiftly toward him.

"Get back there, an' be lively 'bout it," Tom cried, "else you'll stand a chance of havin' your head broke! There won't be any funny business on this 'ere island to-night, 'less somebody gets hurt pretty bad!"

"Who's that?" Captain Doak asked in a rage, stepping back in order that he might have a view of the top of the cliff, and at the same instant a missile, smaller than the first, grazed his arm, causing him to leap aside very suddenly.

"Get back where you belong, 'less you want to be knocked out of time!" Tom shouted, and, sheltering himself as much as possible behind a projecting portion of the cliff, the commander of the "Sally D." cried in a voice hoarse with rage:

"I'll flog you within an inch of your life, you miserable shirker. Come down here, Sam, or I'll mark you with a rope's end as you've never been marked before!"

"I reckon you won't do much floggin' or markin' yet a while," Tom replied stoutly, standing with a missile in either hand, ready to fire a shot whenever Captain Doak was so incautious as to give him an opportunity. "Go aboard your schooner, 'less you're achin' to be 'bout the same as killed, for if we get a fair whack at your precious body it ain't likely you'll be very spry for some time to come!"

"Rube! Rube Rowe! Get around on the top of the cliff an' pitch them cubs down!"

"Do it yourself, if it's got to be done. I didn't ship with you for a pirate!" was the reply from the beach, and Tom added mockingly:

"I reckon you'll have to tackle the job yourself, cap'en, an' if you don't get all that's comin' to you before it's over, I'm way off my base. We've got plenty of rocks handy."

While one might have counted twenty, Captain Doak remained silent and motionless, and then a tiny spark of light could be seen near where he crouched,

which caused Tom to whisper:

"He's settin' fire to the rubbish, hopin' the flames will creep over to the shanty, an' perhaps they may, for the wind is settin' this way. If we'd only thought to bring up a bucket of water, it would be easy to put an end to his fun!"

"There are a couple of buckets behind the shed. If I could get down without his seein' me, it wouldn't take long to have 'em up here."

"Go ahead an' get 'em!" Tom whispered excitedly. "I'll see to it that he don't get out from behind the rocks while you're gone!"

Understanding that there was no time to be wasted if he would carry out the plan successfully, Sam made his way softly down the cliff, and in the meanwhile Tom watched anxiously the tiny threads of flame which began to curl up from amid the dried grass, seaweed and driftwood, and were fanned by the wind directly toward the shanty.

"I'll smoke you out, you cubs!" Captain Doak cried triumphantly as he pushed the blazing fragments forward with a short stick. "It won't be many minutes before you'll be glad to make a change of quarters, an' then will come my time!"

At that moment Sam came to the top of the cliff with the two buckets, each more than half full of sea water, and, seizing one, Tom waited until Captain Doak leaned forward to put more fuel on the rapidly increasing fire, when he threw the contents with rare good aim.

The water struck the commander of the "Sally D." full in the face, causing him to leap backward sputtering and choking, while a good deal of the liquid fell on the flames. The second bucket was emptied in the same manner immediately afterward, and all danger of mischief was at an end for the time being.

It would be difficult to describe clearly the exhibition of rage which the commander of the "Sally D." gave on being thus baffled by two lads. He stormed at Sam because the lad had dared to run away from the schooner; at Tom for taking part in a quarrel which was none of his, and at Rube Rowe for "skulking" on the beach when his employer was in need of his services.

The "crew" of the "Sally D." remained silent under the torrent of abuse during a few seconds, and then boldly announced his determination:

"I'm nothin' but a common, every-day fisherman, but I allow to be somewhere nigh honest. I shipped with you for a summer's work, an' never allowed to go 'round burnin' houses. If you give me one more word of abuse, I'll turn to an' help the boys so far as I'm able——"

"You'll finish out the season aboard the 'Sally D.,' or you'll never see a cent of wages!" Captain Doak cried, the words sounding hoarse and indistinct because of his rage.

"I'm allowin' that if I should go inter court with the story of why we parted

company before the season ended, I'd be able to collect all you owe me, if so be you've got property enough left to be attached by the sheriff; so I ain't worryin' 'bout that part of it."

Having thus defined his position, Rube Rowe, as the boys could see, set about launching the "Sally's" dory, apparently making ready to go on board, and Captain Doak, seemingly forgetting the enemy on the cliff, sprang out from his hiding-place as if to try conclusions with his mutinous "crew."

"Now's our chance!" Tom whispered as he threw two rocks with good aim, and an instant later the commander of the "Sally D." measured his length on the sand, evidently having been struck by one or both of the missiles.

"What if we have killed him?" Sam cried in a tone of fear when his stepfather made no effort to rise to his feet, and Tom replied savagely:

"I hope we have hurt him enough to put some sense in him; but you'll see him jumpin' 'round in a minute."

The lad spoke in a loud tone, and must have been heard by the captain, for he scrambled to his feet with all haste, running toward the dory as he cried shrilly:

"I'll shoot you boys if I have to spend a week on this bloomin' island!"

"Has he a gun?" Tom asked, as he sheltered himself behind the top of the cliff once more, and Sam replied with a laugh:

"There is one hangin' up in the cabin; but I've heard him say that it would do more harm to the fellow who fired it than to whatever it was aimed at."

"I don't believe he'll dare show himself near enough to shoot; but if he does I'll take good care that the next rock hurts him more. That fire ain't quite out yet, an' we'd better be gettin' more water while he's goin' aboard. Stay here on watch, an' I'll 'tend to that part of it."

Sam was not eager for the task of defending the cliff, therefore, before his friend could say anything more, he seized the bucket, running boldly down the rocky incline, careless as to whether he might be seen.

When he returned with the water, Tom threw it on the smoldering rubbish, and after assuring himself that the last spark had been extinguished, said in the tone of one giving valuable information:

"Your bloomin' cap'en has gone aboard, an' taken the sailor with him. I reckon you'd better get a little more water, an' then we'll kinder fix up 'bout what we shall do if he really tries to shoot us, though I don't believe he can make

any great fist at it with the kind of gun you say he's got."

CHAPTER VII

UNCLE BEN'S ARRIVAL

Sam filled both buckets with sea water and carried them to the top of the cliff, where they could conveniently be got at in case the commander of the "Sally D." made another attempt to burn the shanty, and, this done, there was nothing more to be done in the way of defense.

Now that he had time to consider the situation more calmly, and while they were waiting for Captain Doak to reappear, Tom began to have some misgivings regarding their ability to hold possession of the island against a man armed with a deadly weapon.

"Are you certain that gun of his ain't in condition?" he asked anxiously, and Sam replied with a laugh, as if there was no question whatsoever in his mind:

"I heard the cap'en say it had been loaded more'n two years, an' in that time, for it has been hangin' up in the 'Sally's' cabin all the while, it stands to reason it must have gathered considerable rust. Rube Rowe said he'd rather stand in front than behind it, in case anybody was crazy enough to pull the trigger."

"Then I reckon it's all right," Tom said with a sigh of relief. "I ain't backin' down any when it comes to stoppin' that bloomin' fisherman from burnin' your Uncle Ben's shanty; but I ain't had any too much experience in fightin' with guns. When I lived with Mother Sharkey it was only a case of dodgin' anythin' she could lay her hands on, an' I'm way up on tricks like that, 'cause you see I had to be mighty spry or catch it hot; but—"

"There comes Cap'en Doak, an' he's got the gun with him!" Sam cried, for he could make out, in the gloom, the outlines of a man emerging from the cabin of the schooner. "P'rhaps he's jest crazy-mad enough to fire off the thing without stoppin' to think of the rust!"

"I don't see but that we'll have to take our chances on it, 'cause it's too late to make a move now. Get a couple of rocks ready, an' when I say the word let 'em drive the best you know how. We're bound to do him all the damage we can. He started all this, and it's his fault if he gets hurt."

Sam armed himself as his companion had suggested, but at the same time he was far from feeling comfortable in mind. It was to him a very serious matter,

this attempting to work injury to a human being, and the idea came into his mind that he would be solely responsible for whatever might happen, because, by at once giving himself up, to his stepfather, he could put an end to further trouble on the island, but in such case he would receive most terrible punishment.

"Look here, Tom," he said in a tearful tone as he allowed the rocks to drop from his hands, "this row wouldn't have come off if I hadn't run away from the schooner an' I can stop it all now by goin' aboard the 'Sally' an' takin' what the cap'en sees fit to deal out in the way of a thumpin'. I'm goin' to give in, an' then there won't be any danger Uncle Ben's shanty will be burned."

"You ain't goin' to do any sich foolish thing!" Tom cried, excitedly. "An' what's more, your Uncle Ben's shanty won't be burned while there are plenty of rocks near by! S'pose you hadn't run away, where'd I be now? Swashin' 'round off the shore with the fish havin' a Thanksgiving dinner, an' on account of that I'm bound to hold up the biggest end of this 'ere scrimmage. You won't go aboard the schooner to-night, not if I have to hold you on this cliff with one hand while I fight the cap'en with the other. Here comes the old pirate, so get busy!"

Captain Doak had lost no time in coming ashore after getting possession of his weapon, and as Tom spoke he was advancing rapidly toward the shanty, apparently confident of speedily reducing the defenders to subjection.

"Hold on there! You've come far enough!" Master Falonna cried when the angry captain was a hundred feet away. "The next time we knock you down it won't be so easy to get up!"

"I'll shoot you loafers full of holes!" the commander of the "Sally D." cried, the tremor of his voice telling that he was almost beside himself with rage; but to Tom's relief, he took good care to remain at a respectful distance from the foot of the cliff. "I'm willin' to give you one chance more, an' if you ain't wise enough to take it, there's goin' to be a whole lot of trouble on this island. Let that worthless Sam go aboard the 'Sally' this minute, an' I'll get the schooner under way in a jiffy. If he—"

"Never mind 'bout the rest of it, mister, 'cause Sam's goin' to stay right where he is, 'less we have ter come down an' wipe the earth up with you. I reckon you're right when you say there's goin' to be trouble; but you're the one what'll have it!"

For reply Captain Doak raised the gun as if to take aim, and Tom whispered excitedly:

"He's goin' to shoot! Let him have it!"

At the same instant he suited the action to the words; four missiles came skimming down the cliff, one of them striking the rusty gun within an inch of the captain's face, and another hitting the commander of the "Sally D." on the left leg with a thud that could be distinctly heard.

The ancient weapon was knocked from the captain's hands, or fell when he grasped the injured limb as if in greatest distress, and then came from his lips a regular torrent of abuse and threats.

"I don't allow you're doin' us any damage by usin' your tongue so much; but at the same time I ain't willin' to stand here doin' nothin' while you're shootin' your mouth off at sich a rate," Tom said threateningly, as he armed himself with more rocks. "Get on down toward the beach, or I'll try my hand at bruisin' your other leg!"

To the surprise of both the boys, Captain Doak hastily obeyed this command, hobbling off as if it caused him keenest pain to use the injured member, but at the same time taking good care not to linger within range of those whom he had attempted to bully.

"What do you think of that?" Tom cried in astonishment as he watched the commander of the "Sally D." hurrying to gain the beach.

"He has gone off to try some other game, an' when he comes again we'll get it hotter," Sam whispered timidly, and Tom replied scornfully, almost as if disappointed because the battle had been ended so suddenly:

"Unless he puts up somethin' hotter we've wasted our time by luggin' up so many rocks. He's nothin' but a great big bully, that's what he is, an' the minute things ain't runnin' his way he's ready to cry baby. I'm goin' to get that gun!"

"Don't! Don't leave the cliff, or he'll serve you out terrible!" Sam cried, trying to prevent his companion from scrambling down the rocky descent, but Tom pushed him aside as he said disdainfully:

"It'll be a cold day when he uses me so very terrible, the big bag of wind!" and down he ran at full speed, Captain Doak apparently giving no heed as the lad captured the rusty gun.

In less than sixty seconds Tom was on the top of the cliff again, brandishing his trophy as he shouted to the commander of the schooner who, seated on the sand, was rubbing his injured limb energetically:

"It's time you went aboard, 'less you want to get another dose. We're here to look after things while Uncle Ben is away, an' don't count on havin' sich as you 'round here after dark! I'm goin' to pile a lot of rocks on this gun, when it has been pointed straight for you, an' then tie a string to the trigger so I can pull it without takin' the chances of havin' my head blown off. If you're in the way there'll be a mighty good show of gettin' hurt."

"What's goin' on over there?" a voice cried from across the water, and as the boys remained silent in surprise they heard the splash of oars in the distance.

"Uncle Ben has come back!" Sam shouted, in a tone of most intense relief, and immediately after came the question:

"What's the matter ashore?"

"Cap'en Doak has been tryin' to burn the shanty!" Tom replied, and from the deck of the schooner Rube Rowe took part in the conversation by saying irritably:

"I reckon you haven't got back any too soon, Uncle Ben. The skipper is crazier than a woodchuck, an' if the boys hadn't put up a pretty stiff fight he'd cut quite a swarth!"

There was no reply, but Sam fancied that the oars were worked more energetically, as if the old lobster catcher was in a hurry to gain the shore, and Tom whispered, as he made careful selection of two rocks:

"Let's get down on the beach about as soon as your Uncle Ben comes ashore, for there's no tellin' what that bloomin' stepfather of yours may try to do to the old man."

It is possible that Sam would not have ventured down from the cliff alone; but he could do no less than follow the example set by his companion and by the time Uncle Ben's dory struck the shore the two lads were so near that they might easily have fallen upon Captain Doak before he could do a mischief.

The old lobster catcher hauled his boat far up on the beach and threw out the anchor, lest she should drift away when the tide rose again, before saying anything to the man whom he had warned against trespassing on Apple Island. Then, instead of speaking in an angry tone, he said placidly:

"You are only makin' matters worse for yourself, Eliakim, by tryin' to work mischief. I allowed you'd let your temper get the upper hand an' so did what I could to protect Sam Cushing. I've finished the business at the Port, 'cordin' to what I promised, an' if you lay the weight of your finger on the lad ag'in you'll be buckin' agin the whole state of Maine, 'cause you've no longer got a shadder of a claim on him."

"What's the meanin' of all that, you old idjut?" Captain Doak cried angrily, looking toward Uncle Ben for the first time since he had come ashore.

"I mean that a legal guardian will be app'inted for the boy you've wronged outer his mother's house, an' his case will be looked inter by the judge. As for your bein' here, that's another matter, an' I've found out jest what rights I've got to this 'ere island, seein's how I pay rent for it. You're to keep a proper distance, Eliakim Doak, for I'm warnin' you off of what is the same as my property, an' if you put your foot on this place ag'in I'll have you sued for trespass."

"Hurray for Uncle Ben," said Tom gleefully. Sam was too astonished to speak.

"It takes considerable to get me started," Uncle Ben went on, "an' you mustn't think that all this has come on me sudden-like; I've had it in mind ever since the day you sold Sam's house, puttin' the money inter your own pocket, but didn't get 'round to straightenin' things till you allowed he was obleeged to stop

aboard with you, doin' a man's work an' gettin' nothin' in the way of wages." Then walking toward his shanty, giving no heed as to what Captain Doak might propose to do, the old man said to the boys, "I reckon it is time you turned in, for the night is gettin' old. Come with me, for growin' lads need a good bit of sleep to keep 'em in shape."

Tom and Sam followed Uncle Ben; but before entering the shanty both looked back to see what the commander of the "Sally D." was doing, and, much to their surprise, saw that he remained seated on the sand as when the old lobster catcher came ashore.

"He's not goin' to leave," Tom announced, as he closed the door behind him lest the subject of their conversation should overhear the words, and Uncle Ben replied placidly:

"He'll go aboard after a spell, an' get the schooner under way. An obstinate man is Eliakim Doak, an' it goes agin the grain to be forced inter doin' what he don't like. Have you had much trouble with him?"

Both lads told the story of what had happened on the island, giving the story in a fragmentary way, but none the less clearly, and when the recital was done Uncle Ben said in a tone of conviction:

"It's lucky he didn't have his will, an' p'rhaps it's well he kicked up a row, else I might have fiddled over my plan till there wasn't life enough left in me to carry it out as I've figgered on. Now it's the same as started, an' all owin' to Eliakim's bad temper."

Sam and Tom looked at each other in perplexity. Uncle Ben appeared to think he had accomplished something of importance, and yet they failed to understand what he meant, for to mix a plan of his with the actions of Captain Doak seemed much like trying to combine oil with water.

"What is it, Uncle Ben?" Sam asked after waiting in vain for the old man to make the necessary explanations. "How did Cap'en Doak's tryin' to burn the shanty have anythin' to do with your plan?"

"It wasn't what he tried to do since I left that made any difference; but only because I knew he was out to make trouble. I'll get a bite to eat, fill my pipe, an' then, while I'm takin' comfort, you shall hear all about it."

The old man set about making ready a meal, and while he was thus engaged Tom crept out to learn what move Captain Doak might have made, returning five minutes later with the report that the commander of the "Sally D." yet remained

on the beach as when they had left him.

CHAPTER VIII

UNCLE BEN'S "PLAN"

Before Uncle Ben's "bite" had been made ready the boys understood that it was quite time for them to have breakfast. Already the first gray light of the coming day could be seen in the eastern sky. and it surprised them not a little at thus realizing how long a time had been spent in defending the shanty.

"It didn't seem to be as if we'd been foolin' with Cap'en Doak so long, but 'cordin' to the looks of things he's made a night of it," Sam said in surprise, as he looked out of the shanty door at the sky.

"I'm reckonin' you got so excited that you couldn't keep any very close run of the time," and as he spoke Uncle Ben displayed a slice of juicy steak he had brought from the mainland. "What do you think of that? It ain't very often I allow myself to buy meat when there's plenty of fish to be had for the takin', but this seemed to be what you might call an extry occasion on account of its bein' the beginnin' of my plan."

"You said you'd tell us what that was," Sam suggested carelessly, and the old man replied with a merry laugh:

"That part of the story will come in reg'lar order, but not till I've wore the edge off my appetite, for it makes a man feel mighty sharkish to pull the greater part of the way from Southport to Apple Island."

"Why didn't you wait till mornin', same's you figgered on?"

"Wa'al, I'd got through with the business concernin' Eliakim Doak, an' somehow—I can't rightly say why—it seemed as if I was needed here, so I made sail. P'rhaps it was lucky I did, for that stepfather of yourn had let himself drop inter a bit of temper."

"Temper!" Tom repeated with a laugh. "He was boilin' mad, that's what ailed him, an' ready for all kinds of trouble. Couldn't you use the dory's sail?"

"None to speak of, lad, none to speak of. A dory makes more leeway than headway, when it comes to standin' up agin the wind, so after foolin' 'round with the canvas for a spell I took to the oars. Time was when I didn't mind a pull from here to the Port, but now it seems like a longish job. This meat smells good, eh?"

"That's what it does!" Tom replied emphatically. "I haven't had anythin' to

eat but fish for so long that it seems like I must be growin' fins."

"Wa'al, we've got plenty of time to enjoy this, 'cause we won't need to pull pots till well toward noon. Jest take a squint outside, an' see if Eliakim is still nestlin' in the sand."

"He isn't on the beach, an' the dory has disappeared, so I reckon he's on board the 'Sally,'" Sam reported after a brief survey of the shore.

"We'll hope he's got sense enough left to give Apple Island a wide berth in the future, for I've made up my mind that he shan't hang round here makin' trouble. The time has come when, if my plan is to amount to anythin', I've got to stick up for all the rights the law allows. I reckon you lads may as well fall to, for the meat is cooked, an' I've got two loaves of baker's bread to go with it, sayin' nothin' of these pertaters what are browned to a turn."

The boys did not need to be urged; both were hungry, as well they might be after the exertions of the night, and Tom was about to make an attack upon the potatoes without waiting for Uncle Ben to serve him, when he saw that Sam was sitting with bowed head, as if waiting for some ceremony to be performed.

"What seems to be the trouble?" he asked with a laugh, which died away very suddenly when the old lobster catcher began thanking his heavenly Father for the food with which they had been provided.

"It's the least we can do, Tom, to thank the Lord for all the blessin's He's allowin' us, for certain it is we don't deserve any," Uncle Ben said when his prayer was finished and he had begun to attend to the wants of his guests. "I ain't countin' on tryin' to read you a lesson, for any lad what's got common sense can see how much he owes his Maker; but I hope you'll kinder keep your weather eye liftin' till you come to realize how the thing stands."

Tom's face flushed, and Uncle Ben, understanding that he felt ashamed, set about telling of his doings in Southport, and how much of stores he was counting to bring from the mainland on the next trip.

Once during the meal Sam looked out of the door to make certain that the commander of the "Sally D." was not lurking in the vicinity; but nothing was seen to cause alarm. The schooner remained at anchor in the cove, and it was not yet sufficiently light to make out whether any person was on deck.

When hunger had been appeased, Sam insisted that he and Tom be allowed to wash the dishes while Uncle Ben was filling his pipe, and the old man was hardly more than ready to explain his "plan" before the lads were at liberty to act the part of listeners.

"I've had this 'ere thing on my mind for many a year, but never seemed able to get 'round to it till I heard how Eliakim Doak was treatin' Sammy, an' then I says to myself, says I, 'Benny, this is the time when you oughter be gettin' your plan under way,'" and Uncle Ben leaned back in his chair with the smoke

clouds curling around his head. "I allowed that I'd take Sammy in an' care for him, seein's how he didn't have anybody to look after him proper like. Then come the idea that if I could lend a hand to Sammy, why couldn't I do the same to half a dozen lads what was needin' a home; but the thing didn't come out straight in my mind till I was on my way to Southport yesterday."

"I can't seem to make out exactly what you mean," Sam said in perplexity as the old man ceased speaking, much as if his story had been told.

"It'll all come plain after a bit, lad, 'cause you see I ain't got inter my yarn yet, so to speak. Wa'al, I was turnin' the matter over in my mind jest before Tom takes it inter his head to show up, an' then I says to myself, says I, 'Benny, it's all bein' worked out for yer, so go ahead an' do the rest,' an' that's what I did yesterday, so to speak."

"But what did you do yesterday, Uncle Benny?" Sam asked in perplexity.

"That's jest what I'm tryin' to tell you, lad; but first an' foremost you must know what the plan really is. I allowed that this 'ere island was big enough for quite a family, an' that a good-sized school of boys might get a decent livin' here, if so be they was willin' to work. You see it wouldn't be much of a job to raise all the vegetables that a big lot of people could eat in a winter. Then ag'in, if we had a schooner the size of the 'Sally D.,' an' boys enough to run her, we'd be makin' a large dollar by fishin', with the lobster business goin' on same as ever. Now do you catch on to the plan?"

"You mean to hire a lot of boys to come here an' work for you!" Tom cried, believing he understood the drift of the old man's remarks.

"I don't mean to hire 'em, lad; but when we find a boy like you was yesterday, we'll say to him somethin' like this: 'If you're willin' to pay your own way in the world, want a home, an' will live peaceable one with another, come inter your Uncle Ben's family, an' we'll share an' share alike.' Now here are you two, both willin' to do a full share of work, an' here's me with the island, boats an' lobster gear for a start. We've already set ourselves up as a family, an' if so be we run across a decent lad who's in need of a home—mind you, we won't cavort 'round the country huntin' for 'em, but if we come across one, we'll give him a show on Apple Island, leavin' him at liberty to turn his back on us when things ain't to his likin'."

"Is it kind of a 'sylum that you're startin', sir?" Tom asked in a tone of disappointment, and Uncle Ben replied emphatically:

"Not a bit of it, lad, not a bit of it! We'll jest gather a family here, with no charity business 'bout it. Each one shall do what he can for the good of himself an' all around him. We'll have some rules, same's would be found in every proper kind of a family, an' when we can't live up to 'em, we'll separate peaceable an' friendly. It'll be a case of workin' for a livin', an' workin' hard; but we'll be able

to live snug, lads, for Apple Island ain't the worst place in the world, an' if so be the family grows till this shanty is too small for it, why all we have to do is build another."

Tom's face was aglow with pleasure, and Sam stood by the old man's chair that he might show his joy by caressing Uncle Ben's hand, worn and horny though it was with hard labor.

"Like the plan, eh?" and the lobster catcher appeared to be well pleased by the expression on the faces of the boys. "Wa'al, the Lord has been mighty good to me all my life, an' I've laid by a tidy bit of money, thinkin' the day might come when I could help them as hadn't had it as easy in this world as has been my lot, an' I reckon it's close at hand. When the family grows big enough, I can buy, an' pay cash for, a trim little schooner 'bout the size of the 'Sally D.,' an' then we'll carry on a reg'lar wholesale business in the fishin' line. I've jest taken a new lease for the island, runnin' twenty years, an' when that time has come to an end I'll be in the other world, while one of you is keepin' the family goin'."

"But what if Cap'en Doak should keep on tryin' to get hold of me now, when everythin' looks so fine?" Sam asked in a whisper, as if afraid of expressing his fears in words.

"You needn't have any trouble on that score, lad. When Eliakim turns up in Southport ag'in, he'll find out what I've been doin' an' won't dare to raise so much as a finger agin you."

"S'posin' there should be five or six boys here at one time, do you reckon we could all earn a livin'?" Tom asked.

"Earn a livin'? Why, the lobster fishin', carried on industriously, would run the whole family, an' if we have a schooner for deep sea work, there's no reason why we couldn't lay by considerable money. I'm countin' that when the time comes for me to go over the dark river, if so be the plan is carried out, I can leave you boys with a handsome capital. But remember this, an' don't let it out of your mind once, that the whole plan depends on every member of the family doin' his level best in the way of work. There'll be plenty of times when we'll have a chance for play; but while business is to be looked after, it's a case of hustle, 'cause lobsters an' fish don't hang 'round cryin' for lazy folks to catch 'em."

Then, his "plan" having thus far been given in detail, Uncle Ben went out of the shanty, much as if believing that these, the first two members of his "family," might want to discuss the matter, and no sooner had he gone than Tom exclaimed with a long-drawn sigh.

"Well I'll be blowed, if he ain't the best kind of a man I ever run across! Jest think of his workin' all these years with the idee of spendin' his money on a bloomin' lot of duffers like us!"

"He's mighty good, an' it makes me feel awful mean when I think that if it

hadn't been for you I wouldn't had the nerve to stand Cap'en Doak off when he was tryin' to burn the shanty!" Sam said mournfully, and hie companion cried cheerfully:

"Don't let any sich notions get to worryin' yer, Sam. If you'd been here alone I'm allowin' you'd perked up in great shape; but that pirate had kept the upper hand so long that you'd got kinder shaky. I wonder if he's had sense enough to make sail?"

