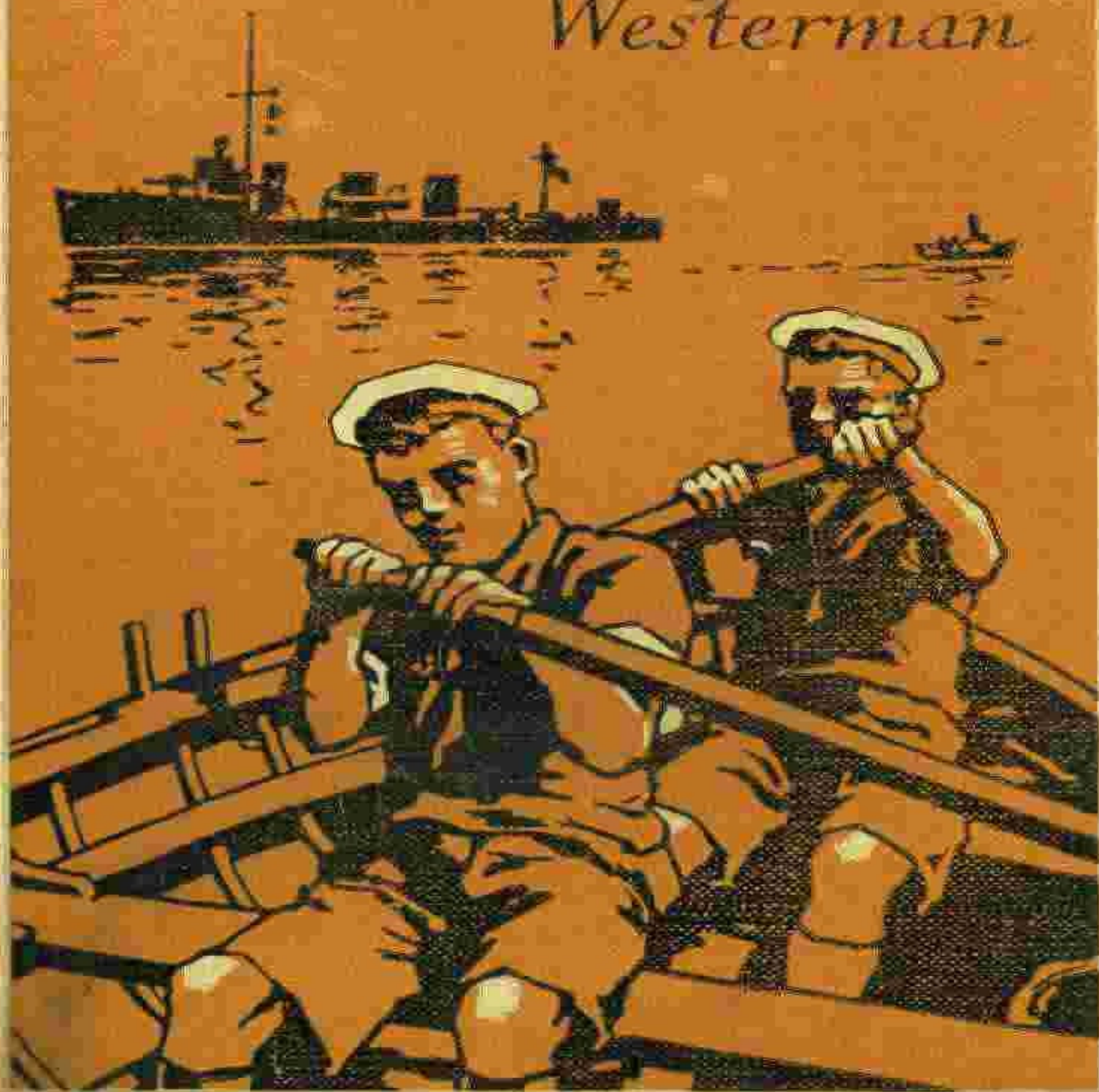


# SEA SCOUTS UP-CHANNEL

*Percy F.  
Westerman*



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# Sea Scouts up-Channel

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[Illustration: "WANT A TOW INTO WEYMOUTH?" *Frontispiece*,  
[Page 242](#)]

# **Sea Scouts up-Channel**

**BY**

**PERCY F. WESTERMAN**

Author of "The Third Officer", "The Salving of the Fusi Yama"  
"Sea Scouts All", &c.

*Illustrated by C. M. Padday, R.O.I.*

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"WANT A TOW INTO WEYMOUTH?" *FRONTISPIECE*

"ALL CLEAR!" HE ANNOUNCED, EXHAUSTED AND TRIUMPHANT

BOTH MEN TUMBLED ON THE CABIN-TOP

"DROP THAT AND GIVE IN AT ONCE!"

# Sea Scouts up-Channel

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## CHAPTER I

### The Guardship

"It's going to be a dirty night," remarked Mr. Graham, Scoutmaster of the 9th Southend-on-Sea Sea Scouts. "Not very promising for the first day of our holidays."

"You are right, sir," agreed Desmond, the Patrol Leader. "We are safe enough here; and, after all, the weather isn't everything. We're jolly lucky to be afloat."

"Although we've nothing much to go to sea in," added Pat Hayes. "This part of the coast is very different from Southend, isn't it, sir?"

"I can hardly believe we're miles from home," chimed in Ted Coles, the tenderfoot or "greenhorn" of the troop. "My word, that shakes the old boat up!" he exclaimed, as a vicious blast of wind bore down upon the side of the lofty superstructure of their temporary floating home.

It was a stroke of good luck, or perhaps good management on the part of Scoutmaster Graham, that five members of the 9th Southend Sea Scouts found themselves in the Isle of Wight.

They had that afternoon "taken over" the guardship of the 6th Wootton Bridge Sea Scouts, the latter having accepted an invitation to take part in a "jamboree" on the other side of the Channel at a place called St. Valerie-en-Caux.

Before the Wootton Bridge lads left, their Scoutmaster, Mr. Tweedie, wrote to Mr. Graham—they had been brother officers in the R.N.V.R. in that distant

period "when there had been a war on"—offering to lend him the Wootton Bridge Sea Scouts' guardship for the latter end of July and the greater part of the month of August.

Scoutmaster Graham put the proposition before the lads. They simply jumped at it. A holiday in the Isle of Wight was far different from knocking around the Essex and Suffolk creeks in their open whaler—an old tub that could not be trusted to go anywhere under canvas unless the wind was abaft the beam—and rowing, although good exercise, is apt to become a tedious business, especially when it comes to propelling an unwieldy eighteen-foot ex-Service boat for miles and miles.

So the offer was gladly accepted. Mr. Graham, Frank Bedford, Pat Hayes, and Ted Coles had taken train to Portsmouth; Patrol Leader David Desmond and Second Jock Findlay had done the ninety odd miles journey on their trusty push-bikes. Taking two days over the distance, they were awaiting the train-party at Portsmouth Harbour Station when the Scoutmaster and his three young companions arrived with their somewhat generous amount of luggage.

It was a matter for mutual regret that some members of the troop were unable to be present. The fact remained that out of three patrols only five Sea Scouts were able to accept the Wootton Bridge lads' invitation, although it was just possible that others might do so later on.

From Portsmouth the elated Sea Scouts crossed by steamer to Ryde, their one disappointment being that they were unable to have a glimpse of Nelson's *Victory*, but the staunch old three-decker was in dry dock, undergoing a thorough overhauling to repair the ravages of Father Time.

At Ryde they commenced their four-mile tramp to Wootton Bridge, their gear being piled upon a trek-cart lent them by some obliging brother-Scouts.

It was late in the afternoon when the Sea Scouts had their first view of Wootton Creek, and rather unfortunately it was nearly low water. From the top of the hill they could see a very narrow stream meandering between banks of mud. On either side the ground rose steeply, the left bank being thickly wooded. Away to their right the Sea Scouts could discern the creek winding towards the open waters of Spithead, while in the distance the flat coast of Hampshire cut the skyline.



"Where's the guardship, sir?" asked Hayes.

"There she is, unless I'm greatly mistaken," replied the Scoutmaster, pointing to a long, low, black hull with a white superstructure.

"She's not very big," remarked Ted Coles, the greenhorn, dubiously. "And the creek's little larger than a ditch."

"Don't look a gift-horse in the mouth," said Desmond. "Wait till we're aboard. Things look a bit deceptive from a height. Come on, you fellows, it's down hill all the rest of the way."

At length the Sea Scouts and their trek-cart came to a halt outside an old mill. Here the main road from Ryde to Newport, the "capital" of the Isle of Wight, crosses the creek by means of a brick bridge. Close to it is the village that takes its name from the bridge.

"Now to find out Mr. Johnson who has the key of the guardship," announced the Scoutmaster; but, before he could take further steps in the matter, an old, grey-bearded man, wearing a blue reefer suit and a peaked cap, came out of a cottage near by.

"You'rn the gen'l'man what's a friend to Mr. Tweedie's, I take it, sir?" he inquired. "Johnson's my name, master mariner for nigh on thirty-five year. I've got the keys, sir. Here they be, an' a list of where everything be to. If you'rn wantin' any help, come to Cap'n Albert Johnson, being me."

"Thanks awfully, Captain," replied the Scoutmaster. "I suppose there's a dinghy to get off to the guardship with?"

"Ay, ay, there's a nice li'l boat belonging to our Sea Scouts. She'm alongside yon steps, but there ain't enough water just now, seein' as 'ow the tide's out."

"In that case we must wait," rejoined Mr. Graham. "How long will it be before the dinghy is afloat?" Captain Johnson gave a glance at the mud-banks.

"Matter of an hour, mebbe an hour an' a half," he replied. "Say seven o'clock an' you'll be on the safe side."

"In that case," said Mr. Graham cheerfully, "we may as well get in a few

provisions. Unship that gear, Desmond. The trek-cart will come in handy for the grub. Hayes, you'd better mount guard over our gear. I suppose there's fresh water aboard, Captain Johnson?"

"Ay, ay, sir," was the reply, "the lads filled up her tank just afore they went 'foreign'. There'll be a couple o' hundred gallon in a iron tank amidships. You'll find the tap in the galley, but don't use the pump. That be for salt water."

Leaving Hayes to contemplate the narrow trickle of water between the mud-flats, the Scoutmaster and the rest of the Sea Scouts set off on their task of buying provisions. By the time they returned with their well-laden trek-cart the tide had commenced to flow, and the water was already lapping the keel of the dinghy.

Ten minutes later the little craft was pushed off through the soft mud and taken alongside the bridge. The stores and baggage were passed aboard, the trek-cart put into a shed at the mill, and the Sea Scouts set off for their temporary floating home.

"She's a whopping craft, after all!" exclaimed Ted Coles, as the dinghy drew near the guardship.

Viewed from without, the guardship turned out to be an old Thames barge, about eighty feet over all and from fifteen to eighteen feet beam. The whole of her two holds had been built upon, with a double-decked structure extending the whole width of the ship except for about fifteen feet amidships, where the deck-houses came to the outer edge of the original coamings, thus leaving two sheltered portions of the deck. Aft, the upper deck terminated twelve feet forward of the lower deck, the roof of the latter boasting of a large teak skylight. There were several large glass windows, while a short lowermast and light topmast gave a finishing touch to the Wootton Bridge Sea Scouts' guardship.

Making the dinghy fast fore and aft to a couple of booms, the Sea Scouts followed their Scoutmaster on deck, and waited with ill-concealed eagerness while he unlocked the door leading to the upper deck.

They found themselves in what was styled the chartroom, a space about six feet in length and occupying the extreme width of the ship. In it were a compass, a flashing signal lamp, a signal locker with a complete set of flags, hand semaphore flags, a couple of telescopes, and on the bulkhead two large charts of

Spithead and the Solent.

On each side were windows commanding a view abeam and ahead, while right aft another window, long and narrow, gave an uninterrupted view of the entrance to the creek and the sea beyond.

Leading out of the chartroom was a wide, doorless opening, communicating with the club-room and two sleeping-cabins on the upper deck; while a steep brass-treaded ladder with brass hand-rails gave access below.

On the lower deck were the dining-saloon, kitchen, and two more sleeping-cabins, with nearly seven feet headroom throughout, while right for'ard was a low-roofed storeroom. Aft the dining-saloon, and gained by means of a small sliding door, was the bathroom, which in the days when the guardship was a sea-going Thames barge had served as the skipper's cabin. "Jolly fine, isn't it, sir!" exclaimed Desmond. "And did the Wootton Bridge Sea Scouts do all the work of converting her?"

"Every bit, I think," replied Mr. Graham. "I remember Mr. Tweedie writing to me about it. They cemented the floors and the space between the sides and the lining with ferro-concrete—nearly forty tons of it—before they commenced the woodwork. Altogether it took them seven months to finish the work."

"It must have cost them something," observed Frank Bedford.

"About a couple of hundred pounds," replied the Scoutmaster. "They raised every penny of it by themselves—concerts and that sort of thing—without cadging a single halfpenny. Well, come on. How about grub? Then we'll go to general quarters, stow gear, and sling our hammocks."

The first meal on board was a great success, if Jock Findlay's initial blunder was not taken into consideration. Jock was told off as cook for the day, and, apparently not having heard Captain Johnson's instructions, had made the cocoa with boiling sea-water.

It was getting on for nine o'clock when the conversation related in the beginning of this chapter took place. Already the sun had dipped behind the tree-clad hills on the western side of the creek. Away to the nor'ard the sky was overcast, while an on-shore breeze blew with steadily increasing strength up the tidal estuary. The evening was cold—decidedly chilly for July—while

occasional scuds of rain presaged a dirty night.

Presently Patrol Leader Desmond, who had been examining the entrance to the creek with one of the telescopes, gave an exclamation of surprise.

"What is it, Desmond?" inquired Jock, who, with the Patrol Leader, was standing in the chartroom. "An SOS?"

"Of sorts," rejoined his chum. "There's a small craft out there flying a signal—I'm not sure, but I think it's the NC."

Findlay snatched up the second telescope, threw open one of the windows, and levelled the glass in the direction Desmond had indicated. Before he could focus the instrument, the object lens was blurred with rain.

"Dash it all!" he exclaimed, and proceeded to clean the glass.

Before Findlay could resume his investigations, Desmond had put down his telescope. Hurrying to the head of the ladder he roused his chums by shouting:

"On deck there, you fellows. There's a vessel in distress off the mouth of the creek."

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Sea Scouts to the Rescue**

At the hail, Mr. Graham and the rest of the Sea Scouts swarmed up the ladder into the chartroom.

Patrol Leader Desmond had read the signal correctly, in spite of the fact that the light was fading and that the flags, owing to the direction of the wind, were nearly end on and blowing out almost as stiff as a board.

Taking the telescope, the Scoutmaster verified his Patrol Leader's statement. There was the white and blue chequered flag surmounting a white pennant with a red ball in it, signifying: "In distress; need immediate assistance".

"How long has this been flying?" inquired Mr. Graham.

"Not long, sir. Less than a couple of minutes," replied Desmond. "She's been at anchor there for the last hour. I was wondering what she was doing in the open."

"Waiting for enough water to get in," hazarded the Scoutmaster. "It's not far from high tide now. Come along, Desmond and Findlay, we'll see what's wrong. No, not you others; three of us will be enough for this job. Got your first-aid outfit, Jock? I wouldn't mind betting that's what will be wanted."

With mixed feelings, Bedford, Hayes, and the Tenderfoot watched their Scoutmaster and their two chums push off in the dinghy. They were disappointed that they were compelled to remain on board as passive spectators, but they knew that in a choppy sea the dinghy stood a better chance of reaching the craft in distress than if she were deeply laden with six fairly hefty individuals. So, with a cheer of encouragement, they bade their chums good luck and remained watching the slow progress of the dinghy until she was lost to sight in the rapidly gathering darkness.

Jock Findlay, a big-limbed, deep-chested lad of sixteen, pulled bow; Mr. Graham was at the stroke oar; Desmond steered. Already the Patrol Leader had made good use of his eyes during his comparatively short experience of Wootton Creek. By the aid of the chart he had studied the somewhat intricate entrance, verifying his facts by observing through the telescope the actual position of the "booms" or mark-posts. Thus he knew that the black-and-white chequered posts were on the port side of the approach channel and that those painted all black were to starboard.

"There's a coast-guard station on our starboard hand, sir," remarked the Patrol Leader. "It's rather strange they haven't turned out."

"I know," replied Mr. Graham shortly. He was pulling strongly and was disinclined to speak more than was absolutely necessary. He knew that it would be a tough struggle before the dinghy arrived alongside the disabled or distressed craft.

A bend in the creek brought the dinghy abreast of the little hamlet of Fishbourne. The boat was now dead in the eye of the wind, and, although it was nearly high water, there was still a considerable tide setting in. These conditions made the rowers' task a hard one, but it had one advantage: with the wind and tide in the same direction the waves were not so short and steep as they might be were the natural forces acting in opposite ways.

The Sea Scouts had already passed a line of small yachts anchored in the lower reaches of the creek. Several, doubtless belonging to the place, were without anyone on board; others showed gleams of yellow light through their scuttles and skylights. Their owners were comfortably sheltering in their snug cabins, thankful that on such a dirty night they were in a secure anchorage.

On the gravel beach at Fishbourne were several pleasure boats hauled up. The boatmen, in view of the rain, had decided early that it was of no use staying there to look for customers, and they had gone home.

The Sea Scouts' dinghy was barely a hundred yards below the coast-guard station when an oilskin-clad man wearing a sou'wester appeared from the look-out hut. He was obviously puzzled to see a little open boat making seaward on a night like this. Had it been light enough he might have spotted the craft flying the distress signal; but now it was too dark to discern her, and for some unknown reason she failed to display a riding-light.

So both the boatmen and the coast-guards had missed a chance of earning salvage.

"Where is she?" exclaimed Findlay breathlessly, turning his head and shading his eyes with one hand while he pulled with the other.

"I can just make her out," shouted Desmond in reply. "Ough!" ejaculated the bowman, as a shower of spray hit him on the back and a cold stream of salt water trickled down his head. "We look like getting wet shirts before this job's done."

It was soon evident that the task the Sea Scouts had undertaken was not only a strenuous one. It was a dangerous one; but the mute appeal for aid was sufficient. Having set out upon an undertaking they meant to see it through.

Already the water was sluicing over the bottom-boards, as the tubby little

dinghy rose and fell in the vicious seas. Desmond, still keeping his eyes fixed upon a faint object that he rightly supposed to be the craft in distress, groped and found the baler. Steering with one hand he began baling for all he was worth. Even then the water seemed to be gaining as the tops of the white crested waves slopped in over the bows.

The Scoutmaster and Jock Findlay were beginning to feel the terrific strain. Used as they were to rowing, they stuck it grimly, but even their horny hands were blistering, while their muscles ached and their breath came in short, jerky gasps. Nor could Desmond relieve his chum at the oar, without an almost certain chance of capsizing the dinghy, while even the slightest respite would result in the boat being carried shorewards.

The outermost beacon appeared to glide slowly past the labouring boat. Here the waves were dangerously steep, for the tide was setting strongly to the west'ard, resulting in a seething cross-sea.

"Nearly there!" bawled Desmond encouragingly, raising his voice to make it audible above the noise of the wind and waves.

The yacht—for such she proved to be—was now only about a hundred yards away, as she rose and plunged to the waves, but it took Mr. Graham and Findlay a good ten minutes of desperate pulling to cover the comparatively short distance.

There was no need for the Patrol Leader to give the customary order: "Way 'nough". He knew that his companions would have to row until the dinghy was within oar's-length of the yacht. And then Desmond would be faced by the difficulty of bringing the dinghy alongside the heaving, pitching hull, as the yacht strained at her chain cable.

The result of a false move on the helmsman's part would be that the boat would miss her objective altogether and drift yards lee'ard, or else would be crushed like an egg-shell as the larger craft rolled towards her.

"Ahoy!" shouted Desmond.

"Ahoy!" came a muffled reply. "Come aboard."

"Easier said than done," thought Mr. Graham. "Why doesn't the fellow come

on deck to take our painter?"

Awaiting his opportunity, Findlay, with the slack of the painter over his left arm, sprang upon the deck of the yacht, while Mr. Graham fended off. Desmond followed, and finally the Scoutmaster leapt on board, steadying himself by the shrouds. The dinghy, left to its own devices to a certain extent, drifted rapidly astern, until she brought up with a jerk that almost wrenched the painter out of Findlay's hands.

"Below there!" hailed the Scoutmaster again, as he peered down the companion-way in a vain attempt to see what was taking place in the unlighted cabin.

"Come on down," replied a somewhat faint and quavery voice. "Sorry I can't get you a light."

"That's easily remedied," declared Mr. Graham, as he switched on his electric torch. "What's the trouble?"

With Desmond and Findlay close at his heels the Scoutmaster descended the slippery, brass-treaded ladder leading to the yacht's saloon. There on one of the bunks sat, or rather reclined, a man of about fifty years of age. His face looked grey and drawn. He was supporting his right arm with his left, the sweater-sleeve of which looked ominously lumpy just above the wrist, while a dark stain was showing on the woolly garment.

"Fracture, eh?" inquired the Scoutmaster.

"Double fracture, to be precise," replied the owner of the yacht. "You're Sea Scouts, I see? Thought at first you were the coast-guards."

"Sort of substitute, you know," rejoined Mr. Graham. "Now let's see what the trouble is," he added briskly.

Jock Findlay was ready with his first-aid outfit, Desmond lit the cabin-lamp, but the erratic motion of the yacht so affected it in spite of its being gimballed, that the confined space was poorly illuminated.

With a pair of sharp scissors the sufferer's sweater and singlet sleeves were ripped open, and the arm exposed to view. It was not a pleasant sight, for in two



places the ends of fractured bones had forced themselves against the skin. In addition, there was an abrasion that was bleeding freely. "Fraid it will give you gip," said Mr. Graham apologetically, as he prepared, with the assistance of his young companions, to set the broken limb. "I'll have to grin and bear it," replied the injured man stoically. "But before you start--in case I make a fool of myself, you know--can you take my yacht into Wootton Creek?"

"We'll try," replied the Scoutmaster.

"You know the way in?" inquired the owner anxiously.

"Yes," replied Mr. Graham briefly. Already he knew enough of the creek to justify the assertion.

"Thanks awfully," was the rejoinder. "And can you phone to my wife, Mrs. Collinson? She's staying at the Solent Hotel, Ryde. Tell her I'm all right, or at any rate reassure her that there's nothing much the matter. Good! Now, I'm ready."

It was not the complicated nature of the injury but the awkwardness of the impromptu surgery that was the difficulty. The motion of the yacht was now so violent that the Sea Scouts had great trouble to maintain their balance, let alone to support and hold the injured man, while Mr. Graham placed the limb in two well-padded splints.

But Mr. Collinson did not "grin and bear it". Long before the first-aid process was completed he was in a dead faint.

"Just as well," commented the Scoutmaster, "only it will mean telling off one hand to prevent his rolling off the bunk. You stay here, Jock; Desmond and I will get the yacht in. She'll do it easily under foresail only, I think. There's no immediate hurry. We'll have to overhaul the gear before we get the anchor up. It's no use monkeying about with sheets and halliards on a strange craft in the dark after we are under way."

Leaving Findlay in charge of the patient, the Scoutmaster and Desmond went on deck. For a few moments, coming from the lighted cabin, they could see nothing. By degrees their eyes grew accustomed to the darkness. They could discern the high ground on either side of the entrance, but the beacons marking the channel were invisible. All around there was a welter of foaming water.

"We're dragging, sir!" exclaimed the Patrol Leader.

"By Jove, we are!" agreed Mr. Graham, abandoning his intention of overhauling the ropes. "Stand by at the helm, Desmond. I'll get the anchor up and set the staysail. She ought to draw clear."

Making his way for'ard the Scoutmaster knelt on the heaving fore-deck while he fumbled for the gasket securing the staysail. In this position he was often thigh deep in water, as the yacht dipped her lean bows into the angry crests. It was now blowing half a gale, and the yacht was perilously close to a lee shore.

To his relief, Mr. Graham found the staysail halliard without difficulty. A trial hoist showed that the sail could be set without risk of fouling anything.

The next task was to weigh the anchor. In ordinary circumstances this operation would be performed by means of a small capstan—an easy yet slow process. Long before the anchor could be brought a-peak the yacht would drag and go aground. Slipping the cable was out of the question, as the Scoutmaster did not know whether the end of the chain was shackled or not, and there was no time to grope about in a strange fo'c'sle, struggling with a possibly refractory shackle.

"Desmond!" he shouted.

The Patrol Leader, relinquishing the as yet unwanted tiller, made his way for'ard, clutching at runners, shrouds, and mast as he did so. Without these supports he would almost certainly have lost his footing, so erratic and violent was the motion of the yacht.

"Bear a hand!" exclaimed Mr. Graham breathlessly, pointing to the cable.

Desmond understood. In order to save time the anchor-cable was to be hauled in by hand instead of by means of the winch.

It was a tough task, especially at first, but gradually the iron chain came home, until a sudden and considerable relaxation of the strain announced that the anchor was off the bottom, or in nautical terms "up and down".

The Patrol Leader subsided ungracefully upon the mainmast spider band, while the Scoutmaster sat heavily upon the brass-capped bitts. It was painful for both,

but there was no time to waste in vain complaints.

"Take the helm—quick!" shouted Mr. Graham, regaining his feet and hauling in the staysail halliards.

Desmond hurried aft, secured a grip on the tiller, and waited.

For some moments the staysail slatted violently in the wind. The yacht began to gather stern-way and showed a tendency to fall off on the starboard tack. Exerting all his strength the Scoutmaster gripped the stiff canvas (his finger-nails were tender for a week afterwards) and held the sail aback.

Even then the yacht hesitated. There was a distinct shock, different from the jars and jerks caused by the action of the waves. The vessel had touched bottom. Her keel had struck what felt like a shingle bank.

Then, to Mr. Graham's relief, she heeled and drew clear of the bottom.

But the danger of striking a lee shore was not yet over. The yacht under staysail alone could not "claw off ". She had to be sailed free, but not too free, until she rounded the spit of mud at the starboard side of the entrance to the creek. The question was whether Desmond could strike the happy medium and keep her on the only possible safe course, which was now against a strong west-going tide.

Checking the lee staysail sheet, Mr. Graham came aft. Then, belaying the sheet, he glanced at the bellying canvas which was just discernible against the loom of the land.

That glance told him that the youthful helmsman knew his job.

"Couldn't do better myself," thought the Scoutmaster.

He made no attempt to take the tiller. It was one of his principles in Sea Scouting never to interfere when one of the lads was doing his work properly. And Desmond knew it was "up to him" to keep the yacht on her course; he also knew that he was doing the right thing, otherwise his Scoutmaster would have "butted in".

Suddenly, through the shower of spray flying over the yacht's bows, Desmond caught sight of the outermost of the beacons, barely twenty yards to lee'ard.

It was now a case of "up helm and run for it". The yacht answered readily to the action of the rudder, and in a few seconds she was scudding before the wind with slacked-off sheets and almost on an even keel.

"See the next mark?" shouted the Scoutmaster "On your port bow?"

"Ay, ay, sir," was the confident response.

"All right below, there?" inquired Mr. Graham, calling down the companion-way.

"Quite, sir," replied Jock, who up to the present had all his work cut out to keep the injured man from further harm. "He's not come to yet, sir."

Certainly Jock had seen little or nothing of the fun. By the noises on deck as the cable came home he knew that his comrades were weighing anchor. The shock too, when the yacht grounded on her keel, was far more pronounced to him than it had been to the others on deck. Then, by the more or less steady heel to starboard, he was aware that the little craft was under way. And now, by reason of the yacht running in comparatively calm water, he knew that she was within the entrance to the creek.

Gybing abreast of the coast-guard station the yacht flew up stream, passed the line of anchored craft, until she was almost becalmed under the high, well-wooded ground to starboard.

"We've got her in, sir," remarked Desmond. "Now what are we going to do?"

That was precisely what Mr. Graham was thinking about. The obvious thing to do was to get medical aid for the injured man. In his present state it was far too risky to attempt to land him in the dinghy, and, since he could not be taken to the doctor, the inference was that the doctor must be brought to him. Then, again, was the question: where could the patient be placed? The narrow, ill-lighted cabin was not at all suitable, with its awkward bunks and headroom of less than six feet under the beams. The best thing to do in these circumstances was to tranship the injured man from the yacht to the guardship.

"I'll take her for a minute," said Mr. Graham, relieving Desmond at the helm. "Call up the others and tell them we're coming alongside."

Springing upon the now steady cabin-top the Patrol Leader flashed a series of dots with his torch. The reply signal came almost immediately, showing that Bedford, Hayes, and Coles were anxiously on the look out for their comrades' return.

"We are bringing yacht alongside," signalled Desmond in Morse. "Swing in boat booms and lay out fenders."

For the next quarter of a mile progress was slow. The ebb-tide was weak, but the wind came only in fitful puffs over the tree-tops.

"We'll get it in a minute," declared the Patrol Leader, pointing to the ruffled water ahead that showed up distinctly in the reflected gleam of the guardship's riding-light.

"That usually happens," observed Mr. Graham. "Often and often a yacht approaches her moorings in a gentle little breeze, then just as she's on, down comes a puff that shoots her past the buoy like a young racehorse.... Findlay!"

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Jock from the cabin.

"How is Mr. Collinson?"

"Still insensible, sir."

"All right; think you can leave him? If so, come on deck. You'll be wanted to make fast when we go alongside."

Findlay obeyed with alacrity; but had it been light Mr. Graham would have had a bit of a shock. The excitement of attending to the injured man, and the Sea Scout's subsequent confinement in the stuffy cabin of the violently pitching and tossing boat, had made the lad sea-sick. Yet, dreading the chance of discovery more than the actual malady, Findlay had not said a word about it, but had stuck gamely to his appointed task.

As Desmond had predicted, there was quite a heavy squall as the yacht approached the guardship. Waiting until the latter craft gathered sufficient steerageway, Mr. Graham lowered the staysail. Adroitly steered by Desmond, the yacht ran gently alongside the hull of the guardship. Ropes were thrown and made fast, and, with hardly a jar, the two vessels were side to side, separated

only by a pair of large coir fenders.

The first instalment of the Southend-on-Sea Sea Scouts' "good turn" was an accomplished fact.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **An Involuntary Guest**

Mr. Graham was surprised to find that it was just past midnight when he returned on board the guard-ship. Taught by experience, he had left his wristlet watch on board, knowing that he was in for a soaking before the then unknown task was but half completed.

"We've been nearly two hours, lads!" he exclaimed; "and we haven't finished yet. You two fellows"—indicating Frank Bedford and Pat Hayes—"can take the dinghy and row up to Wootton Bridge and find a doctor. Bring him back with you. It's an urgent surgical case—compound fracture. And, since the post office is bound to be shut, the doctor will probably have a telephone. Ask him to let you use it. Ring up the number on the paper and give the message I've written down. Got that?"

"Yes, sir," replied both Sea Scouts, and without a moment's delay they brought the dinghy alongside the yacht, clambered into her, and rowed vigorously in the direction of Wootton Bridge.

"Now, lads," continued the Scoutmaster briskly, addressing the remaining three youths, "we've got to get the patient aboard here. I don't suppose our friends the Wootton Sea Scouts have left a stretcher on board, so we'll have to rig one up. Get busy. If we can do this part of the business before Mr. Collinson recovers consciousness so much the better. He won't feel the jolting."

The Sea Scouts had often constructed impromptu stretchers, and, in spite of being comparatively strange to the guardship and her gear, they soon got to

work. A couple of short boat-hook staves, some light lashing, and a few blankets were all that were necessary.

While these preparations were in progress Mr. Graham had not been idle. In one of the large sleeping cabins on the upper deck he had prepared a comfortable bed in the centre of the room, so as to allow easy access to the patient from all sides. His next step was to light a couple of hurricane lanterns and hang them in the rigging of the yacht, so that the stretcher-bearers could see what they were doing when it came to transshipping the injured man.

With the aid of the stretcher it was not a very difficult task. The awkward part of the business was moving the patient from the sofa bunk on to the stretcher, without allowing his arm to come in contact with anything. Compared with this the work of lifting him up through the companion-way was fairly simple.

At length the still-unconscious Mr. Collinson was put to bed on board the guardship. The Sea Scouts made no attempt to revive him, since the Scoutmaster thought it best for the patient to remain insensible until after the doctor had made his examination.

The three Sea Scouts left on board the guardship while the rescue work was in progress had not been idle. There was a piping hot meal awaiting Mr. Graham, Desmond, and Findlay on their return, to which, after having changed their saturated clothes, they did full justice.

"Now, you fellows," said the Scoutmaster, "you had better turn in. There's nothing more to be done that I cannot do single-handed. If you don't get decent rest you'll be fit for nothing to-morrow."

The trio were reluctant to go, but they gave no sign of their feelings. It was discipline, and discipline was a subject upon which Mr. Graham laid particular stress. When he gave an order he gave an order, and it had to be carried out promptly. Yet he had the happy knack of serving out pills with a sugared coating. There was nothing harsh or unnecessary in his orders. The Sea Scouts knew this and admired him for it, while he on his part realized that unless discipline were maintained, without destroying a sense of self-reliance in the lads, it would be a risky, nay, positively dangerous business to be responsible for the lives of his youthful charges afloat.

The three Sea Scouts had not turned in more than five minutes before the

dinghy returned bringing the doctor.

"Sorry to turn you out at this time of night," said Mr. Graham apologetically.

"Not at all," protested Dr. Baker, after they had mutually introduced themselves. "Part of my job, you know."

"The hardest-worked profession in the world," added the Scoutmaster, as he led the way to the cabin where Mr. Collinson was lying, after telling Bedford and Hayes to follow their comrades' example and turn in.

"H'm!" ejaculated Dr. Baker, when he examined the patient's arm. "Bit of a nasty mess. How did it occur?"

"I don't know," replied Mr. Graham, and proceeded to give a brief version of how he had found the owner of the yacht injured in his cabin.

With the Scoutmaster's assistance the doctor unbound the broken arm.

"Your youngsters know their work," said the medical man as he replaced the splints. "I've seen very little better work in some of the crack London hospitals. Oh, yes, when he comes to give him one of these pellets, and another in four hours' time if he's in much pain. I'll call in during the morning if you can send a boat for me at eleven sharp."

The Scoutmaster rowed the doctor to the quay. During the trip back to the guardship, Mr. Graham found himself wondering whether he had been wise in packing off his youngsters. Certain things had to be done, and if, while he was busy, the patient recovered consciousness it might be bad for the latter if there were no one on the spot.

Arriving alongside, Mr. Graham found that his surmises were correct. Mr. Collinson had regained consciousness, but fortunately Desmond had heard a noise and had gone to see what was the matter.

"How are you feeling now?" inquired Mr. Graham. "Rotten," declared Mr. Collinson pointedly. "This arm of mine is giving me what is commonly termed 'what for'."

"Take this," said the Scoutmaster, proffering the violet-coloured pellet.



"Doctor's orders. He's been and gone."

"Morphine, eh? All right."

Ten minutes later the patient was sleeping soundly. Mr. Graham told Desmond to go to his bunk again; and, having seen that the dinghy was properly secured and that the yacht was lying comfortably alongside the guardship, the Scoutmaster "turned in all standing", ready at the first occasion to attend to his involuntary guest.

Nothing more of an unusual nature occurred during the night. At six in the morning the Sea Scouts turned out, to find that the summer gale had blown itself out and that the sky was cloudless and the wind a gentle breeze from the west'ard.

"Not so much noise, you fellows," cautioned Desmond. "There's an injured man on board, remember."

"Tell us what happened," asked Bedford.

"There's nothing much to tell," replied the Patrol Leader. "We just went out, found Mr. Collinson with his arm broken, and brought the yacht in."

"How did he get his arm broken?" inquired the Tenderfoot.

"None of us knows," was the reply.

"I'd like to find out," continued Coles, scenting a mystery.

"You will soon, I expect," rejoined the Patrol Leader. "Now then; who's cook?"

"Bedford," replied three voices in chorus.

"Right-o! Get to work, old son," said Desmond, turning to the "cook of the day"; "and don't give us salt-water cocoa for breakfast."

The meal over, all hands "squared off", airing clothes and bedding, and stowing everything away in a ship-shape fashion. This last had only just been completed when a boatman came alongside with a passenger, Mrs. Collinson.

"Your husband is sleeping well," replied Mr. Graham. "The doctor will be here at eleven."

"How did the accident happen?" inquired Mrs. Collinson.

The Scoutmaster had to admit his ignorance. For the third time, at least, during the last eight or nine hours that question had been put without anyone being able to give a satisfactory reply.

"I was very anxious until I had your telephone message," continued Mrs. Collinson. "My husband and I are yachting—or I ought to say, were yachting. Yesterday morning we brought up off Ryde and I went ashore for the day, my husband having arranged to come ashore for me at nine. I was on the pier before that time, but the *Ocean Bride* had disappeared. As the wind had increased I thought that he might have had to clear out of the exposed anchorage and make for either Portsmouth Harbour or Cowes. So I went to the Solent Hotel—where I had previously arranged to go should anything occur to prevent my returning on board—and rang up the Customs at both places. When I had a reply that the *Ocean Bride* had not put into either harbour, I did begin to feel anxious, because it was blowing hard and my husband was single-handed. Of course, there was the motor——"

"Was there a motor on board?" broke in the Scoutmaster. "We didn't notice it in the dark, and no one has been on board this morning. It might have saved us a fair amount of hard work."

Just then Ted Coles appeared.

"Mr. Collinson is awake, sir," he repeated, with a smart salute.

The Scoutmaster escorted Mrs. Collinson to the cabin, and left her with her husband. A few minutes later the dinghy returned with Dr. Baker.

The doctor's report was most satisfactory. The patient was going on well. His temperature was only one degree above normal, and there was very little pain in the injured limb.

"He will probably be able to be moved to-morrow," added the medical man. "Where is your home, Mrs. Collinson?"

"At Derby," was the reply. "We are on our annual holiday. We always go sailing on the South Coast every summer."

"Fraid you won't do any more this summer," declared Dr. Baker. "Derby's a long journey for a man with a compound fracture. Why not take rooms in the village until your husband is really able to stand the fatigue of a railway journey?"

"That is precisely what I thought of doing," said Mrs. Collinson, "until we can make arrangements to get the yacht back to her home port, Poole."

"There is no immediate hurry for you to get rooms," remarked Mr. Graham. "If you don't mind the company of a few rather high-spirited boys, we can fix you up with a cabin on board."

"That will be nice," exclaimed Mrs. Collinson, with genuine gratitude. "I am sure I'd quite enjoy it. But I hope it would not be putting you out?"

Dr. Baker took his leave, promising to look in again next morning unless something occurred to warrant an earlier visit.

Findlay rowed him ashore. The dinghy was away quite twice as long as the trip required, and when Jock returned he had a large basket in the stern-sheets.

Without saying a word to his companions on deck Findlay secured the dinghy and went below to the galley. There, in an atmosphere of steam, was Bedford in his robe of office—a white apron tied under his armpits.

"What's for dinner to-day, Frank?" inquired the Second.

"Irish stew," was the reply.

"How about a cup of tea for Mrs. Collinson?" continued the thoughtful Findlay.

"Just getting it," declared Bedford, indicating a metal tray on which were a couple of enamelled iron mugs and a plate of the same material, all showing signs of hard usage, while a battered tea-pot of huge proportions and a half-consumed tin of condensed milk completed the picture.

"Hardly what a lady would fancy, old son," remarked Findlay cheerfully. "This

outfit ought to suit."

So saying, he opened his basket and produced two china cups and saucers, plates, a small brown earthenware tea-pot, and a jug. From another compartment he took a bottle of fresh milk, a roll of bread, butter, and lump sugar; while, rolled up in a clean tablecloth were some knives.

Bedford regarded his chum with ill-disguised astonishment.

"Where did you get that lot from?" he asked. "Who paid for them? Did Mr. Graham give you the money?"

Jock shook his head.

"It's just my good turn for the day," he replied. "The people at the shop where I bought the grub lent me the crockery. They wouldn't charge for the loan of it, though I don't know why they didn't."

In a few minutes the transformation of the tea-tray was complete, and Findlay, cautiously negotiating the steep ladder to the upper deck saloon, brought his offering in safety to the person for whom it was intended. "How delicious!" exclaimed Mrs. Collinson. "Do you always have china cups on board? I don't. On our yacht we have to be content with plain enamelled ones."

For the rest of the day the Sea Scouts "carried on" as if the guardship was not sheltering an invalid. This was at the express wish of Mr. Collinson. But the lads took care not to disturb the invalid. For the most part they were away in the dinghy, exploring the creek, indulging in glorious bathes on the sandy beach to the west'ard of the entrance, practising semaphore, and half a dozen other pleasurable tasks so dear to the heart of a Sea Scout.

All too soon came what Patrol Leader Desmond described as "the end of a perfect day".

## CHAPTER IV

## The Gratitude of Mr. Collinson

On the following morning the curiosity of everyone interested in the mystery of the *Ocean Bride* was satisfied by Mr. Collinson, who was well enough to relate his adventures.

"There is really very little to tell," he began. "As you heard from my wife, I was on the yacht off Ryde, having arranged to go ashore about nine. Just before seven I noticed that it looked a bit dirty to wind'ard. In my interest in various small jobs I had to do on board, I had quite forgotten to look at the barometer. When at length I did, I saw that it had fallen nearly half an inch since the morning.

"Since the anchorage I was in is a very exposed one, and I was riding to my own anchor instead of picking up a stout mooring, I decided that the best thing to do was to make for Wootton Creek. Portsmouth was dead to wind'ard, Cowes didn't seem an enticing proposition, since it was a foul tide for the next two hours. And every yachtsman who knows the Solent realizes what Cowes Harbour, crowded as it is during the summer, is like in a northerly gale.

"So I hoisted sail, broke out the anchor, and got under way not a moment too soon. It was then about half-past eight, and the wind had piped up considerably.

"Of course my luck was out. When off Binstead the dinghy's painter parted. I didn't realize my loss until I saw the little boat drifting shoreward a good quarter of a mile astern."

"You lost her, then," remarked Mr. Graham.

"Yes, only temporarily, I hope," was the reply. "Of course, I put about and tried to pick her up, but by that time she was close to the edge of the mud. I had no wish to risk getting the yacht aground on a lee shore, so I put about again and carried on. I noticed some fishermen on the beach, so they no doubt have got hold of her.

"It did not take long to fetch the entrance to Wootton Creek. In fact, I was too early. There wasn't enough water for *Ocean Bride*—she draws six feet two—so I had to anchor.

"At ten o'clock, or thereabouts, I prepared to go in under power. It was still

sufficiently light for me to discern the beacons, although down below it was almost dark. I suppose I must have accidentally advanced the ignitor lever, for, at the first pull of the starting-handle, the motor back-fired. She had never done so before, and I never anticipated her acting in that manner. So much so that I did not take the simple precaution of keeping my thumb underneath the handle.

"The result was a crack that knocked me silly. I suppose I must have fainted. Then, when I pulled myself together a bit, I found out what the damage was. My only course was to signal for assistance. I trusted to the NC flags, meaning to try a flash lamp if they failed to be seen, but your Patrol Leader tells me he got the signal all right. What I was afraid of was my anchor dragging."

"As a matter of fact it did, sir," remarked Desmond; "but Mr. Graham hauled it aboard, and we got away in the yacht just in time."

"How about your dinghy?" inquired the Scoutmaster. "If you like we will fetch her for you."

"I'd be awfully pleased if you would," replied Mr. Collinson gratefully. "The men who picked her up will want payment, naturally, but I hope I shan't have to be bothered with formalities with the Receiver of Wrecks. I loathe that sort of business."

So during the forenoon, at about three hours before high water, Mr. Graham, Desmond, Bedford, and Hayes went off in their dinghy, leaving Ted Coles on board the guardship to act as cook, and Jock Findlay as officer of the watch.

It was a beautiful day for the trip—a calm sea with a light off-shore breeze. Rowing steadily and without undue haste and exertion, the Sea Scouts took a little less than an hour to make Binstead Hard.

There were a few boats hauled up on the beach, but nothing resembling the *Ocean Bride's* dinghy. A little way along the shore was a fisherman mending his nets.

To him went Mr. Graham. The Scoutmaster "knew the ropes ". Instead of asking: "Have you seen or heard anything of a dinghy?" he opened the conversation by stating:

"We've come for the white dinghy that drove ashore here at about nine o'clock

on the night before last."

"O-ay!" replied the man. "She be in t'boathouse over yonder back along. Me an' my mate picked her up, knowin' as 'ow you'd be up along soon. If you hadn't, Garge—him's my mate, you'll understand—was a-goin' into Ryde to report to the coast-guards."

The old fisherman led the way to a tumble-down shed. Unlocking the door he disclosed the truant.

"Is she damaged?" asked Mr. Graham.

"Not so much as a bit o' paint scraped off, sir," was the reply. "Me an' my mate just waded in—above our knees it wur—an' lifted her over the stones."

"Well, what do we owe you?" inquired the Scoutmaster, when the Sea Scouts had lifted the light dinghy and carried her to the water's edge.

"Leave it to you, sir," suggested the fisherman, with the wiliness of his class.

"I wouldn't if I were you," rejoined Mr. Graham, with equal guile. "You might be very disappointed if you did. Now, come on. What do you think is a reasonable sum for the trouble to which you have been placed?"

"Dunno, I'm sure, sir," replied the old man, scratching his head as he strove to solve the problem. Then, seized with an inspiration, he added: "I'll call my mate. He'll know."

The old fellow glanced up and down the shore, and then regarded the expanse of sea with a watery eye, as if he were looking for his far-distant partner.

"Garge!" he bawled. "Where be to?"

With uncanny suddenness a hulking giant in jersey, heavy cloth trousers, and sea-boots, appeared in a gap in the brushwood that grew almost down to the water's edge. Evidently pal Garge meant to be on the spot—an unseen listener if his partner succeeded in "touching the gent handsomely" or an active participator in any bargaining that might ensue.

"What be the trouble, Jim?" he asked, with an overacted air of

disinterestedness.

"This gen'l'man 'ere," replied Jim, "'as come to fetch the lil' dinghy. Wot's a fair sum to charge 'im for our trouble?"

"'Tes for you ter say, Jim," declared Garge. "A fair reasonable sum an' the gen'l'man 'll be only too pleased to square up."

Jim ruminated a good thirty seconds, covertly regarding Mr. Graham with a half averted face.

"Will five quid hurt you?" he asked at length.

"Just the sum as I was a-goin' to suggest," added Garge promptly.

"It would," replied the Scoutmaster, addressing Jim and ignoring Garge's corroboration. "To me five pounds represents two days' work, and strenuous work at that. Now, tell me: what did you do in picking up the dinghy to warrant a payment of five pounds?"

"It blawed tur'ble 'ard," declared Jim, in extenuation of his claims.

"And yet the dinghy came ashore undamaged," countered Mr. Graham.

"An' us went over our knees in water," countered Jim.

"Ay, over our knees in water," repeated Garge, with parrot-like fidelity.

"But you were wearing thigh boots," said Mr. Graham swiftly. "In those conditions you had no inconvenience and certainly no risk. And, what is more to the point, you had the boat and made no attempt to immediately report the matter to the Receiver of Wrecks. Immediately, mind. Those are the official instructions."

"Don't be 'ard on a couple o' pore seafarin' men, sir," said Jim.

"I don't mean to be," replied Mr. Graham. "At the same time I don't mean to allow myself to be done. You understand that? Good. Well, here's a pound note. That's all you'll get out of me. Desmond and Bedford, launch the boat and push off."



A few minutes later both dinghies at about five yards abreast were heading for Wootton Creek.

"Only a pound!" exclaimed Mr. Collinson, when the matter was told him. "That was quite reasonable. If it had been me I should have paid whatever the sharks asked. I suppose it's a failing of mine."

"Which makes it bad for others who cannot afford to pay through the nose," rejoined Mr. Graham. "Fortunately, I know the ways of the longshore-men, and Messrs. James Jell and George Grainger have the reputation of being the biggest rascals amongst the boatmen of the Island. I found that out before we went for the dinghy. They had to clear out from Ventnor on account of a very shady transaction, and at Sea View they narrowly escaped prosecution for stealing gear from another boatman."

"I've been talking matters over with my wife," said Mr. Collinson, abruptly changing the subject. "Naturally I don't want to thrust myself upon you longer than I can possibly help. And I'm not at all keen upon going into apartments for the next six weeks. I came down here to be afloat, and I jolly well mean to be afloat, a broken arm notwithstanding." The Scoutmaster nodded gravely.

"You're not intruding upon us," he said. "What we did was up to us as Scouts."

"I do not doubt that," rejoined Mr. Collinson. "But tell me: your lads wear the Southend-on-Sea shoulder-straps; what brings you down to this part of the south coast?"

Mr. Graham explained.

"Then you haven't a—er—guardship, I think you call it, of your own?"

"No; but we have an ex-naval boat," replied Mr. Graham. "My lads get a good deal of fun and instruction out of her."

"Centre-board?" inquired Mr. Collinson, with the interest of a typical yachtsman in nautical matters.

"No, unfortunately," admitted the Scoutmaster. "It limits us, of course; but half a loaf's better than no bread. At least we've something to go afloat in, and she isn't such a bad sort of craft."

"To-morrow," announced Mr. Collinson, "my wife and I are going on board our yacht. We intend to use her as a house-boat until I'm fit again. In this sheltered creek there will be no difficulty about getting ashore, and my wife can manage the dinghy quite well. If you wouldn't mind mooring the *Ocean Bride* about a cable's-length astern of you I'll be most grateful."

"Certainly," agreed Mr. Graham, "and if, while we are here, I or any of my lads can be of service to you, don't hesitate to ask."

"How long do you propose staying here?" asked Mr. Collinson.

Mr. Graham looked up sharply. He fancied he saw a twinkle in the questioner's eye.

"Until the end of August, I hope."

"Is there any reason why you should not alter your plans?" continued the persistent inquisitor.

"Man proposes——" quoted the Scoutmaster.

"Quite so," agreed Mr. Collinson. "I too have a proposal to make. As I remarked before, my wife and I have been talking things over. We feel that we are greatly in your debt for what you have done for us, and we wish to make some sort of acknowledgment of our gratitude."

"But——" protested Mr. Graham.

"Let me have my say," persisted the other. "My proposition is this: I have a nine-ton yawl, the *Spindrift*, lying at Bude, on the north coast of Cornwall. I don't suppose I'll ever sail her again now I have the *Ocean Bride*. I'm not particularly keen on selling her. If I advertise her there are pages and pages of correspondence before the deal's completed—and I hate writing business letters. So what do you say to this? I will hand her over absolutely to the 9th Southend Sea Scouts, but you must navigate her round either to the Solent or else the East Coast, whichever you prefer."

"I'll be only too pleased to accept your kind offer," said Mr. Graham.

"Good," rejoined Mr. Collinson. "I thought you would. Now then, let's go into

details."

## CHAPTER V

### A Gift worth Having

"Couldn't we have the boys in?" asked the Scoutmaster. "They'd like to hear all about your gift to them."

"If you like," agreed Mr. Collinson. "As long as we stick to facts, I don't mind; but don't make a song about what I've done. I hate having to hear my praises sung and all that sort of thing. After all, it's *quid pro quo*, or one good turn deserves another."

The Scoutmaster went into the charthouse and looked around. Desmond, Bedford, and Hayes were paddling around in the dinghy, Findlay was fitting up a fishing-line. Coles as "cook of the day" was in the galley.

The Scoutmaster gave a shrill blast on his whistle. "All hands!" he shouted from the head of the quarter-deck ladder.

The summons was smartly obeyed, and the five Sea Scouts fell in and awaited orders.

"Mr. Collinson wishes to have a palaver with you," announced Mr. Graham briefly. The lads filed into the saloon on the upper deck, where Mr. Collinson was sitting in a comfortable arm-chair in front of a large window that commanded an extensive view of the creek. His injured arm was in a sling, but, apart from that, he looked in perfect condition.

Mr. Collinson looked at Mr. Graham; Mr. Graham looked at Mr. Collinson. For some moments there was absolute silence, each waiting for the other to speak.

"Fire away!" prompted the patient.

"It's your show," retorted the Scoutmaster, then without a break he addressed his lads: "Mr. Collinson has made the troop a present. He will explain the nature of the gift."

Mr. Collinson cleared his throat. He realized that the Scoutmaster was "one

up". He had no option but to speak.

"It's only this," he began. "You're a jolly decent crowd of fellows. I've had you under observation, don't you see, and you're really smart at boat work. Your Scoutmaster tells me that you have only an old ship's boat. You deserve something better. I am giving you a yacht—no, not the *Ocean Bride*," he said hurriedly, as more than one pair of eyes turned in the direction of the yacht lying alongside. "The one I'm handing over to you is the *Spindrift*, which is a little more than half the size of the *Ocean Bride*."

"Thanks awfully much, sir," replied the Sea Scouts in chorus; then in their excitement they volleyed a string of questions: "Where is she, sir? What is she like? When can we have her?"

"Steady!" protested Mr. Collinson smilingly. "One question at a time. Do any of you fellows know what a Falmouth quay punt is like?"

Most of the Sea Scouts did not. The word "punt" conveyed the idea of a small, flat-bottomed craft used for duck-shooting. That sounded like "very small beer" compared with a yacht.

"I know, sir," replied Findlay. "A square-sterned boat, drawing about six feet, with a dipping-lug mainsail and a standing lug mizzen. I've read about them in one of the yachting papers."

"Good lad!" exclaimed the donor approvingly. "Well, the *Spindrift* is something of that type, only she's a yacht. She is thirty-two feet over all, with a beam of nine feet and a draught of five feet ten inches. She is straight-stemmed and has a transom stern. She's an old boat but quite sound, so you needn't be afraid of the keel dropping off in a seaway. In fact, the whole of the keel bolts were renewed eighteen months ago. What is a dipping-lug, Coles?"

The Tenderfoot knew. Although that type of sail is not common in the Essex estuaries, he had seen Scottish fishing-boats at Yarmouth.

"A sail you have to lower a little and set it on the other side of the mast whenever you go about, sir," he replied promptly.

"Which means a lot of hard work, especially in a stiff breeze," added Mr. Collinson. "Well, that would be beyond you fellows, I fancy, but you needn't let

that trouble you. The *Spindrift* is ketch-rigged with gaff mainsail and mizzen. She's rather under-canvassed, which is in her favour. The West Country boatmen used to tell me she'd 'starve me before she drowned me', which is the same as saying she's slow but very seaworthy. She has a cabin and a watertight cockpit, so if you happen to be caught out there's little to fear, provided you know how to manage her."

"Where is she, sir?" asked Hayes. "At Cowes?"

"A good deal farther away than Cowes," came the reply. "She's at Bude, which is in Cornwall. You'll have to sail her round Land's End."

"How topping, sir," exclaimed Desmond. "When can we go for her?"

"That, I take it, depends upon your Scoutmaster's arrangements," said Mr. Collinson. "It is out of my province altogether. I'll write to Brice and Sons—they're in charge of her—and tell them to launch her and put her on moorings as soon as possible. Well, that's that. I wish you jolly good luck with the *Spindrift*."

The Sea Scouts gave three cheers, then, almost falling over each other and themselves in their excitement, they went on deck to discuss their good fortune.

"I wonder why he gave the yacht to us?" asked Bedford.

"'Cause we did him a few good turns," replied the Tenderfoot.

"We didn't expect any reward, though," added Findlay, true to the traditions of Scouting. "And no one can say we cadged from him."

"Like that troop of Sea Scouts we read about the other day," added the Patrol Leader. "They got hold of a seaplane float somewhere, and then advertised for someone to give them a motor to shove into it. Give, mind you! It's like taking a button to a tailor and asking him to make a suit to take it for nothing. But we're lucky. I wonder when we start and how we're going to get there?"

"What I want to know," said Bedford, "is who's going to stay and look after the guardship? We're responsible to the Wootton Bridge Sea Scouts until they come home."

The others drew long faces at that. The proposition had not occurred to them

before.

"Bradley and some of the other chaps will be coming down," declared Findlay. "Mr. Graham heard from them this morning."

Bradley was the Patrol Leader of the Otters, belonging to the same troop as Desmond.

"Yes, in a fortnight's time," said Hayes gloomily. "We don't want to wait till then."

"And they might want to come, too," added Findlay. "After all, they've got a right to. The *Spindrift* was given to the troop, and not to Mr. Graham and us five only."

"Mr. Collinson said 'you lads'," remarked the Tenderfoot.

"Coles," said the Patrol Leader, "you hop it! The palaver ended ten minutes ago. You're cook; it's nearly tea-time and we're hungry. Off you go."

Much as the Tenderfoot wished to hear the end of the discussion, he went without a murmur. He realized that the Patrol Leader had the authority to send him back to duty, and Desmond's word was law when, in the absence of the Scoutmaster, he was in charge of the patrol.

"We'll tell you everything at tea," called out Desmond after the departing cook. "In fact," he added, addressing the others, "we ought to wait till the kid's present. He's one of us, although he's only a tenderfoot."

Mr. Graham was quite a long time before he put in an appearance. He had been talking with Mr. Collinson, and it was not until the whistle sounded for tea that he rejoined the rest of the patrol.

"When do we start, sir?" asked the lads.

"On Monday, all being well," was the reply. "But before we make final arrangements there are many points to discuss. The first one is, how do we get to Bude?"

"Trek there, sir," suggested Bedford. "It would cost an awful lot to go by train."

"Too far," objected the Scoutmaster. "If we had plenty of time it might be done. No, our best plan will be to walk to Cowes, take steamer to Southampton, and then train as far as Exeter. That leaves us fifty miles, mostly across Dartmoor. We might trek that distance in two days, but we'll be carrying full pack, remember."

"And camp out on the way, sir?" asked Hayes. "That will be fine."

"Let's hope it will be fine," added Findlay jocularly. "And how long will it take to sail the *Spindrift* round, sir, do you think? Has she a motor?"

"No, she hasn't, unfortunately," replied Mr. Graham, thinking of the old days during the war when three years in an M.L. rather spoiled him for long and possibly tedious trips under sail only. "So I can't say how long it will take us. We may get a fair breeze round the land and up-Channel; or we may get alternate calms and strong head winds. That is a matter quite beyond our control. There's another point: a couple of hands must stay here to give an eye to things. And it's up to us to assist Mr. Collinson while he's practically helpless on board his yacht."

"A couple of hands, sir?" asked Bedford.

"Yes, a couple," was the reply. "One will be company for the other until Bradley, Johns, and Dexter turn up."

Mr. Graham was on the point of asking who would volunteer and remain, but on consideration he decided that it was asking rather too much of the keen youngsters.

"Desmond goes in any case," he continued. "He will be in charge when I'm off duty, if we have to make a long passage. That leaves four of you to pick from. I think the fairest way would be to take two for half the trip, say from Bude to Plymouth, and the other two, when relieved, can come to Plymouth by train and carry on from there. We'll draw for it."

Producing three matches, Mr. Graham cut one in half and held the two long and two short pieces between his finger and thumb, so that the visible ends were perfectly level.

"Now, Coles, take one."



The Tenderfoot drew a short stick. So did Bedford. "That settles it," announced the Scoutmaster. "Findlay and Hayes take on from Bude to Plymouth; the others from Plymouth to Wootton."

## CHAPTER VI

### Visiting Sea Scouts

By the first post on Saturday morning came a letter from the yacht chandlers at Bude, stating that the *Spindrift* would be launched forthwith and handed over whenever her new owners came for her.

The rest of that morning was a busy one. Not only had the usual routine of "clearing up and squaring off" to be carried out, but preparations had to be made for the commencement of the journey to Bude on the following Monday. In addition, Mr. Collinson had arranged to shift his quarters from the guardship to the *Ocean Bride*, and the yacht had to be moored securely astern.

It was quite a difficult operation to place the yacht on her new berth and keep her there. Owing to the narrowness of the channel at low water, and to the fact that a clear passage had to be left for other craft, the *Ocean Bride* had to be moored fore and aft close to the mud on the starboard hand of the creek. If she were allowed to swing she would obstruct the fairway, while to moor her fore and aft required tackle of sufficient strength to withstand the hardest wind likely to be encountered full on her beam.

Just below high-water mark the Sea Scouts drove in two sets of stout piles, each three in number, with one placed about four feet in the wake of the other two. Each set was ninety feet from the other. These comprised the shore moorings.

The yacht was then dropped astern of the guardship, her main anchor having been previously laid out in the stiff mud on the port side of the channel. To the mooring on the starboard side, corresponding with the anchor, a four-inch warp

was run out from the yacht's bows, the end of the rope being wound round the three piles and "racked back", so that each of the piles bore approximately an equal strain.

As the tide was now ebbing the yacht rode to both the chain cable and the warp.

"Now, lads!" exclaimed the Scoutmaster. "That's done the trick as far as the ebb affects the yacht. All that remains is to make provision for the flood-tide, otherwise she'll swing, which is what she mustn't do." At Mr. Graham's direction a spare length of chain, about fifteen fathoms in length, was shackled to the kedge and the latter "run out" on the yacht's port quarter; while a three-inch warp led from the starboard quarter to the second group of piles. Stationing one Sea Scout at each of the chains and warps, the Scoutmaster gave the necessary directions until the yacht was moved into the desired position close to the edge of the channel.