By way of answering his own question Tom opened the door of the shanty, and an exclamation of mingled surprise and anger burst from his lips as he looked out:

"Well, he's the worst ever! Will you look at the miserable sneak comin' ashore again! Now what game is he tryin' to work, I wonder?"

By this time the new day had fully come, and as Sam peered out over his companion's shoulder he could see Rube Rowe sitting idly on the rail of the "Sally D.," while Captain Doak was rowing ashore alone in the dory.

Uncle Ben must have learned the captain's intentions while the boys were talking in the shanty, for he was standing on the shore at a point where it seemed positive the dory would take the sand, evidently counting on "having it out" alone with the commander of the "Sally D."

"We've got to take a hand in this, Sam!" Tom cried hurriedly. "There's no tellin' what that pirate may do to your Uncle Ben, an' we're the ones who've got to stand up for the new family if it comes to a row."

Tom did not wait to see what steps Sam proposed to take; but, stopping only long enough to arm himself with the buoy to which was attached a short length of rope, ran with all speed toward where che old lobster catcher stood awaiting the coming of him who might well be looked upon as an enemy.

Sam Cushing was not far behind his friend in making ready to aid Uncle Ben in case it should be necessary. A broken oar was the only weapon near at hand, and with this upraised as a club, he ran and took his place alongside Tom Falonna, who, ankle-deep in the water, stood directly in front of the old man.

CHAPTER IX

THE STRANDED SCHOONER

The old lobster catcher understood full well why the boys were gathering so

close around him, and most likely their desire to defend pleased him well; yet he motioned Tom to stand aside, as he said:

"I'm allowin', lads, that Eliakim won't be wild enough to kick up very much of a row, an' by showin' yourselves ready for a fight, it might make him worse'n he is naturally. Get up shore a bit, an' leave me to deal with him, for he ain't the first man I've seen a good deal mixed by bad temper."

Tom had hardly more than time to obey this command before the master of the "Sally D." was ashore and striding up to Uncle Ben threateningly. Tom swung his buoy ready for use, believing that an attack was about to be made upon the old man.

"I want you to understand, Ben Johnson, that I don't allow anybody to mix himself in my business as you've been doin', an' I'm here to settle accounts," and Captain Doak raised his hand as if to strike; but Tom's buoy came so near his head that he prudently stepped back a couple of paces.

"The time has gone by, Eliakim, when you an' I can settle anythin'. In order to protect Sammy, I was obliged to go to Southport yesterday, an' when next you put in there it will be to see that your power over him is gone. I've taken a longer lease of the island, an' found out jest what my rights are as to the place. You're trespassin', an' if you don't take yourself off mighty quick, I shall enter complaint agin you."

It seemed impossible for the commander of the "Sally D." to speak, so great was his anger, and while one might have counted twenty he stood in front of the old man waving his hands threateningly, but not daring to advance a single pace because of the buoy which Tom swung around his head in a manner that told how heavy a blow could be delivered with it. Before it was possible for the infuriated man to gain command of his tongue, Rube Rowe shouted:

"Come aboard, cap'en. What's the use of kickin' agin the law, for you know Uncle Ben has the upper hand?"

"I'll pound you to a jelly when I get aboard, which won't be till after I've squared accounts with this meddlin' old idjut!" Captain Doak cried savagely, and his "crew" replied impatiently:

"If you don't come 'round on another tack mighty soon, I'll go ashore, an' once there you ain't big enough to make me step foot on this deck ag'in!"

"I'll lash you to the foremast for a mutinous hound, that's the way I'll serve you, an' it won't take me long to do it!"

It was as if the captain had suddenly forgotten that he came ashore to settle accounts with Uncle Ben, so great had become his desire to punish his "crew" for thus daring to speak disrespectfully, and without further heed to those on the beach, he leaped into the dory, pulling back to the schooner as rapidly as he had previously rowed toward the island.

"He'll come pretty nigh killin' Rube," Sam cried in alarm. "He's not quite himself, an' when he gets that way he's terrible."

"I'm allowin' that Rube will hold his own," Uncle Ben replied placidly, "an' it'll be strange if Eliakim don't get the worst of the bargain."

"Why don't Sam an' I go aboard the schooner to take a hand in whatever happens?" Tom asked quickly. "That sailor is a decent fellow, an' I'd hate to see him done up by a duffer like Cap'en Doak."

"I've forbid his comin' on the island, an' it wouldn't do for us to lay ourselves open to a charge of trespass by goin' aboard his vessel. You needn't have any fear but that Reuben will come out all right jest now; but what may happen after the 'Sally' gets under way is another matter."

The boys made no reply to this remark, for Uncle Ben had but just ceased speaking when Captain Doak ran the dory alongside the schooner and was clambering over the rail, Rube Rowe standing amidships as if indifferent as to what might be done. The enraged man had hardly more than gained a footing on the deck when the "crew" suddenly aroused himself to activity, and while one might have counted ten, the two struggled together, after which the master of the schooner dropped on the deck as if felled by a blow.

Then Rube Rowe disappeared from view, and while the boys were wondering if he had been seriously injured during the short squabble, he came out of the cabin, dragging a sea chest, which he lowered into the dory that lay alongside. In another moment he was pulling for the shore, and Uncle Ben announced as if the situation needed little or no explanation:

"Reuben has allowed to desert the 'Sally D.,' an' I reckon Eliakim will have a hard time to find another man, for he ain't in no ways a favorite with fishermen."

"How can he sail the 'Sally' alone? Sam asked, in surprise.

"He can't, an' that's why I'm sorry he an' Reuben parted company so soon, 'cause we'll have him layin' here kickin' up a fuss when we count on bein' peaceable."

"Reckon I can take your dory a minute, eh, Uncle Ben?" Rube said as he beached the schooner's boat and threw the sea chest out on the sand. Then, without waiting for reply, he launched the old man's craft, and began towing the "Sally D.'s" dory out to the schooner.

Until he had completed his task Uncle Ben and his "family" watched the proceedings in silence, but when he returned to the shore, pulling the dory belonging to the island well up on the beach, the old man asked with just a tinge of curiosity in his tones:

"Where is Eliakim?"

"Stretched out on the deck, too ugly to move; now he knows I won't stand any more of his nonsense."

"Ain't you puttin' yourself in the way of bein' called a mutineer, by knockin' the cap'en down?"

"Mutiny aboard a fishin' vessel layin' at anchor, with only one man as crew, an' he doin' no more'n protecting himself!" Mr. Rowe repeated with a scornful laugh. "If Doak can make mutiny out of it, an' prove to a judge that I wasn't doin' any more'n a decent man has a right to do, by defendin' himself, let him go ahead an' I'll stand the shot. Say, Uncle Ben, will you keep me here a little while, pervidin' I'll turn to an' work my board?"

"For certain, Reuben. You're welcome to stay as long as you like, an' needn't distress yourself tryin' to pay for what you eat. It kinder looks as if my family was growin' faster'n I counted on, an' at this rate I'll have to get somebody to help me out with the housekeepin'."

"I'll do the cookin' an' Tom can look after the shanty," Sam cried, and Master Falonna added:

"We can do that much, an' 'tend to the lobster-pots while we're restin'. Even then it won't be any more'n a snap, 'longside of what I've been having."

"I reckon I'm able to do my full share of the work for a spell yet, so we won't shove it all off on to you lads. Reuben shall lend a hand, as he's allowed, an'— Hello! Eliakim has come to, an' now I'm guessin' we'll hear considerable bad talk."

Captain Doak had risen to his feet, and was standing near the rail looking toward the shore where he could see that his "crew" had really abandoned him. He gazed at the group on the beach for an instant, then looked alongside where the dory was made fast, and afterward shouted in a voice thick with rage:

"Don't think you've beaten me off, Ben Johnson! I'll spend all my time from this out settlin' accounts with you, an' when they've been squared, I'll make Rube Rowe wish he'd never been born! Better do your crowin' now, 'cause you won't have a chance after twenty-four hours have gone by!"

"I'm allowin' Eliakim's bark is worse'n his bite," Uncle Ben said placidly, as the commander of the "Sally D." ran forward much as though time was very precious just then. "But what is the poor creeter countin' on doin'?' Surely, he don't allow to sail the schooner alone!"

"He's liable to allow anything," Mr. Rowe replied, and then the conversation ceased as those on the beach watched the captain of the schooner.

That he intended to sail the vessel alone could be seen when he hauled in on the anchor.

"He won't go far if he don't make sail mighty quick," Mr. Rowe muttered as the little schooner swung around once the anchor was clear of the bottom. "With the wind settin' in so strong from the s'uthard, it'll be a touch an' go if he clears the point. Why didn't he get some sail on her first, an' then he might have been

able to handle himself?"

When in his right mind Captain Doak was a good seaman, and, perhaps, there were none in Southport who could get more speed out of a vessel than he; but now he was little better than a crazy person, and before it was possible to raise an inch of canvas the bow of the "Sally D." was so far inside the point that she could not by any possibility be made to clear it.

"Let go your anchor, Eliakim, or you'll take the ground for sartin!" Uncle Ben cried excitedly, and Captain Doak replied, as he ceased work to shake his fist threateningly:

"Hold your tongue! I'll run my own craft as I please, an' when I come back there won't be enough left of you an' your gang to fill a pint pot!"

Then he turned to the main halyards once more; but before he could make the first motion toward hoisting the sail the schooner, given considerable headway by the strong wind, struck heavily just inside the point, throwing her commander to the deck. The surf was by no means heavy, but yet had sufficient force to send the "Sally D." inshore yet further, until her nose was buried deeply in the sand, when she heeled over at a sharp angle.

"That's the end of his cruise, an' now we'll have him on our hands, for no matter who owns the island, he's got the right to come ashore in order to save his schooner," Uncle Ben said mournfully, and Mr. Rowe added:

"Unless he hires a steamer to pull her off, she'll lay where she is for good an' all. It's the top of the tide, an' nothin' but a tug, which can't be found this side of Portland, will move her. I allow that Eliakim hasn't got ready money enough to pay any sich bills."

By this time Captain Doak had scrambled to his feet, and was gazing stupidly into the water, as if not fully understanding what had happened; but he aroused himself to activity when Uncle Ben cried in a friendly tone:

"I'm allowin' you're needin' a tug, Eliakim, an' if we can take any word to Southport for you, we're ready. The 'Sally' is on there to stay till you can get steam power to haul her off."

"Mind your own business, or it'll be the worse for you!" Captain Doak roared. "When I'm so far gone that I'm ready to take advice from a cantin' old hypocrite like you, it'll be time to order my coffin!"

Then, moving like one in a fury of rage, the commander of the stranded schooner literally threw himself over the rail into the dory, and an instant later was pulling like mad in the direction of Southport.

"He's crazy as a hedgehog, an' I'm allowin' he'll be worse before gettin' better," Mr. Rowe said as he turned his attention to dragging the heavy chest toward the shanty, while Tom and Sam ran along the beach until arriving opposite where the "Sally" lay helpless, and so near the disabled schooner's bow that it

seemed as if they might board her without wetting a foot.

"Don't make the mistake of foolin' with her," Uncle Ben shouted warningly. "She's abandoned, an' any one has the right to take possession, but we can't afford to have more of a row with Eliakim Doak, so the safest plan is to give the schooner a wide berth. We'll pull the pots now, so's to stay in the shanty when he comes back to set about workin' her off."

"An' it'll stand him in hand to come mighty soon, for it won't take long for her to settle herself so far in the sand that all the steamers 'twixt here an' Boston couldn't pull her off," Mr. Rowe cried as he dragged his chest inside the shanty, disappearing with it to come out a moment later and say cheerily:

"If you lads know where the pots are, I'll row the dory while you do the pullin'. Uncle Ben can stay ashore an' look after things, 'cause there ain't any call for all hands to go."

The old lobster catcher made no protest at thus being relieved of labor, and as soon as they could make ready Mr. Rowe and the two boys set off to make a complete voyage around the island, as would be necessary in order to examine all the traps, while Uncle Ben was left critically examining the "Sally D." from a distance, as if trying to form in his mind some plan of launching her.

CHAPTER X

MR. ROWE'S PROPOSITION

The catch brought in on this day, when Uncle Ben had no hand in the work, was so large as to surprise the old man, and he said in a tone of content, when Sam reported the number of lobsters put into the car, which was just outside of where the stranded schooner lay:

"'Cordin' to the looks of things it would pay for me to stay ashore all the time, for I haven't taken as many full-sized lobsters this last month."

"Well, why don't you do it, Uncle Ben?" Rube Rowe asked, as if the matter was one which might readily be arranged. "You're gettin' kinder old to be knockin' 'round in a boat, an' it looks as if you had help enough here to run things about as they oughter be run."

"I don't allow that the boys are quite up to handlin' a dory in heavy weather, an' pullin' pots at the same time, so I reckon it's a case of my keepin' off the shelf a spell longer," Uncle Ben replied placidly. "I wouldn't know what to do with

myself, knockin' 'round on shore with nothin' 'special to be done."

"The boys have been tellin' me 'bout your plan, an' I allowed that when you'd got your family together, there'd be plenty for you to do without lobsterin', 'cept when you wanted to tackle the job in pleasant weather for what fun might be got out of it," Mr. Rowe suggested in a tone which told that he would have said more, but lacked the courage, whereupon Uncle Ben asked with a smile:

"What is it, Reuben? There's more in your noddle than you've let out so far, an' no reason why you shouldn't make a clean breast of it."

"Wa'al, I reckon I may as well say what came inter my mind while we were out in the dory. The boys got the idea that you was countin' on buyin' a schooner, so's you could do a little fishin'?"

"That's in my mind, Reuben; but, of course, it ain't to be thought of till the family grows a bit. Sam an' Tom will have their hands full with lobsterin', an' consequently, there wouldn't be anybody to run the vessel if I bought one."

"It was the idee of the schooner that set me to thinkin'," Mr. Rowe said hesitatingly, much as though hardly daring to put his thoughts into words. "If there was another man on the island, I don't see why you couldn't run a schooner on short trips, an' 'tend to the lobster catchin' at the same time; two boys, with a skipper who knew his business, oughter bring in quite considerable fares of fish."

"But so long as I'm the only one to look after anythin' of the kind, there ain't much sense in talkin' 'bout it," Uncle Ben said with a laugh which ceased very suddenly as a new idea presented itself. "Look here, Reuben Rowe, are you kinder hintin' that you'd turn to with us?"

"That's jest the size of it, Uncle Ben!" Mr. Rowe exclaimed, evidently much relieved in mind by having the matter thus brought speedily to a head.

"I ain't allowin' that I could run a schooner or look after the lobster end of it as well as you; but yet you know I'm counted an A1 man aboard a fisherman."

"We couldn't afford to hire a skipper, Reuben. If I can contrive to pay for a vessel, the crew will have to work for the family, without countin' on gettin' wages."

"Wa'al, ain't that the same as I've been talkin'?" and now Mr. Rowe really appeared aggrieved because he had been misunderstood.

"What?" Uncle Ben cried in amazement, as, with his hands on his knees he looked keenly at the fisherman. "Do you mean to say you'd be willin' to come here to Apple Island an' work on the same lay as the boys?"

"Why shouldn't I?" Mr. Rowe asked meekly. "Take one season with another I don't earn much more'n my keep, 'specially when I go ashore at this port or that an' blowin' my wages same's the most of the crew do, an' I can't seem to hold off when they're keen to have me go with 'em. Seein's how I never was any great of a scholar, an' wasted what few chances I did have for gettin' an education, I can't

count on goin' ahead as a sailor, so why not stop here where things look to be mighty snug? Take it all in all, Uncle Ben," and now Mr. Rowe's tone was one of pleading, "there ain't much difference betwixt the way I'm fixed an' the way the boys stand; so far as I know there ain't child nor chick in this world that wants to have any truck with me, 'cept it is in the way of hirin' me for the smallest wages I'll take. When I get so low down as to sail with Eliakim Doak it seems as if it was time to take a turn, an' p'rhaps it would come if I could be one of your family, same's Sam is."

"Look here, Reuben," and Uncle Ben spoke in a most friendly tone, "you've got good reason to believe that I'd share whatever I had with you so long as you keep yourself fairly clean in habits, as I've heard you do. If so be you want'er jine our family, rememberin' that each one works for the good of the whole, settle down here, an' we'll make things as pleasant as we can; but don't think you're bound to stay any pertic'lar time. Whenever the fit takes yer, pack up an' be off with friendly feelin's all 'round."

"You're what I call a good man, Uncle Ben, an' it might s'prise yer to know what a big favor you're doin' for me. I'll have a home for the first time in twenty years, an' the show to feel that I'm of some use in the world. I don't count on braggin', but at the same time I'm allowin' I can help out a good bit."

"I know full well you can, Reuben, an' I'm glad to have you with us. We'll build up a place here on Apple Island that a man can take pride in, an' it'll help mightily to have you join us; but remember, when you have an itchin' to get out with the rest of the world, don't be backward in speakin' right out."

Mr. Rowe seemed to think it necessary to shake hands all round in token of having thus been made a member of the "family," and, this done in the gravest manner possible, he set about dragging his chest into the shanty that he might make himself more fully at home expiating to Sam in the meanwhile that all he owned was there.

"I'm here bag an' baggage, lad, an' mighty glad to be settled down for the first time since I can remember."

That noon Sam cooked dinner, making a regular feast with roasted lobsters, fried fish and something which looked considerably like an apple pie, although the cook modestly confessed that he had not had "real good luck with it."

The remainder of the day was spent catching cunners to be used as bait for the lobster traps; mending some of the old pots, and putting tar on the seams of the dory. Mr. Rowe worked as if the labor was sport, and Uncle Ben no sooner tried his hand at this thing or that, than one of his "family" insisted on doing it, until the old man said with a laugh of content:

"I declare it does seem as if all hands were bent on drivin' me outer business. I've allers been able to putter 'round with nobody to help, an' it comes a little odd

not to be allowed to so much as raise a finger."

"Your part is to do hard work, bossin' the rest of us, Uncle Ben," Mr. Rowe said cheerily. "There ain't so much to be done but that the boys an' me can get through it without half tryin', an' it's time you did a little loafin' so's to see how it seems."

During the afternoon Uncle Ben's family fully expected Captain Doak would return with a steamer to pull the "Sally D." from her resting place in the sand, and when night came without any sign from the owner of the schooner, Mr. Rowe said, with an air of concern:

"I declare I ain't hankerin' for a sight of Eliakim; but I do wish he'd show up with a tug, for the longer the schooner lays here the more it will cost to get her off. Give her one week, with a southerly wind blowin', as is likely at this season of the year, an' she'll be smothered in sand."

"It's goin' to be a big job at the best to get her off, seein's she took the ground at chock high water," Uncle Ben added, as if talking to himself; "but it'll cost more'n she's worth, if the work ain't begun mighty soon."

"How much do you allow she's worth?" Tom asked, and one might have thought he had it in his mind to buy her, so serious and businesslike was his air.

"Wa'al, I allow she'd fetch seven or eight hundred dollars afloat, an' not half that where she lays," Uncle Ben replied as he looked at the stranded schooner critically. "She must be fifteen or sixteen years old, which ain't much if she'd had proper care; but Eliakim has allowed her to run down terribly these last two seasons. Look at her! Oakum hangin' out of her seams like yarn in a frayed stockin', an' you never could tell by the hull what color she was painted last."

"If Eliakim wanted to sell her as she lays, I'm allowin' he couldn't get four hundred cash, an' yet it wouldn't take so many dollars to put her in good fair trim. I'd like to own her, high an' dry as she is," Mr. Rowe said thoughtfully.

"But how would you get her into the water?" Tom asked curiously.

"I'd leave her where she is till I'd got her lookin' somethin' like a vessel, shorin' her up so's she wouldn't really bury herself, an' then I'd risk the launchin' part of it. She must be nigh full of water by this time, for she leaks a good bit around the stern-post."

"Wa'al, we can't do any good by settin' here chinnin'," Uncle Ben said abruptly as he rose to his feet. "If this 'ere family is to be kept from starvin' we'd best turn in, so's to be ready for a good day's work to-morrow."

Sam was the first to "turn out" next morning, as was his duty since he had taken upon himself the task of cook, and he had no more than opened the door than the sleepers were startled into wakefulness by hearing him cry:

"Cap'en Doak has come back; but he's alone, an' it don't look as if he was goin' to do anythin' toward floatin' the 'Sally,' for he's sittin' on the sand smokin'."

"Most likely he's waitin' for the steamer to come," Uncle Ben said, as he made a hurried toilet. "If so be he's got things ready for the launchin' of her, we must all bear a hand."

"Are you goin' to help him after what he's tried to do against you?" Tom asked in surprise, and the old man replied in a decided tone:

"That goes without sayin', lad. It's no reason why we should be brutes because he makes a beast of himself at times. If there's anythin' we can do to help another in trouble, I'm hopin' we'll be ready to do it, without stoppin' to reckon up whether he's in our debt."

Then Uncle Ben went rapidly toward the commander of the stranded schooner, and Tom Falonna, eager to hear what might be said, followed close at his heels; but neither Sam nor Mr. Rowe showed any desire to have an interview with Captain Doak.

"Wa'al, Eliakim, are you countin' on havin' a steamer over here to pull the 'Sally' off?" Uncle Ben asked cheerily, and Captain Doak replied in a surly tone:

"Whether I am or not is none of your affairs, Ben Johnson, an' I'll thank you to keep your nose out of my business or there'll be considerable trouble sich as won't be pleasant."

"Now, see here, Eliakim," and Uncle Ben spoke in a most friendly tone, apparently giving no heed to the ill-natured words, "I ain't countin' on meddlin' with you an' yours more'n I already have, an' what I did was somethin' that you brought on yourself. Now if we can give you a lift in floatin' the 'Sally,' we wanter do it, as neighbors should."

"I've seen your tracks at the Port, so let me tell you, Ben Johnson, that if I couldn't launch the 'Sally' without your help, I'd leave her to rot where she is!"

Uncle Ben was not so thick-headed but he could understand that it would be worse than useless to attempt to hold friendly converse with Captain Doak while he was in such a humor, therefore he went slowly back to the shanty, looking as if in deep distress.

"I hope he'll never get her off!" Tom cried angrily when he and the old man were so far from the captain that there could be no danger his words would be heard by the owner of the schooner. "He acts like a great big chump!"

"There's no call to say anythin' harsh, Tom," Uncle Ben said reprovingly. "He allers used to be a pleasant-spoken man till he got into bad habits. I reckon he'll be glad of our help before he finishes the job that's to be done, an' when that time comes we'll turn to jest as willin'ly as if he'd shown himself to be the best friend we ever had. I'm hopin', lad, that this 'ere family I'm tryin' to get together will allers do as they'd be done by, for it's the one mighty good rule in

this world.”

CHAPTER XI

”FOR SALE”

Although Uncle Ben appeared so ready to find excuses for Captain Doak’s surliness, Tom Falonna was not disposed to let the matter drop, as if it were no more than an ordinary incident, but, on his return to the shanty, told Mr. Rowe and Sam of the meeting, and what had passed between the two men, adding in conclusion:

”Cordin’ to my way of thinkin’, there’s sich a thing as bein’ too good for this ’ere world, an’ that’s what’s ailin’ Uncle Ben. What he oughter done was to up an’ hit that pirate a clip under the ear, so’s to give him a lesson in manners. I only wish his schooner had to lay there on the sand till I lent a hand toward gettin’ her off! You can bet real money that she’d rot there!”

”After all that’s been done an’ said, I ain’t got it in my heart to do a friendly turn for Eliakim Doak,” Mr. Rowe added thoughtfully. ”I’d heard considerable ’bout him before I agreed to fish aboard the ’Sally D.’ this season; but I never allowed he, nor any other man for that matter, could be so downright mean an’ ugly as he’d showed hisself. I’d had it in mind to leave him the very minute I could get some little part of what was due me for wages; but when Sam stirred up things, I come to believe that dollars didn’t count very big when it meant stayin’ aboard the schooner any longer. My biggest hope now is that he’ll float her mighty sudden, for the sooner that’s been done the quicker we’ll get rid of him.”

”It won’t seem as if we’d really been made over inter a family till he has left the island for good an’ all,” Sam said emphatically, as he straightened up from his work of frying fish to look over his shoulder apprehensively toward the beach. ”It’s dead certain he’ll be on the watch for a chance to get hold of me once more, no matter how much Uncle Ben threatens, an’ I’ll have cold chills just so long as he hangs ’round here.”

”Don’t let Eliakim fret you, Sammy,” Uncle Ben, who had entered the shanty in time to hear the conclusion of the lad’s remark, said placidly as he seated himself at the breakfast table. ”I cut his claws when I went to the Port, an’ he knows he’d get inter mighty deep water with the law by interferin’ in your affairs.”

Uncle Ben, understanding that such conversation only served to increase Sam's fears regarding what the owner of the "Sally D." might do, hastened to change the subject by outlining the labors of the day:

"I reckon we may as well get at the old pots, to put 'em in shape agin winter weather. Now we've started out as a reg'lar family, it stands us in hand to have some rule 'bout the day's work. It strikes me that if Eliakim is goin' to loaf 'round here, as seems to be his idee, I'd better stop ashore to keep him down where he belongs. So s'posen all hands turn to an' bring the traps up here where I can find 'em handy? When that's been done, the lobsterin' crew better get onto their job. If they have as good luck as came to 'em yesterday, it'll be a case of carryin' a cargo to the Port mighty soon."

Sam, at this point, put an end to the conversation by setting before the hungry family the results of his labor as cook, and during the next ten minutes all hands were actively engaged "puttin' in a stomach linin'," as Uncle Ben expressed it.

Immediately the meal was finished Mr. Rowe and Tommy set about bringing up the pots which needed repairs, while Sam washed the dishes and otherwise put the shanty to rights. Uncle Ben lost no time in beginning his portion of the work, and while the "family" were thus as industrious as bees, Captain Doak sat on the beach sulkily smoking his pipe.

"I declare, Sammy, I can't make out what Eliakim's got on his mind," the old lobster catcher said, after getting well settled down to his task of knitting new heads for the traps. "It don't look as if he counted on doin' anythin' toward gettin' the 'Sally' outter the sand, an' yet he must have some scheme in his mind."

"P'rhaps he's waitin' to get hold of me," the amateur cook suggested timidly.

"Then he's wastin' his time, for a fact. You'll be out in the dory with Reuben an' Tommy the best part of the day, an' I'll go bail he can't do you any harm there. When you get back, the family will all be close at your heels, so however evil-minded he may be, Eliakim won't be able to spin a thread."

"If so be the cook is done putterin' 'round, we'll look after the pots!" Mr. Rowe called cheerily from the outside as he and Tommy brought up the last load of traps, and Sam replied to what might be considered as an invitation, by hurrying out of the shanty.

When the three launched Uncle Ben's dory in order to begin the real work of the day Captain Doak yet remained where Sam had first seen him that morning, and, so far as could be told, he gave no heed whatever when the lads and his mutinous "crew" passed to and fro near him.

"Do you allow he might be thinkin' of tryin' to get square with Uncle Ben?" Tommy asked in a whisper when the dory was some little distance from the shore on her way to the nearest trap, and Mr. Rowe replied confidently:

"Don't get any sich a notion as that down, lad. Eliakim is sober enough now to realize that he'd be gettin' inter the worst kind of hot water if he tried any funny games with the old man, 'specially after we would swear he was the only outsider left on the island when we pushed off. He couldn't count on doin' any mischief with the idee that nobody would know who'd done it. I reckon he's hard up for cash to hire help in floatin' the schooner, an' havin' nothin' else to do, is kinder watchin' the craft, with a crazy belief that she may slide off'er the sand without waitin' for help."

Then the dory was over the first trap, and Tom, who insisted on serving a thorough apprenticeship at the business, was picking up the buoy rope with the gaff, doing it "uncommonly handy-like," as Mr. Rowe said approvingly.

The "take" was not as large as on the day previous, but yet they found marketable lobsters enough to satisfy any save the most avaricious, and when finally the dory was pulled around the southern point of the island on her way to the car, where the results of the day's work were to be left, Mr. Rowe said exultantly:

"I reckon the family have earned their keep an' a leetle more this day. With lobsters fetchin' eighteen cents apiece wholesale we've scooped in good wages. But wait till Uncle Ben gets a schooner! Then you lads will be jumpin' to in good earnest. What with saltin' down, runnin' fresh fish inter market, an' 'tendin' to the traps, it won't be any very idle lives you'll be leadin'."

"Knockin' 'round here don't seem like real work," Master Falonna replied, in a tone of content. "But even if it was the hardest kind of a job we'd feel like bucklin' down in great shape, so long as we're workin' to make a home for the family. Hello! It looks as if Cap'en Doak had gone at last! I can't see his dory anywhere!"

"What's that white thing on the 'Sally's' hull?" Mr. Rowe asked, curiously, turning in his seat to make certain Tommy was not mistaken as to the absence of the unwelcome visitor.

Neither of the lads could even make a guess as to the correct reply. They could see a small square of white on the hull of the stranded vessel, and it had, from a distance, the appearance of a sheet of paper; but since it was not probable Captain Doak would have taken the trouble to fasten anything of the kind on the "Sally," it seemed reasonable to suppose that something had been blown against the timbers by the wind, as Tommy suggested carelessly.

When the lobsters had been thrown into the car and the fishermen were nearing the beach, Uncle Ben came out of the shanty to meet them, and as the boat's bow struck the sand he cried, showing signs of nervous excitement for perhaps the first time in his life:

"Do you see that 'ere?" and he pointed to the square of white which had

already attracted Mr. Rowe's attention.

"Ay; what is it?" Reuben asked carelessly as he leaped over the gunwale into the water to aid in carrying the dory beyond reach of the tide.

"It's a notice sayin' that the 'Sally D.' will be sold at auction as she lays, this day week," Uncle Ben replied with yet more show of excitement, and Mr. Rowe said curiously:

"Sold at auction, eh? So that's what Eliakim came over here for so early, eh? Sellin' her as she lays! Does that mean he believes she can't be floated?"

"I dunno; he wouldn't make any talk to me 'bout it. After you left I tried to be neighborly—asked him to come inter the shanty an' have a cup of coffee; but I might jest as well have invited a ragin' hyena. He made a good deal of rough talk, mixin' in some threats, an' after a spell tacked up that paper. Sold as she lays this day week! I'm allowin' he couldn't raise the money to hire a tug, an' kinder figgered that the season wouldn't 'mount to much, now that he had lost his crew an' the cook, so he's countin' on goin' outer the business. How much do you reckon she'll fetch, Reuben?"

"Wa'al, the 'Sally' ain't any slouch of a schooner," Mr. Rowe said slowly and thoughtfully, as if giving due weight to the subject; "but neither is she so very young, an' it'll need a power of fixin' to put her inter what you might call first-class shape, for I'm doubtin' if Eliakim has spent a dollar on her these last five years. Then ag'in, she'll be mighty deep in the sand by this day week, an' the tides won't be runnin' so high. Take it all in all, Eliakim will come out mighty well if he gets four hundred dollars, though if I had twice as much ag'in, an' lived here on the island, I'd allow it would be a good bargain to offer it."

"How much will it cost for a tug to pull her off?"

"Wa'al, that's as may be. It ain't any ways certain it could be done in two days, or even four, an' I allow there ain't a man 'round here who'd take the job less'n a couple of hundred, with the chances of not finishin' it even then. But it wouldn't be any steamer for me, if I owned the schooner an' lived here."

"How would you go about it?" Uncle Ben asked quickly, and with no slight show of eagerness.

"First an' foremost, I'd get out five or six of the biggest trees on this 'ere island, an' peel off the bark so's they'd answer for ways. Then I'd start in when the tide was goin', an' dig along one side till I'd made sich a slope that she'd reg'larly fall inter it—after I had the timbers fixed jest right. Then it would be more of a job to get her shored up on the other side; but it could be done if time didn't count for too much.;"

"I dunno as I jest catch your meanin', Reuben," Uncle Ben said in perplexity, and Mr. Rowe replied with a laugh:

"I don't reckon as I've made it very plain; but the thing is mapped out all

right in my head. I've been thinkin' 'bout it ever since the 'Sally' run her nose inter that sand, an' am willin' to agree that I could do it with the crew that's here, in less'n six weeks. Of course, if a man had to hire them as was needed to help him, keepin' 'em 'round loafin' when the tide was so high that the work couldn't be done, it would cost a pile of money; but put this 'ere family at the job, an' it would be easy."

"An' you'd be willin' to pay eight hundred dollars for her, eh?"

"Look here, Uncle Ben," and Mr. Rowe wheeled to look the old man suspiciously in the face. "You aint pumpin' me jest for the sake of talkin', an' that I'll bet on! What have yer got in your noddle?"

"Wa'al, Reuben, to tell the truth I've been wonderin' if this 'ere wasn't our chance to get a schooner for what little money we've got to spend. When I talked 'bout goin' inter fishin', I allowed it might be possible to buy a small craft at a song, 'specially if she was so old that it wouldn't be safe to take her to the Banks. But here's the 'Sally'; we know what she is—looks worse'n she really is, an' a craft that would serve our turn to a hair. I've got eight hundred dollars, an' that's about all—"

"Take my word for it, Uncle Ben, you won't have to put half of it out to get her!" Mr. Rowe cried excitedly, while Sam and Tommy shook hands with each other as their way of showing approbation of the old man's scheme. "She's worth a good five hundred more to you, than to any other man, 'cause you can float her so much cheaper'n a fellow could who had to hire a crew for the work. Jest say that you'll be willin' to spend four hundred, an' I'll figger my plan out so plain that it can be understood, an' prove that we needn't pay a cent for steamers or men."

"I would believe the Lord had put it inter Eliakim's head to sell her in order that we might have a vessel of our own, if she could be bought at that price," Uncle Ben replied emphatically, and that he had been considering the matter in all its bearings, was shown when he added: "If we didn't have to pay more than you allow, then I'd have enough left to put her inter good sailin' trim, for she needs a thorough overhaulin'."

"Now look here, Uncle Ben," and Mr. Rowe spoke with so much earnestness as to be impressive, "you can take my word for it that she's jest the same as yours this very minute, though if you take my advice, you'll get somebody at the Port to bid her in to you, 'cause I've got an idea that Eliakim wouldn't let you have her if he could help himself. Buy the schooner, an' if I can't get her afloat without askin' you to spend a cent of money, I'll sign articles to work for you without

wages, till I'm as old as Methusalem!"

CHAPTER XII

SHIPOWNERS

It is only reasonable to suppose that the crew of the dory, after having been at work nearly all day at the oars or hauling in the wet ropes of the lobster traps, were ravenously hungry, and yet never one of them gave a thought to food because of the excitement which possessed all at the mere suggestion that it might be possible for them soon to become shipowners.

The family was, as Uncle Ben afterward expressed it, "all mixed up," and night had fully come before the first move was made toward going into the shanty. Mr. Rowe insisted on showing exactly how he would set at work to get the "Sally D." on ways from which she could readily be launched after the necessary repairs had been made, and drew diagrams in the sand until that portion of the beach looked as if an immense flock of sea-gulls had been promenading to and fro.

The result of all the conversation and discussion was that Uncle Ben finally said in a decisive tone:

"I'll agree to buy her as she lays, if the price don't go over five hundred dollars. There ain't any doubt in my mind but that she's worth, as you figger, Reuben, twice that money, but we can't yet tell how much must be spent before she's seaworthy, an' it wouldn't do for this 'ere family to spend so much on the first cost that they couldn't put her in shape afterward."

"I'm allowin' you won't hear anybody bid over you," Mr. Rowe said in a tone of conviction; "that is, if Eliakim don't suspicion you're tryin' to buy her. He's so mighty sore 'cause you've taken Sammy an' me inter the family, that he'd be willin' to lose a good many dollars rather'n have her knocked down to you. Why not get Billy Mansfield to bid on her? Of course, I'm allowin' he ain't figgerin' to get her for himself, an' that you could soon find out. It looks reasonable he's huntin' for the chance to make an investment, an' Eliakim never'd think of smellin' 'round to see if he was on your side. We've got a good load of lobsters in the car, Uncle Ben, an' some dandies that we took outer the traps today, so what's to hinder your goin' over to the Port in the mornin'? We'll 'tend to the work here all right, an' you may stay till you've worn your welcome out,

so far as business is concerned."

"I believe I'll go, Reuben," the old lobster catcher replied after a brief time of thought. "To tell the truth, I was kinder turnin' over that same thing in my mind before you spoke. We can't afford to take any risks jest now, an' there's no tellin' how soon the weather may change so's we can't get over to the Port for quite a spell. I reckon we'd best toddle up to the shanty an' get somethin' to eat, seein's how it's pretty nigh time to tumble in for the night. It beats all how a chance like this mixes me up!"

"I don't wonder at it, Uncle Ben," Sam cried. "The thought of havin' the 'Sally D.' for our own would mix anybody up! If we can only get her!" and Sam ran swiftly toward the house to make ready the long-delayed meal, Tom following close at his heels in order to render such assistance as might be in his power.

On that particular night the cook might have made many blunders without any one's being the wiser, so excited was every member of the "family" at the possibility of owning a vessel, and the old lobster catcher himself was not in any less a "mixed" frame of mind than Mr. Rowe, who was, as he said, "so twisted" that Sam was actually obliged to lead him to the table when the meal had been made ready, otherwise he might have gone supperless to bed.

Again and again did Reuben explain how he proposed to launch the schooner without the aid of a steamer or machinery; at least a dozen times Uncle Ben tried to make an estimate of how much money it would be necessary to spend after the vessel was afloat; and whenever they could get a chance to join in the conversation, Sam and Tom speculated upon the income which might be earned by the "family" after an outfit for deep-sea fishing had been purchased.

In fact, the sole topic of conversation, from the moment Uncle Ben had broached the subject until nearly midnight, was regarding the possibilities of the future if the "Sally D." should be purchased by the old lobster catcher and when the master of the shanty declared he would not allow another word spoken until after daybreak next morning, Reuben Rowe confessed that he was more weary than he ever had been even after a hard day's work at mackerel catching.

Quite as a matter of course, it was the first thing the members of the family recalled to mind on awakening next morning, and Uncle Ben was hurried as never before, to the end that he might make a start for Southport at the earliest possible moment.

"I declare for it, if one or another of you hasn't been luggin' me around ever since I turned out," he said half laughingly, half fretfully, when he clambered into the dory which Mr. Rowe had launched. "A body would think you feared the Port might be moved away if I didn't get there before dinner time an' yet I can't see as there's any sich dreadful hurry, seein's the 'Sally' won't be sold till yesterday week."

"It's time you got things fixed, 'cause we can't afford to let sich a chance slip us," Mr. Rowe said as he pushed the dory's bow off even before the old man had taken up the oars.

"I don't allow there'll be much chance of things slippin' us, even if I ain't there till afternoon. Look sharp to the island, an' if so be Eliakim takes it inter his head to come before I get back, see to it you don't say a word to rile him. He has sure brought all his trouble on his own head; but I can't help feelin' bad for him, when I think he's got to sell the 'Sally' 'cause he hasn't the money to put her in shape."

"I believe he would lend that old pirate all the cash he's got, if anybody asked him!" Tommy whispered irritably. "This is the first time I ever believed a man could be too good."

"Better look after the traps before you tackle another job," Uncle Ben cried as he pulled the boat slowly away from the shore. "I don't believe, Reuben, that you'd better do anythin' 'bout gettin' trees for the 'Sally's' ways, as you talked of last night, for them as count their chickens too soon are apt to come to grief."

"I'm only hopin' he don't come across Eliakim Doak," Mr. Rowe said as he and the lads stood watching the old man while he rowed with vigorous strokes toward Southport.

"Why?" Tommy asked curiously.

"For fear of his gettin' so tender-hearted that he'd tell him of the plan we've got for gettin' hold of the 'Sally.'"

Then Mr. Rowe, as if believing it was his duty to act as master of the island in the absence of Uncle Ben, insisted that the boys should lose no more time before beginning the work of the day.

As can well be imagined, the purchase of the "Sally D." was all they could talk about, and even the fact that an unusually large number of marketable lobsters were found in the traps did not provoke any comment on their good fortune, because of the fulness of their minds with other matters. All three were on the lookout when, half an hour after sunset, the old lobster catcher hove in sight, and they were waiting on the beach while he was yet nearly a mile away.

"Yes, I've fixed everything as nearly as it be done," he said in reply to the eager questions when he was come within hailing distance. "William Mansfield will 'tend to the business, an' he advises me to pay even six hundred dollars, if we can't get the 'Sally' for less; says he'll be glad to give us credit for what we may need in the way of supplies. I ain't willin' to run up store bills, though I've given him his own head in the matter of a price. An' now don't say another word 'bout ownin' the schooner, else we're likely to neglect everythin'."

Because of this last remark neither Mr. Rowe nor the boys again spoke of that which lay so near their hearts, until the night before the day on which the

auction was to be held in 'Squire Hubbard's office in Southport, and then it was Reuben who said with ill-assumed carelessness:

"I'm allowin' you'll want to be off bright an' early in the mornin', Uncle Ben?"

"Ay, that I shall, an' if the days have been goin' by as slow to you as to me, this has been a miserable long week for all hands. I allow it's wrong to set one's heart on a thing so strong as mine's set on ownin' the 'Sally D.,' but I couldn't put it outer my mind for a single minute, an' if we begin to talk 'bout it now, I shan't get a wink of sleep."

Sam and Tom could have told him that they had literally counted the hours since it was known that the schooner was to be sold at auction, until it had come to be a firm belief with them that the "family" could not prosper on the lines laid down by Uncle Ben, unless they succeeded in buying the vessel.

However, great as was their impatience for the result of the sale to be known, and eager though they were to hear that Uncle Ben had become a shipowner, neither gave words to that which was in his mind until the moment when the old lobster catcher sat in the dory, a full half hour before daylight, ready to begin his journey. Then Sam said in a tremulous voice:

"I hope you will get her, Uncle Ben!"

"So do I, from the bottom of my heart, lad! It's much the same as wicked for us to get so bound up in any one thing, an' yet, no matter how well we was gettin' on before she was offered for sale, it really seems as if my plan of havin' a family would come to naught without her."

"Better not hang 'round here talkin'," Mr. Rowe said impatiently. "There's no tellin' when this wind may flatten completely out, an' it won't do for you to have a long pull while the weather promises to be so hot."

Then, without waiting for the word, Reuben pushed the dory's bow off, and it seemed to the boys as if the first real step toward the purchase of the "Sally" had been taken.

"It'll seem like a month before he gets back, even if he has a fair wind each way," Tommy said with a long-drawn sigh, and Sam cried cheerily:

"Let's get to work, an' keep right at it, else the day will never go by."

Even Mr. Rowe followed this advice, and it is safe to say that a greater amount of work had never before been performed on Apple Island in the same length of time. When the sun began to go down into the west, however, every one kept his eyes fixed on the horizon in the direction of Southport, and Uncle Ben's dory looked to be no more than a tiny speck on the waters, when Reuben shouted:

"He's comin', lads, an' now it can't be sich a dreadful long time before we know who owns the 'Sally D.!'"

Surely the moments never passed more slowly, nor the dory never moved at such a snail's pace before, and Uncle Ben was barely within hailing distance when, unable longer to restrain his patience, Sam cried:

"Who owns her, Uncle Ben? Who owns the 'Sally'?"

Then in a shrill, but triumphant tone, came the reply:

"Uncle Ben's family bought her for four hundred and seventy dollars, an' I've got the papers in my pocket!"

Instantly it was as if the three on the beach had taken leave of their senses. They shouted, sang, and Tommy even danced a hornpipe, after which Mr. Rowe, having learned all he wished to know, ran over to the stranded schooner, where he began making calculations for the work he had already determined should be begun on the morrow.

The two boys acted much as if they wanted to hug the old lobster catcher when finally he stepped ashore; at all events, they each took one of his hands, shaking it so vigorously that he was forced to cry for mercy.

"I reckon I've got a pretty good idee of how you've been feelin'," he said when the whirlwind of their congratulations had subsided somewhat. "Goin' over to the Port I got all worked up over thinkin' that p'rhaps somebody might jump in an' offer more'n we could afford to pay, till I was jest as limp as a rag. We needn't be worried very much, though, 'cause nobody seemed to think she was worth a great deal after layin' in the sand so long. 'Siah Fernald allowed that he'd give four hundred, an' that's what he started her at. I said four-twenty-five, an' he jumped ten more; then I made it four-fifty, an' he sung out 'sixty, an' that's a good bit more'n she's worth as she lays.' I made it four-seventy, an' the auctioneer hung on for another bid till I begun to think he didn't want me to have her, when he shouted, 'Sold to Uncle Ben Johnson, an' I wish him good luck with her.'"

"But I thought Mr. Mansfield was goin' to buy her for you?" Sam cried.

"So he was, lad, so he was. Leastways, that's what he'd agreed to do; but I got so worked up over the business on the way across, that I clean forgot everythin' except how much we wanted to own her an' went to biddin' on my own account."

"Was Pirate Doak there?" Tommy asked.

"Ay, lad, an' glum enough he looked. One spell I thought he was goin' to break the sale up rather'n let me have her; but by hook or by crook he held his tongue, after growlin' out that whoever bought her would be called on to pay cash down. When the auctioneer said she was mine I got the money from William Mansfield, for I'd fixed things when I was in the Port before, so's he could get six hundred outter the bank for me. Eliakim signed the bill of sale, but he never looked my way once. For a wonder he was sober, an' so contrived to act

pretty nigh decent. Now we'll go over an' have a squint at the family's property!"

CHAPTER XIII

WRECKING

When Uncle Ben and the two boys arrived at the stranded schooner Mr. Rowe was there, bustling around as if it was his intention to begin the task of launching her at once, and Uncle Ben said with a laugh, which at the same time was much like a chuckle of satisfaction:

"Wa'al, Reuben, are you countin' on havin' her in deep water before we turn in?"

"I ain't allowin' to let any grass grow under my feet, an' that's a fact," Mr. Rowe replied in a tone of decision. "This 'ere is a longish job, an' I want to get the whole thing figgered out in my head so's we won't have to do any of the work over ag'in."

"Ain't you in any way curious to know how I fixed up the trade?"

"I reckon news like that will keep, seein's how the schooner is yours past all chance of Cap'en Doak's backin' out, eh?"

"The money has been paid, an' I've got a clean bill of sale in my pocket. William Mansfield looked things up, so's to make certain there wasn't a mortgage or lien on her, consequently, seein's how Eliakim signed the documents of his own free will, an' was mighty glad to get hold of my four hundred and seventy dollars, I don't see any show for him to back down on the bargain."

"Come on board, Tommy, an' see what she looks like!" Sam cried as he clambered up over the bow, and Master Falonna followed close at his heels, the older members of the "family" paying no attention to what the lads did, so intent was Reuben on explaining to Uncle Ben exactly how he proposed to begin work on the following morning.

"I'm wonderin' if the boys can't 'tend to the traps alone, to-morrow, so's to give you an' me all the time we want. It ain't that there'll be sich a dreadful sight of work; but we'll need to do a pile of figgerin', an' at that sort of thing two heads are better'n one."

"I reckon they can get along all right," Uncle Ben replied thoughtfully. "Both of 'em have tried it often enough, an' that 'ere Tommy takes hold as if he was born to be a lobster catcher. I was thinkin', though, that there'd be a lot of things

needed, an' I'd be called on to go to the Port."

"Unless you've got business of your own, I reckon you'd better stay 'round here one day so's to make certain I don't go astray on my calculatin'. You see, I didn't get all the schoolin' I mightier had, an' when it comes to shakin' up figgers, I ain't over-strong."

"Hello, Uncle Ben!" Sam cried from the deck of the schooner. "Cap'en Doak has left all his things in the cabin—gun an' everythin'. Do you s'pose he allowed to throw the whole lot inter the trade?"

"The 'Sally' was sold jest as she laid, with everythin' aboard, 'cordin' to what the auctioneer said, an' he allowed there was considerable fishin' gear in the hold: but it don't seem likely Eliakim would leave sich as a gun to go inter the bargain."

"Come up here an' look your property over, so's to know jest what you did buy," and Sam passed down the bight of a rope that the old man might come up without too great exertion.

Mr. Rowe dropped his "calculations" in order to aid in the examination of the new property, and night was fully come before either member of the party had satisfied his curiosity. There were many articles in the cabin such as blankets, oilskins, cooking utensils, the rusty gun, and crockery, which would be of service to the "family"; but the collection was so large that it did not seem possible Captain Doak had intended all should be sold with the schooner, and Uncle Ben said with a long-drawn sigh as he led the way over the rail:

"Dear, dear, I did hope that we'd seen the last of Eliakim; but now I s'pose he'll be fritterin' 'round here pretty nigh all summer, makin' mischief, an' allowin' he's only gettin' his things away."

"If you bought the schooner jest as she lays, I wouldn't trouble my head 'bout Eliakim Doak. I'd tell him flat-floated that what things was aboard belonged to the man who bought her, an' that he'd get himself filled so full of holes that he could let hisself out for a milk-strainer, if he ever stepped foot on the island ag'in," and Mr. Rowe shook his fist in the direction of Southport, as if by so doing he could frighten the man who might possibly attempt to work mischief.

"We won't have any words with Eliakim, Reuben," Uncle Ben replied placidly. "If he comes here claimin' what's in the cabin, I shall tell him to take it an' be off; but he must be made to understand that I won't have him whiffin' 'round this island any longer than's necessary to pack his dunnage inter a boat. Now then, Sammy, if you're goin' to give us any supper this night, it's time you began to stir yourself right lively."

Sam did not need to be reminded of the task to be performed. He was already in advance of the others on the way to the shanty when Uncle Ben spoke, and immediately quickened his pace to a run, followed closely by Tom.

If it is true that "too many cooks spoil the broth," then the supper should have been ruined beyond redemption on this first night after the family had become shipowners, for each member insisted on "bearing a hand," until, as Sam declared, it was hard work to find the stove.

Uncle Ben's prayer was one of thanksgiving, when supper had finally been made ready, and even a stranger might have understood from the words how rejoiced the old man was at having thus come into possession of the "Sally D.," for by the purchase of the vessel it seemed to him as if there could no longer be any question as to the success of his plan relating to the gathering of a family.

There was very little sleeping done by the inmates of the shanty on this night. So great was the excitement that each one got up two or three times to look out of the door for some signs of a new day, and it yet lacked a full hour of sunrise when Uncle Ben said in a tone of positive relief:

"I reckon we may as well turn out, lads. There's a good deal to be done before nightfall, an' precious little chance that we can sleep while all hands are on edge 'bout the schooner."

Mr. Rowe ate breakfast hurriedly, as soon as it had been made ready, and then, in persuance of the plan already formed in his mind, went, in company with Uncle Ben, to the grove of fir trees in the middle of the island, it having already been arranged that Sam and Tommy should attend to the traps alone.

The boys were proud at thus being entrusted with the labor, yet it would have been more to their liking had the task assigned them been on shore, for they were feverishly eager to see the work of launching the "Sally D." begun. As it was, they set about the job with a will, and it is safe to say that never before had Uncle Ben's traps been hauled and reset in such a short time. What pleased them better than all was the fact that the catch was unusually large, and Tom said in a tone of satisfaction as the last captive was thrown into the car:

"At this rate Uncle Ben won't have to take very much more of his money out of the bank to pay for outfittin' the schooner, 'cause the lobsters will pay all the bills. I'm glad we've got so many, an' a good deal better pleased because now we can turn to an' help Mr. Rowe with his work. Let's get ashore lively. I'll help cook dinner, so's not to be gettin' any more of the fun than you."

When the boys went ashore they were disappointed at not seeing any evidences of Mr. Rowe's work. They had expected much would have been done toward floating the schooner, and yet it was as if she had not been visited since they set out to haul the traps.

Not until the two men had answered the summons to dinner did the lads understand the meaning of this seeming neglect, and then Mr. Rowe explained that until the timbers, of which the ways were to be made, had been cut and dragged to the shore nothing could be done.

"We'll give you a job as soon as these 'ere vittles have been ate," he said with a laugh. "Uncle Ben an' I have got three trees ready, an' while you're makin' horses out of yourselves by haulin' 'em to the beach we'll trim up as many more."

Sam would have left the dishes unwashed on this day, in order to get at what seemed more important work the sooner; but Uncle Ben insisted that the housework must go on as usual, whether the "Sally" was floated or not, therefore the shanty was set to rights, hastily but thoroughly, before the boys began their share of the wrecking.