"Now she cannot possibly shift more than two or three feet," he announced. "No matter the direction of the wind or tide, she'll be held securely. That's what is meant by mooring fore and aft. Now, can any of you fellows tell me if this particular job is finished off properly?"

Desmond and Findlay thought that it was and said so. Bedford, Hayes, and Coles thought so too, but made no audible comment.

"Look at those two chains," continued Mr. Graham. "They are stretching across the fairway. True, they sag under their own weight, but if the wind comes in at all hard from the east'ard they'll show above the surface. Even now I doubt whether they are more than three or four feet down. A vessel coming up to Wootton Bridge would be almost certain to foul them."

"Then we'll have to give her a bit more chain, sir," suggested Findlay.

"Which means that she'll drift closer to the bank," added Mr. Graham. "At high tide she'll touch the mud, then when the tide falls she'll heel over almost on her beam ends. I'm sure Mr. and Mrs. Collinson wouldn't appreciate that."

"Can't we weight the chains with something, sir?" asked Ted Coles.

"That's the game," agreed the Scoutmaster. "We'll have to get a couple of pigs

of ballast and lash them to the bight of each chain. Ask Mr. Collinson if he has any short lengths of wire rope on board, Desmond; if not, we'll have to use rope, although it's not so suitable as wire."

"There's some on the for'ard port locker in the fo'c'sle," said Mr. Collinson, who had been sitting in the cockpit and watching the Sea Scouts' activities with marked approval.

The Patrol Leader went below and returned with three short lengths of flexible wire.

"Now for the pigs of ballast," exclaimed Jock Findlay.

"Be careful," cautioned Mr. Graham. "They weigh about a hundredweight, and we've got to take them in the dinghy. Two hands will be enough."

The dinghy was brought alongside. Across her gunwale, and partly supported by the transom, was placed a one-inch board, over which was folded a piece of canvas to protect the varnish work from rust and mud.

"Get in for'ard, Hayes," ordered the Scoutmaster. "Jock, you get in aft and follow my directions carefully. There's no need for haste, and remember if you bungle you'll probably swamp the boat."

Meanwhile, Desmond and Bedford had hoisted one pig of ballast on to the yacht's deck by means of a double sling. The next operation was to transfer the heavy lump of iron from the yacht to the board in the stern of the dinghy. This was accomplished by means of the starboard runners.

"Now work along the chain, Findlay," continued Mr. Graham. "At that," he added, when about ten feet of chain rested on the board by the side of the pig of ballast.

Jock's next task was to lash the ballast to the chain, which he did by reeving the wire through a hole at each end of the pig and taking it round the chain, repeating the operation at least half a dozen times and finishing off with a reef-knot.

"Give way, Pat," ordered the Scoutmaster.

Hayes plied his oars vigorously. The dinghy gathered way. Slowly the chain tautened, and then the pig of ballast began to slide over the board, until, assisted by a vigorous push by Findlay, the mass of iron disappeared beneath the surface.

The chain, instead of taking a gentle curve, now dipped steeply, the additional weight causing the bight to lie upon the bottom of the channel.

"Now, that cable is not in anyone's way," explained the Scoutmaster. "Spell-ho for all hands for five minutes! You've earned it."

The short interval for rest was quickly over. Then the chain on the yacht's port quarter had to be treated in a similar manner.

This time the Sea Scouts carried out the work without any directions from their Scoutmaster, the Patrol Leader superintending the operation. Mr. Graham was keen on encouraging initiative in his lads, and on this occasion, as on many others, he had no cause to find fault. Everything had gone without a hitch, except, as Findlay remarked, the hitches on the cable. This done, the Sea Scouts returned to the guardship for dinner.

"Look, sir!" exclaimed Hayes, pointing with a rust-stained finger in the direction of the entrance to the creek. "There's a motor-boat coming right up. We've only just finished in time."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Graham. "She's a fairly big craft, too. She'll test our work for us."

Desmond had picked up a telescope, and was examining the on-coming vessel.

"Why, sir!" he announced. "She's a Sea Scout boat. At least she's manned by Sea Scouts. I wonder what she's doing here?"

"The creek's free to anybody," rejoined Findlay. "We're not the only Sea Scouts. I expect they'll land at the Bridge."

Meanwhile Mr. Graham had been making good use of his binoculars.

"I've seen that craft before," he remarked. "Only she was painted grey. I may be mistaken, but I don't think so."

He returned the glasses to their case and picked up his peaked cap.

"Fall in on the quarter-deck, lads," he ordered. "Smartly, now; stand by to give them a full salute when they pass."

The Sea Scouts took up their position as directed, standing easy until the Scoutmaster gave the order: "Alert!"

"She's slowing down, sir," said Findlay.

"'Cause they don't want to swamp the dinghy with their wash," explained Desmond. "They've passed over the *Ocean Bride's* chains all right."

On board the on-coming craft a Scoutmaster and three Sea Scouts were visible on deck. They were showing no signs of coming to attention. One of the crew was handling a warp up for'ard, while another was coiling up a rope on the aft-deck. It was not until a third hung out a couple of fenders, and stood by with a boat-hook, that the crew of the guardship realized that the motor-boat was coming alongside.

"Dismiss!" ordered Mr. Graham. "Stand by to take their warps."

With her motor running free with the clutch out, the boat lost way, coming alongside so gently that only the faintest "touch astern" was necessary.

The two Scoutmasters saluted.

"Come aboard!" exclaimed Mr. Graham. "I've met you before, I think. My name's Graham."

"And mine is Armitage," rejoined the other. "Is Mr. Tweedie aboard?"

"Sorry, he's not," replied Mr. Graham. "He's over in France with his troop."

Scoutmaster Armitage had been glancing at the shoulder-straps of the temporary crew of the guardship.

"Southend-on-Sea," he remarked. "We hardly expected to find East Coast Sea Scouts down this part of the world."

Mr. Graham explained.

"Bring your crew aboard, too," he added. "They might like to have a look round."

"That is precisely what we came for," said Mr. Armitage with a laugh. "We'd heard about the Wootton Bridge Sea Scouts' guardship, and we made up our minds to have a run across to inspect her. Our craft is the *Olivette*, and we hail from Milford-on-Sea. You say you met me before, eh? I'm afraid I cannot recollect the circumstances."

"You were very, very tired," explained Mr. Graham. "It was at Brightlingsea two years ago last May. One of your lads, Woodby——"

"Woodleigh," corrected Mr. Armitage.

"Yes, Woodleigh. I remember he brought the *Olivette* into Brightlingsea in a hard blow. You'd had rather a rough time in the Thames estuary. I happened to be at Brightlingsea at the time."

"Of course, I remember now," replied Mr. Armitage. "Two years ago! How time flies! Yes, I still have Woodleigh. He's a Patrol Leader now. Did you recollect Stratton? He's at sea, doing well."

Meanwhile the crews of the two vessels were fraternizing, and both craft were visited and inspected.

"She's a lump of a boat," declared Patrol Leader Woodleigh to his opposite number, Desmond. "It's a pity you can't go to sea in her. You miss a lot. We've been across to France, and as far west as Penzance. On Monday we're off to Plymouth."

"Yes," admitted Desmond. "I agree. A stationary guardship isn't like a sea-going boat, but still there's lots of fun to be got out of her. She's only lent us, as you know; but we're in luck. You see that yacht just astern of us? Her owner has given us a yacht almost as large as she."

"Good business!" exclaimed Woodleigh approvingly. "Motor?"

"No, sail."

"H'm, s'pose it's all right," rejoined the confirmed marine engine expert. "Pity she hasn't an engine, though. It saves an awful lot of fag if there's no wind. Where is she?"

"At Bude."

"Where's that?"

"North coast of Cornwall. We—that is, Mr. Graham, Findlay, Hayes, and myself—are going by train to Exeter and hiking it across Dartmoor to Bude. It'll be rather good sport, eh?"

"Rather," agreed Woodleigh. "I don't know about the hiking part, though. Never was very keen on tramping—much prefer being afloat. We're going down to Plymouth to tow back a dinghy for a friend of Mr. Armitage."

"Wouldn't it be cheaper to send a small boat like that by rail?" asked Desmond.

"I don't know about that," answered Woodleigh. "You see, we have as much paraffin given us as we want. It's a paraffin engine, you know; and when Mr. Murgatroyd—he's the gentleman who made us a present of the *Olivette*—handed over the boat, he arranged for us to have paraffin free, so we've only to buy petrol for starting up and oil for lubricating. And fetching that dinghy means going somewhere with a definite object. We'd be cruising in any case, so now we are going to do a good turn. Have you ever been down the West Coast?"

Desmond shook his head.

"Only on the East Coast—Southend and Harwich way."

"Don't think much of that part," said Woodleigh. "Too jolly flat. But perhaps it wasn't up to sample when we were there in the *Olivette*. You should see Devon and Cornwall—the coast especially. Why, I think there's nothing to touch them anywhere in England for scenery and good harbours. Look here, I've got a scheme. Couldn't you all come down to Plymouth with us? That would save you a long railway journey, and you needn't have so far to tramp. What do you say?"

"Of course I'd like it," replied Desmond, "but——"

"I'll ask our Scoutmaster," interrupted Woodleigh. "He'll be only too pleased.

Hello, Flemming, old son, I was just saying that these fellows ought to go down-Channel with us. I'm just off to ask Mr. Armitage."

"Save yourself the fag, my festive," rejoined Eric Flemming, Woodleigh's special chum. "Mr. Armitage has asked Mr. Graham already. You fellows have just an hour and a half to get ready," he added, addressing the Patrol Leader of the Southend Sea Scouts. "You're coming back to Keyhaven with us, and we're putting you up on board."

## CHAPTER VII

### The Start of the Great Adventure

The crews of both boats assembled in the saloon of the guardship for dinner. It was a convivial meal. The lads let their tongues go with a will when they weren't eating. The two Scoutmasters were discussing scouting and talking over old times—both had been in command of M.L.'s during the war, but had been in widely different patrols—as if they had known each other intimately for years.

The meal too was done to perfection. Hayes, the culinary expert of the Southend Sea Scouts, had lived up to his reputation. The huge sea-pie was pronounced excellent, while a plum-duff of immense size was so light and appetizing that it disappeared altogether. And no one felt any ill-effects after it, which was probably one of the best tests of its good quality.

After dinner the two Scoutmasters went on board the *Ocean Bride* to acquaint Mr. Collinson with the alteration of plans, and to ask him to send for Bedford or Coles whenever they might be of use.

At two o'clock the *Olivette's* crew went on board their own craft in order to start up the powerful engine. While this operation was in progress Mr. Graham, Desmond, Findlay, and Hayes transferred their travelling kit to the motor-boat, after the former had given final instructions to the two caretakers of the guardship.



"If I were you, Graham," said Mr. Armitage, "I'd put your three fellows into different watches during the trip. It would give them a good chance to pick up landmarks when you bring the *Spindrift* back. My lads can put them up to a wheeze or two. As far as we are concerned, we now work the craft in three watches instead of two, when making long passages. I find it better for the lads in every way—four hours on and eight off."

"Right-o!" agreed Mr. Graham. "It's quite a sound scheme."

"No need for that arrangement to-day, though," commented Mr. Armitage. "It's only about an hour's run from here to Keyhaven, especially as we carry our tide. On Monday we'll put one of your lads into each watch. It will take us roughly about twelve hours to reach Plymouth without running the engine all out. It's only a matter of one hundred and twenty-one miles. —All ready, Flemming? Very well, carry on. —I believe in letting my lads act as if I weren't on board," he explained. "It gives them confidence and self-reliance."

"Let go aft!" shouted Flemming from the wheelhouse.

Promptly Bedford on the guardship cast off the *Olivette's* after warp. With the flood-tide boring against her starboard quarter, the *Olivette* swung quickly until her bows pointed almost down the creek. "Let go for'ard!" ordered Flemming. "Touch ahead."

Putting the helm down the young navigator threw the motor-boat's stern clear of the guardship. "Easy ahead!"

With cheerful adieux to the somewhat glum Bedford and Coles, the Sea Scouts saw the last of the guardship for a good many days. They expected to be back in ten days, but they had yet to learn the futility of fixing a time limit as far as a sailing craft is concerned. Even in the case of a powered-boat there was a fair element of chance to be taken into account when making a coasting trip.

The run down the Solent was only too short: at least the Southend Sea Scouts were of that opinion. With the regular crew of the *Olivette* it was a different matter. These waters were no stranger to them, and, although they revelled in being afloat, they were a bit tired of the enclosed channel between the Isle of Wight and the Hampshire shore. Having acquired the taste for exploration, they were never so happy as when navigating unfamiliar waters.

Nevertheless they were very attentive to their guests, pointing out the various objects of interest and answering scores of questions concerning the *Olivette* and her adventures.

For Desmond and his chums there was no lack of excitement. They had a distant view of Osborne House, they saw Cowes, with a crowd of yachts anchored, and the strong tideway known as the Roads; Beaulieu and Newton Rivers were pointed out to them—places where the *Olivette's* crew had had strange experiences. They passed submarines, destroyers, and light cruisers; a giant liner bound from Southampton to New York overtook them, her wash throwing the *Olivette* about like a cork. Seaplanes and flying-boats from the R.A.F. station at Calshot glided overhead. Altogether, it was a brief and exciting hour.

"Game for an early morning to-morrow, Graham?" asked Scoutmaster Armitage abruptly.

"Certainly," was the reply. "What's the scheme?"

"The glass is high and steady," said Mr. Armitage. "It seems a pity to miss the fine weather. What do you say to making a start at 4 a.m.? Barring accidents we ought to be at Plymouth by four or five in the afternoon. That will mean a clear gain of twenty-four hours as far as you are concerned."

"Isn't it upsetting your arrangements?" asked Mr. Graham.

"Not at all. We'll go into Keyhaven on the top of the first high water. That will give us a good two hours alongside the wharf to take in petrol and paraffin. At the second high water we can drop down to our mooring for the night, and start with the first of the west-going tide to-morrow morning."

"These double tides puzzle me," declared the East Coast Scoutmaster frankly. "When a fellow has been used to two high tides a day, it rather muddles him up when he's suddenly got four to deal with."

"Quite simple, really," was the response. "Here—from Hurst to Wootton the second high tide is roughly two hours after the first, Southampton Water has double tide of about the same interval. Now, at Portsmouth there are only two high waters in the day; but the flood makes for seven and a half hours and the ebb is only five and a half hours. Again, at Poole there are double high tides, and

roughly the first high water occurs four hours after low tide, and the second high water four hours after the first. It's interesting work studying the tides. My lads are awfully keen on it. Only the other day I was reading a magazine story to them. It described a person embarking on a yacht at Plymouth. The moon was at the full, it was high water, and the time twelve o'clock. Young Woodleigh pulled me up short. 'That can't possibly be, sir', he asserted. I didn't twig it at the time, but the boy was right. High water, full and change, anywhere between the Lizard and Portland Bill, occurs between five o'clock and six-thirty; eastward of Portland it is between ten and twelve o'clock, right round as far as Margate. So high water at Plymouth at the time stated and with the moon at the full is a physical impossibility. Now, we're nearly off the entrance to Keyhaven. It's a fairly tricky channel, but my lads know it. I don't have to bother about anything. To all intents I'm a passenger."

The Southend Sea Scouts were watching the manoeuvres of Woodleigh with ill-concealed wonder. The *Olivette* was apparently heading for a steep, pebbly beach. On the left part of the beach was a port with a detached lighthouse, which they were told was Hurst Castle, one of the places where King Charles I was imprisoned. Almost in the centre of the shore were several coast-guard houses, direct for which the boat appeared to be steering. South'ard of the point the sea, calm everywhere else, was a wide patch of seething water, which Flemming pointed out as Hurst Race.

Suddenly Woodleigh put the helm hard a-port. Round swung the *Olivette* until her head pointed towards two small beacons in line.

"Wherever is he making for?" whispered Jock. "There's nothing but mud as far as I can make out."

But a little later on the helm was starboarded, and the Southend Sea Scouts saw the entrance to the creek on their port hand—one of the snuggest little anchorages imaginable, being sheltered by the long stretch of shingle on which Hurst Fort is built.

"There are our moorings," said Woodleigh, indicating a roped barrel bearing the word "*Olivette*".

"Aren't you going to slow down and pick it up?" inquired Hayes.

"No," was the reply. "Our Scoutmaster's orders are to carry on alongside the

wharf. I don't know why, but that's neither here nor there. He generally lets us carry on, but when he does give an order we've jolly well got to obey."

Without mishap the *Olivette* was berthed alongside the dilapidated wharf. Then Scoutmaster Armitage told his crew to form up, as he wanted to tell them something.

"I suppose the motor is quite satisfactory, Flemming?" he inquired, for one of the reasons for the *Olivette's* run to Wootton was to test the engine after an extensive overhaul.

"Yes, sir."

"That's good. Now, I want you and Woodleigh to fill up the tanks as soon as possible. Warkworth and Hepburn, you'll undertake the provisioning as usual. Make preparations for victualling twelve persons for two days. Rayburn and Willis, get your bikes out of the store and ride round and tell the various parents that we're sailing at daybreak to-morrow, and that the crew are sleeping on board to-night. That's the new arrangement. All right: dismiss."

"Can't we lend a hand with anything, sir?" asked Desmond.

"Oh, yes," replied Mr. Armitage. "Woodleigh and Flemming will be only too glad if you'll help with the fuel."

The two Scoutmasters went ashore, Mr. Armitage having promised to lend Mr. Graham a set of charts of the Cornish and Devon coasts, and these, not being in general use, he kept at his house at Milford, about a mile and a half from Keyhaven.

"Come along, you fellows," said Flemming with a cheerful grin. "There's nothing like handling barrels of paraffin on a holiday to keep you fit and healthy."

It certainly was hard work rolling two heavy and decidedly sticky barrels from the store to the wharf, and when at length that part of the task was completed there yet remained the filling up of the tanks.

"I say," exclaimed Patrol Leader Desmond. "You are not going to take that paraffin on board in buckets, are you?"

"There's no other way," declared Flemming. "We waste a little, I admit, and it's a dirty job, but there you are."

"Do you happen to have a hose on board?" asked Desmond. "Not one you use for water."

"There's one in the store," said Woodleigh. "It used to be for watering the doctor's garden and washing down his car; but he bought a new one and gave the old one to us. I can't see that it will be much use, though. We haven't a tap for the barrel, and the bung's much too large."

"And besides," added Flemming, in support of his chum, "the deck is higher than the barrel, and paraffin won't run up-hill."

"This paraffin will, I think," rejoined Desmond quietly. "Let's get the hose and try."

The hose was quickly forthcoming. It was about sixty feet in length—much longer than Desmond required.

"Cut it," suggested Flemming. "It's only an old one."

Desmond shook his head.

"It would be a pity to do that," he said. "You might want it some day. No; I think I can manage. Hold up that end, Jock."

Findlay did so. Desmond held up the other end, so that both ends were an equal height from the ground on which the remainder of the hose was resting.

Woodleigh was then directed to pour paraffin into the pipe until it was quite full. Both ends were then nipped tightly so that none of the oil could escape. Then Jock thrust the end he was holding into the *Olivette's* fuel tank, while Desmond, quickly releasing the pressure, jammed the other end of the hose into the barrel.

Save for a faint quivering of the pipe there were no signs of anything happening. Woodleigh looked inquiringly at the demonstrator.

"It's running all right," declared Desmond confidently. "You just look at the

gauge."

"Well I'm blessed!" exclaimed Woodleigh. "You're right. It does save a lot of time, and there's no waste to speak of."

"We showed some fellows how to do it when we were at Canvey," said Desmond. "The next time they tried it was high tide—a very high tide—and the motor-boat's tank instead of being filled was emptied of the little already there. Why? Because the tank was at a higher level than the barrel, and the paraffin was siphoned in exactly the opposite direction to which the crew wanted it to go — Look out, the tank's full!"

It had taken exactly ten minutes. The operation of filling up buckets and pouring the oil through a funnel usually occupied the best part of an hour; but when the "ration party" returned, hot and heavily laden, they found the "paraffin merchants" having a long spell of "stand easy".

"Lazy blighters!" exclaimed Rayburn. "You've been slacking. You'd better hurry up before Mr. Armitage gets back."

"We're not going to do another stroke until he returns," declared Woodleigh composedly. "We're going to spin yarns. If you want to be particularly energetic you can fetch a barrel of paraffin from the store."

Rayburn didn't think he would—and said so. Instead—he began to stow the provisions on board, wondering why his usually energetic Patrol Leader was "hanging on to the slack", and what excuse he would make when the Scoutmaster returned.

When at length the two Scoutmasters arrived, Rayburn was considerably surprised to hear Woodleigh report: "All correct, sir", and Mr. Armitage was interested to hear how the operation of filling up the tank was performed.

"It's never too late to learn," he remarked; "especially as far as boats are concerned."

## CHAPTER VIII

### Disturbing Influences

"Now, you fellows, avast yarning," cautioned Scoutmaster Armitage. "You'll all be as limp as rags when it comes to turning out to-morrow."

The buzz of voices from the crowded fo'c'sle ceased. Ten boys, packed, like sardines in a triangular compartment twenty feet by ten, had had considerable difficulty in turning in. Each of the iron cots on either side had its blanketed occupant; two Sea Scouts were lying on the floor. It was "sleeping rough" with a vengeance; but, as these conditions were "for this night only", the youngsters made the best of things and rather enjoyed the situation.

"I hope your cot-lashing's strong enough," said Desmond drowsily, addressing Woodleigh, whose hefty person was barely a couple of feet above the speaker. "If that carries away you'll flatten me out, old son."

"It's all right," rejoined Woodleigh with a yawn. "Night-night, old thing."

In less than a minute Woodleigh was asleep, his example being quickly followed by the rest of the *Olivette's* crew. But not so the three supernumeraries. In strange surroundings they could not help keeping awake.

"What's that noise, Desmond?" whispered Hayes. "It sounds like water pouring in. Is she leaking, do you think?"

"No," replied the Patrol Leader. "It's the tide rippling past the boat's side."

Five minutes later Hayes declared that there was another weird noise.

"Mooring chain rubbing against the boat's forefoot," explained Desmond. "For goodness' sake don't keep on chattering. I want to get to sleep."

"It's not that I mean," persisted the lad. "There's a sort of gnawing sound. Can't you hear it?"

"Rats!" ejaculated the Patrol Leader.

Hayes kept silent for a considerable time. He was not altogether sure about the

sense in which Desmond had used the word "Rats". He might have meant it as a deprecatory ejaculation. He hoped that he had, because he was afraid of rodents. It was a fear that he had never yet been able to conquer, although in other respects he was a plucky little youngster.

The gnawing sound began again. Hayes, who was sleeping, or rather lying on the floor on top of a number of blankets, realized the possibility of the rat gnawing a hole through the panelling of the fo'c'sle. In that case he being on the floor would be the one to be favoured with the brute's attention.

Doubling his fist Hayes tried to thump the floor in the hope of scaring the rat. Unfortunately he forgot that the *Olivette's* tenderfoot, little Willis, was occupying a made-up bed close to him. So instead of smiting the board Hayes dealt his opposite number a hefty whack in the ribs.

"What's that for?" demanded the astonished Willis, only half awake in spite of the blow.

"Rats," whispered Hayes hoarsely.

"Silly owl!" retorted Willis. "If you are trying to be funny——"

"I'm not," interposed the other seriously. "There are rats on board. Sorry, I didn't mean to biff you. I was trying to scare them away. Listen."

Both lads listened. Beyond the occasional rasp of the mooring-chain and the steady ripple of the wavelets there was silence.

"You've scared it," said Willis at length. "We get a rat on board occasionally—when we are lying alongside a quay. It's nothing to make a song about. You'll soon get used to it. It's in the bilges if it's anywhere. No chance of getting in here. 'Sides, the poor blighter would be scared stiff."

The last sentence trailed off almost into an incoherent whisper. Willis was asleep again.

Hayes lay awake listening for quite another half-hour; then, dimly conscious once or twice that the intermittent gnawing was going on, he too fell into a deep sleep.



Suddenly the silence of the confined space was rent by a frenzied yell, followed by a heavy double crash. In an instant every Sea Scout was awake, and a scene of utter confusion followed as the lads barged into each other and tripped over the writhing bodies of their comrades on the floor.

Roused by the uproar the two Scoutmasters hastened from the after-cabin, Mr. Armitage going through the engine-room and by the sliding door leading to the fo'c'sle, while Mr. Graham gained the deck, went for'ard, and reached the hatchway to the Sea Scouts' sleeping quarters.

Simultaneously both Scoutmasters flashed their electric torches upon the scene.

"Pull yourselves together, lads!" exclaimed Mr. Armitage firmly, although he was quite at a loss to account for the chaotic state of the fo'c'sle. "Patrol, alert!"

The order had the desired effect. The Scouts' equivalent to the military "Shun" was obeyed with an alacrity that would have earned the approbation of the strictest regimental sergeant-major. Promptly the lads "sorted themselves out" and stood still, blinking solemnly at the dazzling cross-rays of the two Scoutmasters' torches.

"Tell me what you know of this business, Woodleigh," continued Mr. Armitage, addressing the Patrol Leader.

"I hardly know anything, sir," replied Woodleigh, conscious of a steadily rising bump on his forehead and a pair of barked elbows. "Something disturbed me. I sat up and barged my head on the deck-beam. Then my hammock gave way and I cannoned off Desmond on top of somebody else."

"It was my fault, sir," declared Desmond. "Some of us were talking about rats before I went to sleep, and I must have dreamt that a rat was nibbling my toe. I remember sitting up and shouting out and bumping the under side of Woodleigh's cot with my head. Then Woodleigh's cot-lashings carried away, and he rolled out on top of me."

"I should hardly have expected to find that you were subject to silly nightmares, Desmond," observed Mr. Graham, who was beginning to shiver in the night air as he hung over the open fore-hatch.

"I don't think it was a nightmare, sir," protested Desmond. "A rat bit me."

In support of this assertion he held up a bare foot. There was blood oozing from a double puncture on the big toe.

Mr. Armitage examined the injury.

"You've knocked your toe against something, my boy," he said. "A nail perhaps. Wash your foot in lysol and fresh water and put some lint to it."

He glanced at his wristlet watch. It was half-past three.

"I don't suppose you fellows will get to sleep again," he remarked briskly; "so get dressed and have something to eat. We'll make a start and get under way as soon as possible. Come on, Graham, it's a bit draughty up there, and you look shivery. Let's get dressed."

The two Scoutmasters returned to the after-cabin.

"That lad Desmond wasn't dreaming, Graham," remarked Mr. Armitage quietly. "I didn't want to alarm him, but it was a bite right enough. We'll have to smoke that rat out as soon as it gets light enough."

Desmond's assertion was not lacking in supporting evidence. A few days previously Flemming had invested in a pair of shoes, and, having walked a good distance in them, had galled one of his heels. To relieve the sting and to soften the tough leather Flemming had rubbed Russian tallow on the heel of his stocking.

Tallow being a delicacy to which rats are particularly addicted, it was not so very surprising to learn that the rodent, who had taken up his temporary abode on board the *Olivette*, had been attracted by Flemming's sock. Not only had the tallow disappeared but four square inches of wool had gone the same way.

Then Hayes discovered a gnawed hole in his haversack, and Woodleigh noted with considerable misgivings that one of his shoes looked a bit ragged. Mr. Rat had been quite impartial in his attentions, and had he not nibbled Desmond's toe he might have taken toll from every Sea Scout on board.

While breakfast was being prepared Findlay engaged upon a tracking stunt in the fo'c'sle. It did not take him long to find the rat's mode of entering. There was a hole through the side of one of the lockers, the ragged edges bearing testimony

to the sharpness of the animal's teeth. From the for'ard partition of the locker another hole communicated with the chain-locker. Here the trail ended. It was impossible for the rat to have got into the chain-locker through the narrow metal-bound aperture that allowed the "ranged" cable to run out. The only explanation of the rat's method of getting into the locker was that at some recent time the lid must have been left open.

The next step was to find out the rodent's hiding-place. There was no other hole between the fo'c'sle and the engine-room. All the lockers were examined. The floor fitted too well to allow the animal to find a refuge in the bilges.

"I don't think we need try smoking the rat out," decided Mr. Armitage. "The only feasible conclusion we can come to is that the brute made its escape through the open scuttle. In all probability the rat has rejoined his brothers and sisters in a hole under the piles of the quay, and is regaling them with a story of wondrous adventures with the Sea Scouts of the *Olivette*."

## CHAPTER IX

### Adrift in West Bay

At the first streak of dawn the *Olivette* slipped her moorings and made for the open sea. It was an ideal daybreak. Not a ripple disturbed the slate-grey surface of the water, save the even wake caused by the steadily moving boat. The sky was grey; the dawn was grey. Even the verdant hills of the Isle of Wight looked grey where they were faintly visible through the light mist.

"It's going to be a scorching hot day," declared Woodleigh.

"Fine weather," added Flemming. "The glass is high and steady."

"I hope it will be rough," said Hayes.

"You'll be sorry for yourself if it is," said Woodleigh. "Take my tip and be

thankful it is fine. Rough weather is all very fine if you've a sound boat and a sheltered harbour close under your lee. The fellow who puts to sea because it looks like being rough is simply asking for trouble. If you're obliged to that's a different matter."

"But isn't the *Olivette* a sound boat? And has she ever been out in a storm?" asked Hayes.

"Of course she's a sound boat," declared the Patrol Leader stoutly. "Yes, we've been out in a storm. The starboard window of the wheelhouse—thick plate-glass—was stove in by a wave. We got into port with about a foot of water over the engine-room floor. Yes, I've had some and I'm not asking for any more, thank you."

By this time the *Olivette* had ported helm and was passing through Hurst Race. Although there was no wind the rush of the west-going tide was very much in evidence. Irregular, crested waves were rearing their heads menacingly within a well-defined area. Everywhere else the sea was as smooth as a mill-pond. "North Channel, Woodleigh?" asked Rayburn, who was at the wheel.

"No, Needles Channel," was the reply. "It will give the others a chance of seeing the western end of The Wight. Close that window, old son, or we'll be getting wet shirts."

"What causes the Race?" asked Jock Findlay.

"Strong tide over uneven ground," explained Woodleigh. "Just here is a deep hole, nearly two hundred feet. It's the greatest depth between the Isle of Wight and the mainland, although this is the shortest distance between. The tide has to tumble through the neck of a bottle, as it were, and in the process it gets a bit angry."

Totland Bay was soon abeam, then the Southend Sea Scouts feasted their eyes upon the multi-coloured cliffs of Alum Bay, until their attention was attracted by the Needles and the outlying lighthouse, backed by the towering cliffs of glistening chalk that form the western extremity of the Isle of Wight.

Clear of the Bridge a course was shaped to pass four miles south of Portland Bill. This meant being a considerable distance from the picturesque Dorset coast between Old Harry and The Bill; but, as Mr. Armitage remarked, time was an

object, and, if the *Olivette* were to make Plymouth the same day, she could not afford to skirt the coastline simply with the idea of giving the guests an opportunity to enjoy the scenery.

Still carrying her tide the *Olivette* made good progress. Early in the forenoon a light easterly breeze sprang up, but since the speed of the boat was about equal to that of the wind there was no tempering coolness to be derived from it. The only apparent result was to throw up a long, low swell that made the *Olivette* roll considerably.

"There's Portland Race, lads," announced Mr. Armitage, pointing to a dark-coloured patch of water on the starboard beam and to the south'ard of the wedge-shaped Bill. "It's one of the worst parts off the South Coast."

"Have you ever been through it, sir?" asked Hayes.

"No; and I don't want to, thank you," was the reply. "I've been inside it, which is quite a different matter. When you fellows bring the *Spindrift* up-Channel I'd advise you to keep outside it. Inside is all right if you work your tides, but in this district of topsy-turvydom in the matter of tides there's an important thing to remember about Portland Bill. For nine hours out of twelve the current sets south'ard on both sides of the Bill, so that, if you were in a sailing craft and were unable to stem the tide, you would be swept into the Race itself."

"And what would happen, sir, if a boat did get carried into it?" persisted Hayes.

"Swamped," replied the Scoutmaster laconically.

"So don't try it, Hayes," added Mr. Graham.

"I believe I can hear the Race," declared Findlay.

"Yes," agreed Woodleigh, "you can. We've heard it miles away on a calm night. It's not a pleasant sound."

Half an hour later the *Olivette* entered West Bay. This expanse of water was living up to its reputation as a bay of calms—except when it is rough. Like the little girl with the curl in the middle of her forehead:

"When it is good  
It is very, very good;  
But when it is bad  
It is horrid."

The breeze had died away, and the water was an almost boundless expanse of gentle rollers. The Bill was almost lost in the haze, the high ground behind Lyme Regis and Bridport was entirely hidden in the warm, misty atmosphere. A large yawl bound west was lying becalmed, her white sails shaking from the yards as she wallowed in the swell. Her crew were lying unconcernedly on the deck and hardly noticed the *Olivette*; but her owner, seated in a deck-chair aft, raised his glasses and kept the Sea Scouts under observation.

"Bet he's a bit sick that he hasn't a motor," remarked Hayes.

"Don't crow," exclaimed Desmond. "This isn't our boat. We may be in the same plight when we bring the *Spindrift* across West Bay."

Half an hour later the yawl was hull down, her idle canvas showing faintly against the blue sky.

"I say," suddenly exclaimed Jock Findlay. "That's a long way from shore for a small boat, isn't it?"

He pointed to a rowing boat about half a mile on the *Olivette's* port bow.

"It's a dinghy with a man in her," reported Woodleigh. "He's not rowing. He may be fishing, but I hardly think so. Shall we run alongside, sir?"

"Yes, do," replied Mr. Armitage. "If he's all right there's no harm done. If he's in difficulties we may be able to do him a good turn."

"Starboard ten," ordered the Milford Patrol Leader, addressing Flemming, who was at the wheel.

The *Olivette* was now heading straight for the drifting boat. The solitary occupier seemed utterly unaware of the motor-boat's approach, but sat on the stroke thwart, nursing his head.

"Perhaps he's deaf, sir," hazarded Findlay.

"No, sea-sick," rejoined Mr. Graham, handing Jock his binoculars. "His face is green—absolutely. A tripper adrift most likely."

"Ahoy!" shouted Woodleigh, holding up a coil of rope. "Do you want a tow?"

The fellow raised his head and gazed pathetically at the *Olivette*. He gave no sign that he was at all anxious to be aided.

"Why, he's only a boy," declared Findlay.

"A pretty hefty one," supplemented Desmond.

"What shall we do, sir?" asked Woodleigh.

"Get him on board and take the boat in tow," replied Mr. Armitage. "Stand by one of you to grab her painter."

The *Olivette's* clutch was put into control, and, under Flemming's practised helmsmanship, the motor-boat ranged up alongside the unmanageable dinghy. Desmond, leaning over the side, grasped the painter and took a turn round the starboard bollard for'ard, while Rayburn hooked the stern as the dinghy swung in towards the high side of the *Olivette*.

"Come on board," exclaimed Mr. Armitage authoritatively. "You'll soon be all right."

The boy attempted to obey, but lurched awkwardly as if he had no control of the limbs. Two of the Sea Scouts leapt into the dinghy, and literally hauled its occupant on board the boat.

"Take him down below out of the sun," said Mr. Armitage. "He may have a touch of sunstroke. If it's only sea-sickness, give him a piece of lemon to chew. All right, Desmond, pass the painter aft."

The *Olivette* regathered way, the dinghy riding comfortably astern, with her bows high out of the water. On her backboard were the words: "Gregory—Abbotsbury".

"He's a bit out of his reckoning," observed Mr. Armitage. "Abbotsbury is a good fifteen miles to the nor'ard. He'd never be able to row back that distance."

"What do you propose to do with him?" inquired Mr. Graham.

"Put into Brixham and land him, I expect," replied Mr. Armitage. "We can't put back to Abbotsbury very well. For one thing, it's well out of our course and there's no harbour. We might find if we went there that there'd be too much swell to effect a landing, and we would then have to carry on into Lyme Regis or Bridport—both inaccessible at low water. I'll find out more about the youth, and see what he wants to do. Come along, Graham. We may hear an interesting story."

The two Scoutmasters found the rescued youth sitting up on one of the fo'c'sle cots. Apparently the slice of lemon had had the desired effect, for his face had lost the greenish hue and looked well sunburned. He was talking to Desmond and Rayburn, asking them numerous questions concerning the *Olivette* and her crew.

"Well, my lad," began Mr. Armitage briskly, "let's have your story. How came you so far out to sea?"

"Got lost in a fog, sir."

Mr. Armitage made no comment. It had been a bit hazy on the Solent that morning, so it was quite possible that West Bay was enveloped in mist.

"What's your name?"

"Gregory, sir."

"Is that your boat, then?"

There was a brief pause.

"My father's, sir."

"He'll be a bit anxious about you."

"Yes, sir."

"In that case we'll land you at Brixham."



"Plymouth'll do me, sir. I've got an uncle living there. He's a smacksman, so he could tow the boat back to Abbotsbury."

Mr. Armitage left it at that, but he decided to signal Prawle Point and report the finding of the boat.

"What sort of a fellow is he?" he inquired of Desmond, after the latter had come on deck.

"I hardly know what to make of him, sir," replied the Patrol Leader. "He doesn't seem to know much about the sea, which is a bit strange since his father is a fisherman. He seems rather anxious to know if we are putting in anywhere before we get to Plymouth."

"The only seafaring things about him are his clothes," remarked Mr. Graham. "He doesn't talk with a South Coast accent. I suppose——"

"Suppose what, Graham?" asked Mr. Armitage.

"Perhaps I had better not say," rejoined Mr. Graham. "I hate having to be suspicious about anybody, but there are certain points about the lad that look a bit fishy."

"'Fishy' is a natural characteristic of a fisherman's son, I take it," rejoined Mr. Armitage, with a laugh.

"Not in that sense. Suppose we have the fellow on deck. He seems fit enough now. Give him a few simple jobs and see how he shapes."

In response to a message—delivered by Rayburn—Gregory came on deck.

"You'll have to earn your passage, my lad," said Mr. Armitage. "My boys are about to scrub down decks. You might give them a hand. How about coiling that rope away?"

The Scoutmaster pointed to a hawser-laid rope lying just abaft the mast.

Gregory went for'ard, lurching with the movement of the boat. Then he began coiling away, struggling with the stubborn rope until he literally tied it up in knots.

"Tough bit o' stuff, this," he remarked, regarding his efforts with evident mistrust.

"It is," agreed Mr. Armitage. "All right. You can steer, I suppose? Take on from Flemming. He'll give you the course."

Gregory made for the wheelhouse. The two Scoutmasters exchanged knowing glances. Test Number One had failed, as far as the fisherman's son was concerned. Every seafarer knows that a hawser-laid rope is coiled "with the sun". Gregory had reversed the process with the result that every coil had kinked badly.

Soon it became evident that the lad's helmsmanship was no better than his skill at curling down a rope. Judging by the zig-zag wake the wheel was giving him plenty of trouble, although after a bit, thanks to Flemming's assistance, Gregory made a better show than he had previously done.

Nevertheless, both Mr. Graham and Mr. Armitage were now agreed that the sea-sick youth, picked up from the dinghy, was certainly not connected with the sea. Who and what was he, then?

## **CHAPTER X**

### **The Fouled Propeller**

A sudden jar that shook the *Olivette* from stem to stern promptly dislocated the trend of the two Scoutmasters' surmises. For thirty seconds or more the motors laboured heavily, until Warkworth, who was taking his trick in the engine-room, declutched and cut off the ignition.

The Sea Scouts on deck gave inquiring glances at Mr. Armitage; but, true to his principles of letting the lads act on their own initiative, he gave no solution for the cause of the mishap or any suggestion as to what ought to be done.

Presently Woodleigh grasped the reason for his Scoutmaster's silence. It was "up to" the Patrol Leader to act.

"Motor all right, Warkworth?" he inquired.

"Yes," was the reply. "I switched off because I fancy something's fouled the propeller. Send somebody down, and we'll try to turn the shaft round by hand."

Desmond volunteered to assist Warkworth. The removable floor-boards over the shaft were taken up, and both lads, by means of pipe wrenches, tried their hardest to turn the massive metal rod, which in ordinary circumstances could be moved with very little effort.

"Prop's foul of something," announced Warkworth.

Woodleigh and most of the Sea Scouts on deck were aft. By this time the *Olivette* had lost way and was rounding-to broadside on to the now slight breeze. Lying at full length, and leaning over the short counter, the Patrol Leader could discern the three-bladed propeller, its boss a couple of feet beneath the surface.

"There's rope wound round it," he declared, "about half a dozen turns. Get a boat-hook, somebody; I think I can get it off."

Hayes brought the desired article. With a couple of fellows holding on to his legs the Patrol Leader tried for a full five minutes, until, red in the face and cramped in body and limbs, he desisted from his unsuccessful attempt.

"The stuff's as hard as a chunk of iron," he announced. "I'll get Warkworth to start up again and put the gear into the reverse. That might throw the rope clear. Stand by with that dinghy's painter: we don't want that fouled as well."

The motor being warm it did not take long to restart even on paraffin. Then Warkworth let in the clutch in the reverse, and, although the engine did not labour quite so much, the desired result was not attained. An examination of the propeller, after the motor had been running for a couple of minutes, revealed the disconcerting fact that the rope was still wound tightly round the boss. In the ahead position the undue strain on the shaft almost pulled the engine up dead.

"I suppose the only thing to be done is to set a square-sail and make either for Torquay or Brixham," remarked Woodleigh. "We're bound to get a tow in, and at

low tide we can cut the rope away."

"Then we won't make Plymouth to-day," added Flemming.

"Let me have a cut at it, Woodleigh," said Jock Findlay quietly.

"How?" asked the Patrol Leader.

"By diving for it," replied Jock.

Findlay was the champion diver of the 9th Southend Troop of Sea Scouts. Only a few weeks previously he had carried off first prize in a plate-diving competition in fifteen feet of water. One rival came to the surface with twelve tin plates. Another brought up sixteen. When Findlay reappeared after he dived he held eight plates in his hand; and while the onlookers, who regarded Jock as the favourite, were showing their surprise at the small number Findlay had handed over, the wily Sea Scout produced another twelve from the inside of his bathing-dress.

"Can you?" queried the doubting Woodleigh. "You'll be knocked out if the counter gives you a crack. The boat's rolling a bit."

"I'll risk that," rejoined Findlay, who was already divesting himself of his clothing.

"Will that lad be all right, do you think?" asked Mr. Armitage in an aside.

"Quite," replied Mr. Graham, with firm conviction. "He's like a young eel in the water."

"All my lads are good swimmers," observed Mr. Armitage, "but curiously enough they are indifferent divers. Woodleigh, for instance, always shuts his eyes when diving. He says he cannot open them while under water. It's pure fallacy, although I know plenty of people who say the same thing."

Meanwhile Findlay, looking like a young Apollo, was whetting his knife on the palm of his hand.

"No chance of that propeller revolving?" he inquired.

"Motor's stopped," replied Woodleigh. "You'll be all right as far as that is concerned; but for goodness' sake mind you don't get a biff on the head."

Jock made a clean, graceful dive over the counter, and, reappearing almost at once, swam towards the stern. Awaiting his opportunity he grasped the upper edge of the rudder and drew himself beneath the surface.

For thirty long-drawn-out seconds Findlay remained submerged; then he reappeared about a couple of yards from the boat.

image: IMAGENAME1

[Illustration: "ALL CLEAR!" HE ANNOUNCED, EXHAUSTED AND TRIUMPHANT *Page 105*]

"Heave me a line," he called out breathlessly. "I'm all right—don't want to hang on to the boat—she's rolling too much—rope's hard as wire—I'm cutting it through."

Five times the plucky Sea Scout returned to the attack. Pieces of frayed grass rope drifting alongside gave evidence of the progress of his labours. Finally he broke the surface, with a short length of rope in one hand and his knife in the other.

"All clear!" he announced, exhausted and triumphant. "Give me a hand, Desmond."

He had not the strength left to clamber up the side, but willing hands caught him and hauled him on deck to the accompaniment of a rousing cheer from the *Olivette's* crew.

"Plucky lad, that!" exclaimed Mr. Armitage.

"Yes," admitted Mr. Graham proudly. "There is one thing in which the Southend Sea Scouts can give points to the Milford fellows, and I know you won't begrudge them that."

"No," rejoined Mr. Armitage. "Your lads have more than earned their passage."

And the welcome purr of the motor, as the *Olivette* once more forged ahead in her normal style, emphasized the justice of the Scoutmaster's sentiments.

## CHAPTER XI

### The Semaphore Message

"Stand by with the Red Ensign and Code Pennant, Rayburn," ordered Patrol Leader Woodleigh.

The *Olivette* had passed Start Point, and was approaching the low-lying extremity known as Prawle Point, on which is built a Lloyd's signal-station.

The Southend lads watched the operation of "making her number" with deep interest. They had often heard and read of vessels proclaiming their names and destination by this means, but this was the first occasion on which they were about to see the "real thing".

Rayburn, the *Olivette's* "bunting tosser" had brought the signal-locker close to the base of the mast. Deftly he toggled the ensign above the red and white striped pennant and hoisted it. Then he drew four flags from the locker.

"That's our number," he explained to the temporary crew.

"'K J V T'—that's not a number," observed Findlay, who knew the International Code Flags by heart.

"Isn't it? It is," rejoined Rayburn. "They are letter flags, but they form a number all the same. They tell the signal-station that we are the *Olivette* of London. Stand by with the signal-book, Hepburn." The Sea Scout signalman had the four flags together, and was now watching Prawle Point station through his binoculars.

Promptly the shore station hoisted the answering pennant, just "at the dip", to show that the signal was seen, and their "close up" indicating that the message was understood.

A E L W and A E N U followed in quick succession.

"They mean Southampton and Plymouth," explained Rayburn. "Our port of departure and the port we're bound for. Southampton is considered our port, since Keyhaven comes in that district. Now give me V O X."

"What does that mean?" asked Desmond.

"I am going to semaphore to you ',' was the reply. Rayburn glanced over his shoulder at Gregory, who was sitting on the raised cabin-top with his eyes fixed shoreward. "Mr. Armitage gave me instructions to report the picking up of young Gregory at West Bay. I think there'll be a rather astonishing reply." Taking up a pair of hand-flags, Rayburn awaited the acknowledgment from Prawle Point and then began to semaphore the message.

"Have picked up dinghy with 'Gregory, Abbotsbury' on her transom. One person in her is now aboard. Propose landing him at Plymouth. Please telephone information to Gregory, Abbotsbury, Dorset."

Presently the long arms of the shore semaphore began sending out the reply:

"Boy escaped from Borstal Institute, Portland, yesterday night. Keep him on board until arrival at Plymouth. Will inform police there, who will take necessary action."

"Message received," replied Rayburn, then, turning to Findlay, he exclaimed: "Haul down!"

Meanwhile Woodleigh, standing just behind Rayburn, had written down the message as the latter dictated in a low voice the astounding news. Then, without giving any sign that might arouse Master Gregory's suspicions, the Patrol Leader went aft and handed the written report to Mr. Armitage.

"By Jove, Graham!" exclaimed the Scoutmaster. "How's that for character-reading? The young blighter is an escaped Borstal boy. I wonder what he was sent to Portland for?"

"Better not ask him," rejoined Mr. Graham. "He might give trouble. It's rather a wonder he didn't get the wind up when we commenced semaphoring."

"Perhaps he is in a bit of a funk," said Mr. Armitage. "However, that's his affair. I'm not going to spoil his few hours of unauthorized liberty unless he cuts up rough. There's Salcombe, lads. A snug harbour but a tricky place to enter. Bolt Head's just on our starboard bow. The next few miles is a magnificent bit of coast."

The *Olivette* was now fairly close to shore, about half a mile from the frowning cliffs of Devon. Fascinated by the sight of the surf-lashed shore, stupendous walls of rock, the Southend Sea Scouts gazed stolidly shorewards, while Mr. Armitage pointed out the various objects of interest between Bolt Head and Bolt Tail, and gave accounts of several notable shipwrecks that had taken place within the limits of the two forbidding headlands.

Then across Bigbury Bay, almost out of sight of land, the *Olivette* ploughed her way against a foul tide. The best of the day had gone. Misty-looking clouds were banking up in the west'ard with a promise of rain before very long.

"That doesn't look very inviting for a tramp across Cornwall," remarked Mr. Graham.

"It may be only local," replied Mr. Armitage. "Without casting any aspersions upon the attractions of Plymouth, I can assert that I have put into the Sound on at least half a dozen widely different occasions, and I have never yet done so in sunshine. It has always been raining pretty heavily."

Two hours later the *Olivette* rounded the peaked, isolated rock, known as the Mewstone, and the whole of Plymouth Sound with its magnificent breakwater came into view. In spite of the fact that it was raining heavily, all the Sea Scouts not actually on duty in the wheelhouse and engine-room kept on deck to enjoy the view, for enjoyable it was even in the now steady downpour. Gregory too was up for'ard gazing, rather apprehensively it seemed, at the Hoe and Smeaton's Tower.

"I feel sorry for that chap," confided Jock Findlay to his chum Desmond. "I think he knows that there's something in the wind. He has hardly spoken a word since we passed Prawle Point."

"It's rough luck being pitchforked into the arms of a policeman," said Desmond. "Of course, we don't know what he was sent to Portland for, but I'm hanged if I like the idea of pushing him back. We can't help it, but it looks like a



low-down trick on our part."

"Nearly there, you fellows," announced Woodleigh, as the *Olivette* passed the end of Mount Batten Breakwater. "Don't you think you'd better sleep aboard again? It's not much fun tramping ten miles on a wet evening like this."

"Especially if you've got to sleep out," added Flemming.

The Patrol Leader bent down and spoke to the engineer through the open window of the wheelhouse.

"Turn over to petrol now, Warkworth, old son," he said. "We're almost at Sutton Pool."

The crew began to make ready with ropes and fenders, while Woodleigh kept a sharp look out for a suitable berth in the sheltered but considerably crowded harbour known as Sutton Pool.

"*Unity*, ahoy!" he hailed, addressing a short, thick-set fisherman in a blue jersey, tanned trousers, and sea-boots, and wearing a billy-cock hat that looked rather out of keeping with his nautical rig. "Can we berth alongside you? Are you putting out to-night?"

"Make fast alongside o' we," replied the skipper of the fishing-smack *Unity*. "You'm welcome, sure."

"Why don't you tie up alongside the quay?" asked Desmond.

"We never do if it can be avoided," explained Woodleigh. "For one thing, it's rough on our fenders, grinding against a stone wall; for another, we'd have to keep a watch on deck all night to tend the warps when the tide fell. Lying alongside the smack we rise and fall with her. Her crew will have to see to the warps."

The task of making fast had occupied the attention of all hands, but when the work was completed the Sea Scouts became aware that they were objects of considerable attention. There was quite a crowd of fishermen and longshore folk taking an interest in the *Olivette*, while standing discreetly in the background, with their helmets showing above the heads of the onlookers, were two stalwart policemen.

## CHAPTER XII

### A Misunderstanding Cleared Up

Instinctively the eyes of nearly all on board the *Olivette* turned towards the object of the policemen's presence. Gregory had spotted the representatives of the Law too. Mr. Graham, regarding him from a distance of about twenty feet, fancied that his jaw dropped slightly and that his face became a darker tint. Beyond that Gregory gave no indication of either fear or defiance.

Presently the crowd parted as the stalwart men in blue advanced towards the quay-side with the obvious intention of crossing the deck of the *Unity* and boarding the *Olivette*.

Even then Gregory did not shift his position. Desmond, watching him out of the corner of his eye, wondered what the wanted youth was going to do. It seemed improbable that a hardened young criminal would give in tamely while a chance remained to attempt to escape.

"I think that if I were in his place," soliloquized Desmond, "I'd jump into the dinghy and scull for the other side of the harbour like blue blazes. Perhaps he'll dish the bobbies yet."

Mr. Armitage advanced to the rail to receive the two policemen.

"You know what we're here for, sir?" remarked one of the men.

The Scoutmaster nodded.

"What's the lad done?" he asked in a low tone.

"Broke into an old woman's shop, rifled the till, and well-nigh did for her, sir," was the reply. "He's a dangerous chap, seeing he's not turned seventeen. Did he give you any trouble, sir?"

"None whatever, Constable."

"That's strange, sir."

"When a fellow's sea-sick there's the bottom knocked out of the universe as far as he's concerned," remarked the Scoutmaster drily.

The second constable had meanwhile sauntered for'ard, keeping the still unresisting but now restless Gregory between him and the bows of the *Olivette*. At a sign from his companion the policeman laid his hand on the wanted lad's shoulder.

"Come on, Greening," he exclaimed. "This is the end of your little stunt. Come quietly now, or there'll be more trouble."

"What for?" demanded the youth with sudden energy. "My name's not Greening—it's Gregory, and I ain't done nothin'!"

"And half a dozen other aliases, I suppose?" rejoined his captor caustically. "It won't wash, Greening, so chuck it."

The boy appealed wildly to Mr. Armitage.

"I've done nothin' wrong, have I, sir?" he exclaimed. "It ain't you who's given me in charge, is it, sir?"

The Scoutmaster did not know what to reply. It seemed a despicable act on his part to have kept the boy "in the dark" until his captors were upon him. He could only shake his head in a deprecatory way.

Gregory went quietly. With quite unnecessary vehemence the two policemen bundled him off the *Olivette* and across the deck of the smack. Murmurs of pity rose from the throng of interested spectators, while execrations of no mild form were hurled at the crew of the *Olivette* and the two Scoutmasters in particular, for their part in surrendering their charge. Clearly the sympathies of the Sutton Pool habitués were strongly in favour of the prisoner.

Suddenly the lad stopped and raised his head.

"Uncle! Uncle Garge!" he shouted.

A short, burly man on the fringe of the crowd, on hearing himself addressed, elbowed his way through the press and planted himself rigidly in front of the leading policeman.

"What you'm doin' wi' my nephew?" he demanded.

"Tell them my name's Gregory, Uncle," exclaimed the youth, before the policemen could say a word.

"'Corse it tes," rejoined the fisherman. "Same as mine, an' nothin' for to be ashamed on. What are ye got 'im for, perliceman?"

"Broke out of the Borstal Institution at Portland, day before yesterday," replied the constable laconically.

The little man held his sides, threw back his head, and laughed uproariously.

"Lead on, Joe!" exclaimed one of the policemen to his comrade. "We can't stop here arguing the point."

"Get back, man!" said the other constable, addressing the highly amused fisherman. "Get back, or I'll run you in for obstruction."

Just then the two Scoutmasters came up. The assertion of Gregory's uncle and the policemen's replies had been distinctly audible on board the *Olivette*. Realizing that there was certainly a mistake somewhere, Mr. Armitage jumped ashore to see the matter through, and Mr. Graham followed to back him up.

"I think there's some misunderstanding, Constable," observed Mr. Armitage. "We'll go with you to the station. This man's assertion quite conforms to—er—Gregory's statement when we picked him up in West Bay."

"But didn't you report the matter to Prawle Point, sir?" asked the policeman. "They telephoned the information on to us and we acted upon it."

A howl of execration burst from the lips of the onlookers. Clearly they regarded the Scoutmaster as the cause of the trouble.

Realizing that there was not much to be gained by arguing with a couple of policemen on Sutton Pool quay in the face of hostilely inclined onlookers, Mr.

Armitage did not reply to the question.

A few minutes later the double doors of the police-station closed in the faces of a curious and demonstrative crowd, while the two Scoutmasters, Gregory, uncle and nephew, and the two policemen entered the charge-room, where they were greeted by a stern-faced inspector.

On the one hand the police had acted upon instructions. The description of the missing Borstal lad corresponded very closely with that of the youth removed from the *Olivette*. The time, place, and proximity to Portland, as far as the rescue in West Bay was concerned, tended to bear out the official view of the case.

On the other hand Uncle Garge Gregory, a well-known local smack-owner, was emphatic that the lad was his nephew and that he certainly was not at Portland a week ago, because his sister had mentioned his nephew in a letter.

"All you've got ter du, Inspector," he added, "is tu telegraph tu the police at Abbotsbury an' get them to see my brother Tom—young Tom here's father."

The inspector turned to Mr. Armitage.

"You reported the matter, I understand?"

"We merely reported that we had picked up a boat with a boy in it somewhere in West Bay," replied the Scoutmaster. "The reply to our signal was to the effect that the boy was the one who had broken out of Portland. We had no reason to doubt the statement. Now we know that it is wrong, but you must admit that the assertion did not come from us. I might also point out that the dinghy bears the words: 'Gregory—Abbotsbury'."

"All right, Gregory," said the inspector, addressing "Uncle Garge". "You can take your nephew away and be responsible for him. Bring him here to-morrow at ten o'clock—merely as a matter of form."

The crowd without raised a cheer when the two Gregorys appeared. Mr. Armitage and Mr. Graham were greeted with a storm of hisses and cat-calls.

Holding his nephew's arm, Garge Gregory mounted a doorstep and held up his hand. Such was the popularity of the little man that almost instantly the noisy throng relapsed into silence.

"Friends!" exclaimed Mr. Gregory in stentorian tones, "'tes all a mistake. You'm no call tu rant at these gen'l'men here. They be rare gude uns, seein' as 'ow they saved my nephew's life, so tu say. Look see: they bain't a-had nothin' tu du wi' this little misunderstandin'. T'was all the fault of the perlice; so don't 'ee shout agin' these gen'l'men no more."

"We'm mighty sorry to be sure, sir," said one of the men, who had been conspicuous in the hostile demonstration.

"Quite all right," replied Mr. Armitage hurriedly. "We all make mistakes sometimes."

It was nearly eight o'clock when the two Scoutmasters regained the *Olivette*. Although the rain had ceased it was now quite out of the question to think of the Southend Sea Scouts setting out on their long trek.

"We are sleeping on board to-night," announced Mr. Graham, after Mr. Armitage had briefly related what had occurred at the police-station. "If any of you fellows want to stretch your legs, let me recommend a stroll round the Hoe before it gets dark."

A little later a fisherman crossed the deck of the *Unity* and dumped a pailful of fish into the *Olivette's* well.

"Might come in handy like, mister," he said sheepishly. "Us—me an' my mates—wish tu make amends, in a manner o' speakin', for kicking up a shine. Us hopes you'll let bygones be bygones, sir, an' if you'm wantin' any assistance while you'm stoppin' at Plymouth don't 'ee be afraid tu ax any o' we."

## CHAPTER XIII

### The Trek

At eight o'clock on the following morning the *Spindrift's* navigation party "fell

in" on the deck of the *Olivette*. Each member carried a couple of blankets rolled in a ground-sheet, haversack containing toilet requirements in the outer pocket, and rations in the inner one. In addition, Mr. Graham had a pair of binoculars slung across his shoulders, and carried a bundle of charts. Patrol Leader Desmond was responsible for the bulky volumes, *The Channel Pilot*, *Lists of Lights*, and the *Admiralty Tide Tables*. Findlay was additionally burdened with a camp kettle with a folding handle, while Hayes acted as "emergency man" to relieve the others of their additional gear in turn.

"Good luck and *bon voyage*!" exclaimed Mr. Armitage. "We'll keep a look out for you when you approach the Wight. We're generally cruising about there when we haven't any particular object in view."

"I suppose you'll make Falmouth to-day," remarked Mr. Graham.

Mr. Armitage glanced aloft, where the clouds were scudding fairly rapidly across the sky.

"Glass is falling," he replied. "I think we'll keep inside the breakwater to-day. Look here, Graham, suppose we run you up the Tamar. It will knock about twelve miles off your journey."

"Thanks awfully," said Mr. Graham frankly.

"We don't know the Tamar," continued Mr. Armitage, "but there's no reason why we shouldn't find our course up the river. It won't be the first time we've had to navigate strange waters. It will be rather fun. Start her up, lads."

In five minutes the crew of the *Olivette* had their able little craft ready to get under way. The warps holding her to the *Unity* were cast off, and the boat began to gather way.

As usual, Mr. Armitage left the navigation to his Patrol Leader, merely standing by ready to correct any possible error that might result in a serious mishap. So Woodleigh, with a large-scale chart of "The Approaches to Plymouth", was in the wheelhouse, giving the course to Flemming at the wheel.

Warkworth was in charge of the motor, and, as was the invariable custom in crowded waters, kept within arm's length of the clutch. The rest of the Sea Scouts were on deck taking in the ever-changing view with the deepest interest.

Drake's Island glided past on the port beam. The intricate narrows between Devil's Point and Cremyll were safely negotiated, and the expansive Hamoaze, a sheltered sheet of water large and deep enough to accommodate the navies of the world, came into view.

Assisted by the strong flood-tide, the *Olivette* made rapid progress past the Royal Dockyard and Keyham Yard to starboard, and with warships of all sizes and descriptions lying at moorings on their port hand.

"There's a bridge right ahead of us, sir," reported Rayburn. "Shall we have to lower our mast to go under it?"

"How high is our mast?" asked the Scoutmaster gravely.

"Twenty-five feet, sir," replied Rayburn promptly.

"We may just do it, then," rejoined Mr. Armitage. "You needn't bother about unshackling the forestay just yet. Wait and see what the clearance of the bridge looks like when we get a bit nearer."