It was exhausting labor to get a pair of wheels under each of the heavy timbers in turn, and drag it across the island, but neither Sam nor Tom counted the cost, so that their portion of the task was accomplished.

When night came again Mr. Rowe announced that it was his purpose to "make a showin'" next day, promising that when the sun had set once more his companions should see that which would make plain his method of floating the schooner.

"I've got timbers enough for the ways on the port side," he said, "an' there won't be need of cuttin' more till she's on her beam-ends. The only question is whether we can do it in one tide; for if we can't, all our work will be wasted."

"If it wasn't for pullin' the pots, Tommy an' I could put in some mighty big licks at shovelin' sand," Sam suggested, and much to his surprise Uncle Ben added placidly:

"I've been thinkin' of jest that same thing, lad. You see I ain't used to anythin' but fishin', an' can't do more'n half a man's work at other jobs, so I'm allowin' to pull the pots alone to-morrow, same's I've done year in an' year out ever since settlin' down here. That will leave you boys free to help Reuben, an' I'm countin' on seein' a big pile of work done when I get back."

"That's what will happen," Tommy replied confidently, and then he began to help the cook that they might get to bed the earlier.

There were no laggards in the shanty next morning. It would not be time to attend to the traps until about the middle of the forenoon, because of the tide, therefore Uncle Ben took it upon himself to do the housework. Thus there was nothing to prevent the boys from getting at the task of wrecking as soon as breakfast was eaten, and the meal had been prepared before sunrise.

A hard master was Reuben Rowe. His desire to see the "Sally D." in a seaworthy condition was so great that it seemed as if neither himself nor any other could do as much work in a given time as he wished to see done, and the consequence was that he drove his assistants to the utmost of their powers, until Sam laughingly declared that he "begrudged the time it took them to draw their breath."

The plan was to excavate the sand from beneath the port side of the

schooner, doing it in such a manner that the timbers could be set in place before she heeled over, and this was, as he said, "quite a nice piece of work."

Uncle Ben shoveled industriously until it was time for him to visit the traps, and then said cheerily as he pushed off in the dory:

"I'm allowin' to come back as soon as may be, an' I'm not sorry to get a breathin' spell. Pullin' lobster-pots is child's play 'longside of what Reuben expects his helpers to do, an' I'll be havin' what you might call a vacation. Keep steady at it, lads, for that's the way to win in a long race."

"An' you can make up your mind that we're counting on that same thing!" Reuben replied emphatically. "After we get the schooner on what you might call ways, so's there's no chance of her sinkin' any deeper in the sand, it'll be all right to take things a little easier, but till that's done it's a case of hustle all the time."

Then Uncle Ben pulled off from the shore, and the three laborers shoveled sand as if their very lives depended upon it, until Reuben finally announced:

"I'm thinkin' half an hour more will see us well along with this job, an' it hasn't been done any too quick, for the tide is beginnin' to come. If it catches us before the timbers are down all the work will go for nothin', 'cause it wouldn't take long for the sea to wash every grain of sand back where we've taken it from."

As he spoke the lads straightened up for an instant to relieve the painful strain on their backs, and at the same time Sam chanced to look seaward, when he saw that which caused him to cry in dismay:

"There comes a dory from Southport way! It can't be anybody but Cap'en Doak, an' he wouldn't pull all the distance over here except it was to make mischief!"

There was an expression of anxiety on Reuben Rowe's face as he gazed intently in the direction indicated by Sam, and after what seemed like a very long time of silence he said slowly, and with somewhat of menace in his tones:

"I'm allowin' that's him for sure, an' there's likely to be the biggest kind of a row if he tries to be funny. If we lay still half an hour jest now, this day's work is spoiled, an' he shan't be the man to waste our time like that!"

"I wish Uncle Ben was here," Sam said half to himself, and Reuben added:

"I ain't certain but it's a good idee he's away. The old man is too soft-hearted to deal with the likes of Eliakim Doak, an' I ain't given that way a little bit, seein's I know him root an' branch."

"What will you do if he tries to kick up a row?" Tommy asked anxiously, and one might have believed that he would be pleased to see the former owner of the "Sally D." meet with a person who was not very careful to avoid hurting his feelings.

"I'll give him all he's lookin' for, an' a little more! Dig the best you know how, lads, an' p'rhaps we can get the timbers in place before he makes the cove.

Then we'll have time to look after his case," and Mr. Rowe set the example by throwing out sand from the trench in a regular stream.

CHAPTER XIV

A WAR OF WORDS

"I want you boys to know that I ain't afraid of Eliakim Doak, when it's only my own skin that's to be hurt, nor of any four men like him," Mr. Rowe said as he continued to throw up the sand. "It's only 'cause I'm afraid he may contrive to keep us on edge till the tide comes up an' puts things in bad shape. If we can get these 'ere timbers down shipshape, before he pulls in, I'll be ready to give him a full dose. Jump to it, lads, for every shovelful counts jest now!"

There was little need to urge the boys to further exertions; they could understand full well how important it was, unless they were willing to lose what had already been done, to push the work to the utmost, and never for a single instant did they even look seaward, although both were curious to know how rapidly the enemy was approaching.

It was fortunate for Uncle Ben's "family" that Captain Doak did not take it into his head to leave Southport any earlier in the day, for he was nearly half a mile from the cove when, with a cry of triumph, Mr. Rowe laid the last timber in place, as he said grimly:

"Now let the old heathen come; we're ready for him," and he literally scraped the perspiration from his face.

"It'll be quite a spell yet before he gets here," and Tom straightened himself slowly, as if with difficulty after remaining in a bent position so long. "What I'm keen to know is, how much better off we are after puttin' these logs down? The schooner lays jest as she did before."

"Ay, lad, an' lucky for you she didn't heel over while we were workin' so far under the hull. I'll admit that it don't look now as if we'd done very much for her comfort; but after the tide comes up, an' the water swashes back an' forth for a spell, you'll see her lay over like a tired man, an' unless I'm way out of my reckonin', she'll be restin' the biggest part of her weight on the logs by mornin'. Then it's only a matter of workin' the other side like this. After that's been done, we know for a fact that she can't settle any further inter the sand, an' it'll only need a couple of smooth planks with a few wedges, to slide her off when we're

ready.”

”I hope it’ll work; but I can’t figger out how,” Sam said in perplexity, and before Mr. Rowe’s mirth, which had been aroused by the expression on the boy’s face, was abated, Captain Doak ran his dory up on the shore within a dozen yards of where the ”Sally D.” lay.

”What’s goin’ on here?” he cried angrily, and as if it surprised him to see any one at work near the schooner.

”We’re tryin’ to stop the old hooker from buryin’ herself in the sand,” Mr. Rowe replied without any show of anger; but Tom noted with no little satisfaction that the former ”crew” of the ”Sally” held his shovel firmly in his right hand, as if thinking it might be needed for a weapon.

”What right have you to be foolin’ ’round her?” and Captain Doak rose to his feet threateningly, whereupon Mr. Rowe stepped a few paces nearer the bow of the vessel to where he could clamber on board without difficulty.

”I haven’t turned her over to Ben Johnson, an’ p’rhaps I shall change my mind ’bout lettin’ her go, ’specially at the ridiculous price he bid.”

”You gave him a clear bill of sale!” Mr. Rowe cried angrily, and the two boys ranged themselves on either side of him, as if believing they would soon be called upon to take part in defending the property of the ”family.”

”I may have been crazy enough to give a bill of sale, but till I say the word he ain’t got any right to fool ’round her. An’ I warn you here an’ now, Rube Rowe, that if you so much as lay your hand on that craft I’ll sue you for trespass, if so be I ain’t on the spot to knock your two eyes inter one!” and Captain Doak stepped out from the dory in what both Sam and Tom thought was a threatening manner.

”Hold on, Eliakim Doak, an’ don’t take the chance of makin’ the biggest mistake of your life!” Mr. Rowe said impressively. ”You haven’t got old Uncle Ben here to deal with. I don’t keep soft words for sich as I know you to be. I’m in charge of this ’ere island, likewise the schooner that has been bought an’ paid for, an’ it’ll be the sickest day’s work you ever did to kick up a row jest now. What’er you here for, anyhow?”

”I came to get my things outter the cabin, an’ to settle on whether I’d let her go at any price——”

”The last part of it has been settled already, an’ that you know very well, Eliakim Doak, ’less you’re willin’ to admit you’re a bigger dummy than I ever allowed you was. Uncle Ben has said that you could have what things are in the cabin, though if I’d bought the schooner as she lays, it would be a long, cold day before you’d take the value of a fish-scale away from her.”

”We’ll see ’bout that part of it,” said Captain Doak.

”We’ve seen about it already! I’ll throw out what stuff Uncle Ben allowed

you could take away, an' then you'll make a quick move from this 'ere island, or I'll know the reason why," and with the agility of a monkey Mr. Rowe clambered aboard the stranded vessel.

Captain Doak stepped forward as if about to make an attack, but seeing Sam and Tom near the bow with shovels ready to be used as weapons, he wisely concluded to remain on the beach, contenting himself by shouting:

"I'll have the law on you if a single thing in that 'ere cabin is touched!"

In reply to this threat came a shower of oilskins, followed by the rusty musket and a quantity of battered tin dishes.

"Shove that stuff aboard your craft, an' I'll send down some more," Mr. Rowe cried with a grin as he leaned over the rail. "It's a certain thing, Eliakim, that you ain't to be allowed to board this 'ere schooner, for I wouldn't trust you as far as I could sling a mule by the ear, if there was any chance to do mischief!"

"I'll stay where I am till I get good an' ready, an' you ain't the man who can make me move! I've got rights that I'm goin' to have——"

"The only rights you've got 'round here is to get inter that dory, an' keep beyond low water mark!" Mr. Rowe cried as if in a fury of rage, and the two lads were actually frightened when they saw him leap over the rail with an oar raised over his shoulder threateningly. "Now take that dunnage inter yer boat, or get in without it, else——"

"Reuben! Reuben!" came in placid tones from over the water, and, looking up, the lads saw Uncle Ben pulling slowly toward the island.

"If he hadn't got back quite so soon I declare I'd have damaged you some with this oar!" Mr. Rowe cried savagely, as he swung the weapon menacingly in front of Captain Doak until he could do no less than beat a slow retreat toward his boat.

Then the war of words ceased until the old lobster catcher ran his dory ashore and stepped out on the beach as if it was the most natural thing in the world to see Captain Doak on Apple Island.

"Have you been havin' any trouble with the cap'en, Reuben?" he asked, and Mr. Rowe, so angry that the words came like a torrent, replied by repeating what the former owner of the "Sally D." had said.

"There is no reason, Reuben, why you should get so disturbed over it, for the sale was open an' legal. Eliakim took from me the money I bid, and gave a lawful bill of sale. It is only right that he should have what belongings are in the cabin, for I didn't count them as goin' with the schooner."

"Wa'al, he's got 'em, hasn't he?" Mr. Rowe cried, pointing to the assortment of goods on the sand. "I don't allow that he shall step his foot on board the 'Sally,' for nobody knows how much mischief sich as he'd be willin' to do when he's in one of his ugly tantrums."

"I'm not allowin' he shall go on board," Uncle Ben said in such a firm tone that the boys looked at him in surprise. "He can name over what he claims, an' then leave the island, else I'll start for the Port. What'll be done after I get there he knows full well."

Captain Doak appeared to be quite as much surprised as were the boys; but it was not in his nature to give in beaten until absolutely obliged so to do, and he cried hotly:

"I'll do as I please—"

"We'll see about that!" and Reuben advanced with upraised oar. "I didn't think it was in Uncle Ben to take sich a strong stand; but it seems that he's got considerable backbone after all, which is apt to be the way with these soft-spoken folks. You're to leave, an' do it mighty quick, without another word, or I'll let this oar drop!"

To the surprise of all, even including Mr. Rowe, Captain Doak selected a few articles from the collection on the beach and threw them into his dory without speaking, but after pulling from the shore a few strokes, he stopped to say:

"Don't think you've seen the last of me, Ben Johnson. I count the 'Sally' as belongin' to me as much as she ever did, an' from this out I'll make it my business to see that you don't swell 'round in her, lordin' it over me!"

"No one wants to lord it over you, Eliakim," Uncle Ben replied, quietly. "I would like to be friends with you, an' have tried from the first to lend a hand when you was needin' it—"

"I s'pose that's what you was doin' when you took my cook from me?" the captain roared.

"What I did then was to help a poor little orphan who was bein' abused, an' it was no more than my duty."

"Fine words butter no parsnips with me! I'll show you an' that mutinous hound of a Rube Rowe what comes to them that cross Eliakim Doak's path!" and with this threat the captain rowed away, the little group on the island watching until he was beyond ear-shot, when Mr. Rowe said thoughtfully:

"I never had no great idee that Eliakim ever hankered much after the truth, but when he promises to work mischief, I'm believin' he'll keep his word."

"It's childish for us to think that he can do anythin' to harm us," Uncle Ben replied, as he pushed off the dory again, preparatory to carrying his morning's catch to the car.

"It would be childish to give him a fair chance," Mr. Rowe cried. "I'm not allowin' that he'll cut any great swarth while the 'Sally' is high an' dry on the sand; but once she's afloat you know as well as I that a man like Eliakim could do her so much harm in one hour that we couldn't repair it in a year."

"We won't cross any bridges until we come to them," the old man said cheerily, as he pulled away, and Reuben added in a low tone, not caring that Uncle Ben should hear him:

"I allow there's a good deal of sense in that old sayin', but there are times when a man better keep his weather eye peeled to see that sich as Eliakim don't build bridges for him to cross. We'll put aboard this plunder that Doak didn't take away with him, an' then get dinner, for I'm countin' we'll have a spell at the pump this afternoon. There's a good bit of water aboard the 'Sally,' an' it must be well out of her before we can caulk around the stern-post."

When Uncle Ben came ashore from the lobster car dinner was nearly ready, and while washing his hands and face he announced the result of his morning's work.

"Things are surely comin' our way. Here we are takin' more lobsters than I've seen come out of the pots this many a day, an' jest when we're needin' the money to buy a new outfit for the 'Sally.'"

"Much good the new outfit will do her if Eliakim's goin' to hang 'round watchin' for a chance to put a spoke in the wheel," Mr. Rowe grumbled.

"There, there, Reuben, don't keep frettin' when we've got so much to be thankful for. Eliakim's bark is worse'n his bite, an' that I've known this many a day."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by Sam's announcement that dinner was ready, and, much to Tommy's surprise, Uncle Ben's prayer was mostly a plea for Captain Doak, that he might be brought to see the errors of his ways.

While eating, the old man asked concerning the work that had been done during his absence, and when Reuben had made a detailed report, he said:

"I'm allowin' that you'll be wantin' me to make another voyage to the Port mighty soon, Reuben?"

"It would be a good thing if we had a bale of oakum an' a barrel of tar this very day. We're goin' to pump her out after dinner, an' oughter be able to stop the worst of the leaks as soon as that's been done."

"I'll get off bright an' early in the mornin'. Sammy an' Tommy can tend to the pots, an' you'll have to shift as best you can alone till they have done the work. I'm allowin' there are some things the cook is needin', so we'll write 'em all down an' I'll spread myself buyin' stuff."

Sam did not wait to finish his dinner before making out a list of what was needed in the way of stores, and Mr. Rowe called for several tools that would be required in the work of wrecking, all of which promised to make up a busy day of shopping.

"I reckon I'll be gone till nigh nightfall, if I buy all that stuff," Uncle Ben

said, with a chuckle of pleasure. "It's mighty lucky lobsters are fetchin' a big price, else I might have to bust the bank by drawin' out all my money."

Mr. Rowe was not inclined to linger long at table, or spend very much time in conversation while there remained so great an amount of work to be done on the "Sally," and as soon as Tom and Sam could wash the dishes he insisted on their following him to the beach.

A full hour after sunset did the entire "family" labor on their vessel, and when finally they went to the shanty, tired to the verge of exhaustion, it was with the pleasing knowledge that very much had been accomplished since sunrise. The largest leak, which was near the stern-post, as Reuben had guessed, was stopped as well as it could be with oiled rags, and the "Sally D." had already settled over to port on the timbers.

"I'm allowin' that by to-morrow night, even though you lads are to loaf half the time foolin' with the lobster traps, we'll have things in sich shape that she can't go any further inter the sand, no matter how strong the wind may blow from the s'uthard."

CHAPTER XV

A NEW MEMBER

When Sam was first told that he would be allowed to live on Apple Island with Uncle Ben, he mentally promised that he would be the first up and at work in the morning, to the end that the old lobster catcher might gain more rest than had been possible when, as he himself expressed it, he was "captain, mate, and all the crew down to the cook"; but on this day after the first real work of wrecking had been done on the "Sally D.," the lad's eyes were so heavy with slumber that he continued to sleep even while Mr. Rowe and Uncle Ben were cooking breakfast.

When, finally, he did awaken, the odor of coffee and fried fish came to his nostrils, and for the merest fraction of time he believed it was all a dream; but an instant later he was on his feet, thoroughly wide awake, as he said with somewhat of reproach in his tone:

"Why didn't you waken me, Mr. Rowe? It isn't fair for you an' Uncle Ben to be doin' my work when I show myself such a sleepyhead. It would have served me right if you'd dragged me out by the heels!"

"You put in a hard day's work yesterday, Sammy," Uncle Ben said in a kindly

tone. "It stands to reason that you was tired out, an' it seemed the biggest kind of a pity to break in on what you was enjoyin' so much, 'specially since my eyes were open so wide that I couldn't have brought 'em together agin no matter how hard I tried. I declare for it, I'm allowin' myself to get wrought up over ownin' the 'Sally' as bad as Deacon Stubbs was when 'Bije Fernald gave him a foxhound! The idea of what I've got to buy at the Port to-day, an' how the schooner will look after we get her in sailin' trim once more, has kinder turned my head. Give Tommy a shake, Sam, an' as soon as you boys have washed up, we'll have breakfast."

All this while Tom had been sleeping noisily yet peacefully, but he was aroused to consciousness of his surroundings very speedily after Sam obeyed Uncle Ben's command, and was no less surprised than had been his comrade, on finding the breakfast ready for eating.

The old lobster catcher seemed to think it comical because he had been able to cook breakfast without arousing either of the lads, and evidently enjoyed the surprise, therefore very slight complaint was made by the regular cook, although he felt that in some way, he was not just certain how, a wrong had been done him.

Uncle Ben lost no time, once the meal had been eaten, in setting out on the voyage, and indeed it was necessary to start early if he counted on doing all his shopping and returning before dark.

"If it should so happen, which I don't think likely, that Eliakim takes it inter his head to come over here to-day, don't get up a row with him, 'cause he ain't worth it," the old man said warningly as he pushed off the dory and took up the oars.

"But you don't count that we're to stand 'round with our fingers in our mouths an' let him do whatever comes inter his ugly head, do yer?" Mr. Rowe asked sharply.

"I'm allowin' that you'll look after things same as if they was your own, an' they really are so long as you're members of the family. What I mean is, that you are to get along without callin' names or otherwise talkin' rough."

"All right, I'll see to that part of it," Reuben replied grimly. "I'd thump his head with an oar an' not open my mouth."

"Now, now, Reuben, remember that a soft answer turneth away wrath."

"It may with some, but not sich as Eliakim Doak. I'm noticin' that your answers wasn't so soft yesterday."

"He'd got all haired up when I come ashore, an' wasn't in the mood to listen except to somethin' harsh."

"Well, don't get to worryin', Uncle Ben; I'll see to it that we don't have a big row, though if one does come, you can make up your mind Eliakim won't want to neighbor on Apple Island for quite a spell, 'cause I'll do the job up brown."

Uncle Ben was forced to content himself with this promise, because he

could not well afford to spend any more time discussing the matter. He had a long voyage before him, with no slight amount of work to be done after arriving at Southport, and it was necessary he took full advantage of the morning breeze.

It would not be time for the boys to haul the traps until nearly noon, therefore Mr. Rowe set them to work digging sand on the starboard side of the "Sally," and when it was time to look after the pots all the timbers had been put in place.

"Now I reckon we can afford to take our time," Mr. Rowe said in a tone of satisfaction, as he wiped the perspiration from his face. "The 'Sally' won't sink any deeper, an' we can get at the job of puttin' her inter proper trim 'cordin' as the fancy strikes us."

"Do you believe she can be launched without hiring a steamer?" Tommy asked incredulously.

"Of course she can! though we don't allow to do anythin' in that line till the hull is sound, an' the 'Sally' less of a sieve than she has been these two years past. But there's no call for you to stand 'round here chinnin'. It's time to look after the traps, an' when you get back I'll have a few chores that you can do."

Mr. Rowe's "chores" were what other people might have called downright hard work, as the lads learned when they came back from the traps, feeling unusually jolly because the catch had been large; but they did not complain, for however severe the labor it was much the same as play when they thought of what was to come after the last blow had been struck.

Bread and butter with plenty of clear, cold water to wash it down served as the noon-day meal, and it was thus frugal because Mr. Rowe had suggested that the cook prepare a regular dinner at night, when Uncle Ben would be there to enjoy it.

Fortunately, Captain Doak did not take it into his head to visit Apple Island that day and the "chores" were not done until late in the afternoon, when Mr. Rowe said with the air of one who is content with what he has accomplished:

"I reckon we can afford to knock off now, lads, for we've put in a good many hours since Uncle Ben began hustlin' 'round this mornin'. Tommy an' I'll catch a nice mess of cunners while Sam is gettin' ready to fry 'em. By the time supper's ready the old man oughter be here."

Soon all three were so intent on these duties that they gave no heed to anything else, and before either had thought of watching for Uncle Ben's return, the dory was at the mouth of the little harbor. It was Sam who made the discovery that the old lobster catcher was so near, and he announced the fact in a tone of surprise:

"Here's Uncle Ben, an' we ain't half ready for him! My! but he has got a full cargo, an'— Say, who is that with him?"

Reuben and Tommy, having caught as many cunners as would be needed

for supper, were cleaning them when Sam cried out, and after one glance seaward Mr. Rowe shouted:

"Now what's in the wind? Do you reckon he had to find somebody to help pull the dory?"

"If that's so, he wasn't very fussy 'bout what he took. The chap in the bow looks as if he had been livin' on wind puddin' for the last couple of weeks!" Tommy said, speaking in a low tone lest the words be overheard, for already was the bow of the dory grating on the beach.

The cause of these comments was a very small and very hungry looking boy who was perched up on the cargo, which had been piled two or more feet above the gunwale, and was now staring at the scene before him with eyes that seemed many sizes too large for his thin face.

"Now why do you s'pose the old man has brought home that little monkey?" Mr. Rowe said half to himself, making no move toward going to the shore, and Sam, a moment later, cried as if believing he had made an important discovery:

"I know what's up! Uncle Ben has found a new member of the family! Come on, let's go down an' see him. Say, but ain't he been playin' in hard luck!" and Sam, followed by Tommy and Mr. Rowe, ran at full speed to the shore.

"I was kinder wonderin' why you didn't lend a hand at unloadin' this boat," Uncle Ben said laughingly as he scrambled ashore with the little stranger in his arms. "Kinder s'prised at seein' this present I've brought yer, eh? Wa'al, what do you think of that?" and the old man gently dropped the strange boy, who looked almost like a baby, on the sand.

"Who is he? Where'd you find him?" Sam cried, going shyly up to the stranger, who stood silent and motionless, as if not quite decided whether to laugh or cry.

"His name is Joey Sampson; he's been livin' out at the poor farm, an' the s'lectmen got so mighty economical they cooked up the idee Southport couldn't afford to feed him any longer, so was countin' on sendin' the poor little creeter down to St. Johns, where somebody said his father's cousin lived. Never tried to find out if that 'ere cousin would take him in or not, but jest allowed to ship him off. I told 'em I'd adopt the child as a new member of my family, an' they was mighty glad to get rid of him. Wa'al, Joey, what do you think of Apple Island?"

"It's a pretty place, sir," the little stranger said in a tearful voice, and straightway Sam's heart went out to him.

"It's better than pretty, Joey," he said, taking the little fellow in his arms, for, as Mr. Rowe afterward declared, "he wasn't bigger'n a shirt button." "If the only home you've had has been the poor farm, you'll soon come to know that you was mighty lucky when Uncle Ben run across your track. Here's Tommy,

an' Mr. Rowe, an' me, who hadn't any home till we were given the chance to stay here, an' it's a mighty comfortable place, with the best man for the head of the family that ever lived, as you'll find out before bein' here many days."

"There, there, Sammy," Uncle Ben interrupted, "have done with your fairy tales. Take Joey up to the shanty, an' the rest of us will tote what of the stuff needs to go under cover. Supper ready?"

"It will be in five minutes, for then the biscuit'll be done," and away Sam ran toward the shanty, petting Joey as if he was really the baby he looked to be. "You'll get on here famously," he said when they were come to the building, "for it'll only be a case of settin' still an' seein' yourself grow fat. Then when our schooner is afloat what great times you'll have fishin'!"

"Do you s'pose your Uncle Ben will let me stay here very long?" the little lad asked wistfully.

"Of course he will, else you wouldn't have been brought here. He's buildin' up a family out of jest sich lonesome boys as you an' me, an' you've come here to be part of it. Camp down in my bunk while I look after the supper, for I'm the cook, an' keep on thankin' your lucky stars that Uncle Ben happened to see you at the right time. How long have you been at the poor farm?"

"Ever since I can remember."

"Did you like it out there?"

"It wasn't very nice," Joey replied timidly, and Sam added emphatically:

"I'll bet it wasn't, though there was one spell when I thought it would be a good deal better than livin' aboard the 'Sally D.' with Cap'en Doak ugly a good deal more'n half the time. Did you ever see that cousin down in St. Johns?"

"I never knew there was one till Deacon Stubbs said it was a shame a big boy like me should be eatin' the bread of idleness, when I had blood relations that were next door to rollin' in luxury."

"Well, was you idle?"

"I did everything they told me—lugged in the wood, split the kindlings, drove the cows to pasture, an' brought in the water—"

"An' that's what they call eatin' the bread of idleness!" Uncle Ben cried as he entered with his arms full of packages, which he laid in one of the bunks, and, taking Joey in his arms, seated himself by the window. "Look out there at our schooner, sonny boy! Some day she'll be layin' at anchor, as trim a craft as ever floated, an' then you shall walk the quarter-deck like any cap'en, while we do the drudgery. You're one of the family now, Joey, an' I'm countin' that all hands will come to love you as much as I've found time to do already. You're a wee mite of a thing, an' it's a baby we've been needin' to make things ship-shape, so that's the berth you've dropped inter. Now then, Sammy, get them biscuit out, for I reckon our Joey is mighty sharkish, seein's he hasn't had any dinner, an' come to think

of it, neither have I, for that matter.”