A couple of minutes later Rayburn came aft again. "I think we'll just manage it, sir," he reported.

"Very well; carry on," was the response.

It was not long before the two miles of river below the bridge were covered, and when the *Olivette* glided serenely under one of the wide and massive spans Rayburn positively blushed. What he had taken to be a low bridge was in reality the famous Saltash Bridge, with a clearance of a hundred feet.

"That's one up against you, Rayburn!" exclaimed Hepburn, and in the general laugh the embarrassed Sea Scout went below.

"Ease her down, Flemming," suggested Mr. Armitage. "We're getting into an intricate waterway, and if we touch with a lot of way on we may do ourselves damage."

Above Saltash Bridge the Tamar contracts considerably. What it loses in breadth it gains in scenery, for on either side high ground crowned with trees made a picturesque setting to the tidal estuary.



"We're in luck," said Woodleigh, pointing to a small paddle-steamer ahead. "She'll be our pilot."

In a few minutes the *Olivette* had overhauled the paddle-boat sufficiently to be right in her foamy wake. Speed was still further reduced until the distance between the two craft was evenly maintained.

"Woodleigh will make one of the smartest coastal navigators going," observed Mr. Armitage to his brother Scoutmaster. "He knows all the 'tricks of the trade' already. He'd make a capital master of a tug or coasting vessel, but curiously enough he hasn't shone at deep-sea navigation. I tried to teach him to work out a position by sextant, but it was hopeless."

"And yet, on the other hand," rejoined Mr. Graham, "how many seamen one meets who are absolutely out of it when navigating in shallow waters. I've seen Royal Navy men—jolly smart fellows at their work—'tied up in knots' when compelled by circumstances to navigate shallow, intricate channels, through which yachtsmen and fishermen venture with impunity."

Calstock, a small village boasting a magnificent stone railway bridge across the river, came into sight. This was the *Olivette's* limit as far as the Tamar was concerned. Berthing alongside the quay and astern of the steamer that had perforce acted as a pilot, the crew once more bade their guests and fellow Sea Scouts good luck.

Mr. Graham, armed with an Ordnance map, "set the course", aiming as far as possible to keep off the highroad. This meant loss of speed; but on the other hand it was preferable to tramping stolidly along a hard-surfaced highway.

The lads were thoroughly enjoying themselves. Tramping after a sea voyage came as a complete change. What was more, there was a goal for which they were making—something to speed them to renewed energies. By five o'clock in the afternoon they arrived at the old-fashioned Cornish town of Launceston, where, guided by a local Scoutmaster, they found a splendid camping-ground a little to the north of the town.

It was a Spartan-like camp, but fortunately the weather was decidedly on the mend. The drizzle they had experienced at Plymouth had been left behind, and on the lofty Cornish hinterland the ground was quite dry and the air marvellously bracing.

Very soon a fire was burning brightly. Over it, suspended by a stout sapling held up by a couple of crossed poles, the kettle boiled very quickly.

It was a gorgeous, Scout-like meal. Tea slightly flavoured with the reek of burnt wood, huge slabs of bread liberally plastered with fresh butter, kippers (purchased in Launceston) fried in the hot embers, and huge, floury potatoes baked in their skins, made a satisfying and appetizing repast.

"How's that wound on your toe, Desmond?" inquired Mr. Graham. He had asked the same question at least half a dozen times before, and the Patrol Leader had stoutly asserted that he hardly felt it, and that it was healing nicely.

"It's a bit painful, sir," admitted Desmond reluctantly. While he had been on the move he had practically forgotten all about it; but now, sprawling on the turf, he was aware of a persistent and increasing throb.

"Take your shoe and stocking off and let me see the injury," said the Scoutmaster.

Desmond did so. In spite of the fact that the ratbite had been carefully washed with disinfectant the flesh was badly inflamed.

Mr. Graham dressed the wound and insisted on the Patrol Leader keeping still for the rest of the evening.

"We'll see how it looks in the morning," he added. "If it's not considerably better you'll have to finish the trek by train."

It was jolly plucky on Desmond's part to have started with a toe in that condition; but he failed to grasp the other side of the case. By "carrying on" he had made the wound worse, with the result that he might be laid up for several days, and thus throw a heavy strain upon the rest of the crew of the *Spindrift*. If, however, he had admitted that his foot was painful, Mr. Graham would have sent him to Bude by train from Plymouth, and in all probability, by the time the others arrived to take over the yacht, Desmond would have been able to carry out his duties without physical discomfort.

The fire was kept up and given a plentiful supply of fuel when darkness set in. The four trekkers had already prepared their beds on a sloping expanse of turf under the lee of a rough stone wall. Making the beds was a simple matter, and

consisted of scooping out a small hole to take the pressure of each sleeper's hip. Then the ground-sheets were spread proofed-side downwards, and the blankets arranged to fold over so that there were two thicknesses above and below the sleeper. Haversacks laid over a heap of moss provided a pillow, while the fold of the ground-sheet over everything made an effectual protection from the night dews.

"Comfortable, Desmond?" inquired the Scoutmaster.

"Yes, sir," came the muffled reply.

"Good night, everyone!" exclaimed Mr. Graham.

"Good night, sir," was the rejoinder from three very sleepy lads, and five minutes later silence reigned in the camp.

Almost before the sun had risen Hayes awoke, stretched himself, and got up. His companions were still sleeping soundly. Resisting the temptation to place a wet sponge on Jock Findlay's face, the Sea Scout went to a near-by brook and washed. Then, stirring the still-glowing embers of last night's fire and applying fresh fuel, he coaxed the dried wood into a healthy blaze.

"Isn't it fine!" he exclaimed to himself, as he stood erect, breathing in the pure moorland air and surveying the expanse of undulating ground terminated by the rugged heights of Brown Willy. "I never thought there was such a view. There ought to be some scheme for sending East Coast Scouts to camp in Cornwall, and give Cornish Scouts a chance to see the Essex mudflats. Now then, you sleepy bounders! Out you turn."

By the time the others had performed their ablutions, Hayes had the porridge under way. It hardly mattered that one kettle had to answer for all culinary purposes; that the porridge had a slight flavour of tea and that there were a few tea-leaves in it. Toned down with thick Cornish cream and a lavish quantity of golden syrup the porridge disappeared, and was pronounced excellent. Slices of streaky bacon grilled over the fire were devoured with gusto, notwithstanding particles of wood ash which adhered to the fat.

Breakfast over, the Sea Scouts struck camp. They did so methodically. The blankets, after being aired, were folded; the scanty gear cleaned and packed away. Then the cinders of the fire and all loose paper and refuse were buried, so

that the owner of the land would have no cause for complaint.

"Now let me see your toe again, Desmond," said Mr. Graham.

Desmond felt none too happy as far as his injury was concerned. He sat down and removed the dressings.

"H'm," remarked the Scoutmaster. "A little better, but there's still a fair amount of inflammation. It's the puff-puff for you, my lad. It's as much as you can do to walk to the railway station."

Protesting ineffectually, the Patrol Leader was escorted into the town. At the station it was found that there was a train in an hour and a half's time.

"You'll be there before us, old man," said Jock consolingly. "Since you've got to keep your foot up you might try lying on one of the bunks of the *Spindrift* in case there are any rats on board. They seem very partial to you."

"That's a fact," rejoined the victim bitterly. "I guess that rat knew I have a Naturalist's Badge."

## CHAPTER XIV

### The Missing Patrol Leader

Shortly after three o'clock Mr. Graham, Findlay, and Hayes trudged into Bude. They were tired and slightly footsore, but the prospect of taking possession of their gift yacht made them forget the effects of their long tramp.

On making inquiries for the yacht yard the Scoutmaster was directed to the canal, the lower part of which forms the wet dock of Bude Harbour. Outside the lock gates the harbour practically dives right out, and is accessible only at certain states of the tide. Originally the canal ran from Bude to Launceston, but, with the exception of a stretch of about a couple of miles, that waterway has fallen into

decay.

"Where is the *Spindrift*, I wonder?" asked Findlay, when they arrived at the bridge crossing the canal.

No yacht was to be seen. There were a couple of coasting craft—topsail schooners both—and a few small boats lying in the basin. In the outer harbour a brigantine had taken the ground, and was lying with a pronounced list to starboard. Beyond that there was nothing that could possibly be taken for the *Spindrift*.

"We'll soon find out where she is," rejoined Mr. Graham. "Here's the office of the yacht yard."

One of the partners of the firm received the arrivals with cordiality.

"Yes, she's lying well up the canal," he replied, in answer to the Scoutmaster's question. "All the gear is on board, and we've filled the tanks with fresh water. You have merely to provision your ship and start away as soon as the tide serves. Oh, no: there is nothing to pay. Mr. Collinson instructed us that the account was to be sent on to him. We did so, and received a cheque in settlement this morning."

"By the by," said Mr. Graham, "has a Sea Scout named Desmond—one of our troop—called here this morning?"

"No—at least I think not," was the reply. "I was out for about an hour, so he may have looked in. I'll ask the foreman."

The foreman, on answering the summons, volunteered the information that he had seen a Scout hurrying along the other side of the canal.

"I didn't take much notice, sir," he added, "seeing as there be plenty of them lads up-along in the holidays."

"Then perhaps he went straight on board," suggested Mr. Graham. "Did you notice that he limped a little?"

"Seein' as how you mentions it, sir," replied the foreman, "I think he did."

"That's Desmond," declared the Scoutmaster with conviction. "Well, we'll go aboard. She's not locked up, by any chance?"

"No," replied the yacht agent. "We left the cabin door open to give plenty of fresh air. We've a couple of hands working on a boat alongside, so everything will be quite safe, even if your Sea Scout isn't on board."

Five minutes later the Sea Scouts had their first glimpse of the *Spindrift*. She was a powerful, able-looking craft, looking spick-and-span with her freshly painted topsides and newly varnished spars and cabin-top. Apparently her sails had been hoisted for airing purposes during the morning, for the sail covers were off and the canvas loosely furled.

For the moment, it must be confessed, Desmond was forgotten. In their eagerness to inspect their new possession Scoutmaster and Sea Scouts jumped on board and went below.

"What a decent cabin!" exclaimed Hayes. "Almost as big as the *Ocean Bride's*."

"But not quite so high," added Findlay, speaking feelingly, for he had just seen a galaxy of stars through his head coming in contact with a deck-beam.

"Two bunks," continued Hayes.

"Four," corrected Jock. "Those seats form bunks, and there are two swinging cots above them. And here's the fo'c'sle. Quite a posh affair."

It was certainly larger than the average run of fo'c'sle in craft of that size. One portion was partitioned off, forming a pantry to starboard and a galley to port. On either side were "spered" lockers, giving plenty of fresh air, while above were two folding cots. Right for'ard was the chain-locker, while the floor space was occupied by a miscellaneous assortment of ropes, blocks, navigation lamps, bucket and mop, and other articles of a yacht's equipment.

Meanwhile Mr. Graham had gone ashore to interview the two workmen concerning Desmond. Already he was pretty certain that the Patrol Leader hadn't been on board. Had he been so he would have carried out the Scoutmaster's instructions and rested his foot. None of the leather cushions in the cabin bore traces of having been sat upon recently; nor was there any sign of Desmond's kit.

Having once been on board he was not likely to have gone off without leaving his blankets and other baggage behind him.

The boat-builders were emphatic that no one except the employees of the firm had been on board that morning or afternoon—not even during the dinner hour, for they had brought their food with them, since they lived at Stratton, a good two miles away.

"Lads!" exclaimed Mr. Graham. "We haven't found Desmond."

"I forgot all about him, sir," admitted Findlay. "Where do you think he is?"

"I can't say," replied the Scoutmaster. "He may have missed a train. He had to make one change."

"But he was seen along the canal, sir," said Hayes. "The description was correct: he limped."

"Limping is not an unusual thing, especially in the holiday time," rejoined Mr. Graham. "Galled heels, feet cut by glass while bathing, a hack while skylarking—there are a dozen common causes; so we can't be certain that the Scout was Desmond. I'll go across to the railway station and make inquiries."

"Shall we come too, sir?" asked Findlay.

"Hardly necessary, Jock," was the reply. "You've had quite enough walking for to-day. While I'm away you might overhaul the halliards and see how they lead. Hayes can square things up in the fo'c'sle and see about getting the galley stove under way."

Mr. Graham set off on his quest. He was certainly anxious about Desmond. The lad was a level-headed youth who knew how to take care of himself, and his failure to put in an appearance was therefore more of a serious matter than if he had been an irresponsible lad. And had Desmond not been of a dependable character, the Scoutmaster would not have allowed him to make the railway journey alone.

On inquiry Mr. Graham was informed, by a porter who collected the tickets, that a Sea Scout carrying his kit and having a slight limp had arrived by the twelve o'clock train, and, in order to confirm his statement, he produced the

tickets given up by passengers by that train. Amongst them was one single from Launceston to Bude.

Armed with that information, the Scoutmaster made his way to the harbour. It was now nearly low tide, and the natural breakwater of kelp-covered rocks was high and dry. On it was a rough track leading to the bathing pool known as Sir Thomas's Pit. Was it probable that Desmond had gone for a bathe and had met with an accident? Hardly likely, otherwise the news would have spread. There were always numerous bathers on this spot, and, besides, Desmond's clothes were marked with his name. Nor was he likely to have been cut off by the tide, for at noon it was just about to ebb. The suggestion that the lad might have fallen over the cliffs was also a subject for mental debate; but this Mr. Graham rejected. A lad with a wound on his toe was hardly likely to indulge in the pastime of scaling cliffs.

Greatly perturbed the Scoutmaster returned to the *Spindrift*. It was now nearly six o'clock. Desmond even had he loitered anywhere—a thing he was very unlikely to do—ought to have put in an appearance long before that time.

Stopping only to drink a cup of tea and eat a bullybeef sandwich, Mr. Graham resumed his quest. Another visit to the yacht agent's place proved unsatisfactory. The foreman could give no further information; none of the other hands could throw any light upon the matter.

The Scoutmaster's next step was to board the two coasters. The master of each was sympathetic, but could not give any news of the missing Patrol Leader. Inquiries of the coast-guard were equally fruitless.

"Bless you, sir!" exclaimed the look-out man. "We get dozens of youngsters up-along here all day. Unless they get too near the cliff or start heaving stones at the hut we don't take much stock of 'em. He'll turn up all right, sir, never you fear. If he'd a-come to harm you'd have 'eard about it long ago. Still, I'll keep my eyes open an' I'll warn my relief when he takes over."

Undecided in his mind as to what course he should now pursue, Mr. Graham was like the proverbial "cat on hot bricks" during the rest of the evening. Being responsible for the missing boy he hesitated to telegraph to Desmond's parents. Should the Patrol Leader turn up safe and sound it would be a false alarm, calculated to cause needless anxiety to them. On the other hand, if anything



serious had befallen the lad it was gross remissness on the Scoutmaster's part not to have communicated with his people at Southend.

The same argument applied to the suggestion of communicating with the local police.

"Hang it all, Findlay!" exclaimed Mr. Graham at length. "I can't stick this any longer. We'll search together for him. Hayes, you had better remain here in case Desmond puts in an appearance while we are away."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied both lads promptly.

## CHAPTER XV

### How Desmond Fared

Patrol Leader Desmond's chief inclination, upon arriving at Bude railway station, was to make the acquaintance of the *Spindrift* as soon as possible. He had two reasons for so doing: he wanted to see what the yacht was like; he also wished to rest his injured foot in order to get it well as quickly as he could. The thought of being an idler on board, when there was plenty of work for all hands, was repugnant to a fellow of his energetic character.

On making inquiries, he was directed to follow a footpath crossing a stream and leading to the lock gates.

"That's the *Spindrift*," he said to himself, as the slender masts of a small craft came into view, "or perhaps she's that 'two sticker' lying farther up. I'd better ask someone."

The first person he met was a freckled-faced, curly-haired seafaring man with earrings. He wore no hat, but the visible part of his attire consisted of a loose canvas jumper, a pair of tanned trousers, and brown canvas shoes. He only wanted a musket slung across his shoulder, brace of flint-lock pistols, and a

sheath-knife to be the living counterpart of a seventeenth-century buccaneer.

"Please can you tell me if that is the yacht *Spindrift*?" inquired Desmond politely.

The man looked him up and down before replying. "Ay, 'tes 'er," he announced briefly.

"Thank you," rejoined the Patrol Leader, and was about to resume his way when the man addressed a string of questions uttered in the broadest Cornish dialect.

Desmond shook his head. He did not understand a single sentence.

The man merely grinned, and, without attempting to repeat his words, rolled unsteadily away.

"Funny sort," soliloquized the Patrol Leader. "Looks as if he hasn't lost his sea-legs. But I've found out what I wanted to know."

Arriving at the canal basin, Desmond saw that the ketch was lying alongside the farthest wall. To get to her necessitated a considerable *détour*, and, in addition, he had to cross a plank bridge over the lock gates.

As he limped along, Desmond took stock of the little craft. She was spoon-bowed, with a raking transom. There was no name painted on her stern, nor anywhere else as far as the Patrol Leader could discover. Her tanned sails were uncoated and loosely furled ready to be hoisted.

Getting on board with no little difficulty, Desmond found that the cabin doors were locked, which was rather what he expected. The circular hatch in the fore-deck was, however, open.

"Good enough," thought the lad. "I can get into the cabin through the door in the fore'ard bulkhead."

He lowered himself into the fo'c'sle. For some seconds he was almost blinded by the sudden change from the dazzling sunshine to the gloom below, especially as his bulk intercepted most of the light from the open hatch.

Rather to his disappointment he found the sliding door closed and bolted on the inside. If he were to gain admittance it would be necessary to obtain the key from the person in charge of the yacht. Desmond was hot, tired, and feeling a fair amount of pain in his injured toe.

"Not worth the fag," he contended. "I'll turn in here."

The fo'c'sle boasted a couple of cots, one folded back against either side of the boat. What struck Desmond as being remarkable was the presence of a number of enamelled cups, saucers, and plates that badly wanted washing up, together with the fragments of a meal consisting of bully beef, sardines, and tinned apricots.

"I expect the workmen have been grubbing here," he hazarded. "They're not Scouts, or they would never have left the place in such a mess."

There was a Primus stove in the gimbals, and close to it a saucepan half filled with lukewarm water. On a nail in the sliding door was a tea-towel.

Desmond set to work with a will to wash up the plates and dishes and to stow them away. This done—it was hot work in the confined space, what with the sun shining on deck and the heat of the stove below—the Patrol Leader felt more tired than before.

Lowering one of the cots, and using a sail-bag for a pillow, Desmond turned in. For a while his toe throbbed painfully, then the desire for sleep overcame every other sensation, and he was soon in a deep, dreamless slumber.

Ten minutes later Tom Truscott and Dick Wilde, part-owners of the 8-ton, centre-board ketch *Spanker*, came hurrying along the canal bank to the accompaniment of a series of exhortations to, "'Urry up if yer want to get through afore yon schooner locks in," from the energetic lock-keeper.

Both men were young, hefty, full of action, and keen yachtsmen. They had come "round the Land", and were making their way by easy stages to Penarth. Three days previously they had put into Bude through stress of weather, and were about to set sail for Lundy Island and the South Wales coast.

There was little time to be lost. Men on the breakwater were tracking-in a topsail schooner, and, as it was close on high water, the vessel was coming

straight into the canal basin. Directly the gates were open there was an opportunity for the *Spanker* to go out under headsails before the limited expanse was still further impeded by the arrival of the topsail schooner.

Truscott and Wilde were deft hands at their work. They went about it with the minimum of noise. Since the yacht was moored alongside a wall, there were merely ropes to be cast off and headsails hoisted. Getting up the anchor to the accompaniment of the rattling of a winch and the clanking of chain cable did not figure in the operation. Almost as silently as a wraith the ketch glided through the lock, and, with the wind well on the port quarter, stood steadily seaward.

Truscott was at the helm, while his companion, after descending into the cabin and lowering the centre-board, proceeded to set first mizzen and then mainsail.

Half an hour later the north Cornish coast grew dim in the summer haze.

"Thought we'd have found more wind out here," remarked Truscott. "What about setting the topsail?"

"Right-o," assented Wilde. "Ten to one we'll have to douse it before we make Lundy. There's wind about—plenty of it before long."

"All right then," said his companion. "Don't bother about the jack-yarder. Send the jib-headed topsail aloft. She'll carry short for all the wind we're likely to get to-day."

Wilde went for'ard to get the required sail, which was stowed in a bag in one of the fo'c'sle lockers.

"Jehoshaphat!" he ejaculated. "We've a jolly stowaway on board, old man! There's a boy sound asleep in one of the fo'c'sle cots."

"Good job we did lock the cabin, then," rejoined Truscott. "What sort of young blighter is he?"

"A Sea Scout," announced the other.

"A Sea Scout?" snorted Truscott contemptuously. "Never came across one yet who was any good. Sort of glorified beach-combers—useless when by chance they do go to sea. I hope to goodness he doesn't muster his bag in our fo'c'sle.

What's to be done with him."

"He's here on board," said Wilde, stating an obvious fact.

"And here he stops," added Truscott grimly. "If he doesn't like it that's his funeral. I'm not putting back to land a rotten stowaway. Get him out of it—sling a bucket of water over him!"

"That's all very well," objected Wilde with a laugh. "But who's going to mop up the fo'c'sle? I know a way."

From one of the cockpit lockers he produced a long metal fog-horn—a kind of exaggerated trumpet. Going for'ard he lowered the instrument until the horn was within six inches of the sleeping lad's face, then, distending his cheeks, Wilde blew a long, ear-splitting, discordant blast.

Intensified by the confined space the terrific roar awakened Desmond only too effectually. He sat up, caught his head on one of the deck-beams, and subsided with his hands held to his aching forehead.

"Sorry, I am really!" exclaimed the genuinely repentant Wilde, who had never anticipated such a sequel. "I only meant to turn you out. What are you doing here?"

Desmond made no reply. He was a little dazed, deafened, and completely mystified at being rudely awakened to unfamiliar surroundings. He slid out of the cot and sat upon one of the lockers, blinking at the disturber of his slumbers.

"What are you doing here?" repeated Wilde.

"This is the Sea Scouts' yacht *Spindrift*," declared Desmond. "I——"

"First I heard of it," interrupted the other with a laugh. "This is the *Spanker* of Dartmouth, for Penarth; and at Penarth you'll be set ashore, unless we drop across some Bude fishing-boats. That isn't likely, as they are generally away down west'ard."

"Then I've made a mistake," said the Patrol Leader.

"First time I've known a Scout to admit that," rejoined Wilde drily. "However,

come aft and tell your yarn to my chum."

It was soon apparent to the partners that Desmond had made a genuine blunder. His open narrative carried conviction, and the annoyance that the two men had shown when the stowaway had been discovered quickly evaporated.

"With luck, you'll be with your pals by noon to-morrow," observed Truscott. "We'll send you back by train from Penarth, unless there's a joy-boat running from Cardiff to Ilfracombe. Hello, Wilde old man: wind's heading us."

During the last few minutes the wind had veered through sixteen points of the compass. It had been from the sou'-sou'-east; now it was nor'-nor'-west.

Tending sheets occupied the crew's attention, and the conversation ceased. Desmond, perched upon the weather-rail, wanted to bear a hand. Inactivity bored him. In spite of his injured foot, he knew he could be of use if required, but his natural hesitation to thrust himself forward in the presence of strangers held him to silence.

"There's Lundy," announced Truscott, as a faint blurr appeared through a partial dispersal of the haze.

"Wind's piping up, too," added his chum. "How about handing that topsail? It isn't doing much good close-hauled."

Truscott glanced aloft. The topsail was acting up to its reputation of being the first sail to shake.

"Right-o!" he agreed. "Down with it."

Wilde went for'ard, cast off topsail sheets and halliards, and commenced to haul down.

"Dash it all!" he exclaimed. "The halliard's jammed. I always said that sheave was too small."

"Can you steer?" demanded Truscott abruptly, turning to the Patrol Leader. "Yes? Right-o, here you are."

Desmond found himself in possession of the tiller, while Truscott went for'ard

to bear a hand with the stubborn topsail.

It did not take Desmond very long to "get the hang" of the helm. Used to small-boat sailing, he quickly found that it was quite an easy matter to keep a yacht on her course without yawing. Had the *Spanker* been running, it might have been rather difficult; close hauled the ketch almost sailed herself, save for an occasional touch of the helm as she tended to come up into the wind.

"That youngster knows what he's about," remarked Truscott in a low voice. "He won't get her in irons. I'll go aloft and clear the blessed sail."

Truscott was a burly fellow. He went aloft, holding on to the staysail halliards and getting a foothold on the mast-hoops. Gaining the cross-trees, he balanced himself on the slender galvanized-iron spreader and stretched for the jammed rope.

image: IMAGENAME1

[Illustration: BOTH MEN TUMBLED ON THE CABIN-TOP *Page 145.*]

As he did so the weather-arm of the cross-trees gave way under his weight. So quickly did the metal-work give, that Truscott had only time to grip the topmast shroud as he fell. His grasp was sufficient to check his downward path, but the wire shroud cut deeply into his hands. He had to let go.

Wilde, seeing his companion's predicament, pluckily broke his fall. Both men tumbled in a confused heap upon the raised cabin-top, fortunately on the wind'ard side, or both might have been thrown into the sea.

Lashing the helm, Desmond hastened to their assistance. He stubbed his already injured toe upon a cleat as he did so, but in the excitement of the moment he hardly noticed that the wound had reopened.

Both men had to be assisted into the cockpit, for they were shaken by the concussion. In addition, both of Truscott's hands were lacerated across the palms, while Wilde had sustained an injury that Desmond correctly diagnosed as a broken collar-bone. It was pretty obvious to the Patrol Leader that he was the only capable hand left on board, and that upon him would devolve the management of the ship.

Desmond's first step was to haul the headsail sheets to wind'ard. Fortunately the *Spanker* was an admirable craft when hove-to. She was now as steady as she could possibly be, forging ahead at less than one knot.

"I'm all right," protested Truscott. "There's a tar-pot and some waste up for'ard. Nothing like a flick of tar to stop bleeding."

Desmond did not view these rough and ready methods of first-aid with anything like approval. Tar, in itself an excellent disinfectant, was hardly suitable for a deep wound in which, more than likely, fragments of rusty wire were embedded.

"I've a first-aid outfit in my kit," he announced, "if you don't mind washing your hands, while I see what I can do for your chum."

"Good lad!" exclaimed Truscott approvingly.



The Patrol Leader fetched his outfit from the fo'c'sle and proceeded to attend to Wilde's injuries. This done, he carefully bandaged Truscott's cuts with boric lint, and not until both men were fixed up as comfortably as possible did Desmond re-dress his own injuries.

"Hadn't we better put back?" he inquired. "I can take the yacht into Bude, but I don't know the Bristol Channel."

Somewhat to Desmond's surprise, Truscott, "who wasn't going to put back for anything or anybody" according to his own words a couple of hours ago, offered no objection. His views of Sea Scouts, and this one in particular, had undergone a rapid change. He knew that Desmond's plan was a sound one. It was a hazardous task for a youth practically single-handed to sail the *Spanker* almost dead to wind'ard for a matter of fifty or sixty miles of strange waters, when Bude lay an easy distance dead to lee'ard.

"Carry on," he replied. "Can you get her about? Don't gybe her."

Desmond had no intention of gybing. Casting loose the tiller, and trimming the headsail sheets to lee'ard, he soon got way on the vessel. Then, putting her helm down, he "went about" and steered for the now invisible Cornish coast.

Three hours later, for the wind had dropped considerably, the land loomed up. It was unfamiliar ground. Hartland Point, which Desmond had noticed on the outward passage, was nowhere to be seen. Right ahead was a bold promontory crowned with a few scanty ruins.

He called Truscott from the cabin.

"What's that point, sir?" he asked.

Truscott gave a low whistle.

"You're a little out of your course, my lad," he declared. "That's Tintagel. Bude is twelve miles to the nor'-east'ard. Bring her close to the wind. We may fetch it without tacking, but I'm doubtful."

It was Desmond's lack of navigation that had been responsible for the error. Simply reversing the compass course for the return run was not enough. He had omitted to take into consideration the strong tide running to the sou'-west, with

the result that the yacht had made her landfall a dozen miles to lee'ard of her destination.

"Live and learn," thought Desmond philosophically. "I'll know better next time."

The *Spanker* was now close-hauled on the port tack, and, although she was able to lay on her course, the wind had fallen so light that she was hardly able to stem the adverse tide.

"It doesn't very much matter, my lad," remarked Truscott. "You wouldn't have been able to get the *Spanker* into harbour until close on high-water. Better keep on sailing than lying at anchor in a ground-swell."

"That's all very well," added Wilde, "but how about my collar-bone?"

"I've not forgotten it, nor my hands either," rejoined his chum, with a faint show of asperity. "My head's aching like anything."

"So's mine," said Wilde, "so you've nothing to make a song about."

Desmond heard, but said nothing. It seemed strange to him that two chums should start wrangling on board a small craft. But a few minutes later amicable relations were resumed as suddenly as they had been interrupted.

At six o'clock the yacht was hove-to once more, while the handy Sea Scout prepared and served a meal. Shortly after, the tide turned, and the *Spanker* made better progress, although the breeze was paltry and inclined to be fluky. Nine o'clock found her off Compass Point, the southern boundary of Bude Haven, and Desmond had another experience: that of waiting for enough water to make the entrance.

At last, with centre-plate up, the *Spanker* ran in. Fortunately for Desmond the wind was very light. Wilde, with his uninjured arm, held the tiller, while the Sea Scout lowered first mainsail, then mizzen, jib, and finally the staysail.

Gradually losing way, the ketch was brought alongside the stone wall outside the lock and made fast. In the fading twilight Desmond was delighted and surprised to recognize Mr. Graham's voice.

"Thank Heaven I've found you!" exclaimed the Scoutmaster gratefully. "What have you been doing, Desmond?"

It was Truscott, erstwhile scoffer of Sea Scouts, who replied:

"Doing a rattling good turn, sir. We'd have been tied up in knots if it hadn't been for Patrol Leader Desmond."

## CHAPTER XVI

### The Outboard Motor

It was midnight before the crew of the *Spindrift* turned in, but for once the regulation for "lights out" at ten was waived. Findlay and Hayes had to be told a detailed account of Desmond's adventure; while Desmond had to hear the story of the fruitless search for the missing Patrol Leader. The belated supper was a protracted affair, and yarning seemed to be going on indefinitely, until the Scoutmaster reminded his youthful crew that, all being well, the homeward voyage was to be commenced within the next twelve hours.

All hands were up and about by eight the next morning. There was still much to be done, overhauling gear, taking in provisions, and making all snug. After breakfast they paid a visit to the *Spanker*. Truscott and Wilde had both received medical attention, and the doctor had inquired who had dressed their injuries.