Mr. Rowe came into the shanty on tiptoe, as if thinking he must be very quiet while Uncle Ben was holding the “baby,” and Tommy, who followed him, said laughingly: “You’d think Joey was a reg’lar kid, by the way Mr. Rowe moves ’round. But say, don’t it make things look better to see sich a little shaver here!”

Joey would have been very hard to please if the greeting he received in his new home had not soothed his heart, and by the time Uncle Ben made a “high chair” by putting a buoy on one of the stools and covering it with an old fish-net, he appeared to be in the best of spirits.

“A month of this kind of livin’, with plenty of fresh air an’ nobody to talk ’bout the bread of idleness, will make a new man of you, Joey,” Uncle Ben said when the tiny lad, unable to swallow another mouthful, slipped down from the fish-net cushion. “I’m allowin’ to set here in stormy weather, when there’s nothin’ to be done outside, an’ jest watch you grow fat.”

CHAPTER XVI

“THE BABY”

If, when Uncle Ben started for the Port on the trip when he found Joey Sampson, Sam and Tom had been told that anything could happen on Apple Island which might turn the least little portion of their attention from the schooner they would have said indignantly that it was not possible, and yet not only the two lads, but even Mr. Rowe, soon came to think that the new, tiny member of the family was more interesting than the work of wrecking.

On the morning after Joey’s arrival Uncle Ben insisted on being allowed to wash the dishes and set the house to rights, claiming that it might be better for Sam and Tom to spend all the time possible, before the hour came for hauling the traps, helping Mr. Rowe, and Sam said almost jealously, when he followed the others out of the shanty very shortly after daybreak:

“I really believe Uncle Ben is willin’ to do the housework this mornin’, so’s he can watch Joey! But say, I don’t blame him a little bit, for that baby is mighty cute!”

“It’s goin’ to be a big thing for us to have him ’round here,” Tom replied reflectively. “Jest as soon as Uncle Ben gets through foolin’ with him we’ll take the little shaver out in the dory to let him see us haul in the lobsters——”

"You won't do any sich risky thing!" Mr. Rowe said, emphatically. "Don't get the wild idee inter your heads that you can take the baby out in a dory 'less Uncle Ben or I go with you. 'Cordin' to the looks of the schooner, we haven't got to keep so terribly sharp at the work of floatin' her, now we've put the timbers in place, an' it may be that I can go out with you a spell this forenoon, so's to let Joey see what lobsterin' is like."

If one could judge by the expression which came over the faces of the lads when Mr. Rowe thus made it plain that he intended to have a full share of the "baby's" company, they were not particularly well pleased with this announcement, nor did they continue the subject further.

There was plenty of work before them, now that Uncle Ben had brought from Southport the needed materials, and the three set about it with a will during a full hour, when it seemed much as if they had lost interest, for then Uncle Ben came down to the shore leading Joey by the hand, and straightway each of the laborers appeared to believe he was called upon to entertain the new member of the family.

Uncle Ben stretched himself lazily on the sand as if it pleased him wondrously well to watch the "baby," while Mr. Rowe introduced him to the "Sally D.," even carrying him on board upon his shoulders, and, seeing Sam and Tommy wistfully watching the movements of the two, the old man said encouragingly:

"If you boys want to play with Joey, why don't you do it? I reckon, now that Reuben has got these famous timbers of his in place, there ain't any good reason why you shouldn't take things easy, an' the baby hasn't had any too comfortable a time in this world but that he'll take to a bit of sport with you."

Mr. Rowe was clambering down over the bow of the schooner as Uncle Ben thus spoke, and one might almost have fancied that he was displeased with the proposition which would prevent him from sharing in the romp. He said quickly to the lad who was yet seated on his shoulder:

"How would it strike you if we went over to look at the lobster car?"

"You can't see anythin' there, Joey," Tommy cried enticingly. "Come with Sam an' me; we'll roll up our trousers an' go in wadin'."

The little lad from the poorhouse scrambled down from Mr. Rowe's shoulder, eager to accept the invitation, and the former "crew" of the "Sally D." could do no less than seat himself by Uncle Ben's side, saying in an apologetic tone as he did so:

"I s'pose, when you come right down to facts, that I'm a leetle too old to be playin' with a lot of youngsters; but it seems so mighty good to have a baby like him cavortin' 'round, that I can't help wantin' to have a hand in the fun myself."

"I don't blame you, Reuben, I don't blame you a little bit, for I've been feelin' a good deal that way myself this mornin'. To have a little shaver like Joey

tumblin' 'round, makes it seem as if we'd really started a family, an' if things go along as smooth as they oughter, what with the schooner, an' all these 'ere youngsters, the rest of my days will be spent in havin' a good time watchin' the rest of you runnin' the island. Look at that baby, will yer! Ain't it doin' him a world of good to be paddlin' in the water? I'm allowin' that when we got hold of him it was a good deal better trade than buyin' the schooner."

As a matter of fact, Joey Sampson so occupied the attention of all the "family" that when the hour of noon came around, and no more than sixty minutes had been spent in work on the "Sally," Mr. Rowe said half to himself, but yet speaking so loud that Uncle Ben could hear the words:

"He's a mighty smart baby, an' I'm glad he's goin' to live here on the island; but there's got to be some rules an' regerlations 'bout playin' with him, or watchin' others do it, else it'll be winter before we're ready to launch the schooner."

"I reckon you're right, Reuben," Uncle Ben said with a long-drawn sigh, "an' I'm goin' to draw a line on myself right away; but at the same time I don't know when I've enjoyed myself more'n I have this forenoon. As for the baby! Look at him rollin' over in the sand! At a moderate guess I'd say he'd fattened up a full half-pound since mornin'."

It was quite a long time, however, before Uncle Ben was able to "draw a line" upon himself to the extent of treating the "baby" like an ordinary member of the family. It was not until the old lobster catcher had taken him out in the dory that he might see the boys haul the traps, and that Mr. Rowe had given him an afternoon of pleasure on board the stranded schooner, and Sam and Tom had carried him to the grove in the centre of the island, that the regular routine of work was taken up once more.

Then all hands labored with a will to make up for the time spent in amusement, although each night, for at least half an hour after supper, Uncle Ben insisted on holding the "baby" on his knee while Sam and Tom washed the dishes and set the house to rights generally.

And as to Joey? Verily his lines had fallen in pleasant places. Never before had he received so much attention, and for the first time in his life did he understand what it meant to be loved and petted. It was the belief of all the members of the family that he was growing fat very rapidly, and Uncle Ben daily gave words to his regret that he had not been sufficiently thoughtful to have weighed the little fellow before leaving Southport, so they might know to a certainty how much Apple Island agreed with him.

It must not be supposed, however, that while the "family" was thus being amused by Joey as if he had been a veritable plaything, all the work was neglected. As Mr. Rowe said, "they spent about half the time coddlin' him, but

managed to putter 'round the 'Sally D.' enough to show that they were really bent on launchin' her."

Then came the time when it was agreed among all hands that the "baby" must take care of himself, to a certain extent, and the work of wrecking was pushed forward with a will, each member of the family doing his best to make up the lost time.

The schooner's hull had been caulked and painted while yet she lay half in the sand and half on the rude ways, and Mr. Rowe felt confident every leak was stopped. Sam and Tom had taken it upon themselves to clean and paint the interior of the cabin until it was as sweet as soap and water could make it, and thus every token of Captain Doak had been cleared away.

Uncle Ben had made two trips to Southport, but Joey had refused each invitation to go with him, giving as his reason that Apple Island was far too pleasant a place to leave even for a single hour, and this refusal pleased the old man even more than to have had the lad all to himself during an entire day.

Then, about five weeks from the day when Uncle Ben became the owner of the "Sally D.," everything was made ready for the launching, and Mr. Rowe announced that at high tide on the following morning he would be able to prove to the family that his method of wrecking was without a flaw.

"We'll make a reg'lar Fourth of July out of the day," Uncle Ben declared, as he sat by the window with Joey on his knee, "an' even if we did squander considerable time on the baby when he first came, I'm allowin' that we've earned a little pleasurin', so Sammy an' Tommy shall get up the finest dinner they know how to cook, an' we'll eat it in the 'Sally's' cabin after she's swingin' to her anchor in the cove."

As a matter of course, this was welcome news to the cooks, and they at once set about deciding upon what particularly dainty dishes should be served, until Mr. Rowe said half to himself:

"When I think that in all this time Eliakim Doak hasn't showed hisself, I can't help fearin' he has been hatchin' some kind of mischief for unless he's left Southport, which don't seem likely, it ain't reasonable to think he'd be willin' to let us go on so smooth."

"Now, now, Reuben, don't go to crossin' bridges before you come to 'em," Uncle Ben said placidly, as he stroked Joey's hair affectionately. "I'm allowin' that Eliakim has come to see the evil of his ways, an' hasn't been givin' a thought to work us harm. Beside what call has he to do anythin' agin us? We paid cash for the schooner, an' more than anybody else would give, at a time when he wanted to sell her, so, as I've figgered it, we did him a good turn."

"There's no goin' back of that, Uncle Ben," Mr. Rowe agreed, "but doin' Eliakim Doak a good turn is much the same as if you'd kicked another man black an'

blue. He ain't built the right way to appreciate it. The only time he can be made to understand is when somebody stands ready to knock him down whenever he goes wrong, an' that'll keep him where he belongs."

"Wa'al, Reuben, we won't bother our heads 'bout Eliakim jest now when the 'Sally' is so near afloat. Let's have our launchin' in the mornin' an' celebrate it the best we know how, without thinkin' of anythin' that ain't pleasant," and once more Uncle Ben gave himself up to the enjoyment of treating Joey as a veritable baby.

It is safe to say that at least once every five minutes during the remaining time of daylight each member of the "family" looked out of the window at the "Sally D." as she stood on the ways, looking every inch fit for the launching, and more jaunty, so Uncle Ben declared, than on the first day she made the acquaintance of the water.

There was no indication that the sun was near at hand when Mr. Rowe awakened the inmates of the shanty next morning, but he insisted they should be up and at work in order that, as he expressed it, "they might have plenty of time to look at the 'Sally' before she went slidin' down the well-greased ways."

Therefore it was that the sun had not yet risen when the family ate breakfast, and Sam and Tom finished the morning's work at least three hours before the tide would be at its height. They were intending to cook a regular feast to be carried aboard the "Sally" after she was in the water, but it would not be time to set about that for a long while and the lads, having nothing else with which to occupy themselves, strolled down to the beach when the shanty had been set to rights, where were Uncle Ben, Mr. Rowe and Joey Sampson gazing at the schooner as eagerly as if they had never seen her before.

"There's no use talkin', she'll make a snug little craft for this 'ere family," Mr. Rowe was saying as the lads joined the party, "an' if she don't bring in a good many more dollars than ever the lobster business did it's 'cause I've forgotten how to handle a line!"

"I'm hopin' she'll pay well," Uncle Ben replied thoughtfully, "but it ain't on account of my hankerin' after the dollars for myself. I reckon there's enough left in the bank to pay my funeral expenses, an' I'm hopin' the Lord won't let me live after I can't take care of myself; but it's the family that's makin' me want to have more money comin' in. If I can see scraped together what's needed to buy the island an' have it fixed by the lawyers so's it'll always be a home for decent boys who are willin' to help themselves if they're given half a chance, then I'll feel as if I'd done somethin' in this 'ere world that's worth countin'."

Mr. Rowe looked oddly out of the corner of his eye at the old lobster catcher for a moment, and then said, half to himself:

"'Cordin' to the way I look at things, what you've already done is well

worth countin', Uncle Ben, an' if there are sich matters as harps in the next world, yours oughter be the biggest an' have the most strings!"

"If that old heathen ain't comin' over here jest when we don't want him, I'm a duffer!" Tom screamed at the full strength of his lungs as he pointed across the water in the direction of Southport, and, turning quickly to learn the cause of the alarm, the other members of the family saw two dories heading for the island, one leading the other by a considerable distance.

In an instant Uncle Ben and Mr. Rowe were on their feet, the old lobster catcher showing by his face that he was seriously disturbed in mind, as he asked of Mr. Rowe in a gentle whisper:

"Do you allow, Reuben, that Eliakim can really be comin' here after havin' stayed away so long?"

"I'm ready to allow that there's nothin' too mean for him to do, 'specially when he's got one of his ugly spells. It strikes me that we've got to handle him my way, instead of yours, for you're too soft to deal with the likes of Eliakim Doak."

"We won't have any trouble, Reuben, unless he tries to do mischief, an' then allow we're warranted in protectin' our own. Ain't there two men in that first dory?"

"Yes, an' most like he's got some vagabond crony or another, with more trailin' on behind, allowin' that they'll do jest about as they please. Now see here, Uncle Ben," and Mr. Rowe spoke in an imploring tone. "You ain't built the right way to tackle sich as them, so s'pose you toddle up to the shanty with Joey, an' let the boys an' me 'tend to this 'ere job? I'm willin' to agree that soft words are all right as a general thing, but when it comes to throwin' 'em away on the likes of Eliakim, it's a waste of time an' breath. This 'ere is the same as your own island, an' if you'll crawl off somewhere, I'll see to it that Doak don't do any funny business."

CHAPTER XVII

THE LAUNCHING

Uncle Ben lifted Joey in his arms, as if about to do exactly as Mr. Rowe desired, and then remembering, most likely, that Reuben's methods of dealing with men like Captain Doak were not such as he approved of, he stood irresolute, gazing

anxiously at the approaching boats as he said:

"It's too bad that our day of pleasin' should be spoiled by Eliakim, when he hasn't got the least little reason for makin' a row."

"Do as Mr. Rowe wants you to, Uncle Ben, an' there won't be much of anythin' spoiled," Tommy said pleadingly, as he tried to drag the old man toward the shanty. "The three of us can take care of the schooner without tryin' very hard."

"But I'm afraid there'll be a fight, Tommy, an' that's a poor way of celebratin' the launchin' of the 'Sally,'" the old man said mournfully.

"Don't you worry 'bout that, for we'll knock his head off before he gets very far along in his funny business," Tom cried confidently, and this assurance seemed to have the opposite effect from that intended.

"We won't stir up more of a row than can be helped, an' I'm certain you'd rather we showed a little fight than let him do harm to the schooner just when we've got her in sailin' trim," Sam pleaded, and Mr. Rowe added, speaking as if to a child:

"Now do look at it in the right light, Uncle Ben! We're bound to take care of the 'Sally,' else what'll come of your plan for makin' a home here for them what ain't got any?"

In no other way could Mr. Rowe have presented the case to more speedily insure Uncle Ben's obedience. The possibility that Captain Doak might work such mischief as would prevent him from carrying out the scheme he had so long in mind, and which was so well begun, caused the old man to lose sight of everything else, and, as if escaping from some terrible and immediate danger, he ran swiftly toward the shanty with Joey in his arms.

"Now we're got rid of Uncle Ben, I reckon it won't take us long to settle that old heathen's hash, no matter how many heelers he's got with him," Tommy said, in a tone of satisfaction, and looking very much as if the prospect of trouble with the former owner of the "Sally D." pleased him greatly.

Mr. Rowe, however, was not inclined to look upon the situation as affording many possibilities for enjoyment. The fact that Captain Doak had such a large party with him seemed fairly good evidence that he had come to do something more than make threats, and, regardless of the fact that he had spoken so confidently of what he would be able to do in the way of protecting the "family's" property, Reuben understood that he and the two lads could not successfully oppose any determined attack.

Within five minutes after Uncle Ben and Joey had taken refuge in the shanty, it was possible to make out that the second dory had as crew three men, and these with the men in the first boat would make up a force which would be able to carry out any plan agreed upon, however bravely the defenders of the

island might battle for their rights.

"That's Eliakim in the leadin' dory," Mr. Rowe said after a keen survey of the approaching craft, "an' unless I'm way out of my reckonin', it's Jim Coulson with him. 'Cordin' to my idee these two are about the most worthless couple that can be found in the Port. It stands to reason they've come to make trouble, an' I'm beginnin' to be afraid we'll have our hands full."

"They'll have to work mighty lively if they get the best of us," Tom said confidently as he searched about for something in the shape of a club that would serve his purpose, and Sam, who was seriously disturbed by the expression of anxiety on Mr. Rowe's face, added doubtfully:

"We can't hold out very long against five men, less Uncle Ben takes it inter his head to lend a hand, an' I'm afraid he'd see 'em wreck the 'Sally' before thinkin' he oughter make a reg'lar fight."

"No, we can't count on him," and Mr. Rowe shook his head sorrowfully, but seeming to recover his courage an instant later, as he added: "Howsomever, we'll make it hot for a spell, no matter how many Eliakim has got with him, an' then if we're downed it won't be our fault."

Tom had found such a weapon as would apparently serve his purpose, and set about procuring something of the same kind for Sam; but Mr. Rowe made no preparations whatever. He stood with his gaze fixed upon the leading boat, as if by such close scrutiny he could determine what the enemy's first move would be, and then walked slowly up the beach on seeing that the dory would take the sand a short distance to the eastward of where the "Sally" rested on the ways as if impatient to be in the water once more.

It was evident that Captain Doak had come for some other purpose than to indulge in empty threats, for he spoke not a word as the little craft drifted shoreward, and when she was within fifty feet of the beach Mr. Rowe cried warningly:

"Don't make the mistake of landin' on this island, Eliakim Doak, or there'll be more trouble come of it than you're lookin' for! You've been cautioned against trespassin', an' tellin' you that Uncle Ben counts on doin' jest as he threatened."

"If I did my duty I'd have you in jail for mutiny!" Captain Doak cried threateningly. "If you mix inter this matter, I'll have a warrant out before you're a day older, Reuben Rowe!"

"Why don't you go ahead an' get your warrants, instead of makin' so much talk about it?" the sailor cried angrily. "I count on mixin' in here long enough to give you the strongest dose you ever got, an' don't you forget it! If you come ashore here I'll see to it that you don't go back in as good shape as you are now." Then in a whisper to Tom, who stood close by his side, "You two lads are to jump on Jim Coulson the minute he puts foot on the sand, without payin' any heed to me. If I can't take care of Eliakim Doak single handed, it'll serve me right to be

used up.”

Tom, repeating Reuben’s words to Sam, ran forward to take his part in the coming battle just as Captain Doak leaped ashore, evidently bent on trying conclusions with Mr. Rowe at once, and just at this point, when it seemed as if there was no longer any possibility a fight could be averted, the second dory had come within hailing distance.

Until this moment none of those of the island had given any particular heed to her, therefore, they were really startled by hearing a friendly voice cry:

”Look out, Reuben! Don’t get inter a mix-up when there’s no real need of it! We’ve come over to see that you ain’t imposed on.”

”It’s Uncle Ben’s friend, Billy Mansfield an’ he must have had an inklin’ of what Eliakim was up to!” Mr. Rowe said to the lads in a tone of relief. ”I reckon there won’t be any great amount of mischief done this day!”

”What are you doin’ here?” Captain Doak cried savagely, wheeling about to face the newcomers as if he was only at this moment aware of their neighborhood. ”I’ll have you understand that the man who comes agin’ me this day is like to get all that’s needed!”

”Don’t make the mistake of threatenin’, Eliakim Doak!” Mr. Mansfield cried warningly. ”It may be that we’ve come over to have a share in the launchin’, seein’s how there ain’t much goin’ on in the Port to-day, an’ then ag’in perhaps we tailed on knowin’ you was bent on mischief, an’ countin’ to lend Uncle Ben a hand. Since you’ve begun to threaten, it may be well if I give you notice here an’ now, that you’re to keep away from this island. We at the Port have made up our minds that you’ve got to live somewhere near decent from this on, or leave our part of the country.”

By this time Mr. Mansfield and his friends had stepped ashore from their dory and were standing between the former owner of the ”Sally D.” and the defenders of the island, showing by their attitude that they were ready to lend a hand against the two who were plotting mischief.

”I’ve come here for my schooner, an’ count on havin’ her,” Captain Doak cried in a voice hoarse with passion. ”You an’ half a dozen like you did what you could to cheat me out of the vessel, an’ it’ll be a sorry day when you go any further in sich fraud.”

”You know as well as I do, Eliakim, that you were forced to sell the ’Sally’ because you couldn’t raise money enough to float her,” and it was evident that Mr. Mansfield was striving hard to speak in a calm tone. ”If any other than Uncle Ben had bought the craft you wouldn’t have dared to open your mouth about ownership; but on account of his bein’ a peaceable man who’d stand a good deal before raisin’ a hand in his own defense, you think it will be possible to bully him out of a few more dollars. We at the Port heard last night of what you counted

on doin' to-day, an' we three have come, representin' the town, to give you final warnin'. Behave yourself so far as the schooner an' this island are concerned, or we'll send you out of the county on a rail!" Then, turning to Mr. Rowe, as if believing there was no need of further conversation with Captain Doak, the visitor asked, "Where is the old man?"

"Up in the shanty. We sent him there, thinkin' we could handle Eliakim better without him."

"Well, seein's Cap'en Doak is sober enough to understand that he'd better not kick up any row while we're here, s'posen you go ahead with your launchin'? We've come out to help celebrate, an' don't want any hitch in the business."

"She shall come off the ways at high water," Mr. Rowe replied in a tone of relief, and as Mr. Mansfield and his friends went toward the shanty he set about the final arrangements for sending the "Sally" into the water.

Captain Doak and his friend stood irresolutely near their boat, as if trying to decide whether it would be safe for them to make any further attempt at bullying the inhabitants of the island, while Mr. Rowe and the lads went about their work as if the former owner of the "Sally" no longer had an existence.

There was really very little remaining to be done before the schooner was ready for the launching, but Mr. Rowe seemed eager to find something with which to occupy himself, and his companions did their best at seconding his efforts.

During five minutes or more Captain Doak stood near by the dory conversing in whispers with his friend, and then the two went aboard, Reuben calling after them as they slowly pulled away from the island:

"You've heard what Billy Mansfield said the folks at the Port would do if you tried to be funny with Uncle Ben, an' it won't be a bad idee if you bear in mind the fact that I'll be prepared for sich as you from this time out."

"You wouldn't be crowin' so loud if folks at the Port had minded their own business," Captain Doak growled. "My time will come some day, an' when it does, you'll wish you'd never been born!"

Then the two men bent their backs to the oars, as if not eager for further conversation, and Mr. Rowe said in a confident tone to his companions:

"You can set it down as a fact that Eliakim won't dare to try any more funny business, seein's he's roused the folks at the Port. We've had a mighty lucky day of it, 'cordin' to my way of thinkin', for what he might do has bothered me not a little."

"An' do you believe he's done for now?" Tommy asked incredulously.

"Ay, lad, you can set that down as a fact. Eliakim is a good deal of a coward any time; but now that Billy Mansfield has read the riot act to him, he'll give Apple Island a wide berth from this out. I reckon we may as well pass the word

that them as wants to see the launchin' had best be gettin' their seats, for the tide's as high as it's likely to be this day."

It was as if the lads had, during the excitement of a possible battle with Captain Doak, forgotten that the moment was near at hand when it was to be shown whether the many days of labor would be rewarded by success, and now when Mr. Rowe made his announcement they were plunged into a state of mingled joy and doubt such as would be difficult to describe.

Sam ran at full speed toward the shanty to summon those who had taken shelter there from the unpleasant scene which was presented by the arrival of the former owner of the "Sally D.," and Tommy had no more than hoisted the flags on the schooner's spars than the visitors, Uncle Ben and Joey, came rapidly down to the beach.

"I'm allowin' that all of you will go on board the 'Sally,'" Reuben Rowe said, taking it upon himself to act as master of ceremonies, as was indeed his right after all he had done. "The lads an' I can start her, I reckon. You'll find the anchor ready for lettin' go, so stand by to bring her up with a sharp turn, for it'll be quick work once she's on the move."

Uncle Ben tossed Joey aboard over the bow, while the guests followed as best they might, and immediately the last one was on the deck Mr. Rowe gave the word to his assistants.

Sam and Tom worked on one side of the hull, driving the starting wedge home, while Reuben attended to the work immediately opposite them, and it is safe to say that every member of the launching party was astonished by the swiftness and ease with which this final portion of the task was performed. To the two lads who were just under the bow swinging the heavy sledges, it seemed as if no more than half a dozen blows had been struck before the "Sally" began to slide down the ways much as though eager to be in the water, sending the spray high over her stern when the plunge was made.

Then what a shout went up! If Captain Doak had not made good use of his time with the oars he must have heard the cries of rejoicing when the little schooner was afloat once more, tossing on the swell she herself had created and riding to her anchor much like a captive sea-gull.

"It's a great job you've done, Reuben!" Uncle Ben cried in a tone of triumph when the cheering had subsided sufficiently to admit of his making himself heard. "From this out, so long as it pleases you to stay at Apple Island a member of the family, the 'Sally' shall be under your command!"

"All right, Uncle Ben," Mr. Rowe replied, waving his arms as if it was absolutely impossible for him to remain motionless. "I'll take advantage of that promise by sayin' that if the folks from the Port will stop over night here, so's we can get the ballast in, we'll carry 'em home bright an' early to-morrow mornin'

on board the 'Sally:'"

"You're right, Reuben, you're right," the old lobster catcher cried, gleefully as any child. "I'll see that they stay, an' all hands of us will turn to for gettin' the ballast in!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRIAL TRIP

Sam and Tommy could not afford to spend very many moments in rejoicing after the "Sally D." was afloat, because the work of preparing a dinner which should really be a feast of thanksgiving had been intrusted to them, and time was precious if the task was to be performed according to their desires.

It was impossible, however, for the two lads not to devote a few moments to admiring the jaunty little schooner as she rose and fell on the gentle swell, tugging at the anchor cable as if coaxing to be allowed to use her wings once more where the water was deep and the wind blew half a gale.

"It seems almost as if we had built the whole of her," Sam said, half to himself, as he gazed with critical eye upon the charming marine picture before him.