"He said it was a splendid job," declared Truscott. "They call sailors 'handy men', but, by Jove! I think Sea Scouts run them pretty close."

"When are you putting to sea again?" asked Mr. Graham.

"We don't know exactly," was the reply. "We've got to get fit, and we've sent for some chums of ours to give us a hand with the yacht. Fortunately, we are not tied to time."

"Let's hope you'll have better luck for your next venture," observed the Scoutmaster.

"We might have had a jolly sight worse luck than we did," rejoined Wilde, "if it hadn't been for Desmond. The average lad would have been scared stiff if he'd found himself on a strange yacht in the Bristol Channel with a couple of crooked-up blighters like us."

"Hurry up, if you want to pass through the lock!" shouted a peremptory voice.

The Sea Scouts brought their visit to a hasty termination. Scoutmaster and Scouts ran back to the *Spindrift*, the ropes were cast off, and the ketch tracked along the bank and through the wide open gates.

"Good luck!" shouted the crew of the *Spanker* as the *Spindrift* glided past.

"Jump aboard, lads!" ordered Mr. Graham.

Findlay and Hayes, who had been tracking the ketch to the gates, leapt upon her deck. Desmond was at the helm, while the Scoutmaster directed the setting of the canvas.

"Up staysail and mizzen first, lads!" he ordered. Slowly the *Spindrift* forged ahead, aided by the light south-easterly breeze. Not until mainsail and jib were set did she heel slightly to the wind, and the water began to ripple and gurgle as her stem cut its way seaward.

"Isn't this fine, sir!" exclaimed the Patrol Leader. "She's carrying just a little weather-helm. She's as stiff as a house."

"Let's hope she'll prove so in a hard blow," rejoined Mr. Graham, as he unfolded a chart and spread it upon the cabin top.

"Where are we making for to-day, sir?" asked Desmond.

"Only to Padstow," was the reply. "I want to test the *Spindrift's* capabilities before we undertake a long run. This coast isn't like the Essex shore. There aren't harbours every few miles. Keep her on Carnbeak, Desmond. That's the point right ahead—but I suppose you know that already."

"Do I not, sir!" said the Patrol Leader with a laugh. "I thought yesterday that we'd never pass it. The tides do run hot on this coast."

It was a pleasant, almost uneventful sail. Mr. Graham exercised the crew, getting them to go-about, gybe, heave-to, and shoot the yacht up into the wind in order to pick up the lifebuoy, which he threw overboard without warning—to practice "man overboard!" evolutions.

People ashore must have speculated on the cause of the *Spindrift's* antics; but there was method in the Scoutmaster's madness. It was all very well to put to sea under ideal conditions and to be unprepared for eventualities. Mr. Graham meant to make his crew capable of "knocking down a couple of reefs", and, until they could do this smartly and without unnecessary fuss, he kept them at it.

By the time the *Spindrift* was abreast of Carnbeak the Scoutmaster announced his satisfaction at the way the crew had carried out their task. Already they had "got the hang of things". They knew where each sheet and halliard was belayed, so that there would be no confusion when it came to shortening or stowing sail. Each lad took his trick at the helm, so as to get accustomed to the pull of the tiller and the amount of helm necessary to put the yacht about without causing her to miss stays and get in irons, for the *Spindrift's* long keel and pronounced forefoot made her rather slow in going about.

There was no need to hasten. The day was long, the run short. So the *Spindrift* hugged the shore as closely as possible without danger of hitting any of the numerous outlying rocks. She edged inside Meachard in order to give her crew a peep at the miniature Boscastle Harbour; Tintagel Head and Castle were viewed from seaward, the legendary fortress of King Arthur affording the crew a source of deep interest. Then, skirting Trebarwith sands, the yacht brought up in Port Isaac while the crew had a meal on deck, satisfying the inner man while their eyes feasted upon the picturesque aspect of the little Cornish fishing village.

Six o'clock found the *Spindrift* off Pentire Point with the whole of Padstow Bay opened out.

"We'll be anchored by half-past six," observed Hayes the optimist.

But alas for that conjecture! He had reckoned without the baffling entrance to Padstow, where, if the wind be light outside, it is necessary to depend upon either power or oars to make the intricate channel; while, if there is a strong,

commanding breeze, the breakers on the dreaded Doombar render the approach to Padstow unsafe.

All went well with the ketch *Spindrift* and her crew until she was abreast of Stepper Point on the starboard hand. Then the sails began to shake. Gradually she lost way until the coast no longer appeared to glide by.

"Timber topsails, lads!" exclaimed Mr. Graham cheerfully. "A little work with the sweeps won't do us any harm."

Bidding Desmond keep his weather eye lifting for puffs that might sweep down over the cliff, the Scoutmaster took one oar while Findlay manned the other. It was hot, tiring work. Progress was slow, and although, after half an hour's unremitting toil, the *Spindrift* was a mile inside Stepper Point, the anchorage off Padstow seemed as far off as ever.

"I wish we had a motor," said Findlay, breathlessly, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Well, we haven't," rejoined Hayes, "and we aren't likely to have one yet awhile. We're jolly lucky to get the yacht as she is."

"Then come and do a bit with the sweeps," was Findlay's pointed invitation.

Before Hayes could "take on", Desmond exclaimed:

"Stand by! There's a breeze ahead!"

The next instant the *Spindrift* heeled to a free puff. Gathering way she quickly glided up the channel, rounding to and dropping anchor within half a cable's length of Padstow Quay.

After everything was made snug, the dinghy was manned and the three Sea Scouts set out for the shore, Mr. Graham volunteering to keep anchor-watch in their absence.

Close to the *Spindrift* was a "sixteen-footer", in the stern sheets of which knelt a very red-faced man, struggling with a refractory outboard engine. Through sheer exhaustion he desisted as the Sea Scout's dinghy passed.

"Say, you lads," he exclaimed breathlessly. "Do you ever use strong language? If you don't, you would if you had this brute of a pig to deal with."

"What's wrong, sir?" asked Desmond, signing to his chums to lay on their oars.

"What's wrong?—everything," declared the exasperated man. "I bought this diabolical contraption ten days ago. Unpacked it—shoved it into a bath and started it up. First swing of the fly-wheel she fired—the wallpaper isn't dry yet, and my cat got a stream smack in her face. I haven't seen her from that day to this. Took the engine on board next day and tried again. Fire she wouldn't. Did every mortal trick I knew to get her to go—I've had twelve years experience with internal combustion engines. All that day I struggled with her; then I wrote off to the makers. They replied they'd send an expert down if I'd pay expenses."

He broke off his narrative to give a couple of vicious tugs at the fly-wheel. The motor remained silent and vibrationless.

"It does me good to get it off my chest," he continued breathlessly. "You lads interested?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"Well, I made the makers a sporting offer. 'Send the expert down,' said I, 'and if he gets the brute to go within half an hour I'll pay. If he doesn't, you jolly well pay all expenses.' They agreed, and next day the expert comes over from Plymouth. 'Now then, my dear sir,' said I, 'get on with it.' Get on with it he did. He fiddled about for less than a minute, gave one pull at the fly-wheel and off she went like a Maxim gun. 'There you are,' he exclaimed. 'Give her sufficient petrol and I'll guarantee her to keep going for twenty-four hours.' That did me. I paid him up and back to Plymouth he went. Next morning I came on board to start her up. That was as far as it got. From that day to this I haven't got as much as a kick out of her—the obstinate mule!"

He took out the plug, "doped" it with petrol, and replaced it. Half a dozen swings produced no desired result.

"Close on forty pounds she cost me!" he exclaimed. "I've a jolly good mind to heave the blessed thing overboard."

"I wouldn't do that, sir," said Findlay.

The man gave him a swift glance. He was one of those easy-going moneyed men who act upon impulse.

The forty pounds was little or nothing to him. The motor, having aroused his resentment, was of no value in his eyes.

"Then I won't," he replied with a laugh. "Where are you from?"

Desmond told him.

"Look here," continued the internal combustion engine expert, "I'll make you a sporting offer. Take the bundle of scrap iron on board your boat and tinker about with it. I've done with the beastly thing. If you can make it go within the next hour you can have it for a fiver."

"I haven't anything like that amount," declared the Patrol Leader.

"Does that offer hold good as far as I am concerned, Sadler?" called out Mr. Graham. In the calm air he had heard every word of the conversation.

"By Jove! Graham, old son!" almost shouted the jaded victim of the outboard motor. "How on earth did you come to this part of the world? Here, you fellows, help me to unship the infernal contraption and take me aboard your craft."

The engine was unclamped from the transom and dumped on board the *Spindrift's* dinghy. Into her jumped Mr. Sadler, and the Sea Scouts rowed back to the *Spindrift*.

"Now we'll have a long kag about the good old times in the Harwich Patrol, Graham," exclaimed Sadler, gripping the Scoutmaster's hand. "Let your youngsters carry on with that rotten infernal machine. To see your familiar old figure-head again more than compensates me for hours of toil with that low-down motor. Now, then; fire away and tell me all the news about yourself."

While the two ex-R.N.V.R. men were exchanging reminiscences the three Sea Scouts took the motor for'ard. Findlay directed operations. He had a fairly sound knowledge of motor-bicycles, and the principles of an air-cooled engine varied very slightly from the two-stroke outboard motor that had completely baffled Mr. Sadler.



Findlay's first step was to clean the magneto. There were distinct evidences of moisture in the "make-and-break". Testing the plug on the cylinder he obtained a very healthy spark, but, when the plug was screwed home, there was not the faintest trace of firing.

"A regular mystery!" declared Jock. "Have that plug out again, Desmond old son."

Four times Findlay repeated the tests. The current easily ignited the dope in the plug when the latter was laid on the cylinder, but, as soon as the plug was replaced the petrol squirted, but it remained unfired.

"The clearance between the points is all right," he remarked, speaking to himself rather than to his companions.

For about half a minute he toyed seemingly aimlessly with the plug; then in an excited whisper he continued:

"I've got it, lads. At least, I think I have. Hand over that small spanner, Hayes. Thanks. Now bring our dinghy alongside. We'll try this little lad."

Very softly, so as not to disturb the occupants of the cabin (Findlay meant to give them a surprise), the outboard motor was clamped to the dinghy's transom. For the umpteenth time the engine was doped, and with bated breath Desmond and Hayes watched Jock grip the fly-wheel. One vigorous swing and the trick was done! With a series of rapid explosions the engine fired. Ahead shot the dinghy, the sudden acceleration capsizing Desmond and Hayes and throwing them in a heap upon the thwarts, while Findlay had only sufficient time to grasp the tiller and steer the dinghy clear of the yacht's side.

The roar of the motor brought Mr. Sadler and the Scoutmaster on deck. They were just in time to see Hayes and the Patrol Leader sorting themselves out, while Findlay, with a grin of triumph on his face, was steering the dinghy round the *Spindrift* at a speed that she had never before attained.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Sadler in sheer amazement. "However did they manage the trick?" Scoutmaster Graham smiled.

"You repent of your bargain, George?" he asked.

"Frankly, yes," was the reply. "Now that the old engine is letting out so nicely I rather regret my rashness. But a bargain's a bargain. Your lads have carried out their part, and I'll carry out mine."

The Sea Scouts careered about the harbour for nearly half an hour, and then brought the dinghy alongside and switched off the ignition.

"Will she start up again?" queried Mr. Sadler. In reply Jock gave the fly-wheel a sharp pull over. The engine fired immediately.

"She's yours," said the late owner, carelessly stuffing the five one-pound notes that Mr. Graham had given him into his pocket. "But tell me: what was wrong?"

"The plug, sir," replied Findlay.

"But it was a brand new one," rejoined Mr. Sadler.

"Yes, sir," explained Jock. "But the central rod was a little loose. There was the correct clearance between the points when the plug was out of the cylinder. When it was screwed home the rod touched one of the points, so there was no spark-gap."

"Well, good luck to you and your engine," said Mr. Sadler. "You deserve it, and the tip is well worth knowing. I'll order another outboard of the same type to-morrow."

## **CHAPTER XVII**

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of Cement**

"A regular Paddy's hurricane!" commented Desmond as he came on deck next morning.

Not a breath of wind stirred the air. The sky was clear; the placid waters of

Padstow Harbour were as smooth as a mirror. The smoke from the various chimneys ashore went up as straight as a plumb-line.

Findlay, stopping only to tap the barometer, followed his chum into the cockpit.

"Gass high and steady," he observed. "It's going to be a top-hole day. Wind nor'-east, when it does come, I fancy."

"It's a good thing we have a motor," added Hayes, glancing at his blistered hands. "The *Spindrift* is a regular brute to sweep along. How's that toe of yours, Desmond?"

"Much better, thanks," replied the Patrol Leader.

Mr. Graham, clad like the others in a bathing-suit, came on deck, glanced over the side to make sure that the tide was slack, and gave the signal.

The next instant four distinct splashes indicated that the crew of the *Spindrift* were taking a personal interest in the waters of Padstow Harbour. A vigorous swim, followed by a brisk rub-down, gave the lads a most healthy appetite.

"When do we make a start, sir?" asked Desmond, during breakfast.

"As soon as we've stowed everything away," was the reply. "We've a fairly long run to-day."

"Round Land's End, sir?" asked Hayes.

"Hardly," rejoined Mr. Graham. "We'll have to be satisfied if we make St. Ives before night. There'll be wind before very long. By the by, Findlay, while we are clearing away and snugging down, you might go ashore and get a couple of tins of petrol and a quart of lubricating oil."

Jock went off in the dinghy. Whilst he was away Hayes washed up, Mr. Graham dried the breakfast things, and Desmond stowed them away.

"Are we going to tow the yacht out with the dinghy, sir?" asked Findlay on his return.

"No, we'll have the motor on the *Spindrift's* transom," replied the Scoutmaster.

"For one thing, the propeller will be a fairly big drag for the dinghy when we're towing her under sail."

"We can unship it from the dinghy, sir," said Findlay. "It only weighs about forty or fifty pounds."

"Quite so," agreed Mr. Graham, "but even that weight requires some lifting in a small dinghy. If there's any roll on outside it will be a difficult matter to unclamp the motor and transfer it on board the yacht. We'll see what we can do now."

Luckily the edge of the transom projected a couple or three inches above the *Spindrift's* after-deck, and to this projection the outboard engine was clamped, and the propeller adjusted until it was the right depth below the surface. Meanwhile Findlay had mixed the petrol and oil in the right proportions and had filled the tank.

"We've quite a lot of water in the bilges, sir," announced Hayes, who had lifted up one of the floor-boards.

"Yes, by Jove, we have," agreed Mr. Graham. "She's probably not taken up properly. Get the pump going, Hayes."

The Sea Scout fitted the plunger and primed the pump. Then he gave a dozen vigorous strokes, without the desired result.

"Pump's not working, sir," he declared.

The Scoutmaster looked to see what was amiss. The lower valve was adrift. It was of the double-mushroom pattern, with a flange in the barrel and a nut in the suction-pipe to keep the valve in its place. Removing the lower valve by means of a hooked rod, Mr. Graham found that the nut had come unfastened, and was probably half-way down the pipe. Without it the valve was lifted completely out of its resting by the suction of the plunger.

"That's awkward, sir," said Desmond. "The pipe's soldered to the barrel instead of having the usual union. What's to be done?"

"We can't go to sea with a pump out of action," rejoined the Scoutmaster. "What do you suggest, Desmond?"

"Unshipping the whole concern and taking it ashore to be set right, sir," was the reply. "It's a plumber's job."

"It would mean a day wasted," objected Findlay. "It's a pity to miss this fine weather."

"Then what do you suggest, old son?" asked the Patrol Leader. "If you've a stunt in the back of your mind, out with it."

"I'd scrap the lower valve," declared Findlay.

"But you must have one, Jock," interrupted Mr. Graham, "otherwise the pump won't act."

"Yes, sir, I know," said the Sea Scout. "All we want is a hollow india-rubber ball, slightly smaller than the bore of the pump, and a handful of cement. Punch a small hole in the ball, fill it with dry cement, and then put it in water to set. That's your lower valve."

"Yes, and I fancy that will do the trick, Jock," agreed the Scoutmaster. "Nip ashore and see if you can get the things."

Findlay made a second trip in the dinghy. During his absence the others got rid of the bilge-water by the tedious process of baling out, since some hours must necessarily elapse before the cement would set.

On Jock's return the motor was started and the anchor broken out. At a modest three knots the *Spindrift* glided easily toward the open sea, as if to demonstrate the superiority of the little 2 3/4 horse-power engine over a pair of sixteen-feet sweeps manned by Sea Scouts.

Desmond was at the helm; the Scoutmaster and Findlay were engaged in setting canvas in contemplation of a breeze outside; while Hayes, armed with bucket and mop, proceeded to remove the mud from the ketch's deck and to clean the slimy ooze from the anchor.

"We're in luck, sir!" exclaimed the Patrol Leader, as Trevose Lighthouse opened out on the port bow. "There's a breeze coming up right aft."

It was a fairly long time coming, but when it did arrive the breeze was a fair

and steady one. The motor was switched off and hoisted inboard, sheets were trimmed, and lee-runners slacked away. Although the tide was against her, the *Spindrift* was soon slipping steadily past the rock-bound coast.

Findlay set to work with the cement and the india-rubber ball. It was rather a troublesome task, as, in the rising wind, the powdered cement was blowing all over the yacht; but at last the ball was filled as tightly as possible and then dropped into a pail of water.

"It will be set by the time we drop anchor," he declared.

Three hours steady run brought the *Spindrift* abeam of Newquay. Then, clearing the Goose and the Chick—two outlying rocks—she squared off towards St. Agnes' Head.

"Fine piece of coast, this," observed Mr. Graham. "You'd hardly imagine those cliffs contained little harbours that did a roaring trade in the old smuggling days. There's Hanover Cove, Trevellas Porth, and Trevaunance Cove—picturesque little holes that from seaward would easily pass notice."

"What's the matter with the sea, sir?" suddenly exclaimed Hayes. "It's red!"

At that moment the *Spindrift* had passed over a clearly defined line. On one side the sea was of a deep green, on the other it was of a vivid red, the red patch extending in semicircular formation with its base shorewards.

"Mundic—a sort of arsenic refuse from the mines," explained the Scoutmaster. "There's a large mine over there, close to Trevaunance, and the pumps throw out the mundic waste into a stream that in turn carries it to the sea. All along the coast you'll see the same sort of thing. Now, how about lunch, you fellows? I'm jolly hungry, if you are not."

Findlay, as "cook of the day", went below to start up the stove and prepare the meal. There was a certain amount of rivalry between the lads in the matter of providing an appetizing meal, and Jock meant to "keep his end up".

Presently the fragrant odour of grilled steak wafted aft. The Scoutmaster, Desmond, and Hayes sniffed the air and nodded knowingly. Jock was going to do them well.

"All ready, you fellows!" he shouted.

The *Spindrift* was hove-to on the starboard tack, which meant that if she made any way at all it would be away from the shore. By this time the tide had changed, so that although hove-to she was still being carried towards her desired haven.

Into the cabin Scoutmaster and Sea Scouts scrambled. Findlay, proud as a peacock, served up the first course—pea soup. The hungry crew attacked it ravenously. They were too eager to talk.

After a few spoonfuls Desmond slowed down and watched his companions. Mr. Graham was somewhat critically examining the soup on his plate. Hayes had given up his portion as a bad job and was awaiting corroborative evidence.

"What's wrong?" asked the Patrol Leader.

"I don't know," replied Hayes. "It doesn't seem quite right, somehow. Does it, sir?"

Mr. Graham, thus appealed to, was about to give his verdict when Findlay came into the cabin from the fo'c'sle.

"Ready for second course, sir? Hello! Not finished yet. Is there anything wrong?"

"I suppose, Jock," observed the Scoutmaster, "I suppose you did make the soup from the packet labelled 'pea soup'?"

"Yes, sir," replied Findlay, getting red in the face.

"I thought perhaps it might have been a packet of ground oyster-shells for chickens that the grocer had given you in mistake for pea flour."

Findlay tasted a spoonful of soup.

"It certainly is gritty, sir," he admitted. "All right, I'll bring the steak. Hang on to those plates, Hayes."

Hayes, who was nearest to the fo'c'sle door, took the pile of tin plates, as

requested. He promptly dropped the lot.

"They're hot!" he exclaimed, holding his tingling fingers.

"Sorry," murmured Jock. "I meant them to be warmed. Pick them up with that cloth. I'm bringing in the steak and potatoes."

Judging by the rich brown appearance and savoury odour, the steak was done to a turn. But alas! Both meat and potatoes were as gritty and as unpalatable as the pea soup. It was only by carefully scraping the steak on all sides that it could be rendered eatable; while the potatoes, boiled to softness, would not yield to such treatment. Nor was the bread much better.

"I can't think what's happened, sir," said Findlay, abjectly apologetic.

"I can tell you, I think," rejoined the Scoutmaster. "Everything's smothered with cement dust, and the powder has solidified into little pellets. Look! This shelf is thick with white dust."

Desmond laughed good-humouredly.

"Poor old Jock evidently forgot that we belong to the Seal Patrol, sir," he exclaimed. "He thinks we are ostriches. Ostriches swallow chunks of stone and nails, don't they, sir?"

There was yet another course—jam tart—but Findlay had not the courage to produce it. Surreptitiously, a couple of hours later, he dropped it overboard. The pastry, as hard as iron, sank like a stone, which was not to be wondered at when Jock found that the remainder of the cement had toppled over into the jar containing the flour. In the dim light of the fo'c'sle he had failed to notice the catastrophe—hence the pastry composed of flour and cement in almost equal parts.

There was nothing to be done but to fall back upon bully beef and biscuits. Fortunately, these were in air-tight tins and had escaped the sand-storm which had swept over the cabin and fo'c'sle.

"Cheer up, Jock!" exclaimed Mr. Graham. "There's no harm done." ("I don't know about that," remarked Hayes *sotto voce*.) "It's merely a little object lesson in the advantages and disadvantages of the use of Portland cement."



## CHAPTER XVIII

### Good Luck in Disguise

The sorry repast over, the crew repaired on deck. Headsails were trimmed, and once more the *Spindrift* heeled to the freshening breeze. Godrevy Island and its lighthouse were presently abeam, and the expanse of St. Ives Bay lay ahead.

"Clinking breeze, isn't it, sir?" remarked Desmond.

"M'yes," admitted the Scoutmaster.

The Patrol Leader glanced inquiringly at him. The none too emphatic affirmative needed some explanation.

"This wind," continued Mr. Graham, "is rather bad for the tidal harbour of St. Ives. It may send in a nasty lop unless it pipes down before night."

Mr. Graham was particularly anxious to put into St. Ives, as it was a good port of departure for rounding Land's End, or "The Land" as it is described by seamen. But, with the wind east or nor'-east, the anchorage was undesirable, although there was little danger. An alternative was Hayle, where a safe but congested anchorage was to be found, but that meant considerable delay and increased distance for the next day's run. A high and steady glass decided the point; Mr. Graham made up his mind to make St. Ives.

Shortening sail, the *Spindrift* passed the end of the partly demolished breakwater and rounded-to. In ordinary circumstances it would have been possible to run out a warp to an iron post ashore and a stern line to one of the buoys; but such a course was now impracticable. The tidal harbour was so full of fishing craft that no post or buoy was available.

"We'll have to anchor, lads," he exclaimed. "Stream the buoy—clove hitch on the crown, there Jock. Let go!"

The wind was dying down, and there was only a slight roll. The picturesque little harbour took the Sea Scouts' fancy immensely. They were all eager to go ashore.

"Can't we have a meal in the town, sir?" inquired Hayes artlessly. "If we had it on board we might have to swallow another peck of cement."

"All right!" agreed Mr. Graham. "See that there's nothing loose on deck."

"Are there thieves about?" asked Findlay.

"No, I'm not thinking of that," replied the Scoutmaster, "otherwise one of us would have to remain on board. As a rule it's quite safe to leave anything about in these Cornish ports. The people are quite different from those of certain Thames Estuary places, where you daren't leave the slightest thing of value and expect to find it in the morning. No; what I'm thinking of is that the *Spindrift* may lie over a bit when the tide leaves her, and things on deck may roll off."

Ten minutes later the crew of the *Spindrift* were exploring the crooked, narrow, and picturesque streets of old St. Ives, built on a narrow neck of rocky ground called, for some inexplicable reason, The Island. There they inquired for the post office, for Mr. Graham had arranged to pick up letters at St. Ives.

There was a goodly budget, all hands receiving three or more missives. One was from Patrol Leader Bradley, of the 9th Southend Troop, who was one of the lads who had arranged to join the guardship at Wootton.

"DEAR SIR" (it ran),

"Johns, Dexter, Phillips, Wenlock, and I arrived here yesterday. We think it a top-hole place, but we wish we were with you on the yacht. There's not much news. Bedford cut himself last night, and this morning Coles fell overboard.

"Yours truly,  
"WILL BRADLEY,  
"P. L. 9th S. on S. Sea  
Scouts."

Another letter was from Tenderfoot Coles:

"DEAR SIR,

"We hope you are having a good time on the *Spindrift*. I hope to have a telegram from you telling Bedford and me to come to Plymouth as soon as possible. The other fellows came here yesterday, so we are pretty lively. I've just fallen overboard. A rope parted as I was hauling up the dinghy. There was no tide running, so I swam to the gangway, and Dexter hauled me up. I've changed and now I'm quite all right. Bedford cut his little finger with a tin-opener. It's not much. Phillips and I bound it up, and this morning it is almost healed.

"Yours Sea-scoutingly,  
"EDWARD COLES."

"Two youngsters write about the same incident," thought Mr. Graham. "One omits the most important part—how the accidents occurred and how they resulted. The other gives just the necessary details and no more. Coles will, I fancy, turn out to be a better Patrol Leader than Bradley is. One is practical, and the other is unimaginative. Bradley is a worker, but he has no initiative."

After a long walk along the cliffs, the Sea Scouts returned to the harbour to find the *Spindrift* lying high and dry, and with a pronounced list to starboard. Fortunately, she was fairly flat-floored and had been fitted with bilge-keels, so there was no cause for anxiety on the score of her not lifting to the rising tide.

Taking off shoes and stockings, the crew dragged their dinghy over the sandy bed of the harbour until they were close enough to secure the painter to the yacht's bumkin. Then, scrambling on board, they made the best of a bad job until the rising tide brought the *Spindrift* to an even keel.

It was now ten o'clock. Assuming that the tide would be half an hour later on

the morrow, Mr. Graham announced that he hoped to get under way sharp at eleven.

"And have a good night's rest, lads," he added. "To-morrow's cruise will be the heaviest of the lot, I fancy. We may not make Penzance until after dark."

The lads had a fairly restful night, but at five in the morning those sleeping in the bunks on the port side were summarily evicted by the *Spindrift* heeling well over as the tide left her. Findlay and Hayes, being on the starboard side, slept on, sublimely unconscious of their companions' discomfort, until Desmond slackened off their cot-lashings and tumbled them unceremoniously upon the floor.

They had breakfast in undignified postures, sitting on the rise of the starboard bunk with their feet propped against the panelling of the cabin. To the happy-go-lucky Sea Scouts it was part of the game. They made light of their discomforts, and of a heavy and substantial meal at the same time.

A trip ashore, performed almost dryshod on the bed of the harbour, occupied a part of the time before the *Spindrift* lifted. Then, as the tide rose and the angle of the yacht's deck became less and less, all hands set to work to prepare the vessel for sea.

At last she was afloat. With a light nor'-westerly breeze sweeping down over The Island the canvas was set and the cable hove short. Already the bilge had been pumped dry. The yacht had almost "taken up", and the pump now acted admirably, thereby compensating in a measure for Findlay's lavish use of powdered Portland cement.

"All ready?" shouted Desmond, who had charge of the yacht during this stage of the proceedings. "Cant her off on the starboard tack, Jock. Up with the anchor, Hayes, smartly now!"

The *Spindrift* heeled as Findlay hauled the staysail sheet a-weather. Hayes at the winch plied the lever vigorously. At first the cable came home quickly, then the strain became greater and greater until Hayes was unable to move the winch lever another inch.

"Up with it, Hayes," yelled the Patrol Leader.

"Can't," was the laconic response.

Quickly belaying the staysail sheet, Findlay went to his chum's assistance. Another half a dozen links came home, and then the cable remained rigid and immovable.

"Anchor's foul of something, sir!" reported Findlay breathlessly.

"Carry on!" was the Scoutmaster's only rejoinder.

The Sea Scouts knew the meaning of that "Carry on". It meant that they were on their mettle. They had to extricate the anchor by their own devices. The first thing they did was to secure the anchor-trig and haul on the trip-line. The latter was unequal to the strain. It parted well below the surface. Not for the first time was a trip-line a broken reed.

Then Desmond tried to break out the anchor by "sailing it out". Telling Jock to pay out plenty of chain, he got way on the yacht, first on one tack and then on the other. Every time the cable snubbed violently, but still the stubborn anchor retained its hold.

It was now about time, thought Mr. Graham, that he had a look in. Gaining experience was all very well when time was no object; but, with a long day's run in front of him, the Scoutmaster realized that every minute counted. Not only that, the tide was making rapidly, and the deeper the water the more difficult would be the task of freeing the fouled anchor.

Telling Findlay and Desmond to heave short, Mr. Graham went for'ard with a long boat-hook and a coil of three-inch manila, one end of which was bent to the anchor buoy. Sounding, the Scoutmaster confirmed his suspicions: the anchor had caught in a heavy ground-chain. His next step was to submerge the buoy with the boat-hook until he could pass it under the bight of the chain. This took a considerable amount of time and patience, but at length the buoy reappeared on the surface, while the rope to which it was attached had been passed under the chain itself. "Now we've settled the problem!" exclaimed Mr. Graham. "Cast off the cable from the wind, Findlay, and take a couple of turns with the rope. That's right, now heave on the winch." The two Sea Scouts did so until the three-inch manila was strained almost to breaking-point. They now realized what the Scoutmaster was about. The strain on the rope lifted the mooring chain clear of the ground. It now ought to be a simple matter to shake the anchor clear, stow it

on board, and ride to the rope until it required to be slipped.

It was a simple operation in theory. In practice Mr. Graham had done it successfully on several occasions, but this time the Scoutmaster had the mortification of finding that his practical demonstration was a failure. The anchor stubbornly refused to release its hold, and no power available could raise the bight of the mooring chain above the surface. For half an hour Mr. Graham persevered. By that time the strain on the rope had brought the yacht's bows down a good eighteen inches above her water-level.

"Slacken away, lads," he exclaimed. "We'll have to wait till low tide. There's no sailing for us to-day."

During the afternoon, a heavy ground-swell set in, followed by a gusty sou'-westerly wind. Consulting the barometer the Scoutmaster found that the glass had dropped three points in less than a couple of hours.

He no longer regretted that the *Spindrift* had been compelled to remain in port.

Presently the fishing-boats in St. Ives Bay came heading up for home under close reefed canvas. A little later a couple of boats ran round Fisherman's Reef with their mizzen sails set on their main-masts. Their mainsails had been split to ribbons. They were followed by a smack under jury-rig, her mast having parted five feet above the deck.

The Scoutmaster was immensely relieved that the *Spindrift* was not off Land's End.

At low tide all hands went over the side to retrieve the fouled anchor. One fluke had caught in a link, and the strain had forced it in so far that it could only be released by heavy blows with a hammer.

To prevent a repetition of the occurrence, the anchor was unshackled and the cable passed under the ground chain and brought back on board again.

"That will hold us all right," declared Findlay.

"My word, sir," said Hayes. "It would have been a bit rough outside, wouldn't it?"

"They say—those fishermen over there," remarked Desmond, "that the Sennen lifeboat had to go out to rescue the crew of a couple of schooners. Where is Sennen, sir?"

"Close to Land's End," replied Mr. Graham, while in his heart he was giving thanks to Providence that the *Spindrift* and her crew were not lying fathoms deep off the pitiless rocks of Cornwall.

## CHAPTER XIX

### The Fog

For the next two days the *Spindrift* remained at St. Ives, alternately rolling like a barrel or lying well over on the bottom of the harbour, according to the state of the tide. On the first of those two days it would have been sheer madness to attempt to put to sea: the yacht would have been dismasted or sunk before she came abreast of Pendeen. On the second the brief summer gale had moderated. The *Spindrift* might have made the passage round The Land successfully, but Mr. Graham deemed it prudent to wait until the sea calmed down. It looked quiet enough when viewed from the heights above St. Ives, but there were those long Atlantic rollers between Cape Cornwall and Land's End to be taken into account, to say nothing of the strong current setting towards the deadly Brisons.

The greater part of the time was spent ashore. Enthusiastic sailor-lads though they were, the Sea Scouts found that life afloat under these conditions was neither comfortable nor instructive. Sleeping on board, with the deck at an angle of 45 degrees was bad enough, but when it came to eating and living in a confined space that was rolling monotonously until the yacht's planks were awash, it was too much for the crew to endure.

At length, the glass began to rise slowly, after suffering a relapse that threatened a harder blow. The weather reports stated that a cyclone of considerable violence and with a narrow path had shifted towards the North Sea. Vessels putting in from the west'ard reported calm seas, while on the morning of

the third day a grey dawn prognosticated a return of fine weather. On a falling tide, and with less than a foot of water under her keel, the *Spindrift* slipped the friendly mooring-chain—their blessing in disguise—and stood out bound round The Land. A light nor'-westerly breeze was in her favour, although it was a case of long and short tacks until Zennor Hill was abeam.

"Is that Land's End, sir?" asked Hayes, pointing to a bold promontory on the port bow.

"No," replied the Scoutmaster, "that's Cape Cornwall. It looks to be the most westerly point of England, and its bold appearance rather bears it out. Don't expect too much of Land's End. Viewed from seaward it has rather a disappointing aspect compared with Cape Cornwall."

The latter cape rounded, the *Spindrift* stood well out to avoid the Brisons, tall detached rocks connected with the shore by a submerged reef, over which the tide swirls furiously.

Right ahead, a tall lighthouse reared itself from a low-lying ridge of rocks. It was the Longships, one of the beacons lighting the "Chops of the Channel".

"We don't have to go outside that, sir, do we?" asked Desmond, who was taking his trick at the helm. "The chart shows plenty of water between the Longships and the shore."

"No, inside," replied Mr. Graham. "You'll have to keep on a stern-bearing—keep the highest part of the northern Brison west'ard of the highest part of the southern Brison. That will take you through. There's Land's End, lads."

Before the noted promontory drew abeam, Mr. Graham saw something that caused him certain misgivings. He had wished to round The Land in calm weather. That wish was being satisfied; but with the calm came a sea-fog. Already the high ground above Land's End was being obscured by a pall of fleecy vapour.

To make matters worse the wind died away, leaving the *Spindrift* rolling sluggishly, with her canvas hanging idly from her swaying yards.

"We're in for a fairly thick fog, Desmond," said the Scoutmaster quietly. "Take a compass bearing of Land's End before it's shut out. Good: now keep her head



on sou'-by-east. Jock, start up the motor. The sooner we get into the English Channel the better."

Five minutes later the *Spindrift* was enveloped in the dense, clammy fog. From the cockpit it was impossible to see the bowsprit end, while the headsails, grey and grotesquely distorted, seemed baffling in their size and appearance.

Somewhere astern, the Longships Lighthouse was throwing out its fog-signals—two explosive rockets every five minutes. Faintly, and far ahead, came the hoarse bray of a steamer's syren. Ashore a dog was barking dismally—the noise too close to be appreciated by the crew of the fog-bound yacht; while in the flat calm, the roar of the surf upon the iron-bound coast was an audible reminder of the fate a small craft might expect should she be carried upon that dangerous shore.

It was the Scoutmaster's plan to hold on the present course until the yacht was well clear of the coast; then to shape a course up-Channel until the fog lifted. He was of opinion that it would be far safer to spend a day and a night afloat, if necessary, with plenty of sea-room, than to attempt to find his way into Penzance in a blinding fog, and to risk being swept ashore or being carried upon one of the numerous reefs or detached rocks which abound on the west side of Mount's Bay.

Although the *Spindrift's* compass had no deviation card, the Scoutmaster had verified it by taking various bearings on the run from Bude to St. Ives. He found that the compass was remarkably accurate with the vessel's head pointing between west and sou'-west; but whether there was an error in the compass on an easterly course he had not the slightest idea.

Consequently, he decided to take no undue risks on that score, and when, after an hour's steady progress under motor-power, the *Spindrift* was, according to his calculation, four miles south of Land's End, he ordered a course east-by-south.

The Sea Scouts had been caught out in fogs off the Essex coast several times. Then the usual procedure was to stand shorewards and drop anchor in about one fathom at low water, until the fog lifted. In such shallow water there was very little risk of being run down.

But in the present circumstances anchoring was out of the question. All they could do was to carry on with the utmost caution, until a lifting of the pall of

vapour gave them a chance of verifying their position.

Although the lads did not realize the gravity of the situation to the same extent as did their Scoutmaster, they felt far from happy. It was an eerie experience, forging ahead at about three knots through the mist. No longer could they hear sound from the shore. The noise of the exhaust from the motor deadened everything, the sharp reports reverberating as the sound was thrown back by the enclosing vault of fog.

Suddenly a loud whistling noise rent the air, its weird shriek outvoicing the roar of the motor.

"Down helm!" shouted Mr. Graham.

Findlay, who had relieved the Patrol Leader at the helm, put the tiller hard over. Even as he did so, a faint light appeared through the fog almost on top of the yacht. Then the crew had a brief glimpse of a large can-buoy, painted in black-and-white vertical stripes, as it swept past them, straining at its moorings in the strong tideway.

It was a narrow squeak. A few feet nearer and the *Spindrift* would have crashed violently into the buoy. Even her stout planks and heavy timbers could not have withstood the shock.

Five seconds later the buoy was lost in the mist, but as a parting reminder it emitted another long-drawn whistle.

"It's the Run-something Buoy, sir," said Desmond. "I saw the first three letters painted on the side."

"Runnelstone," said Mr. Graham. "It marks a dangerous rock off the coast. Fortunately, we were outside the buoy. Put her east-sou'-east, Jock."

Mr. Graham realized that there was something wrong. Although he had allowed, as he thought, ample margin, the original course was not sufficient to give the coast a wide enough berth. Either the compass was in error, or else a strong indraught of tide was setting the yacht ashore. By steering another point to the south'ard the *Spindrift* ought to be clear of everything.

Hour after hour passed in nervous tension. All the crew kept on deck, straining

their eyes needlessly, and listening for the faintest sound. In spite of oilskins, they were wet through. The fog, cold and clammy, seemed to penetrate everything. At one time, the fog-horns and wrens of several craft were distinctly audible. At another a bell clanged dolorously. But for the most part the yacht was in a zone of silence, broken only by the noise of the engine and the sullen splash of the water against her bows.

"Switch off the motor, Jock," said the Scoutmaster. "We haven't any too much petrol, and we may want the engine to help us into port."

"How far are we from Penzance now, sir?" asked Hayes.

"Bother the boy: he does ask awkward questions," thought Mr. Graham. He could not say, for the simple reason that he was out of his course; and to state that fact would be an admission of incompetence as far as his crew were concerned. It might also tend to put them in a state of alarm.

"We are not making for Penzance," he replied. "With the fog hiding everything it would be too risky to close the coast. So we are going to carry on all night, if necessary. With plenty of sea-room and a calm sea there's nothing much to worry about. Now, then. All hands below for tea. I'll take the helm until Desmond comes on deck to relieve me."

At length, the murky daylight began to fail. Night was approaching. The fog was as thick as ever, notwithstanding a faint westerly breeze that had sprung up.

Already canvas had been hoisted, and the *Spindrift* was gliding through the water at about 3 1/2 knots—forcing her way through the dense bank of vapour that, in the gathering darkness, could be felt—actually felt.

For hours not a sound had been heard from without. An uncanny silence was in the air. Even the breeze failed to give its tuneful song as it usually does when it hums through the rigging.

At ten o'clock a large steamer, going at high speed and blaring incessantly with her siren, passed within fifty yards of the little *Spindrift*; for a temporary lift in the fog showed her port light like a gigantic blur of fire. So great was the steamer's speed, that her bow wave broke completely over the yacht's weather side, causing her to roll so furiously that Hayes afterwards said it was as if the *Spindrift* was standing on her head.

"Not much use blowing our fog-horn," remarked Findlay. "They didn't take the slightest bit of notice."

"There's one good thing: they missed us," said Desmond.

Within the next half-hour half a dozen other craft were heard at varying distances, fortunately not close enough to cause apprehension.

Evidently the yacht was either crossing or converging upon one of the regular "lanes" of shipping; but curiously enough, Mr. Graham failed to detect any fog signals from shore stations. He had listened for the Lizard, and later on, the Eddystone, but in vain. He had to admit that he was completely out of his reckoning, but he made this admission to himself.

"Turn in, lads!" he ordered briskly. "Turn in all standing, except your shoes, in case you're wanted on deck in a hurry."

"How about you, sir?" asked the Patrol Leader. "Can't I take a watch, and let you turn in? I'm not at all sleepy really, sir."

"All right, then," agreed the Scoutmaster, inwardly glad to have company during the night watches. "You can do a trick with me on the understanding that you turn in at dawn. You others, watch below!"

Scoutmaster and Patrol Leader, both clad in oilskins in addition to their pilot jackets, prepared for their long trick. Desmond, supremely confident in his officer's capabilities, had lost that sense of dread which had gripped him in the early stages of the fog. He was rather enjoying the novelty of a night at sea in thick weather.

But not so Mr. Graham. The fog had upset all his calculations. Added to this, the obvious unreliability of the compass had destroyed his sense of direction. The leadline was all but useless. It was but twenty fathoms in length, and at no time during the fog had the crew been able to strike soundings.

It was a long night. At intervals Mr. Graham consulted the luminous dial of his wristlet watch, and was surprised to find how slowly the hours passed. Then there was more trouble with the compass. The light did not burn well, and condensation on the underside of the binnacle glass made it a matter of great difficulty to read the points. It was only by flashing his electric torch directly

upon the card that the Scoutmaster was able to shape a course.

Yet he "kept his end up", chatting on various subjects with his youthful companion, the while stifling the ever-present suggestion that the *Spindrift* was lost in the fog-enshrouded English Channel.

At last the blackness of the night gave place to a greyish light that indicated dawn. The fog still held and showed no sign of dispersal, while the wind held steadily from the same quarter.

"Daybreak, Desmond!" exclaimed the Scoutmaster, stretching his cramped limbs and yawning. "Down below you go. Turn Findlay out, and get him to make some hot cocoa before you turn in."

Five minutes later Jock thrust a tousled head through the companion and sniffed inquiringly.

"Where are we now, sir?" was the question Mr. Graham expected—and got.

"Still running up-Channel," was the Scoutmaster's unsatisfactory reply. "Until the fog lifts we must not close the shore."

"I'll give you a spell, sir, directly I've made the cocoa," said Findlay. "We haven't much fresh water left, sir. Only about a gallon."

Left to himself, Mr. Graham threw a used match over the side and watched it drift until it was lost to sight in the fog. By the rate at which it drifted, the Scoutmaster estimated the yacht's speed at three knots. Assuming that that speed had been maintained from the time the *Spindrift* rounded Land's End, she had already covered a distance of forty miles in thirteen hours—the time the tide was against her being equalized by an equal period when it was in her favour. That meant that she ought to be fifteen or twenty miles east-sou'-east of the Lizard, but Mr. Graham felt none too sure about that.

Presently, Findlay appeared with two cups of steaming cocoa and half a dozen dry biscuits on the lid of a tin.

"I've served out cocoa to the others, sir," he reported.

The Scoutmaster drank his cocoa gratefully, and began to nibble a biscuit. It

was only then that he realized how thirsty and hungry he was. He had carried on throughout the night without any desire to eat or drink, and maybe could have held on much longer had not Jock brought the meal on deck.

Then came the almost overpowering desire for sleep. More than once, Findlay, who was as fresh "as paint", caught Mr. Graham nodding his head over the tiller.

"Won't you turn in, sir?" asked the lad. "I'll keep her going and call you if there's anything to report."

Mr. Graham shook his head.

"I'll stick it," he declared. "When the fog lifts I may snatch a few minutes."

But alas for the Scoutmaster's resolution! Five minutes later he awoke with a start as the yacht ran up into the wind, and the slatting of canvas brought the three Sea Scouts hurriedly on deck.

"Take her, Jock," said Mr. Graham wearily, as he handed over the helm. "I must have a spell-o. I'll turn in on the cockpit floor. Kick me if you want me."

## **CHAPTER XX**

### **Captured**

"Fog's lifting, sir!"

The Scoutmaster opened his eyes and blinked at the welcome light. The good news seemed too soon to be true, but right ahead the sun was visible—a watery disc looming faintly through the dispersing vapour.

"Nine o'clock!" exclaimed Mr. Graham. "Have I slept all that time?"

"Only four hours, sir," replied Jock. "Nothing's happened, so we let you sleep

on."

Stiffly, the Scoutmaster sat up. A grating makes a hard bed, oilskins and greatcoat notwithstanding. Looking over the port coaming of the cockpit he found that the range of vision was limited to a distance of about a hundred yards, but there were indications that matters would improve in that direction. The wind too had increased, and was blowing more to the starboard quarter.

"That's much better, lads!" exclaimed the Scoutmaster. "I hope we've seen the last of the fog. It hung about much longer than usual."

"Where are we, sir?" asked the three Sea Scouts in chorus.

"That's a problem I'll leave you to find out," was the reply. "Get hold of the chart and let each of you pin-prick the position you think we are in. The winner gets a coco-nut when we put into port."

This competition kept the crew busy, as they argued amongst themselves and plied parallel rulers and dividers in an attempt to solve the problem.

The tail-end of the fog cleared fairly rapidly. By ten o'clock the horizon was visible, but land was nowhere in view.

"Shin aloft and see if you can sight land, Hayes," said the Scoutmaster.

Hayes, lithe and active as a kitten, went up to the cross-trees, grasping the main halliards and using the mast-hoops as foot-holds. Arrived at his perch twenty-five feet above the sea, he surveyed the horizon.

"There's land on our port quarter, sir," he reported. "Or it may be clouds," he added dubiously.

"Then that's the high ground behind the Lizard," thought Mr. Graham. "Steer nor'-nor'-east, Desmond," he added aloud, "and we'll make Plymouth Sound in a few hours."

At noon, when the Sea Scouts went to dinner, land was not in sight—not even from the cross-trees. At three in the afternoon, a faint blur to the nor'-west looked like land. Half an hour later the surmise proved to be correct.

It was a rocky coast, broken by lofty hills, but nowhere could Mr. Graham pick out the triangular-shaped promontory of Rame Head, the western portal to the approaches of Plymouth.

It was land, and that was all to be said about it. Somewhere within a few miles was a harbour. The Scoutmaster had no intention of having another night at sea, if it could possibly be avoided.

Again and again he examined the chart, and consulted *The Channel Pilot*, hoping to recognize the coast by means of the illustrations given in the book.

It might be Falmouth, or Fowey, or perhaps Plymouth—that gap in the coastline. He hoped the last, but he was far from feeling confident about it. Instinctively, the crew realized that their Scoutmaster was out of his reckoning. They treated it as a huge joke.

With a pair of binoculars slung round his neck, Desmond went aloft. Scanning the coast-line from his post of vantage he at length solved the knotty problem.

"It's the Start, sir!" he reported confidently. "And I can see Prawle Point, where we semaphored about young Gregory."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Graham sharply.

"It is, sir," declared the Patrol Leader.

Telling Desmond to come down, the Scoutmaster went aloft. Desmond was right. Through the powerful binoculars, the white lighthouse buildings on Start Point and the signal station at Prawle Point were unmistakably clear.

"That settles it," decided Mr. Graham. "We'll make for Dartmouth."

"Dartmouth, sir!" exclaimed Desmond. "I thought we were going to pick up Bedford and Coles at Plymouth?"

"Out of the question," rejoined the Scoutmaster. "We can't beat to wind'ard all that way and retrace our course. We'll wire them to join us at Dartmouth."

About twenty minutes later a topsail schooner, close hauled on the port tack, showed evident intention of crossing the *Spindrift's* bows. By the "Rule of the



Road at Sea" the latter, running free on the same tack, had to make way for her.

As the ketch passed astern of the schooner, whose name, painted in vivid yellow letters, was the *Gloria*, of Fowey, a short, thick-set man, wearing a reefer suit and a bowler-hat, hailed the *Spindrift*.

"Ahoy!" he bawled. "Can you heave-to, an' take a lad ashore?"

"What's the game, I wonder," remarked Mr. Graham to his companions. "Another sort of Gregory stunt?"

Apparently the skipper of the *Gloria* considered his request acceded to, for he ran the schooner up into the wind and backed his top-sail. The *Spindrift* also put her helm down, and hove-to about fifty yards from the schooner's starboard quarter.

"Anything wrong?" queried the Scoutmaster.

"Nothin' to speak of," was the reply. "'E's nephew o' mine, an' his old mother do live at Dartmouth. Us'll pick him up when we loads up at Plymouth for Littlehampton!"

"Right-o," rejoined Mr. Graham. "We'll put him ashore. We'll send our dinghy."

Although the sea was calm, the Scoutmaster decided that it was not worth the risk to run the *Spindrift* alongside the schooner. Findlay jumped into the dinghy and rowed off, returning with the passenger.

The crew of the *Spindrift* were not particularly impressed at the appearance of the newcomer. He was a freckled, red-haired youth of about eighteen, with a loose lip, and greenish eyes that had a strained, worried look. He waved his hand to the *Gloria* as the schooner filled her top-sails and resumed her course.

The youth was not at all backward at asking questions. He wanted to know all about the *Spindrift* and her crew, where they came from and where they were bound for; why they weren't running the motor, and when did they expect to make Dartmouth?

On the other hand, he was very communicative when the Sea Scouts questioned him, and was as outspoken as the misjudged Gregory had been

reticent.

Choosing the inshore passage inside the Skerries, Mr. Graham suggested that it was time for another meal. Findlay went below to light the stove and prepare the food, and, when he announced that all was ready, the crew and the guest went into the cabin, leaving Hayes at the helm.

"Keep her as she is, Hayes," cautioned Mr. Graham. "I'll be on deck to relieve you long before we open out Dartmouth Harbour."

The Sea Scouts were hungry; so was the stranger. There was food in plenty, but, owing to the shortage of fresh water, there was only one cup of cocoa for each person.

Suddenly, the passenger made a hurried exit into the cock-pit. The Sea Scouts looked at each other and grinned. They had seen similar precipitate rushes to the open air before. Even Mr. Graham raised his eyebrows knowingly.

But the next turn of events completely took the wind out of their sails. Almost before they realized what was taking place, the cabin doors were slammed to and the sliding hatch drawn over. They heard the rasp of the securing hasp, and the sharp click of the key in the padlock.

"Forehatch, quick, you fellows!" exclaimed the Scoutmaster, who, seated at the after end of the cabin, could not make his way into the fo'c'sle as quickly as Findlay and Desmond. Both lads attempted simultaneously to squeeze through the sliding door between the cabin and the fo'c'sle. By the time Jock had given way to the Patrol Leader it was too late. There was a scuffling of feet on deck. The forehatch was shut with a bang, and a marline-spike inserted through the securing-bar. The Scoutmaster and two of the crew were prisoners.

Meanwhile, Hayes was still at the helm. Not until the young ruffian, whom they had befriended, had secured the forehatch did he grasp the situation. It was useless for him to leave the tiller. Without a key, it was impossible for him to open the companion-doors, while to throw back the fore-hatch was out of the question while the red-haired youth was in possession of the deck.

For several minutes the fellow remained for'ard, watching the vibrations of the hatch cover under the the united efforts of the imprisoned crew to burst it open. Satisfied that the metal bar defied their united strength, the red-haired youth came aft, ostentatiously fingering a large clasp knife.

"Look 'ere, kid!" he exclaimed. "Me an' you's goin' for a trip together, friendly-like. S'long's you gives no trouble, well an' good. Any tricks, mind you, an' it'll be the worst for yer. Got that?"

Hayes felt very hot in the throat. He was up against something this time. He racked his brains to know what to say or do. To attempt to try conclusions by force with this tough-looking fellow seemed out of the question. Hayes was small but sturdy, but he was no match for the huge-limbed, bull-necked youth who had taken charge of things.

"I don't know what you mean," he said. "We're expecting to fall in with another Sea Scout motor-boat off Dartmouth, so I don't see what you can do."

"We ain't goin' to no Dartmouth," declared the youth with a leer. "We're goin' for a run in that there dinghy. Your pals will go for a cruise on their own till someone picks 'em up. They can't come to no 'arm. What's that place over there?"

Hayes shook his head.

"Where's that map of yours I seed you with?" continued the young ruffian. "Chuck it over 'ere."

He studied the chart intently, at the same time taking frequent glances at the helmsman to guard against surprise.

"Allsands, that's wot it is," he declared. "Now, look 'ere, mate. Throw the yot up in the wind and put that there engine into the dinghy. Can you work it?"

Hayes shook his head again.

"You'll jolly well 'ave to," continued the young pirate. "Look slippy."

Obediently the Sea Scout threw the *Spindrift* up into the wind and drew the dinghy alongside. His ready brain was evolving a plan. He meant to make a flying leap into the dinghy and push off, leaving the other fellow in possession of the yacht. It was unlikely that the red-haired youth would jump overboard and swim after the dinghy before Hayes had time to ship rowlocks and man the sculls. If he did, a tap over the head with one of the oars would bring him to his senses—or otherwise.

But the Sea Scout reckoned without his host.

"'Ere, 'and me that painter," said the pirate with a grin. "Do you go aft an' fix up

that motor. Look sharp, there."

Hayes clamped the outboard motor, and adjusted the controls. As he did so, he noticed that the fellow had not belayed the painter, but was holding it in his hand. If the engine were put suddenly into the reverse, the chances were that he would have to choose between letting go or being dragged overboard.

The engine fired. Quick as thought Hayes raised the tiller, thereby setting the propeller blade at full astern. As the Sea Scout had surmised, the painter tautened suddenly, and the next instant it was jerked out of the red-haired youth's hands.

As soon as the dinghy was sufficient distance astern the triumphant Hayes put the engine ahead, in order to keep within hailing distance of the fellow in possession of the *Spindrift*, and to deliver an ultimatum.

But Hayes's elation was short-lived. He had forgotten the painter trailing in the water. A jerk and the engine stopped dead, with half a dozen turns of rope round the propeller.

Shipping the oars, the Sea Scout paddled within five yards of the yacht.

"You're done for," he exclaimed to the furious youth. "I'm going ashore to summon assistance, if you don't instantly let my chums out of the cabin. The wind's falling light, and the yacht won't get very far before you're caught."

"Don't you crow, you young blighter!" was the reply. "I'm not done yet. See that beach? That's where I'm jolly well goin' to run this 'ere yot ashore and trust to luck. If anythink 'appens to your pals it won't be my fault."

Hayes realized the import of this sinister threat. Even in the light breeze, the *Spindrift* could sail much faster than he could row the dinghy, impeded as the latter was by the drag of the useless propeller. And on the desolate beach a heavy swell was breaking, sufficient to smash the *Spindrift* into firewood in a few minutes. And how would Mr. Graham and his two chums fare? They looked like being drowned like rats in a trap. And, now he came to think of it, Hayes stood a poor chance of getting ashore in the dinghy, unless there were help at hand to save the little cockleshell from the breakers.

## CHAPTER XXI

### The Tables Turned

"What is the game, sir?" asked Desmond, after the efforts of the trio to burst open the fore-hatch had to be abandoned as hopeless.

"Can't say, I'm sure," replied Mr. Graham breathlessly. "Let's hope it's a practical joke, but I'm afraid it isn't."

"Do you think it's Greening or Greener, or whatever his name is?" asked Findlay. "Or perhaps it's another Borstal boy escaping from Portland."

"That thought occurred to me," admitted the Scoutmaster, "but there's one flaw in the argument. The skipper of the *Gloria* vouched for him. It might be a case of sudden mental disorder. 'Ssh! He's speaking—listen."

In silence they listened to the almost one-sided conversation between the red-haired youth and Hayes. They heard the outboard motor starting up, and the ominous silence when the painter fouled the propeller. Then followed the cold-blooded threat to run the *Spindrift* ashore.

"It's time we took drastic measures, lads," said Mr. Graham calmly. "Fortunately, Hayes isn't on board the yacht. That's what was tying my hands, as it were."

The Scoutmaster took down his portmanteau from one of the racks, opened it, and fumbled amongst an assortment of articles. Producing a small leather holster, he laid it on the cabin table and withdrew from it a short-barrelled automatic taking Service ammunition. "It's rather an un-Scouting article," remarked Mr. Graham, as he proceeded to fill the magazine. "I had doubts about bringing it, but I think the circumstances warrant it."

"Are you going to shoot him, sir?" asked Findlay, rather awe-struck.

"Not if I can help it," was the decided assurance. "We'll have to rush the fellow. Remember, he has a knife."

Desmond armed himself with a knotted towel in which was wrapped up a large iron shackle. Findlay laid hold of a rolling-pin from the galley. It was the first time that it had been used for any purpose since the Sea Scouts took over the yacht, and in Jock's hand it looked a formidable weapon.

The *Spindrift* was now heeling to starboard—an indication that the young rascal on deck had put the helm up and was getting way on the yacht.

"Stand by!" whispered Mr. Graham. [5]

Raising the automatic he placed the muzzle against the cabin door and pressed the trigger. A deafening report shook the confined space. The air reeked of burnt cordite.

Another shot followed in quick succession, then, hastily setting the safety-catch of the pistol, the Scoutmaster thrust his shoulder against the door.

Already the two bullets had done their work. The hasp had been torn from the teak door, and it required very little effort to clear a way.

Into the cockpit rushed the Scoutmaster, the two Scouts hard on his heels.

Alarmed by the shots, the miscreant had run for'ard, evidently under the totally wrong impression that they were meant for him. Then, grasping the lever of the winch, he stood on the defensive, looking more like an infuriated beast than a human being.

"Drop that and give in at once!" said Mr. Graham sternly, pointing the muzzle of the automatic at the fellow's stomach. The safety-catch was still set, as the Scoutmaster knew, but he was also aware that a man, who will face the muzzle of a pistol without outward signs of fear, will begin to quiver and quake when the weapon is pointed at the buckle of his belt.

The boy dropped the lever and began to raise both hands. Desmond and Findlay ran for'ard to secure him, but with a yelp of rage the hardened youngster leapt overboard.

He reappeared half a dozen yards astern, waving his hands and yelling until he dipped for the second time. To all on board it was evident that he was unable to swim. The *Spindrift*, although running up into the wind, was still carrying a lot of way. Hayes in the dinghy was a cable's length astern, rowing strongly, but making slow progress owing to the drag of the outboard motor's propeller.

The Scoutmaster picked up a life-buoy and threw it to the drowning youth. So careful was he to avoid hitting the lad with the buoy, that it fell short.

Simultaneously, there were two splashes. Without waiting even to kick off their shoes, Desmond and Findlay had both "taken to the ditch" and were swimming strongly to the aid of the lad in distress.

It was an unwise and unnecessary step for both to dive overboard. One would have been sufficient to make for the buoy and push it within reach of the drowning youth. It also left Mr. Graham to manage the yacht single-handed, and, although he was quite capable of so doing, it was a tough proposition to go about, huff, and pick three persons out of the water.

Putting the helm up, the Scoutmaster soon had the yacht under control. Already she had "eaten her way" well to wind'ard of the lad in distress. To go about would mean placing a still greater distance between them. So Mr. Graham still kept the helm hard up, at the same time checking the main-sheet until the *Spindrift* gybed. Then running to lee'ard he close hauled and lulled up.

By this time, Desmond had reached the life-buoy. Findlay, a quicker and more powerful swimmer, made no effort to get hold of the life-buoy. He saw that the object of his efforts was pretty far gone. Incautiously, Jock made a grab at him, and the next instant the Sea Scout was seized round the neck by the brawny arms of the frenzied youth.

Both went under at once. Findlay, although he had not time to take a deep breath, fortunately retained his presence of mind, and, keeping his arms down and using his feet vigorously, brought himself and the drowning youth to the surface.

But only for a brief instant. The other fellow, gripping like a bear, strove to raise himself out of the water, with the result that Jock went under again. Desmond, marking time with the buoy, hesitated to approach lest he should be entangled in the meshes of this human net. Deciding that something must be



done—and that quickly—to avoid a double fatality, the Patrol Leader swam behind the struggling youth, raised the life-buoy, and brought it down heavily upon the latter's head.

Desmond went under in the process, but when he broke surface, the desired result had been obtained. Jock was treading water, holding up the now unconscious lad.

image: IMAGENAME1

[Illustration: "DROP THAT, AND GIVE IN AT ONCE!" [Page 206](#)]

"Thanks!" he exclaimed breathlessly, as Desmond pushed the life-buoy to within reach. He could say no more, as he was spluttering and coughing up copious quantities of salt water.

"Stand by!" shouted Mr. Graham.

The two Sea Scouts looked round. The *Spindrift* was luffing up.