"An' I allow we can take more credit for her looks than belongs to the man who really did put her together," Mr. Rowe added quickly. "She was what you might call a wreck when Uncle Ben bought her, an' now cast your eyes over the beauty! I remember when she was first launched, an' am free to say that she didn't come anywhere near bein' as handsome as at this minute, for her spars never did have rake enough, while the bowsprit allers made her look snub-nosed. We've changed all that; she's as tight as a cup, an' if she can't outsail anythin' on this 'ere coast I'll eat my hat, instead of the dinner you lads are allowin' to fix up this day."

"An' it's time we got about the work, instead of standin' here lookin' at the dandy of all schooners that ever floated," Tommy said with no slight show of nervousness. "Here we've got to build a fire in the cabin, cook all the stuff that has been made ready, set the table, an' do more work than the law allows! Can't you make Uncle Ben an' his visitors come ashore, Mr. Rowe?"

"They can't do it till I go after 'em in the dory, an' that's the fact," Reuben replied laughingly. "Do you know, I'd clean forgot everythin' except the little beauty that we've worked over so long! If Eliakim Doak could see her this minute,

I'm reckonin' he'd jest about go crazy 'cause she don't belong to him any longer!"

"Don't talk about that old heathen!" Tommy cried imploringly. "It seems like it would bring us bad luck even to speak his name on the first day the 'Sally' is in the water. Take hold with me, Sam, an' we'll shove off the dory, else Mr. Rowe'll never get through lookin' at the schooner!"

Reuben aroused himself, as it were, and in another moment set about the work which was necessary before the first steps toward making ready the thanksgiving feast could be taken.

It was agreed that Tom should go aboard and build a fire in the cook-stove, which had been made ready for use several days before the launching, while Sam began the task of bringing the eatables from the shanty to the shore, with the assistance of Reuben and little Joey, as soon as the guests had been brought ashore, for the "baby of the family" had insisted on being allowed to aid in the celebration.

Although no one had anticipated the coming of guests, it had been agreed that Uncle Ben should not raise his hand in the way of work on this day, therefore, according to the program already made, he had nothing to do save act the part of host to Mr. Mansfield and his friends.

How Sam and Tom worked when the food had been brought aboard the "Sally" and they, with Joey as assistant, were alone on the schooner! Sam had already laid his plans as to what should be served for dinner, and such a quantity of food had been provided that even the addition of three to the list of feasters did not require additional preparation, save in the way of extra dishes and stools.

Because of the visitors from Southport, Mr. Rowe suggested that a table be set up on deck, since the cabin was too small to accommodate so many, therefore, while the boys worked over the stove he and Joey put two boards, that were well scrubbed with soap and water, across from the top of the cabin to the starboard rail, and on these the feast was spread.

The bill of fare was made up of fried lobster, broiled cunners, roasted clams, lobster chowder, stewed clams, potatoes and fresh bread in plenty, and coffee for all in brightly-scoured tin cups.

Not until late in the afternoon was Sam willing to admit that he could do no more, and then Mr. Rowe brought Uncle Ben and the guests on board, after making the dory gay with a couple of old flags.

If the boys had been hoping to be complimented for their skill as cooks they were not disappointed, for the gentlemen from Southport were loud and profuse in their praises as they seated themselves on either side the makeshift for a table, and Sam's eyes glistened when Uncle Ben declared that the "family cook" was the best coffee maker "he had ever struck."

It can well be fancied how fervent was the blessing the old lobster catcher

invoked, and a stranger might have thought that the schooner had been presented to him without money and without price, so humbly grateful was he to the good God for the gift of the little vessel.

Sam and Tom insisted upon waiting upon those at table, and little Joey had been eager to assist them, but Uncle Ben declared that he wouldn't be able to eat a mouthful unless the baby was by his side, therefore, the two boys had the pleasure of conducting the feast unaided.

How the food disappeared after the feasters got well to work! If Sam's skill as a cook had not already been spoken of he would have understood that it was fully appreciated before that dinner came to an end. Even though so much had been prepared, it was necessary to fry six more lobsters, else the two boys would have gone hungry, for nearly everything on the table was gone before the last man declared it was impossible for him to eat any more.

"It's the best dinner I ever put into my mouth," Mr. Mansfield said decidedly as he sipped the steaming coffee. "I've heard it said Sammy Cushing could beat any cook that ever sailed out of the Port; but I never put much faith in the talk till to-day. I allow you're buildin' up quite a family here, Uncle Ben?"

"That's what I'm hopin' to do, William," the old lobster catcher replied modestly. "Not havin' child nor chick of my own, it seems as if I oughter do somethin' in the way of lookin' after youngsters what haven't got any homes. Apple Island is big enough for a good many, an' now that we've got this 'ere schooner to be used in fishin', I'm allowin' that we can provide for quite a number of lads who are willin' to help themselves. Since Reuben Rowe wants to stay with us, an' will run the 'Sally,' it stands to reason that with what the vessel brings in, added to the lobsterin', we'll be able to do more than pay our way."

"I've allers allowed that you was a good citizen, Uncle Ben," Mr. Mansfield said as he rose to his feet, "an' we at the Port are proud of you, even though we haven't said very much about it. When the selectmen got so snug that they couldn't afford to keep Joey at the poor farm, an' you gave him a home sich as any boy can be happy in, we had a better idee of what you was tryin' to do than if you'd spent a week explainin' it. The upshot of the whole matter is that we of the Port made up our minds to have a hand in the business, an' without much tryin' we've raised a hundred dollars cash, with the agreement to give more when it's needed, so here's the money."

Having said this, Mr. Mansfield laid before Uncle Ben a roll of bank-notes, and then sat down with the air of a man who is nearly on the verge of exhaustion from much speaking.

Uncle Ben was so surprised that during several moments it seemed impossible for him to say a word; he swallowed something which seemed to have come up in his throat suddenly, brushed his eyes as if they were full of dust, started up

to leave the table, and then sank back again as if unable to do other than keep down the lump in his throat.

It was Mr. Rowe who put an end to what was becoming really unpleasant by crying out loudly:

"Three cheers for Uncle Ben an' the people of the Port who've found out what kind of a man he is!"

Then all hands, except the old man himself, cheered wildly, and in the confusion caused by this outburst Mr. Mansfield proposed that the guests go ashore in order that the boys might have a chance to set the deck of the schooner to rights after the thanksgiving feast.

"It begins to look as if this 'ere family was comin' out right strong, if the folks at the Port are lookin' after it," Tom said, in a tone of triumph, and Sam replied sharply:

"Put all the people at the Port together, an' they wouldn't make up one of Uncle Ben's fingers! It would have been a long day before they thought of startin' a family, an' it wasn't until Uncle Ben had spent about all the money he had in the bank that they woke up to the idee he was doin' somethin' big in helpin' sich fellers as you an' me."

"Don't you count one hundred dollars any thin'?" Tom asked in surprise.

"Of course I do; but what is it for all of them to raise, when Uncle Ben has put out more'n five times as much without winkin'?"

Then Sam, as if he had settled the matter finally, went about his work, and the sun was not yet ready to drop out of sight behind the hills when the deck and cabin of the "Sally D." were as cleanly and orderly as before the feast was made ready.

Mr. Mansfield and his friends were not inclined to eat the "bread of idleness," as was shown very shortly after they went on shore; for then they set about bringing out ballast in the dories, under the direction of Mr. Rowe, until a full half hour before night had shut in, the "Sally D." was in good trim for the trial trip on the following morning.

As had been arranged, the regular crew of the "Sally" slept on board that night in the newly-painted bunks. Reuben claimed the right as captain to the aftermost one on the starboard side, while Sam and Tom occupied the two forward berths opposite, and very snug and beautiful was the cabin when the small swinging lamp had been lighted.

"It won't be anythin' more'n fun to go out fishin' in a craft like this," Tom said sleepily, as he took one last look around before Mr. Rowe extinguished the light for the night, and the "captain" replied with no little of sharpness in his tones:

"It's dollars, not fun, that we'll be after, lad, when once the work is begun.

This 'ere schooner has cost a heap of money, even though Uncle Ben did get her at a bargain, an' if she don't bring in the whole expense of the family, with a little left over for them as may come later, I'll say we've made a bloomin' failure of our job. Why, I've known a craft like this to pay for herself twice over in one season, an' while we can't count on any sich luck as that, seein' our crew will be small, we oughter make enough to keep Uncle Ben's mind easy 'bout money matters. Now you lads are to shut your eyes, 'cause it'll be a mighty early call in the mornin'."

As to this last Mr. Rowe kept his word faithfully, for it seemed to the boys as if they had no more than fallen asleep before he aroused them with the word that they would "need to jump right lively in order to make breakfast ready before the schooner was under way."

The sun had not yet risen when Uncle Ben, little Joey and the guests came on board; but even then Sam and Tom had a hearty meal prepared; and when, with every flag flying and the wind cresting the waves with foam, the "Sally D." glided out of the cove under full sail, the day was no more than well begun.

If only it were possible to describe the joy of the "family" on this first trip of the schooner they had rescued from the sands! Every inch of canvas was spread to the fresh breeze, the little craft heeling over to it until to Joey it seemed as if she was in danger of capsizing, and with the water spouting up from her bow into spray, she gave good proof that Reuben had told only the truth when he said she could show her heels to anything of her size that ever sailed out of Southport.

Mr. Rowe stood at the helm; Sam and Tom stationed themselves in the bow as lookouts, although there was no need of any such precaution; Joey ran to and fro screaming with delight, while Uncle Ben and his guests remained well aft where they could watch with sailorly eyes the movements of the jaunty little schooner.

The lads in the bow, who behaved very much as if believing the cruise could not be made if they failed of keeping their eyes fixed upon the waters ahead, would have been well content to spend the entire day, and then a dozen more, cruising idly about, and it was really with a sense of disappointment that they saw the entrance to the harbor of Southport close under the bow.

"I reckon we've been comin' some, to get here as soon as this," Tom said in a tone of admiration, and Sam added contentedly:

"This is the craft that can fly when she's in shape, with somebody at the helm who knows what he's about."

It was as if the people at the Port had received early notice of the exact time when the "Sally" was to arrive, for as she entered the harbor flags were flying on every vessel in port, the church bells were ringing out a noisy welcome, and the one pier was literally black with people who had assembled to welcome the

"family" and their schooner.

"It looks as if they counted on makin' a reg'lar celebration out of it," Sam said in delight, and then a cloud came over his face as he added in a whisper: "S'pose Cap'en Doak should be here, an' it stands to reason he is, we're bound to have trouble, 'cause he'll never get over sayin' that he owns some part of the 'Sally'!"

"Well, let him say it," Tom replied carelessly. "He can talk himself black in the face without changin' anythin', an' by this time the folks here know what kind of a pirate he is."

"But we can't afford to have a row the very first day the 'Sally' is under sail, 'cause it'll be bad luck!" Sam wailed.

"The luck will be whatever we're a mind to make it, an' as for that old heathen, he won't dare to open his mouth while all these people are around."

Reuben Rowe interrupted the conversation by giving the word to let go the jib halyards, and by the time the "Sally" was stripped of her canvas Uncle Ben had thrown a hawser ashore to be caught and made fast by the many hands that were outstretched to have a part in this first landing.

The little schooner was not moored when the church bells rang out a yet louder welcome, and Uncle Ben's weather-bronzed cheeks were actually red as the citizens of the Port shouted themselves hoarse in his honor.

"It's a big day!" Sam whispered to Tom, "an' if only Cap'en Doak ain't here we'll have the time of our lives!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE FIRST CRUISE

When Joey Sampson was an inmate of the poorhouse, the people of Southport gave little heed to him as, bent on some errand, he entered the village; but on this day it seemed as if every man, woman and child was eager to speak a kindly word. The tiny fellow was lifted over the rail by some of the more officious even before the "Sally D." had really come to a full stop, while those whom he had never seen before greeted him as a friend until he was absolutely dazed by receiving so much attention.

Uncle Ben also found that he had suddenly grown popular, for the people crowded around when he came over the side of the schooner, shaking his hand

so often and vigorously that the old man was really bewildered, and whispered to Sam at the first opportunity:

"I declare, Sammy, I can't make out what has come over the folks here! A body would think I was the best friend they ever had; it wasn't this way when I put in here last."

"They're beginnin' to find you out, Uncle Ben, that's what's the matter," Sam replied with a laugh, and Reuben Rowe, who had come up in time to overhear the conversation, added:

"I'm allowin' that you can lay a good deal of this 'ere reception to Eliakim Doak. He's been makin' so much talk, an' threatenin' to raise sich a pile of mischief, that the folks began to think 'bout what you're doin' in the way of raisin' a family, till all of a sudden they've found out that you're the salt of the earth."

Then the conversation ceased because of the many people who had been pushing their way through the throng to speak with the old lobster catcher, and who insisted on claiming his attention; therefore Sam modestly allowed himself to be shoved back against the rail of the "Sally," where he was standing when Tom, who had been to the head of the pier, came up literally breathless with excitement.

"Your old pirate is over there by the storehouse sure enough; but while so many people are around I reckon he won't dare to show himself very big. I've got it in my head, though, that he'll raise a row if it looks as if he could without gettin' inter too much trouble."

Sam was no longer afraid of what Captain Doak might do. The citizens of Southport had been so cordial in their welcome that the lad knew full well the former owner of the "Sally D." would not dare to say or do anything disagreeable, and he replied with a show of carelessness:

"We needn't bother our heads 'bout fair, to-day, for he's got sense enough to keep quiet; but when we're back on the island, an' the 'Sally' is layin' at anchor with nobody aboard, he'll be brave as a lion, cause he knows Uncle Ben wouldn't hurt a fly no matter how many times he'd been bitten."

Having thus dismissed Captain Doak from their minds, the boys gave themselves wholly up to the pleasures provided for them by the citizens of the Port, and from that time until late in the afternoon they enjoyed every moment of the time. Then Mr. Rowe, who had come in search of them and found both feasting on figs in Mr. Mansfield's store, announced:

"Uncle Ben says it's time we was makin' a break for home, an' I allow he's right, seein's how we need to get an early start to-morrow, for there's considerable work to be done after we get home."

"Where are you countin' on goin' to-morrow?" Sam asked as he followed the captain of the schooner.

"Deep-sea fishin'. Uncle Ben has bought a barrel of bait, an' we're goin' to see what can be done with it."

"Is it to be the first real cruise? How long are we to be gone?" Tom asked excitedly.

"It'll be a real cruise all right, an' I'm allowin' we'll stay till we get fish enough aboard to make it pay," and Mr. Rowe led the way to the pier at a rapid pace. "You see Uncle Ben found a chance to buy some bait cheap, an' since he an' Joey can look after the lobsterin' without strainin' themselves very hard, it stands us in hand to make the 'Sally' earn some little part of what's been put out on her."

"But we'll have to take a lot of food with us," and Tom looked anxious, as if fearing the start could not be made as soon as Reuben had proposed.

"I reckon it won't take you two lads long to put aboard what we'll need in the way of pork, flour an' potatoes. It'll be a case of livin' mostly on what we catch, or goin' hungry."

Now the boys were as eager to leave the town as they had been to visit it, and on arriving at the schooner were well pleased at finding Uncle Ben and Joey aboard awaiting them.

If the citizens of the Port could have had their way the little vessel and her crew would have remained in harbor many days, but, recognizing the fact that the old lobster catcher would be eager to make the first experiment at deep-sea fishing, after having spent so many dollars on the "Sally," they did what little they might toward hastening the departure.

When the hawsers had been cast off and the Bails hoisted, the people cheered Uncle Ben and his "family" until they were well out of the harbor, and not until then did the boys think it possible to attend to their duties, which were to cook supper and make preparations for the night, Mr. Rowe having announced with an air of authority that the "crew" would be forced to sleep on board in order to be ready for an early start.

"We're goin' out for fish," he said, as if expecting some one would dispute the statement, "an' what's more, we're bound to get 'em. The first cruise must be made to pay, else we're like to have bad luck."

"I kinder had it in mind, Reuben, that the whole family oughter have a hand in the first fishin'; but since we've got the bait, I reckon you an' the boys will have to go out alone," Uncle Ben said with such a mournful ring in the words that all hands understood he was disappointed in not being able to take part in the opening venture, and Sam replied quickly, stifling his own desires:

"You shall go, Uncle Ben, an' I'll 'tend to the pots alone. It won't be very much of a job."

"No, no, Sammy, I shan't agree to anythin' like that, for I know how keen

you an' Tommy are to try out the 'Sally.' It's foolish in an old man like me to hanker after what oughter be an old story at my time of life. The baby an' I'll stay at home where we belong, an' look after the island to see that it don't run away."

"I can't see anythin' foolish in your wantin' to go, 'specially since you've come pretty nigh sinkin' your last dollar in this 'ere schooner," and Mr. Rowe spoke in a thoughtful tone, as if he was turning some plan over in his mind. "Say, what's to hinder your goin', anyway?"

"We can't use the 'Sally' as a plaything, Reuben. Lobsterin' is what we're dependin' on for a livin', and it mustn't be neglected."

"Who's talkin' 'bout neglectin' it?" and the captain of the "Sally" appeared aggrieved because such a suggestion had been made. "I'm keepin' it in mind that lobsterin' is the mainstay of this 'ere family, while fishin' is what might be called a side issue till it's been tried out good an' hard. What's to hinder our lookin' after the traps to-night? We've only got one barrel of bait, an' it don't stand to reason that the first cruise can be a very long one. Now it won't do any harm if the pots ain't hauled for eight an' forty hours, an' we're sure to be back before that time has gone by."

Uncle Ben's face brightened, while little Joey clapped his hands in glee at the possibility of making the first cruise in the schooner on which all hands had labored so long and earnestly, and Sam, now quite as eager as either of the two, cried pleadingly:

"Take up with Mr. Rowe's offer, Uncle Ben, take it up! Tom an' I'll pull the traps as soon as ever we get back, an' you won't be the poorer by a single lobster, 'cause we'll put in plenty of bait so's them as get inter the traps won't go to eatin' each other."

Then Tommy added his entreaties, while Mr. Rowe continued to "figger out" how and why Uncle Ben could safely leave the island during two days, with the result that the old man, after questioning the boys as to whether they had cunners enough on hand to bait all the traps, said slowly, much as if he was weakly yielding to temptation:

"I'm free to confess that I'm jest the same as achin' to have a hand in the first take of fish that comes aboard the 'Sally' after she's the same as been dug outter the sand, an' while I know it's childish to set my heart on sich things, the baby an' I'll go. We'll not be very much worse off for mixin' in a little play with our work, even if we have the same as wasted this whole day."

"I don't call it a waste of time when you try out a schooner after launchin' her," Mr. Rowe grumbled, "an' seein's how the folks at the Port sent you a clean hundred dollars, it strikes me you was in duty bound to carry back them as brought it."

"Yes, yes, Reuben, I'm allowin' you're right, an' we'll all hands go on the first cruise. Look after your helm, for if the lads are to haul the pots to-night, we need to make Apple Island as soon as may be."

It was needless to caution Mr. Rowe as to his steering, for he was doing his best to leave the straightest of straight wakes behind him, and from the time of leaving Southport had never once taken his eyes from the course. However, the sheets were flattened a bit to get all the advantage which might be had from the breeze, and Uncle Ben and little Joey swayed down on the jib halyards to take out an imaginary wrinkle from the canvas.

It seemed as if even the wind was favorably disposed toward Uncle Ben's desires, for it freshened very decidedly within ten minutes after the question had been settled, and the "Sally D." sped toward Apple Island with a big bone in her teeth, heeling over until little Joey began to fear she would capsizes.

The sun was considerably more than an hour high when the family arrived at the cove, and immediately the anchor had been let go Mr. Rowe said sharply, as he began to snug down the canvas:

"You lads don't want to waste any time now, else it'll be too dark to see the buoys before you have pulled all the pots. Get away smartly; Uncle Ben an' I'll 'tend to matters here."

The lads were over the rail in a twinkling, only waiting to tow the old dory alongside the "Sally" before setting off with the idea of doing half a day's work in two hours, and Uncle Ben called after them as they left the cove:

"Don't stay out after dark, lads, 'cause it ain't safe to pull pots when, if one of you went overboard, the other couldn't see him. I'm allowin' it won't be any great harm if we don't look after 'em all to-night; we'll make up on fish what we may lose in the way of lobsters."

To this the lads made no reply; but when they returned to the cove, a full three hours after setting out, it was with the report that every trap had been visited.

"The catch was so big that it didn't seem right to skip any," Sam said by way of explanation. "We took mighty good care not to make a slip while haulin' in, an' brought back forty-one full-sized lobsters, which I allow is the biggest haul that's been made this season.

"Indeed it is, lad," Uncle Ben cried excitedly. "I declare for it, we oughter stay home if lobsters are movin' at that rate!"

"Now, now, Uncle Ben, you can't go back on your word," Mr. Rowe cried as if in alarm. "You've allowed to go with us in the mornin', an' here are these boys wet an' hungry with tryin' to fix things so's nothin' would prevent you takin' part in the first cruise. Supper is all ready for you, lads, an' the sooner you fill up your stomachs the quicker you'll be able to turn in, for a full night's rest is what

all hands will be needin' before another day's work has been done."

Then Mr. Rowe served up the remains of the breakfast, which he had heated for the occasion, and without stopping to argue with Uncle Ben as to the question raised by him, Sam and Tom set about eating as if they and food had been strangers for many a long day.

Half an hour later every bunk in the "Sally's" cabin had an occupant, and, save for the loud breathing, there were no signs of life apparent until Mr. Rowe came out "all standing" at least an hour before daybreak.

"All hands on deck!" he shouted, after looking out of the cuddy-hatch. "We're goin' to have as much wind as will be needed, an' can't afford to be loafin' 'round here while there's many a school of fat mackerel outside cryin' for us to come an' catch 'em."

There was little need to urge Uncle Ben's family on this morning, once their eyes were open, for the idea of making a try at taking fish was so exciting that it only needed they should be aroused to consciousness before all hands were, as Tom said, "skippin' 'round right lively."

It was hardly more than daybreak when the "Sally" sailed out of the cove with every flag flying, Uncle Ben at the helm, the two boys cooking breakfast in the cabin, and little Joey and Mr. Rowe forward on the lookout for mackerel.

It was well for the "family" that the cooks did not loiter over their portion of the work, for in less than ten minutes after the last one had eaten breakfast Mr. Rowe gave the welcome word that there was a big school of fish in the path of gold cast by the rising sun, and when Tom came on deck he could see what appeared to be a shadow, even amid the rays of light.

"Yes, them's mackerel, all right!" Uncle Ben said joyously in answer to Tom's question. "They swim so near the surface that their fins are almost out of water. A big school it is, for a fact, an' if we get our fair share out of it I'm allowin' we shan't be away from the island many hours, for at this season of the year fresh mackerel are worth a good bit of money. We'll be in a hurry to get 'em to market."

Ten minutes later Mr. Rowe was throwing bait industriously as the "Sally" came up into the wind, and the old lobster catcher cried excitedly as he made ready his lines:

"Get your gigs out, lads, for this 'ere is a hungry school. Let the hooks jest touch the water, an' when you bring one in over the rail, snap him off anywhere on deck, for this kind of fishin' is what you might call lively work, with no time for finnick business."

Even as he spoke Uncle Ben drew in a fish, and in a twinkling all hands were pulling the flapping beauties over the rail at a rate that promised the richest

kind of a fare in a very short time.

CHAPTER XX

GETTING EVEN

To Tom and little Joey mackerel catching was a novelty, and neither was able to aid very much in the work until after having satisfied his curiosity regarding this odd method of fishing.

Tom was lost in wonder because the hungry fish snapped at the bit of white cloth, or even the bare hook, before it was well down to the surface of the water, and not the least of his surprise was regarding the ease with which the mackerel could be shaken off after having been brought inboard.

"It's the greatest fishin' I ever heard tell of!" he exclaimed in delight as Uncle Ben detached a rainbow-colored fish from the hook by a sharp jerk on the line. "My, my, but don't they take hold lively!"

"That's more'n can be said for you," the old lobster catcher replied with a laugh as he pulled in another fish. "When you strike a school of mackerel it don't pay to spend much time with your mouth open, for they're odd creeters, an' jest as apt to knock off bitin' in another minute as they are to keep on for the next hour. Fishermen have to get 'em when they're in the humor, an' it's a case of jumpin' to it the best you know how. Why don't you swing your line over?"

"I declare for it I'd forgotten all about doin' my share," Tom said, in what was much like a tone of apology as he acted upon the old man's suggestion. "It's so funny that I couldn't do anythin' but watch."

Even while speaking he swung a fat fish over the rail, and from that moment the most enthusiastic fisherman aboard was Tom Falonna.

The eager fish even allowed themselves to be caught by the "baby," and little Joey screamed with delight as he brought over the rail a tiny "tinker" gorgeous in hues of blue, green, pink and white.

"Talk about luck on the first cruise!" Mr. Rowe cried when it seemed as if the "Sally's" deck was completely covered with the beautiful fish. "To strike a school so near inshore at this time of year is enough to make a man sit up an' look at himself; but to have 'em keep up the fun so long is somethin' I never run across! What about losin' a few lobsters for the sake of gatherin' in sich a fare as this? I'm tellin' you, Uncle Ben, if we could get this lot inter Boston fresh, the

'Sally' would come somewhere near payin' half her cost. If we only had a lot of ice aboard!"

"I'm allowin' Portland would be as good a market as Boston, an' if this wind holds we could run in there with the mackerel sweet an' fresh, even though we didn't have any ice," Uncle Ben replied thoughtfully, but without ceasing his work for a single instant.

"I believe it would pay, even though we didn't get back to the island for a week, for there's a good bit of money in this fare," Reuben said in a tone of satisfaction; but his face clouded when the old man added decidedly:

"We can't afford to take the chances of havin' things go wrong at home, an' that's the fact."

"S'pose you can't get 'em in port fresh, what is to be done with such a slat?" Tom asked, and Mr. Rowe replied mournfully:

"We'll have to salt 'em down, which not only means a big lot of work, but cuts down the price a lot. It's a pity we hadn't left you lads ashore, an' then it would be a case of our gettin' inter market with what would fetch a couple of hundred dollars."

"How far do you allow we are from Apple Island now?" Sam asked suddenly, as if a happy thought had come to him.

"Somewhere 'bout five miles, I reckon. What do you say, Uncle Ben?"

"We can't be much further off than that; but if we was countin' on makin' Portland, it would add ten miles to the run if we put in home, an' that's far enough to cut short our chances of gettin' the fish on the market while the weather is so warm."

"What's to hinder Tom an' me from pullin' over home when this school gets through bitin'?" Sam asked. "You could get under way in a jiffy, an' have no need to worry 'bout things on the island. The only trouble would be that you'd have to go without a small boat."

"You've hit the nail square on the head, lad!" Mr. Rowe cried excitedly. "It's the very thing to be done! I allow we can get along without the dory when it's a case of scoopin' in two hundred dollars or more!"

"What about it, Uncle Ben?" Sam asked anxiously, and the old man replied, speaking slowly and thoughtfully:

"It'll be a long pull for you, Sammy; but if it wasn't for that I'd say Reuben had the right idee. We've got a lot of fish here, an' they're worth seven or eight cents apiece as they run, for fresh mackerel at this time of the year are somethin' of a rarity, an' there are rich folks enough in this world to pay extra money for the sake of havin' things out of season."

"Then the whole business is settled," Tom cried, still continuing his work of adding to the cargo. "It wouldn't make any difference if we were ten miles

from home, 'cause we'd be bound to pull back for the sake of helpin' bring in two hundred dollars to the family. How is that for two or three hours' fishin'?"

To this outburst Uncle Ben made no reply and his crew took it for granted that the matter was settled without need of further discussion. Mr. Rowe suggested that the "baby," who was not making any great headway at taking fish, set about gathering up the catch into baskets that it might be sent into the hold where the sun could not shine upon it and the remainder of the "family" worked even more rapidly than before, if indeed that could be possible, in order to add to the take before the mackerel were done biting.

It seemed to the eager fishermen as if a full hour had been spent at the work before the fish, with no apparent reason, suddenly sank out of sight, and Uncle Ben announced as he swung his lines inboard:

"That finishes this job, an' if you're countin' on makin' Portland while the fare is sweet an' fresh, Reuben, I'm allowin' we'd better get the 'Sally' on her course. It's been a rare piece of good fortune for the first cruise," Uncle Ben said placidly, and Mr. Rowe shouted in a tone of command:

"Now, then, if you boys are reckonin' on pullin' back home, it's time you got over the rail, for we can't waste a minute jest now!"

"Shan't we hold on a bit to help put the fish in the hold?" Sam asked. "It's so early in the day that no great harm will be done if we make the trip three or four miles longer."

"We can do that work after we're on our course, an' I'm not allowin' you shall go any further from home," Uncle Ben said decidedly. "If you're willin' to go back, get about the job before the 'Sally' is under way."

"Willin'? Of course we are!" Tom cried as he hauled the dory alongside. "It would be funny if we wasn't, with so much money to be made. I'd go back alone rather than lose the chance to make a pile on the first cruise."

"Then over the rail with you, an' be lively!" Mr. Rowe cried.

In a twinkling the two boys were in the dory, the painter was cast off, and little Joey was dancing excitedly about the deck as he screamed shrilly:

"Good-bye, Sam! Good-bye, Tom! I'm sorry you won't have a chance to see the city, but I'll tell you all about it when we get back!"

"We don't want to see any city, when there's lots of lobsters in the pots!" Sam cried cheerily. "Say, Uncle Ben, the car was mighty nigh full when we dumped the catch in last night; what's to be done if we have good luck to-day?"

"Better freight a load over to the Port, Sammy, if you feel able to pull that far. Mr. Mansfield will take all you carry; but in case you're too tired, we'll run the chances of losin' some of 'em, seein's how this 'ere lot of mackerel more'n makes up for them as may eat each other."

"Jest hold your hand on the top of your head till we get tired when there

are big dollars to be made, an' see how long you'll keep it there!" Tom cried as the "Sally" came around on her heel, every inch of canvas catching the fresh breeze and forcing the little schooner on her way to Portland, as if understanding how necessary it was the fish be delivered to the purchasers by daybreak next morning.

"I thought I'd seen quick work before, but I never struck any thin' so sudden as mackerel fishin'," Tom said when the dory, with the boys each pulling a pair of oars, was headed for Apple Island. "There must be big money in sich business, an' I wonder Uncle Ben don't knock off lobsterin' to 'tend to it."

"We might come out fifty times, an' not strike luck the same as we had it this mornin'," Sam replied with a happy laugh. "It's great for the first cruise, an' now if we can take as many lobsters as we did last night, it'll seem as if this family had started in all right."

So elated were the lads by the success of the morning that the five-mile pull was hardly more than sport, and so busy were they speculating as to how much money the mackerel would bring in that it seemed as if they were hardly more than cast off from the "Sally D." before Apple Island was close under the dory's bow.

"I reckon Mr. Rowe was way out of his reckonin' when he said we were so far away," Tom cried in astonishment, when Sam called his attention to the fact that they were almost home. "It can't have been more'n— Hello! Ain't that your old heathen jest pullin' out of the cove?"

Sam ceased rowing in order to gaze in the direction indicated by Tom's outstretched finger, and an exclamation of dismay burst from his lips as he cried:

"That's him sure enough! Now, what kind of mischief do you reckon he's been up to?"

"With all hands of us an' the 'Sally' away from home, I don't allow he could kick up very much of a row," Tom replied carelessly, and added with a hearty laugh, "I reckon he was chafin' some under the collar when he found we'd got out of his way."

"Unless he fooled with the lobster car, I don't s'pose he could do much mischief," Sam said half to himself; "but yet it seems as if he must have cut up some kind of a shine, else why is he goin' off so peaceable like?"

"'Cause there was nobody ashore to pick up a fuss with," Tom replied in a tone of satisfaction. "I wish Uncle Ben would let Mr. Rowe, an' you, an' me serve the old pirate out once! I'll bet he wouldn't want to come foolin' 'round this island ag'in!"

The lads gave no further attention to Captain Doak, after making certain that he was pulling toward the Port at his best pace, and five minutes later their dory had rounded the point, opening to view the shore of the cove.

Then it was that both the boys ceased rowing very suddenly, as they gave vent to a cry of mingled anger and sorrow, for the shanty appeared to be in a blaze, with the flames already bursting out through the roof.

"That's what the old heathen has been doin'!" Tom cried in a rage, as he dipped his oars deep in the water. "Pull around, Sam, so's we can overhaul him, an' no matter how big he is, I'll give him a dose that won't be forgotten very soon!"

"Even if we could get the best of him, there's no use chasin' his boat; he's got a good mile the start, an' we'd never be able to make that up 'twixt here an' the Port. Pull, Tom, pull the best you know how, an' perhaps we can save some few of the things!"

"It's too late now, for the whole place is in a light blaze," Tom replied sorrowfully, but he obeyed the command to the best of his ability, and the dory was sent over the water at a rate of speed which, it is safe to say, she had never equaled.

The boys did not slow down on nearing the shore, but ran her at full speed high up on the sand, leaping over the rail even as she struck, but before they had taken a single step in the direction of the shanty it was possible to see that any efforts of theirs would be useless.

Uncle Ben's home, slightly built of inflammable material, was burning fiercely, the flames leaping up from every point, and it could be understood that Captain Doak had waited until making certain his villainous work was thoroughly performed before he left the island.

The boys ran at full speed, however, hardly knowing what they did, and came to a halt only when the heat of the fire prevented any nearer approach. Here they stood watching the devouring flames in silence a full minute, when Tom, turning in the direction of the Port, shook his fist threateningly as he cried angrily:

"It makes no difference what Uncle Ben says, if ever I come within strikin' distance of that miserable pirate! The idea of burnin' a shanty when he couldn't do himself any good, but only to turn an old man outer house an' home! Come on, Sam, even if we can't catch him we'll tell the folks at the Port what he has done, an' I'll be way out of my reckonin' if they don't make it hot for him before he's many hours older!"

"We can't spend the time to go there till after the traps have been hauled, 'cause even if the shanty is burned we've got to take care of the lobsters," Sam replied with a sigh. "If we could only rig up some kind of a place for Uncle Ben to sleep in when he get back!"

"He'll have the 'Sally,' won't he? We can live aboard of her till another house is built; but it'll take all the money that comes in from the mackerel to pay

for new lumber.”

”I forgot that we’d have the schooner for a home, so things ain’t quite so bad as they might have been. See here, Tom, we mustn’t think of runnin’ after Cap’en Doak, for there’s no knowin’ but that we’ll have to carry a load of lobsters to the Port, an’ if that’s so, we oughter get off early, ’cause we must be back before dark.”

”Why? There’s no place here for us to sleep, ’less we camp under the trees an’ if we have to go to the Port I’m thinkin’ we’d best stay there till mornin’, ’cause there’s no show Uncle Ben can get back even as early as to-morrow.”

”You’re right; but even at that we can’t hang ’round here very long, seein’s how there’s nothin’ to be done. Let’s pull the traps, an’ then make up our minds what we’d best do.”

”Say, we’ve got to go to the town, ’cause there ain’t anythin’ here to eat, an’ I’m mighty hungry already.”

”Come on, then; we’ll tackle the traps, for it’s a case of goin’ hungry till that work has been done an’ we’ve pulled a heavy dory six or seven miles!”

CHAPTER XXI

AT THE PORT

Tom’s hunger increased as he realized that it would be impossible to get anything to eat until after considerable heavy work had been done, and he was already tired with the labors of the day; but since Sam did not complain, he would have been ashamed to speak of his own desires or needs, and followed his comrade back to where they had so hastily left the dory.

”It’s goin’ to come pretty tough on us, I reckon; but we oughter be willin’ to tire ourselves a big bit, seein’s this is about the best chance we’ll ever have to show Uncle Ben what we’re willin’ to do toward squarin’ up for his bein’ so good to us,” Sam said, as if believing his companion needed heartening, and Tom replied stoutly, forcing a smile to his lips:

”Don’t get it inter your head that I’m goin’ to cry baby jest ’cause I can’t fill myself up with things to eat. I’ve been hungry many a time when I didn’t see any show ahead for gettin’ the next day’s breakfast, an’ reckon I can hold out as long as you. It won’t do any harm if we lay in a cargo of water. My mouth is pretty dry, an’ that old pirate couldn’t play any funny business with the spring.”

Then the boys refreshed themselves with cold water, after which they launched the dory to set about the work of hauling traps, each doing his best to make it appear that plenty of exercise was the one thing needed at that time.

The catch was not as large as on the previous night, but yet they brought in so many lobsters that Sam knew from experience it would not be wise to leave such a large number in the car any length of time, and said with an air of wisdom as they neared the cove on their return:

"We'd have to go to the Port even though the shanty hadn't been burned, an' if we count on gettin' there before dark it's a case of hustlin' right lively from now on. We'll take as big a cargo as can be carried in good shape, an' be off. Do you want another drink of water?"

"I could stow away considerable, but I reckon we'd better not stop to go to the spring. The sooner we strike the Port the sooner we'll get somethin' to eat, an' I'm growin' mighty hollow inside."

It was neither a long nor a difficult task to take from the car, by aid of a gaff, as many lobsters as were needed to make up a fairly good cargo for the dory, and when this had been done the lads buckled down to the oars once more, both feeling so tired that under any other circumstances they would have believed it absolutely impossible to make the journey.

With so heavy a load the boat moved sluggishly through the water, despite all their efforts, and, to add to their labor, the wind was dead ahead.

"It's goin' to be a long pull; but Uncle Ben says that any job can be done by stickin' at it. So don't let's look around to see how near we are, but keep on workin' the oars till we get there," Sam said with a brave effort at cheerfulness as he set the example.

The lads were not inclined for conversation during the journey; both were nearly exhausted, and it required all their courage to continue at the laborious task. It really seemed as if the dory lay like a log on the water, and no matter how they tugged at the oars, which had apparently grown wonderfully heavy since morning, it seemed impossible to crawl away from the island.

Tom shut his teeth tightly as he worked, while Sam, trusting that his comrade would steer the craft, kept his eyes fixed upon the bottom of the boat, striving manfully to forget that he was weary, thirsty, and hungry. The rippling of the water against the side of the dory was the only sound to be heard; the sun, although very near to setting, sent his most fervent rays across the lazy swell of the ocean as if trying to discourage the toiling lads, while the warm wind, instead of refreshing, only added to their discomfort.

But, following Uncle Ben's advice, they "stuck at it" without any interval of rest, and, as a matter of course, decreased the distance between themselves and the Port by a certain number of inches with every stroke of the oars.

Finally, just when the sun had sunk out of sight behind the western hills, the dory poked her nose around that point of land which formed the eastern arm, or side, of Southport harbor, and Sam said with a long-drawn sigh of relief as he pulled a trifle more vigorously at the oars:

"It surely seems as if we'd been rowin' two or three days. I did think, when Uncle Ben told me I might live with him on Apple Island, that the time never could come when I'd be played out by pullin' a boat, 'cause of bein' so glad that I had a decent home once more; but if we'd been much longer rowin' over here I ain't certain as I could have stuck at it."

"Don't talk about it," Tom replied with a groan. "I'm so near dead that if I stop to think I'll tumble over. It did seem a spell ago as if I was starvin'; but now I'd rather lay down an' sleep than have the best dinner that ever was cooked!"

Ten minutes later the dory was made fast to the pier, and, by the rarest good fortune, the first person in Southport who learned of their arrival was Mr. Mansfield. He had just sauntered down on the wharf when Sam crawled ashore with the painter, and, as a matter of course, was curious to learn why they had come without Uncle Ben.

But little time was spent in telling the story, for no sooner had Mr. Mansfield gotten an inkling of the mischief done, than he turned abruptly, almost running up the street.

"Now what?" Tom, who had thrown himself full length on the pier, asked with mild curiosity, being so nearly exhausted that he could not display a very lively interest in anything.

"I reckon he's gone to tell the folks what's been done. We'll have to wait here."

"That's jest what I want to do, an' he needn't hurry back on my account, for I could stay right where I am till mornin' an' not fret myself very much."

There was little need for the boys to speculate as to the reason for Mr. Mansfield's sudden departure. He returned within five minutes and at once began to ask many questions, to all of which Sam replied as well as he was able; but before having given any great amount of information his eyes closed in sleep, despite all his efforts to keep them open, and the shopkeeper exclaimed in a tone of self-reproach:

"I come mighty nigh bein' a brute to keep you here talkin', when, 'cordin' to what's been said, you must have been workin' like beavers since before daybreak. Toddle up to my house an' go to bed. There ain't any chance Uncle Ben can get back within the next four an' twenty hours."

Not only did Mr. Mansfield provide them with a bed, but his wife insisted on their eating a hearty meal before lying down, and when, finally, the two lads had an opportunity to crawl between the lavender-scented sheets, Tom said with

a sigh of content:

"It pays to get awfully tired, jest for the sake of findin' out how nice it is to go to bed."

Then it was as if he had dropped into dreamland on the instant, for the words were hardly more than out of his mouth before he was breathing heavily. And Sam did not have time to realize the condition of his comrade, for he himself was lost in the blissful unconsciousness of slumber.

Not until the sun had been looking in at the chamber window of Mr. Mansfield's house a full hour did the boys realize where they were, and then Sam jumped out of bed as he cried:

"Just think of it, Tom, after all our work to get the lobsters here, we left them in the dory all night, an' it'll be the biggest kind of luck if any of 'em are alive now!"

Very hurriedly did the boys dress, and they would have hastened out of the house on the instant if Mrs. Mansfield had not insisted on their partaking of the breakfast which had been kept so long waiting.

"William took care of the lobsters last night, so there's no reason why you should be in such a hurry," she said when Sam attempted to explain why they should be on the pier as soon as possible. "Captain Doak won't be brought before 'Squire Kelly till nine o'clock, an' there's nothing you can do till then."

"Cap'en Doak!" Sam repeated in amazement. "Why is he to come up before the 'Squire?"

"Because he burned Uncle Ben's house, of course," the good woman replied sharply. "Do you suppose the people of the Port are going to allow him to carry on at such a rate? He will have a trial and be punished for what he has done, so William says."

This was most pleasing news to Tom, who did not hesitate to say he "hoped the old heathen" would be sent to prison for a long time; but Sam, although believing the culprit should be punished, felt sad because the man was to answer for his misdeeds.

"Oh," he said, as if trying to find some excuse for the man who had abused him so long, "he ain't anywhere near so bad when he's sober."

"Then it's time he was put where he can't be anything else," Mrs. Mansfield replied sharply. "I've been longing to have him brought up to answer for his tricks ever since your mother died. She, poor woman, the same as had the life worried out of her by that miserable creature!"

Mrs. Mansfield was not the only person in town who believed the time had come when Captain Doak should be put where he could not give way to his appetite and his temper, as the boys learned when they went out on the street after having eaten what Tom declared was "the breakfast of their lives."

The townspeople were determined that Uncle Ben's family should not longer be exposed to the vicious whims of Eliakim Doak, and the testimony of Sam and Tom, who saw him pulling away from the island shortly after the shanty had been set on fire, was sufficient to convict.

The result of the fire was that the former owner of the "Sally D." received a sentence of ninety days in the county jail, in addition to paying a fine of two hundred dollars; but it was understood that if he left town at once the sentence would not be carried into effect until he showed himself again in the state.

It so happened that a lumber-laden vessel was on the point of leaving the harbor bound for Cuba and on her Captain Doak took passage, thus passing out of the lives of those whom he had wronged, and from that day until now neither Uncle Ben's family, nor any citizen of Southport, has ever seen or heard of him.

When the trial had been brought to an end and the angry citizens saw Eliakim leave the harbor on the Cuban-bound craft, Sam and Tom were called upon to tell over and over again the story of the previous day's good and bad happenings, and when the two lads insisted that they must set out for Apple Island in order to arrive before dark Mr. Mansfield said as he went with them to the pier:

"You are to tell Uncle Ben that we of the Port will buy lumber enough to build him a regular house, an' he's to come over here after it when he gets back from Portland. Say to him that we count it our duty to make up for the mischief Eliakim has done, an' when he's ready to put up the buildin' we'll all lend a hand. I reckon we'll make it a reg'lar vacation time. You'll find that mother has sent down food enough to keep you from bein' hungry till the schooner comes back, an' it won't be any great hardship if you do have to sleep out-of-doors this night."

"You've been awful good to us, Mr. Mansfield, an' we won't forget it," Sam said, as he took his seat in the dory, and Tom added:

"It kinder seems as if everybody was good since Uncle Ben took us in hand, an' I'm hopin' the day'll come when I can show him how I feel on account of what he did when he started a family."

"Uncle Ben Johnson is the salt of the earth, if there's sich a thing, an' the funny part of it is that it has taken us folks here at the Port so long to find it out. We've got the idee now, though, an' will keep it in mind mighty fresh."

Then the journey to Apple Island was begun, the lads pulling steadily and strong after their long rest, and once outside the harbor Tom said reflectively:

"I ain't so certain but that your old heathen did Uncle Ben a good turn when he set the shanty afire, 'cause now the old man will have a decent house, which is more'n would ever have come his way if he'd had to spend good money buildin' it."

"That's 'cause he wants to keep all the dollars he can get to help out on

raisin' a family, an' it strikes me that he's doin' it mighty fast, though I ain't certain as we can have such high times when there are a good many fellows around."

Then the lads fell to discussing what would be the result after Uncle Ben's plan had been fully carried into execution, and they were not at an end of it when the dory was run up on the sand near the ruins of the shanty.

Again was it time to attend to the traps, and, stopping only to catch cunners enough to serve as bait, the lads went about their task, believing that when the work was come to an end they must perforce find for themselves beds among the bushes, for it did not seem possible the "Sally" could return from Portland until another day had passed.

The catch was not large on this afternoon, although the labor of hauling the pots was as great as if they had loaded the dory gunwale deep with lobsters, and the last one had been thrown into the car just as the sun sank out of sight.

"I reckon we'd better hustle if we count on findin' a good place for sleepin', 'cause it'll be dark in the woods. I'm— Hello! There's the 'Sally'! Why do you s'pose she didn't go to Portland?"

CHAPTER XXII

FREIGHTING LUMBER

Even Uncle Ben found it difficult to remain sedate, as the head of a family should, when Sam and Tom pulled alongside. Little Joey was running fore and aft on the deck, clapping his hands as he screamed for very joy, while Mr. Rowe leaned over the rail to shout something which the lads could not understand, and the old lobster catcher tried hard to appear unconcerned, but he could hold out no longer when the boys clambered on board.

Reaching out a hand to each of them he cried in a tone of triumph, as if it was no longer possible for him to keep the secret:

"We got two hundred an' ten dollars for the catch, lads! Only think of that! Near to half what the 'Sally' has cost us!"

"An' it ain't the last two-hundred-dollar fare we'll take 'twixt now an' winter!" Mr. Rowe cried from amid the mainsail which he was trying to snug down and at the same time listen to what was being said.

"But how did you get back so quickly?" Sam asked. "We didn't allow to see

you before to-morrow night!”

Mr. Rowe could no longer attend to his work, but, emerging from the billowy folds of canvas, he cried exultantly:

“We got back so soon because the ‘Sally’ is a reg’lar flyer! When I sailed with Eliakim I allowed she could go some, but since we’ve shifted her rig she don’t touch the water at all—jest skims over the top like one of them ‘ere flyin’ fish. Why, lads, she’s made as good as eleven knots ever since we parted company with you, an’ if that ain’t goin’ some I’d like to know what you call it?”

“She surely is a swift craft!” Uncle Ben added emphatically, and one had only to look at his face in order to understand that a sailor’s love for a beautiful vessel was taking root in his heart. “Did you lads carry a load of lobsters to the Port?”

“Ay, that we did, an’ have only been home long enough to pull the pots,” Sam replied, at a loss to know how he should break the sad news to the old man. “We had a full cargo, though I’m thinkin’ we wouldn’t have gone if it hadn’t been for Cap’en Doak—”

“Has he been here again?” Uncle Ben asked in alarm.

Now it was Tommy’s turn to share in the story-telling, and, taking the old man by the arm, he led him aft, where a view could have been had of the shanty if it had still been standing, saying as he did so:

“I reckon you can see what’s been done?”

“What do you mean, lad? What has been done?” Uncle Ben asked impatiently, failing to note the blackened ruins.

“Can you see the shanty?”

A cry of sorrow burst from the old man’s lips, and his face suddenly paled as he understood that his home had been reduced to ashes.

“How did it happen, boys? How could it have burned? Wasn’t you here, or did it— No, that couldn’t be, for we didn’t leave any fire in the stove!”

“That pirate of a Doak did it, Uncle Ben!” Tommy cried passionately. “We got back just in time to see him pullin’ outer the cove, an’ then the shanty was in a blaze. But I’m thinkin’ he won’t set any more houses afire, leastways, till that vessel gets to Cuba!”

As a matter of course Uncle Ben could not understand the meaning of the words and no small amount of time was spent in telling the whole story. When all the details had been given, and not until then, did Reuben Rowe speak, when, raising his hand as if taking an oath, he cried angrily:

“I hope that miserable specimen of a man will know what it is to go hungry before he dies, an’ if I’m anywhere around I’ll chuck good grub away before givin’ him the littlest bit!”

“Now, now, Reuben, that’s bein’ downright wicked,” Uncle Ben cried, seiz-

ing Mr. Rowe by the arm. "We'll hope Eliakim will come in time to realize what he's about, an' turn from the evil of his ways."

"Wa'al, I s'pose I'm wishin' somethin' of the same thing; but at the same time I'd like to have a hand in the turnin' of him, an' then I'll go bail he'd know it had been done!" and Mr. Rowe went back to snuggling down the mainsail as if fearing he could not contain his wrath before the head of the family.

"Wasn't anythin' saved from the fire?" Uncle Ben asked after a long pause.

"Everythin' was burning when we got ashore, an' now we'll have to live aboard the schooner, I reckon," Tom replied.

"If the folks at the Port are goin' to furnish lumber for a new house, why not run over there to-night?" Reuben asked, ceasing work suddenly again. "The boys have 'tended to the pots an' there bein' nothin' here for us to do we may as well be savin' time."

"Do as you like, Reuben, do as you like," the old man said in a sorrowful tone as he turned abruptly and went into the cabin, Mr. Rowe saying in a whisper as Uncle Ben descended the companionway:

"He's takin' it mightily to heart, an' I can't say as he's to be blamed. The shanty wasn't much as houses go, but he'd built it himself, an' lived in it all his life, so to speak. It won't make any difference how good a buildin' goes up in its place, he'll allers be mournin' for the old one. Wa'al, it can't be helped now, though I do wish Eliakim hadn't been let off quite so easy. In with the anchor, lads, an' we'll make harbor off the Port before midnight. Bear a hand lively, an' perhaps it'll chirk Uncle Ben up a bit if he hears us bustlin' 'round."

Not until the "Sally" was under way once more, eating up the miles on her way to Southport, did Uncle Ben come out of the cabin, and then, in the hope of cheering him ever so little, Sam went to his side, taking him by the hand.

"I'd try not to feel so awfully bad, Uncle Ben, for if the family grows any bigger you'd had to have another house or else left some of us out in the rain."

"I know it, Sammy, I know it, but somehow I can't help feelin' mighty lonesome 'cause the shanty's gone, an' what makes it seem worse is that it wouldn't have been burned if I hadn't been so childish 'bout wantin' to go on the 'Sally's' first cruise. If I had stayed at home Eliakim never'd done sich a wicked thing."

"Now that ain't certain, Uncle Ben, 'cause perhaps you'd been out pullin' pots, an' he'd had the same chance. You'll like the new house just as well after we get it built," and Sam patted the old man's hand as he would have done to soothe a distressed baby.

"It'll never be quite the same, Sammy boy, but I ain't got any right to brood over what can't be helped, an' I'll try mighty hard to keep it from my mind. S'pose you an' I cook supper! That'll kinder take up our attention."

Little Joey came below to help the cooks, leaving Mr. Rowe and Tom to

run the "Sally," and so elaborate were Uncle Ben's plans for the meal that the schooner was made fast to the dock at Southport before supper had been made ready.

It was so late in the evening that the citizens of Southport were not abroad to note the arrival, and, therefore, the "family" had no visitors.

It was Mr. Mansfield who discovered next morning that the "Sally" was in the harbor, and he came over the rail before a single member of the "family" had opened his eyes.

"I was allowin' to find you all in the dumps, when I saw the 'Sally' at the dock; but I reckon you ain't takin' it so terrible hard, Uncle Ben, seein's how you can sleep so long," the shopkeeper cried as he entered the cabin without ceremony, and the old lobster catcher replied almost cheerily:

"It did strike me kinder hard at first, William, for I'd got to have a mighty friendly feelin' for the old shanty, but if the family never has any greater misfortune than that, God will be good to us."

"I reckon you're right, as you allers are, Uncle Ben. Now, instead of thinkin' 'bout what's gone up in smoke, we'll look ahead to the house you're goin' to have. We here at the Port allow to chip in for the lumber, an' as soon as it has been freighted to the island, we're countin' on havin' a regular old-fashioned raisin' bee, to help you put it together. Are you ready to take on a load now?"

"The sooner the better," Uncle Ben replied, as if almost ashamed to accept the gift. "I'm hopin' everybody knows that we'll be mighty grateful for what's bein' done, an' if ever I get the chance to do—"

"You've had the chance, an' taken right hold of it, Uncle Ben. It has made us feel like small potatoes to see you tryin' to gather into a family them who needed a home, an' now we're goin' to have a share in the scheme. We'll set right about haulin' the lumber, an' I reckon the first horse-load will be here by the time you've had breakfast."

It surely seemed as if every man and horse in Southport was engaged in loading the schooner, and it was hardly more than noon, thanks to the many pairs of willing hands, before the "Sally" had as much aboard as it was deemed wise to take on the first trip.

The afternoon was less than half spent when the "family" were on Apple Island once more, with their schooner riding at anchor in the little cove, and now, indeed, was it necessary that every member do his utmost in the way of work. Sam and Tom set off to haul the traps, while Uncle Ben, Reuben and even little Joey, labored industriously throwing the lumber overboard that it might be rafted to the shore.

It was considerably past midnight when this day's work was ended, and a more weary crew never turned into the "Sally D.'s" bunks, to be awakened next

morning at daybreak that they might return to the Port for another cargo.

And so this work was kept up until all the lumber was freighted. There had been no neglect of the lobster industry, even when the two boys were so tired that it seemed impossible for them to pull the dory around the island, and, as a matter of course, no fishing had been indulged in, even though all knew it might well be that they could get another large catch of mackerel. Sam had indeed proposed that they fish one forenoon out of every two, hauling the pots in the night; but to this Uncle Ben would not listen.

"You boys are already doin' more work than might well be expected of men, an' I don't count on drivin' willin' horses to death for the sake of gettin' a few more dollars," the old lobster catcher said, very decidedly. "Next week the folks from the Port are comin' over to stay quite a spell, an' what with feedin' them, lookin' after the traps, an' takin' a turn now an' then at carpenterin', I'm allowin' you'll have your hands full. Early Monday mornin' you two lads are to go over with Reuben after them as are willin' to help us, an' I reckon then is the time we'd best empty our car of lobsters."

Therefore it was that the "Sally D." lay in the cove several days, serving the family as a home, and as Uncle Ben had planned so was it done. When the schooner made Southport early on the following Monday morning, they found waiting for them so many of the citizens that Sam was greatly alarmed lest he and Tom would not be able to cook food enough, even though they worked every moment of the time.

The good people of the Port had no idea of allowing Uncle Ben to feed such an army, but had ready on the pier what Tom called a "reg'lar stack" of provisions to be put on board, and there was no question but that they counted on enjoying themselves during such time as the new house was being built.

Among the belongings on the pier was a large canvas tent, in which the workmen were to sleep, and Sam said, as he and Tom were helping stow the goods on the "Sally's" deck:

"What worries me is that Uncle Ben will get terribly mixed up with so many people loafin' 'round."

"I reckon he'll keep himself straight when he sees the house goin' up. Leastways, he's got a mighty good idee of what's goin' to happen, for I heard him tell Mr. Rowe that he an' us two better try to get three or four bushels of clams to-night, if we can pull the pots in time. Clam diggin' is about the only part of Apple Island that I don't like," Tommy added ruefully, "an' these folks will eat a terrible big pile, I'm thinkin'."

"Then you don't count on doin' it?"

"Don't count on doin' it? Say, Sam, what do you take me for? Do you think I wouldn't do anythin' Uncle Ben wanted, whether I liked it or not? If he asked

me to stand on my head so's to hang dish-towels on my feet, you'd see me upside down from mornin' till night."

"Get on there with that dunnage!" Mr. Rowe called from the quarter-deck, for he was playing the part of captain to perfection, on this morning when he had as spectators nearly every person in Southport. "Bear a hand lively, you boys, for I'm wantin' to get under way mighty quick!"

This served to remind the merrymaking carpenters that they also must bear a hand. In a twinkling the stores and tent were on the schooner's deck, while half a dozen men seized each halyard, running up the canvas in a jiffy, and the "Sally" sailed out of the harbor with the jolliest lot of passengers that could have been found in a month's search.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FAMILY HOME

The men of Southport, who had awakened to the knowledge that Uncle Ben's scheme of giving a home to boys who needed and were willing to work for one, had come to Apple Island intending to do all they could toward building such a house as would provide for the needs of the future, but at the same time they counted on mixing a good deal of pleasure with their labor.

They behaved more like lads out for a holiday than staid, respectable citizens of a "slow" town. It seemed to have been agreed that the "family" should not be allowed to do any more work than was absolutely necessary, for when Uncle Ben and the boys made ready to carry the visitors ashore in the dories Mr. Mansfield said in a tone of command:

"All you who live here on the island are to keep your fingers out of this job, except when it can be proven that you are really achin' to work. We'll get this truck ashore, set up the tent, an' put our dunnage inter it. I reckon that'll be enough for one day. In the mornin' we'll begin buildin', an' the family are to keep on with the reg'lar business same's if we wasn't here."

"But we can set you ashore, William," Uncle Ben said pleadingly.

"You'll do nothin' of the kind, Benny. If there ain't anythin' better to be done go up on the cliffs an' watch us put things to rights."

"Then I allow now's the time when we'd better get about the clam-diggin', an' we'll need a pile of 'em if we're to feed sich a crowd," Uncle Ben said with

what was very like a sigh because his visitors were bent on working instead of pleasuring.

"They'll be doin' mighty well to eat up all the stuff that was put aboard at the Port," Sam suggested, hoping that it might not be thought necessary to provide so very much in the way of provisions, for clam-digging was not to his liking.

"I allow they've got stores enough," Uncle Ben replied placidly; "but out here they'll be lookin' for clams an' lobsters, to say nothin' of fried cunners, an' we must see to it that they ain't disappointed."

Now, as any one who has tried it knows full well, there is nothing like sport in the task of digging clams, and to Sam it was the most disagreeable work that could be performed; but he set about it with a thoroughly good imitation of cheerfulness, because it was Uncle Ben who had given the word of command, and he was eager to show his gratitude for what the old man had done in his behalf. When the clam-diggers returned to the cove, their baskets filled to overflowing, the tent had been set up, the goods brought from the Port stowed away in it, and the volunteer carpenters were exploring the island, shouting and laughing like a party of schoolboys out on a holiday.

"It seems jest like a circus," Tommy said in a whisper to Sam, while little Joey begged that he might go nearer the tent to see it more plainly. "Say, wouldn't you like to get inside?"

"Yes, but perhaps they wouldn't like to have us snoopin' 'round. I reckon we'd better stay aboard the 'Sally' when there isn't any work to be done ashore, an' besides, you an' I won't have time to fool very much if we've got to cook for this whole crowd."

"Hello, Uncle Ben!" Mr. Mansfield shouted from a distance. "Send your cooks up to the tent an' let 'em overhaul our stores to get what's needed for supper! I reckon it would be easier for all hands if you brought the cookstove from the 'Sally,' an' did the cookin' under canvas, eh?"

Much to the delight of the cooks, and particularly to little Joey, it was finally decided that this should be done, and during that afternoon Sam and Tommy stood over the stove making clam chowder, and frying cunners as fast as Mr. Rowe could catch them, until it really seemed as if they had prepared food enough to provide every man, woman and child in Southport with at least one hearty meal.

The "Sally" was almost forgotten by the boys in the novelty of the tent; but before another day had passed they were decidedly of the opinion that it was much more easy to perform the duties of cooks in the snug cabin of the schooner, than on shore under canvas.

Next morning the visitors set about their task in earnest, and not only Uncle

Ben, but all his family, were astonished to learn that it was the intention of the volunteer carpenters to build a large house, in which should be not less than eight bedrooms in addition to kitchen and sitting-room.

"I'm allowin' that your family is bound to grow mighty fast, as soon as folks get the idee of what you're about, an' so long as we're goin' to put up a new house, it's no more'n common sense to make it big enough to take care of as many as you may adopt," Mr. Mansfield said in reply to Uncle Ben's remonstrance against the erection of what he called a "reg'lar hotel."

"But I shan't have anythin' to put inter the rooms," the old lobster catcher added almost mournfully.

"I'm allowin' the women folks will look after that part of it, Uncle Ben," Mr. Mansfield replied. "Now there's mother, she told me to put up sich a house as would shelter all the homeless youngsters you might pick up for the rest of your life, an' she allowed that the Southport Sewin' Circle had agreed to see you had furniture enough to make it look comfortable. We're goin' to put a cellar under the whole buildin', for we've got rocks in plenty for the wall. Then you must have a wood-shed that'll hold fuel for six months of fires, an' them cooks are to be put inter quarters that'll make their eyes stick out. Sammy Cushing is quite a hand at mixin' up somethin' good to eat, an' I'm kinder anxious to see what sort of a fist he can make of it with everythin' convenient to hand."

It was useless for Uncle Ben to protest. The citizens of Southport had decided what was needed, and accompanied their decision with lumber sufficient to carry it into execution. Mr. Mansfield and Deacon Stubbs had even gone so far as to make rough plans for the new house, and the others were determined these should be adhered to so far as might be possible.

Therefore it was that the visitors worked as had been agreed upon; Tom and Sam were kept busy from morning until night cooking food, and little Joey found it quite as much as he could do to carry to the tent the wood chopped by Mr. Rowe. Uncle Ben hauled the pots and acted as ship-keeper for the "Sally," lying at anchor in the cove, when, as Reuben said, "she oughter be out chasin' mackerel." Every person on the island was busy during all the hours of daylight, save on the Sabbath, from the day the work was begun on the family home until it was so nearly completed that all the meals were served in what Mr. Mansfield had called the sitting-room.

"Talk 'bout swell houses!" Tom said one evening when he and Sam were privately inspecting the building. "It's goin' to knock the spots outer everythin' 'round here, an' yet I'm thinkin' Uncle Ben had rather have the old shanty back."

"Course he had, 'cause he built that himself; but jest wait till he gets the hang of livin' in a place like this, an' then he'll be contented as a kitten."

The kitchen was roomy and pleasant, as Mr. Mansfield had promised, and

it really seemed to Sam and Tommy that their labors as cooks were lightened fully one-half by the many conveniences, chief of which was a plan of Deacon Stubbs' for bringing water by pipes direct from the spring into the house.

"It's the biggest thing anywhere 'round these parts," Tommy said in a tone of approbation on a certain evening when the people from Southport had retired to the tent, and the "family" were alone in the new kitchen.

"You could get a big crowd of boys in here, by stowin' 'em snug."

"That's jest it, Tommy, that's jest it," Uncle Ben replied, and his tone was so mournful that the others looked at him in surprise.

"You see I kinder allowed that we'd go slow in pickin' up the family, so's to make certain of gettin' boys that were most in need of a home; but now we've got sich a big house, it stands us in hand to fill it up as soon as the work can be done. I've been thinkin' that I oughter hunt 'round right away to find enough for the rooms—that is, when we've got somethin' in the way of furniture to put in 'em."

"Better go slow an' sure," Mr. Rowe said in a tone of caution. "One or two lads who didn't care whether they stuck by the rules an' regerlations would knock the whole scheme inter a cocked hat."

"That's it, Reuben, that's jest it, an' yet what'er we goin' to do with this big ark of a house?"

"Leave her jest where she is, Uncle Ben," Mr. Rowe replied sagely. "In the first place, even if every room was filled chock-a-block with beds an' chairs you couldn't take care of a raft of boys yet a while. We've got to get settled down inter runnin' shape first. The 'Sally' must earn for us what'll buy provisions for the winter, else the family would go hungry durin' cold weather. I'd say that if we got to goin' by next spring it would be the most any crew could do. Then we'll shove the schooner inter some big port, like Boston or New York, an' I'll guarantee you can take your pick of lads."

Uncle Ben was forced to admit that there was a deal of sound common sense in Mr. Rowe's remarks, and he said in his usual placid manner, as he led the "family" to bed on board the "Sally," after the evening devotions:

"I reckon we'll let it go your way, Reuben, an' trust to its bein' the proper thing."

"Proper! It ain't anythin' else, unless you're willin' to take the chances of breakin' the whole thing up. We'll be gettin' ready from now till spring, an' then we'll fill that 'ere house as full of boys as a pod is full of peas."

Then came the day when the men from Southport declared that their work was done. The big tent was taken down and stowed aboard the "Sally." Such of the provisions as had not been consumed—and there was a large amount, so generously had Mr. Mansfield outfitted the party—was carried into the cellar of

the new house and all was in readiness for the return trip to Southport.

"I'm allowin' that we've done the best we knowed how," Deacon Stubbs said, as he halted on the beach, preventing any from getting into the waiting dories, "an' all that's left for us men to do is give a name to what we've built. I move, fellow citizens, that we call this 'ere structure 'Uncle Ben's Retreat."

"Second the motion!" Mr. Mansfield cried at the full strength of his lungs, and by way of showing that the motion had been carried, the visitors gave three such hearty cheers that, as Mr. Rowe said, "the lobsters in the cars must have got quite a surprise."

Uncle Ben seemed to think it necessary some one should be left to guard the new dwelling, but Mr. Mansfield declared that the whole family must go with them to Southport, for the ladies of the Sewing Circle had already insisted that they must be present when a plan, for the "housewarming" was decided upon.

"Now that we've got rid of Eliakim Doak, there ain't a man on this 'ere coast mean enough to harm so much as a shingle on the roof," the shopkeeper said emphatically, "an' mother has set her heart on havin' all hands of you down to the church vestry this evenin'."

Then Apple Island was temporarily abandoned, and within ten minutes after the "Sally D." sailed into Southport harbor Uncle Ben and his family were being escorted by nearly the entire population, as it then seemed, to the vestry, where a dinner was being made ready for those who had just arrived.

Not until evening were the details of the "housewarming" decided upon; but before that time came Tommy admitted to Sam and little Joey that he was almost sorry the good people of Southport had come to understand that Uncle Ben's work was the broadest kind of a charity and should be encouraged.

"I've been tryin' to get outside a little of what everybody offered me, till it seems as if I couldn't even wiggle," Tom said mournfully. "Before I struck Uncle Ben it seemed as if it would be the biggest kind of a thing if I could have enough to eat one day; but I'm beginnin' to feel as if it didn't pay to be too much of a pig."

Tom did not suffer to such an extent, however, that he failed of doing his full duty toward the cake and ice cream which were served in the vestry during the evening; but Reuben Rowe noted the fact that he was ready and even eager to go when Uncle Ben announced that it was time those belonging on Apple Island should be aboard the "Sally D." for the night.

"It beats all how folks have changed in this 'ere town since the day I shipped with Eliakim Doak," Mr. Rowe said in a thoughtful tone when the "family" were reviewing the events of the day before getting into the schooner's bunks. "I'm allowin', Uncle Ben, that you owe a good deal of this 'ere friendly feelin' to Cap'en Doak, for if he hadn't tried to do all the harm he could, the people wouldn't have

waked up to the idee that your scheme was the best ever."

"We owe it all to the good Lord, Reuben. He 'moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform,' an' that's the right kind of a line to keep in mind, lads, when you're feelin' down to the heel because things don't go exactly as you'd have 'em. I figgered an' figgered, tryin' to think up a plan for startin' a family, without seein' my way clear, when lo an' behold, the whole plan is pushed ahead in a far bigger way than I counted on, without my raisin' a hand, so to speak."

CHAPTER XXIV THE "HOUSEWARMING"

Next morning Uncle Ben's "family" were astir bright and early. To be exact, the sun had not showed his face when Sammy announced that breakfast was ready, and the meal had hardly been begun before the tramp of many feet told that the good people of Southport were bent on making a party call.

"I hope I ain't ungrateful for all that has been done to our benefit," Uncle Ben said as he arose from the table to welcome his visitors; "but I did kinder hope we'd be able to get away without any fuss an' feathers. I'm really beginnin' to be ashamed at hearin' 'bout what I've done, as if it was somethin' outer the general run, an' it's growin' to look as if the scheme was gettin' ahead of me."

"You have done somethin' outer the general run," Mr. Rowe replied emphatically. "I'd be glad to find another man what was willin' to give up all his hard-earned dollars to them as needed a home, an' the scheme never'll get ahead of you while you're the boss of the family."

There was no further opportunity for private conversation, because at this moment Mr. Mansfield and Deacon Stubbs came down the cuddy stairs with boisterous greetings, insisting on shaking hands with every member of the "family," including little Joey.

"We got kinder 'fraid you might give us the slip, Benny, by gettin' under way before sunrise, so the deacon an' me hurried down without waitin' for breakfast," Mr. Mansfield began, and on the instant Sam set out clean plates as token that the visitors should partake of their morning meal aboard the "Sally D."

"What did you have on your mind, William, that made you so keen to see us?" Uncle Ben asked with mild curiosity.

"It's a plan that the women folks cooked up last night after you'd left the

vestry, an we wanted to make certain it was put through 'cordin' to their figgerin'. The idee is, Benny, that the Retreat must have furniture, else it'll be lonesome like when you begin livin' in it, an' there ain't the least little bit of reason why the job shouldn't be finished up brown right away. Therefore an' consekently, as the 'Squire would say, we're goin' to work at the job, seein's how business here at the Port is uncommonly dull for this time of year."

"What is it you count on doin', William?" Uncle Ben asked, an expression of disquietude coming over his face.

"Furnish the new house, of course," Deacon Stubbs said quickly, as if fearing he would not have an opportunity to do his full share of the talking. "The women are bustlin' 'round gettin' things together, an' Jim Nason is puttin' the first load on his jigger this very minute. All hands of us are goin' over to Apple Island with you—"

"We men are goin' to lend a hand at settin' the stuff ashore, an' while the women folks are puttin' the new house to rights, we'd like to go out in the 'Sally' for a little deep-sea fishin'. It won't do any harm if you can cure a good big fare of cod an' haddock, an' it'll kinder be a starter for your winter's store of provisions."

Mr. Mansfield ceased speaking at this moment because Sam and Tommy had put before the guests a plentiful supply of food and coffee, and Uncle Ben stood near the companionway as if bent on beating a retreat, until Mr. Rowe asked in a whisper:

"What seems to be the trouble? You ain't lookin' well."

"There's nothin' the matter with me, Reuben, except that it looks as if we was gettin' in the way of idlin' too much. We can't afford to let up on lobster catchin', an' yet how can we 'tend to it if we go out deep-sea fishin' when there's a big lot of work to be done on the island? It strikes me that we're usin' the 'Sally' more as a toy than a craft that must be made to support the family."

"Don't fret yourself 'bout that, Benny," Mr. Mansfield cried with a laugh, for Uncle Ben had inadvertently spoken sufficiently loud for him to hear the last portion of the remark. "I'm allowin' that you can afford to spend a little while havin' a good time, seein's how, 'cordin' to all I know, you haven't had a day's pleasin' in thirty years—I ain't countin' yesterday."

The old lobster catcher could not well refuse to join in the plans which had been made by the people of Southport, more particularly since they had been arranged with a view to the benefit of himself and the "family," and by the time Mr. Mansfield and Deacon Stubbs had come to the end of an exceedingly hearty breakfast Uncle Ben was on deck helping to take aboard the first load of furniture.

The three boys were in high spirits at the prospect of deep-sea fishing, as well as not a little pleased at the idea of having the new house entirely furnished, and a jolly time they had while aiding in taking on board the cargo.

"Things are goin' to be mighty fine over on Apple Island," Tommy said, as he stood gazing in open-mouthed admiration at a well-worn bureau on which was painted in gaudy colors certain objects intended to represent flowers. "Mother Sharkey used to think she had a terrible swell place, but there wasn't anythin' in her house that could hold a candle to this!"

"Did you see the chairs that Mr. Mansfield sent inter the hold?" little Joey screamed. "Every one of 'em shined as if it had jest come outer the shop! Of course, we won't get a chance to sit on 'em; but they'll be mighty good to look at!"

"I'll bet we can do more'n look!" Tommy cried emphatically. "These things are all for the new house, an' it don't stand to reason we'd have to sit on the floor jest 'cause they was too fine!"

The boys found something to admire in every piece of furniture which was put aboard; but when baskets filled with dishes and cooking utensils were sent over the rail, Sam could not control his surprise and delight.

"We're goin' to be fixed up like reg'lar swells! Jest think how the table will look when we have real crockery dishes on it! Talk 'bout cookin'! If a feller can't spread hissself with all them things to use, he oughter bag his head!"

The "Sally D.'s" cargo was not on board until nearly noon, when no less than twenty women and men came over the rail to be taken to the island, and a merry crew they made. Little Joey had never been petted to such an extent in all his short life, while Sam and Tom received quite as much attention as if they had been freaks straight from a dime museum, instead of very ordinary boys.

Not until nearly nightfall did the schooner come to anchor in the cove opposite "Uncle Ben's Retreat," and then was begun the more arduous labor of sending the house furnishings ashore, for it was necessary to load everything into the dories, and, afterward, carry it up to the new house.

While this was being done Sam and Tommy hauled the traps, and when this was finished, at a late hour in the night, the men of Southport were yet engaged in the work of unloading the "Sally."

"You lads are to turn in right away, an' try to get some sleep," Uncle Ben said when the boys had come aboard tired with the heavy work of attending to the traps. "Deacon Stubbs allows that we oughter get under way for fishin' bright an' early in the mornin', an you'll have to look after the breakfast. We're likely to be out a couple of days, an' the lobster catchin' must be neglected all that time."

It was not very much of a task for the boys to journey over into Dreamland once they were in the bunks, and it really seemed as if they had but just closed their eyes in slumber when Mr. Rowe aroused them with the announcement that it was time to "get breakfast under way."

The women of Southport slept in the new house on this first night, and

there were no tokens that any of them had awakened when the schooner, with her very large crew, left the cove within five minutes after Sam and Tom had been awakened that they might begin the work of cooking.

Little Joey, to his great delight, had been allowed to make one of the "Sally D.'s" crew on this occasion, but neither he nor the other boys saw very much of the fishing. The table in the cabin was so small that no more than six could sit around it at one time, therefore the meals were served "in sections," as Mr. Rowe said, and since Joey played the part of waiter, he and the cooks were kept busy very nearly all the time.

"Don't fret 'cause you can't have a line in your hand," Mr. Rowe said when he came below for a mug of coffee after the "Sally" had arrived at the fishing grounds. "You'll see enough of that kind of work 'twixt now an' next spring, an' with sich a gang aboard there's neither comfort nor pleasure to be had."

"Have they caught any fish yet?" Joey asked.

"Bless your heart, lad, they've been at it this half hour, an' if it's kept up at the same rate, we're likely to have by night all that can be cared for."

In this Mr. Rowe was right. Before sunset the men of Southport were weary with the sport, and Uncle Ben declared that it would not be possible for his family to cure any more at one time. Therefore it was that the "Sally's" bow was turned toward Apple Island when the shadows of evening began to gather, and there were no signs of the coming day when she glided into Apple Island cove as silently as a ghost.

The next forenoon was spent in dressing the fish ready for curing; but Sam and Tom were not called upon to do their share of the disagreeable work, owing to the fact that they were sent out immediately after breakfast to haul the traps, and when this labor had been performed the ceremony of warming the new house was begun.

"Go in an' see what she looks like, with the swellest kind of fixin's in every room," Mr. Rowe said, when the boys pulled in from the lobster car to the beach. "You wanter go inter every room so's to get a sweep of the whole layout, an' I'm allowin' you never saw anythin' like it."

"Will they let us go in?" Joey asked doubtfully.

"Let you? Why, ain't it your home, same as it's mine? Did you allow that we was to camp on the shore, an' keep the house only to look at? Of course you can go in, an' when you come to the room jest over the kitchen that's been fixed up for our two cooks, I reckon you'll puff up the size of four ordinary boys."

"A whole room for only us two?" Sam cried incredulously.

"That's what, an' it ain't any almshouse room either! There's a reg'lar bed with all the fixin's, an' what do you say to a whole lookin'-glass?"

The boys could wait to hear no more, but ran at full speed until they came

to that same room, where they stood in speechless astonishment a full minute, after which Tom cried:

"Talk about it! It's the finest ever! An' to think that we wouldn't had it but for Uncle Ben! Say, Sam, we're a couple of lucky chaps, eh? Who'd ever thought I'd come to this?"

Not until little Joey came and literally dragged them away did the boys cease to admire the apartment intended for the use of the cooks, and then, under the guidance of the "baby," they explored the entire house, finding something in every room to excite wonder and admiration, until having come to the kitchen with its apparent wealth of cooking utensils, when Sam spoke for the first time since entering the building.

"Mr. Rowe said the Southport folks only counted on givin' us what they had on hand an' couldn't use any longer! If this stuff wasn't good enough for 'em, they oughter tried to get along with Cap'en Doak's layout for a couple of days! What does Uncle Ben say about it?"

"He's been right there in the sittin'-room this ever so long, actin' as if he didn't know what to say," little Joey replied. "It seems almost as if he was sorry because it's so fine."

"I reckon he's feelin' kinder bad 'cause there ain't more boys here, now we've got such a swell home for 'em," Sammy said thoughtfully, and then he went down-stairs to put his face close to Uncle Ben's as he whispered, "I'm goin' to try mighty hard so's to let you see how glad I am you took me in."

"Bless your heart, sonny, there ain't a boy livin' who could do more to show that same than you've done ever since we two come together. It stands all of us in hand to show our gratitude, an' if you can find the rest of the family, I'd like for 'em to go off somewhere with me to thank the good Lord for His wondrous mercy an' lovin' kindness."

* * * * *

About the housewarming? The people of Southport did that in their own way, making exceeding merry over it; but I'm of the belief that Uncle Ben and his family really "warmed" it when they went into one of the attic rooms and pledged their lives to the work of caring for those homeless lads whom they might meet.

Did the family increase in size? Perhaps some day it will be possible to tell of its famous growth; but just now you who are interested in it must be content to know that Uncle Ben has thirty-eight boys in the "Retreat," and Sam and Tommy are acting as cooks for all those hungry mouths, while Mr. Rowe still claims to be the commander of the "Sally D."

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CRUISE OF THE SALLY
D ***

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