Ably managed, she lost way within an oar's length of the trio in the "ditch". Seizing a rope thrown to him, Desmond made a bowline round the unconscious youth. Then, telling Jock to clamber on board—it was about as much as he could do, and then only by means of the bobstay—the Patrol Leader remained in the water until the rescued lad could be hauled into safety.

It was a tough task. Mr. Graham had to hook on the runners before the heavy burden could be hoisted on deck. Then Desmond came aboard, after having placed the life-buoy on deck.

"You two go below and change," said the Scoutmaster. "I'll see to this young gentleman. And Hayes is almost alongside. He'll give a hand."

Desmond and Findlay were not long in shifting into dry kit. When they came on deck they found the *Spindrift* hove-to and the rest of the crew engaged in first aid work.

"Take the helm, Jock," said the Scoutmaster. "I'll give you the course until we arrive off the entrance to the harbour. The sooner the better."

"Did I hit him too hard, sir?" asked Desmond anxiously. "I simply had to do it."

"That's nothing," replied the Scoutmaster reassuringly. "A tap on the head wouldn't hurt his thick skull. It's the quantity of the English Channel down his throat that's causing the trouble."

The mysterious youth did not recover consciousness until the *Spindrift* entered Dartmouth Harbour, and tied up alongside the quay abreast of the boat-pond.

Hayes was dispatched to find a policeman. He hadn't far to go, and the guardian of the Law came on board, a crowd of curious sightseers lining the quay-side.

The policeman produced his notebook.

"Name, please, sir," he began, "and the name of the yacht."

"Don't you think you'd better get an ambulance, or a doctor?" suggested Mr. Graham, when he had given the information that had little to do with the case.

"What's the name an' address of this person?" continued the unruffled constable.

"That I can't tell you," replied the Scoutmaster.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't know it myself. Get the boy taken ashore and given medical assistance. Then, and only then, I'll give you all the information I know. It will be interesting, constable, very."

The policeman went away, returning in ten minutes with a couple of ambulance men. The patient was taken ashore and carried off "to an unknown destination", as far as the crew of the *Spindrift* were concerned. Mr. Graham yawned. The rest of the crew yawned too.

"Dog tired, the lot of us," remarked the Scoutmaster. "Fortunately we're in a snug berth, although rather open to the public eye. Now, lads, supper and early to bed. We'll sleep the clock round!"

The meal was just fairly under way when the yacht rocked under the weight of a heavy foot on deck. It was the policeman thirsting to give and receive

information.

"Lively young limb you've brought in here, sir," he began, producing his inevitable notebook. "We've got him all right this time. Broke out of Portland a week or ten days ago."

"Really?" remarked Mr. Graham. "I'm not surprised. But are you really sure? On our way down Channel last week—not in this boat—we rescued a lad who was arrested at Plymouth as the Borstal boy at large."

"Answerin' to the name o' Gregory, sir?"

"Yes," replied the Scoutmaster. "Do you know him?"

"A lad from Abbotsbury. His people are puttin' in a claim for compensation for illegal arrest. But we ain't made a mistake this time. Here you are, sir; look at this photo."

There certainly was a striking resemblance to the young ruffian. Now he was properly laid by the heels.

"How came you to find him, sir?" asked the policeman.

Mr. Graham had already made up his mind how much to tell and what to keep back. He merely said that he had been put on board from the schooner *Gloria* from Fowey, and that some time later he had fallen overboard and had been gallantly rescued by Desmond and Findlay. The story of the rascal's escapade he kept dark. The crew of the *Spindrift* would be no better for the telling of it, and they did not want to waste time by having to give evidence in case other proceedings were instituted. The young rogue would be punished severely for his spell of liberty; he had had a very narrow escape from drowning; and these two cases could be written down as a "set off" to the attempt to seize the yacht. As it turned out, the affair was not serious. Beyond the shattered cabin-doors there was no harm done.

At length the policeman departed and the crew sat down to finish their interrupted supper. This they did. By common consent the ritual of washing up after the meal was placed in abeyance. They were just longing to turn in.

But the fates were against them.

"Yot ahoy!" bawled a voice from the quayside. "You can't a-stop here. 'Arbour Master's orders. You're to shift your berth across t'other side abreast yon coal-hulk."

There was no refusal. The mandate had to be obeyed. The weary crew turned out, started up the ready engine, and motored across to the Kingswear side. Here they anchored, and hurrying below were soon deep in dreamless slumber.

## **CHAPTER XXII**

### **A Narrow Shave**

Suddenly, Hayes was awakened by a slight jar upon the yacht's hull. He looked up, sleepily, at the patch of greyish light filtering through the starboard scuttle. Already dawn was breaking.

"Swell of a passing steamer, I guess," he said to himself, as he replaced his head on the pillow.

Another slight shock roused him before he had fallen asleep again.

"It must be the dinghy bumping alongside," he declared. "I suppose I ought to drop a bucket over her stern. That'll keep her clear."

Still drowsy, the Sea Scout rolled out of his bunk, and made his way through the sliding-door into the cabin. Although the yacht was moving slightly, the floor was sloping decidedly to port. Hayes thought that this was rather unusual, but in his semi-torpid state the fact did not trouble him.

Treading softly with his bare feet, so as to avoid disturbing the slumbering occupants of the cabin, Hayes went on deck with the laudable intention of preventing the dinghy grinding against the yacht's side. But, when he gained the open air, he could only stand stock still and rub his eyes in sheer amazement.

The *Spindrift* was not in the spot where she had been anchored the previous night. She was not even in the harbour; she was outside of it and about half a mile from the entrance. Hayes could make out both Dartmouth and Kingswear Castles in the growing light. She was aground, listing slightly to port, with some jagged rocks showing just above the water within a dozen yards of her starboard side.

Hayes was now fully awake. His first step was to rouse his companions.

"Below there!" he shouted. "We're adrift!"

"Shut up, you noisy blighter," replied Desmond sleepily. "It's not time to turn out. Go to your bunk and stop skylarking."

Mr. Graham, too, stirred himself and added to the protest, only to fall fast asleep again in a valiant endeavour to fulfil his promise of "sleeping the clock round".

"G-r-r-r-r!" gurgled Findlay. "Chuck it, you idiot."

But Hayes was not to be "choked off". Descending the cabin steps he gripped the Patrol Leader by the shoulder.

"I'm not joking, Desmond," he said earnestly. "We are adrift. We're aground right outside the harbour."

Desmond rolled out of his cot.

"Right-o," he replied, glancing at the dog-tired Scoutmaster. "Hike Jock out of it. Don't bother to disturb Mr. Graham."

Findlay was turned out without ceremony, and the three lads hurriedly threw on their clothes. By the time they went on deck, the tide had fallen considerably, leaving the yacht still heeling slightly to port.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the Patrol Leader, sounding with a boat-hook. "We've done it this time. We're properly in the soup. There's three feet of water to starboard, and I can't touch bottom on the other side. If she rolls right over she'll be done for. Bring the dinghy alongside, Hayes. Jock, bear a hand with the kedge. We'll have to lay it out and get a strain on the warp by the throat halliards.

It's our only chance."

The Sea Scouts worked like Trojans. The kedg was carried off to the rocks and a strain taken up on the mast by means of a tackle. So great was the tension that the port shrouds were as taut as fiddle-strings, while those on the starboard side were quite limp. But it was impossible to get the yacht on an even keel. All that could be done was done—and that was to prevent the *Spindrift* toppling over the ledge into deep water.

"Now," continued the Patrol Leader, "no jumping about. Keep on the starboard side as much as possible. Bring the dinghy aft: we may want her in a hurry."

"I suppose we can just breathe," remarked Findlay jocularly. "That wouldn't disturb the balance, would it?"

The others laughed. The mental tension was broken.

"You can breathe as hard as you jolly well like, Jock," replied the Patrol Leader. "But you won't develop anything like the horse-power that my heart did just now. It was thumping against my ribs like a sledge hammer."

For some minutes the lads remained silent, watching the falling tide. Fortunately there was not a breath of wind and the sea was calm, save for the ripples as the ebb poured through the narrow entrance to the harbour.

"What beats me," remarked Desmond, knitting his brows, "is how we got here. I suppose the anchor tripped. It's a wonder we didn't foul any of the other yachts and vessels in the harbour."

"I suppose the chain didn't part?" suggested Jock. "We can see," replied the Patrol Leader. "Jump into the dinghy. There's still enough water for her." The three Sea Scouts boarded the little cockleshell and paddled towards the bow of the *Spindrift*. By this time the yacht was well out of water, resting in a shallow groove in a flat-topped, weed-covered shelf of rock. Only six inches of slippery rock separated the keel from a sheer drop into twelve or fifteen feet of water, and, should the supporting tackle give, there was nothing to prevent the yacht falling with a terrific crash into the depths.

"I say," exclaimed Findlay, pointing to the *Spindrift's* bows. "Who anchored the yacht last night?"

"You did," replied Desmond and Hayes simultaneously.

"Then a pretty mess I made of it," admitted Findlay frankly. "Look at it!"

There was the anchor, which was supposed to have been well down into the mud on the bed of the harbour, one of its flukes hung up on the yacht's bobstay, while a bight of fifteen fathoms of chain trailed uselessly across the rocks.

Back to the yacht the lads went, exercising the greatest caution in getting on board. The sight of the yacht viewed from bows-on had not allayed their fears, but rather the reverse. Almost high and dry she looked immense, and it seemed impossible that the two-inch warp could preserve the balance of the dangerously listing craft.

"We'd better wake Mr. Graham, after all, I think," said Desmond. "He can do nothing—nor can we—but if the yacht did fall over he'd be drowned like a blind kitten in a bucket."

The Patrol Leader went below and touched Mr. Graham's shoulder.

"Hello, up and dressed!" exclaimed the Scoutmaster. "What's the time? Why, it's only half-past six! And the yacht's listing. What's happened?"

Briefly, Desmond explained. Mr. Graham did not even wait for the report to be concluded. Grabbing his clothes he went on deck, the Patrol Leader following cautiously and eagerly. He didn't fancy being below. It was a jolly sight safer on deck, he decided.

"Well, she's all right if that tackle holds," said Mr Graham. "You could not have done much more. It's merely a question of waiting till the tide rises. Low water isn't till seven o'clock. With luck we'll be afloat by eleven."

"No grub till then," added Findlay.

"We can run round in the dinghy," continued the Scoutmaster. "That will give the yacht a better chance than if we remained on board."

"How about sending for Bedford and Coles, sir?" suggested Findlay. He knew that, according to arrangements, Hayes and he would have to return to Wootton, and, although loath to miss the rest of the run round in the *Spindrift*, he wished to

see that his chums had a "look in".

"Not much use doing that until we know we've a yacht for them to sail back in," rejoined the Scoutmaster, glancing gloomily at the precarious state of affairs. "All aboard the dinghy—don't jump about too much."

The dinghy was manned. The Sea Scouts pushed off and rowed slowly towards the channel. As it was, the keel grated on the rocks as she drew clear.

Then the dangerous position of the *Spindrift* could be fully realized. She was high and dry, with the exception of her keel. Her mast was at an angle of about 15 degrees from the perpendicular. There was a risk of two accidents happening: either the mast-head tackle might part and let the yacht over, or else her keel might slip off the ledge, with the result that she would strike the sharp edge of the rocky shelf and be stove in. Either might happen should a strong wind spring up.

For a couple of hours the crew paddled about in the dinghy, until it was dead low water. They had to keep an eye on the yacht, not that they could prevent disaster, but with the object of salving anything that floated should she sink.

It was a weird sight, for at low tide the keel of the *Spindrift* was five feet above the water-level, while a plummet from her starboard side would sink in ten feet of water.

"I'm afraid it was my fault, sir," said Findlay.

"Don't let that worry you, Jock," replied Mr. Graham. "You are not the first person who thought he'd let the anchor go properly. There's always that risk on a dark night."

"I'll take good care in future to see that the fluke hasn't caught up on the bobstay," said Findlay with grim resolution.

At last the pangs of hunger drove the crew ashore. The tide was now rising, and every minute lessened the danger of disaster to the yacht; but it was an unwise proceeding to attempt strenuous work on empty stomachs.

After a hearty "breakfast-and-dinner-combined", the crew re-embarked in the dinghy and rowed towards the mouth of the harbour, taking advantage of the



strong counter-eddy to the main flood.

To everyone's delight the *Spindrift* was still in the same position as when they last saw her, but the water was now within a foot of her load-line.

"It's quite safe to get aboard," said Mr. Graham. "Directly she feels lively we can ease off the throat-halliards, recover our kedge and lay it out in the stream. Let's hope there's no steamer coming in or out, or her wash will give the yacht a nasty hammering on the rocks."

All hands set to work with a will. The yacht was pumped dry, although she did not appear to have more water in the bilges than usual. Then the kedge, with thirty fathoms of grass line, was dropped in deep water.

The loud bray of a syren, echoing along the wooded hills on the Kingswear side of the harbour, warned the Sea Scouts that what they didn't want to happen was taking place. Already the bows of a large collier were visible as she rounded the precipitous bluff of St. Petrox.

"Driving for all she's worth," exclaimed Desmond. "Look at her bow-wave. Do you think she'll slow down for us, sir?"

"Hope so," replied the Scoutmaster laconically, and standing on the cabin-top he semaphored to the oncoming vessel to ease down.

The collier showed not the faintest sign of so doing. She passed at full speed, a couple of men on the bridge grinning at the plight of the yacht as she did so.

"Look out!" shouted Mr. Graham. "Mind you aren't jerked overboard."

The Sea Scouts took the warning promptly. It was lucky for them that they did. A huge wave was approaching, but, as generally happens when a vessel is steaming hard in a narrow channel, the water on either side was sucked away like the undertow of a receding breaker.

The *Spindrift*, already practically water-borne, lifted heavily as the swirling stream struck her side. The next moment she was swept from her precarious position into deep water.

So far so good. But there still remained a great risk of disaster. Would the

rapidly-approaching wash hurl the yacht back again upon the granite-like ledge?

Quick to act, the Scoutmaster rushed for'ard and began hauling in the kedge-warp. Desmond, grasping the situation, scrambled for'ard also, maintaining his balance like a cat. Together they hauled their hardest, then:

"Belay!" exclaimed Mr. Graham.

The Patrol Leader took a turn round the bitts. It was impossible to haul in any more of the rope before the swell struck the yacht.

The *Spindrift* dipped her bows well under as the curling mass of water poured over the fore-deck, drenching Mr. Graham and his companion to the skin. Back she staggered until the warp tautened like a violin-string. Then, aided by the undertow, she plunged forward again, this time well clear of danger.

It had been a narrow shave. Findlay and Hayes, who had been hanging on to the cockpit coaming, afterwards told Mr. Graham that the yacht's transom was within a couple of yards of the rocks. Had she struck, the terrific shock would have broken her back and she would have sunk like a stone.

"Thank goodness!" ejaculated Mr. Graham. "That was a close thing. I'd like to meet the fellow in charge of that collier. I won't call him a Master. A sailorman wouldn't do a thing like that. I say, lads, where's our dinghy?"

## CHAPTER XXIII

### The Rebound of the Joke

In the excitement no one had given a thought to the dinghy. She had been made fast to the shrouds, and apparently the violent wash had caused her to break adrift.

She was now a good fifty yards to leeward, drifting slowly, but evidently

uninjured. A portion of the painter still remained bent to the shroud, so there was some slight satisfaction in the knowledge that Hayes had not made a slippery hitch. The two-inch rope, almost new, had parted like pack-thread.

"I'm soaked as it is," said Desmond, kicking off his shoes. "Another little drop won't do me any harm! The oars are in the dinghy, aren't they, Hayes?"

The Sea Scout nodded. That was good enough for the Patrol Leader. The next instant he dived in over the side and began striking out for the errant dinghy.

The first twenty yards was a hard struggle, for the flood-tide was setting strongly athwart the swimmer's course, but, as soon as he was over the ledge on which the *Spindrift* had grounded, the cross-current was not so perceptible. There was now six feet of water over this part of the reef, but the long trailing kelp, which at low tide had been lying dormant on the rocks, was now rising vertically to within eighteen inches of the surface.

It was an unpleasant sensation when Desmond's feet touched the trailing tentacles of weed. Although slimy, they had a distinct tendency to entangle him. They impeded his progress. He tried to keep his feet closer to the surface to evade the kelp, but to no purpose.

While the dinghy was drifting slowly but steadily towards a cluster of rocks, appropriately named The Verticals, against which the surf was lashing. Once she got within the limits of that broken water she would be done for, and Desmond would have all his work cut out to swim back to the yacht.

At length, finding his progress tedious and difficult, the Patrol Leader turned over on his back. His feet were in consequence nearer the surface, and, aided by the fin-like movements of his hands, Desmond found that the weed no longer hampered him.

Steadily he gained upon the truant, until, with a feeling of relief, he grasped the gunwale. Even then, fairly tired with his strenuous efforts, he had to hang on for a minute or so before clambering in over the transom.

There was only one oar in the boat. The other had been jerked overboard by the steamer's wash.

Apart from the actual loss, the fact that only one oar remained did not daunt the

resourceful Patrol Leader. Sculling over the stern is an accomplishment that almost every Sea Scout is capable of. The average amateur is "tied up in knots" if called upon to scull a dinghy.

Fortunately the little craft had a sculling notch in the transom. Quickly Desmond had the dinghy under control, and was making good progress towards the *Spindrift*.

"There's the other oar!" he exclaimed to himself, as he caught sight of the missing article. Offering no resistance to the breeze, it had drifted much slower than the buoyant dinghy, and on that account it had escaped the Patrol Leader's notice as he swam. Standing up and sculling, he commanded a larger "field" of vision—although the "field" was an expanse of sunlit waves—and thus was able to spot the drifting oar.

"Well done, Desmond!" exclaimed Mr. Graham, as the dinghy came alongside the *Spindrift*. The other Sea Scouts gave their plucky comrade a rousing cheer.

"We'll want a new painter, sir," he remarked.

"Findlay will reeve a fresh one," rejoined the Scoutmaster. "Nip down below and shift your wet gear."

Aided by the flood-tide and the little outboard motor, the *Spindrift* was soon back at the anchorage from which she had taken French leave. This time there was no mistake. The crew took good care to see that the anchor was down properly, and in addition they laid out a kedge.

"Here we stop until we weigh for the Solent, lads," said Mr. Graham. "Unless the Harbour Master takes it into his head to make us shift our berth. Now, Findlay and Hayes, have you packed up ready for your train journey to Southampton?"

The two Sea Scouts pulled long faces. It was one of those occasions when they forgot the Scout precept "Keep Smiling".

"No, sir, not yet," was the reply.

"I'm going ashore to telegraph to Bedford and Coles to join us here," continued the Scoutmaster. "But I've been thinking matters over. Bradley and the other

fellows will be quite at home on the guardship at Wootton by this time. We can very well do with a larger crew, so I think you two will be better employed on the *Spindrift* than going back to Wootton."

"Thank you, sir, awfully!" exclaimed Jock, while Hayes began a horn-pipe on deck, which came to a rapid and premature end when his bare toe came in painful contact with a gun-metal cleat.

Accordingly, a telegram was dispatched to Sea Scout Frank Bedford, telling him to arrive at Kingswear at 7.30 p.m. on the following day and that Coles was to accompany him.

"Why did you say Kingswear, sir?" inquired Hayes, as they came out of the post office.

Mr. Graham pretended not to hear the question, and Hayes did not press the point.

After wandering through the streets of Dartmouth and viewing the old-style half-timbered houses of the Butterwalk, the crew of the *Spindrift* made their way towards the castle.

They had not gone very far when Mr. Graham touched Hayes on the shoulder.

"Just run over to Dartmouth railway station and see if there's a parcel for me, please," he said. "We'll wait here till you get back. Be as sharp as you can."

Hayes hurried off on his errand. When he was out of sight, Mr. Graham laughed.

"It's a little joke," he explained to the others. "There isn't a railway station at Dartmouth. Kingswear, across the harbour, is the terminus for Dartmouth passengers. It will be rather curious to know how Hayes progresses in his search for something that doesn't exist."

"Are you expecting a parcel at Kingswear station, sir?" asked Findlay.

"No, I'm not," replied Mr. Graham, enjoying the joke immensely. "We'll sit down by the side of the river and wait for developments."

Ten minutes passed—twenty—then half an hour. The Scoutmaster began to wonder what had happened to his messenger.

"Perhaps he's found out you are pulling his leg, sir," suggested Desmond.

"And then?"

"He's gone on board," continued the Patrol Leader. "Fed up sort of feeling."

"I don't think Hayes would take it that way," declared Mr. Graham, "or I would not have played a joke upon him. A joke always falls very flat if the victim cannot take it good-temperedly."

Three-quarters of an hour passed. The Sea Scouts were about to return to search for the absent member of the crew when Hayes came into view, running and rather short of breath.

"It's there, sir," he began. "There's no railway station at Dartmouth, but the first fellow I asked—a Scout—told me to go across the harbour to Kingswear. There's a ferry across. The chap in the parcel office told me that your box had come, but he wouldn't let me have it. It has to be claimed by the consignee in person."

"I suppose you're trying to pull my leg?" asked Mr. Graham smilingly.

Hayes looked at him in open-eyed astonishment.

"Pulling your leg, sir," he repeated. "Of course not. I saw the box there—it's a pretty heavy one." The Scoutmaster was puzzled. He had arranged for a package to be sent to Plymouth, to be picked up on the voyage; but, as far as he knew, no one had been instructed to forward it on.

"Well, I suppose I must solve the mystery," he remarked. "You fellows carry on. Have a good old ramble round the Castle. Take your time, provided you are at the quayside at seven."

Making his way back to the town, Mr. Graham crossed the harbour in the *Spindrift's* dinghy, in order that he might take his parcel straight on board the yacht.

At the station he found that the Sea Scout's statement was correct. There was a

large box—about as big as one man could handle—addressed to: W. Graham, Esq., Kingswear Station—To be called for.

"Four shillings and twopence, please, sir," said the official in charge of the office. "Passenger train—special rate. And please sign here."

The Scout Master signed the buff form, paid the four shillings and twopence, and took possession of the box. Failing to find any porters, he manhandled the bulky article himself, but, by the time he deposited it in the stern-sheets of the dinghy, the perspiration was pouring down his face.

All the while he was racking his brains to think who could have sent the box. It had been dispatched from Paddington, but there was no indication on the label as to the consignor.

"Gear from head-quarters, that's what it is!" exclaimed Mr. Graham. "Wonder I hadn't thought of that before, but how came they to know I am at Dartmouth—I'll give that part up."

It had been a fairly difficult single-handed job to transfer the box from the stationary pontoon to the lively little dinghy. The difficulty was increased ten fold when it came to transshipping the "gear" from the dinghy to the higher level of the gently rocking yacht.

At length, with the assistance of the throat halliards, the Scoutmaster succeeded in getting the heavy box on to the waterways. Then he dragged it aft, and toppled it carefully into the cockpit; but in spite of his caution, he contrived to bark the knuckles of his left hand.

The box was corded, every knot—"grannies" most of them—was smothered with sealing wax. Mr. Graham was too good a seaman to spoil a sound piece of rope by cutting it. Deliberately he undid the knots and did the rope up into a neat coil.

The next step was to prise open the lid. It was nailed down, with a French nail at every two inches all the way round. By the aid of an axe, a screw-driver, and a hammer, Mr. Graham removed the lid, although in the attempt he split the wood into five or six pieces.

Full of pleasurable anticipation following his strenuous endeavours, Mr.

Graham tore aside the canvas wrappings. Then he broke into a cold sweat, for the box was crammed with theatrical effects—wigs, eighteenth century costumes, partly used grease paints, and a pile of old posters in which the name—Wilfred Graham, Acting Manager—appeared conspicuously.

Evidently the gear belonged to a touring company billed to appear for a two night's performance at Dartmouth, and the Scoutmaster pictured the most unholy row that the actors would kick up when they found that their "props" were not forthcoming.

Hastily Mr. Graham replaced the things he had removed, nailed down the lid and re-corded the box. Then came the labour of hoisting it over the side into the dinghy and taking it back to the station.

He arrived almost breathless at the parcels office, just as a very irate man was coming out. The two W. Grahams were face to face.

"Confound you, sir!" roared the Acting Manager. "What are you doing with my property?"

"Returning it," replied the Scoutmaster. "You'll find nothing missing."

"Of no value to you, I suppose?" snapped the other, sarcastically.

"That," rejoined Mr. Graham, "is beside the point. If you will listen to my explanation I think you will see the funny side of the affair. My surname happens to be the same as your own; so do the initials."

As the explanation proceeded, the Acting Manager's face grew less angry, until he actually laughed.

"All right, dear old boy," he exclaimed. "Come and have a drink?"

The Scoutmaster declined the invitation.

"Then let me give you a couple of tickets for tomorrow night's show," persisted the theatrical man.

"Sorry, but we're away to-morrow," was the reply. The two men shook hands and parted, the Scoutmaster, hot and tired, making his way to the dinghy.



\* \* \* \* \*

At seven sharp, the Sea Scouts were at the quay landing steps. There was no sign of the *Spindrift's* dinghy. The yacht was not visible from where they stood, a large tramp steamer lying between her and the Dartmouth side of the harbour.

At half-past seven, no Scoutmaster being forthcoming, Desmond suggested going on board.

"We can get a boatman to put us off," he said. "It's quite possible Mr. Graham has gone for a row in the dinghy, and it's taking longer to get back against the tide than he thought."

"And we can have grub ready when he returns," added Findlay. "Something hot and tasty, you know."

He winked at Hayes. Desmond, being "cook of the day", didn't greet the suggestion with boisterous enthusiasm.

Returning on board the *Spindrift*, the lads prepared for the overdue Scoutmaster's arrival. It was not until eight-thirty that Mr. Graham showed up, looking very hot and tired.

Offering no explanation, he sat down at the table where the meal was in readiness. The rest of the crew couldn't understand it. It was not like their Scoutmaster.

But half-way through the meal, Mr. Graham rather astonished them by roaring with laughter.

"Hayes, my boy!" he exclaimed, when the fit of merriment was over, "I tried to play a little joke on you this afternoon; but, by Jove! it's rebounded on me with a vengeance."

"How, sir?" asked Hayes.

Mr. Graham explained. He was one of those people who enjoy telling a joke against themselves.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### Refusing a Tow

At the appointed time, the *Spindrift's* crew was augmented by the arrival of Bedford and Coles. The new members were delighted with the yacht and her surroundings. The only grievance—if grievance it can be termed—was that their share of the voyage had been shortened by the distance from Plymouth to Dartmouth.

"Well, what's the news from Wootton?" inquired Mr. Graham, after the two Sea Scouts had taken in the details of their new acquisition, and had been told of her exciting run round The Land.

"Everything's all serene, sir," replied Bedford. "Patrol Leader Bradley has got the rest of the Troop well in hand. Makes them do physical jerks every morning before breakfast. We had to before we came away at nine o'clock."

"You look very fit, Bedford," said Desmond. "You've worked down a lot of your fat."

"And you haven't put any on," retorted Bedford, looking at the lean, weather-beaten features of the Patrol Leader.

"And how are the Collinsons?" asked Mr. Graham.

"Mr. Collinson's doing well, sir," replied Bedford "His arm is mending rapidly. He told me the other day that we were so jolly handy that he meant to ship a couple of Sea Scouts on board his yacht instead of a paid hand. When do we start, sir?"

"At daybreak to-morrow," answered the Scoutmaster. "The glass is high and steady, and the weather forecast—if that's anything to go by—is for westerly winds of moderate strength. We've a goodish run across West Bay, and I want to be well to the east'ard of Portland Bill by the early evening."

Grey dawn was appearing over the Devon hills when the crew of the *Spindrift* turned out.

"Isn't it cold for August!" exclaimed Bedford, swinging his arms.

"You're cold, eh?" rejoined the Patrol Leader, jumping at the opportunity afforded by Bedford's remark. "Right-o; nip below and start up the stove. You're cook of the day."

The Sea Scout obeyed readily enough. By the time the rest of the crew had uncoated the mainsail, got the headsail and mizzen ready to hoist, and had broken out and stowed the kedge, the "galley-slave", as Hayes termed the youth told off for cooking meals, reported that hot cocoa was ready.

A large cup of the sustaining beverage and a couple of very hard biscuits provided the "stand-by" to commence the working day, as breakfast was to be served while under way.

The little motor acted admirably, in spite of the cold, starting up at the first swing of the fly-wheel. "All ready?" shouted the Scoutmaster.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Heave her up."

The pawls of the winch clattered merrily as the cable came home. Presently the big galvanized anchor appeared above the surface. Findlay promptly caught the gravity-band shackle with the lower block of the handy-billy, and in double quick time the "killick" was secured on deck.

By this time the *Spindrift* was forging slowly ahead, and the hitherto fully occupied lads had an opportunity of seeing the last of Dartmouth for no doubt a considerable time.

Within the harbour the water was as calm as a millpond, save for the rippling wake of the outward bound yacht. Outside, the sea was dancing under the influence of a light westerly breeze, which promised to grow in strength as the sun rose higher.

Sail was now set, and the engine switched off.

Desmond, as sailing master, told off Hayes for the first two hours at the helm.

"Keep the East Blackstone on your port bow," he cautioned. "When that's abeam, we'll set a compass course."

"May we fish, sir?" asked Findlay. "We heard last night that there are shoals of mackerel off the East Blackstone."

"Certainly," replied Mr. Graham. "Only take care to keep your hooks clear of the main and mizzen sheets!"

Findlay had brought mackerel hooks and spinners. Quickly two lines were paid out, one on each quarter, Jock tending one and Coles handling the other.

The *Spindrift* was now moving just at the right speed for this sort of work. In less than a minute a jerk of the line nearly pulled it out of the Tenderfoot's hand. Hauling in the line he secured a good-sized fish.

Coles caught a dozen before Findlay hooked his first fish, which puzzled and chagrined the latter considerably.

"Perhaps it's because my line is to lee'ard," suggested Coles. "Take mine, and I'll try my luck with yours!"

The exchange was effected, but still Coles was the lucky one. In less than an hour he had secured twenty-one mackerel to Findlay's four. Then, contrary to expectation, the breeze died utterly away, and the lines no longer trailed astern.

"We've caught enough, anyway," remarked Findlay, coiling away his lines.

"Yes, mackerel fresh from the salt sea for breakfast," added Desmond. "I'm jolly glad it's not my turn to be cook."

That post on board was no sinecure, and there was no competition for the job; but whoever took it did the work cheerfully and generally well. The Sea Scouts believed in the maxim: "a well fed crew makes a happy ship".

For the next two hours the *Spindrift's* progress was tediously slow. Breakfast was cooked and eaten, and the plates and dishes washed up and stowed away, before the breeze sprang up; and Berry Head and the red cliffs of Devon were

still plainly visible.

"Rather slower than when we passed here last time, sir, in the *Olivette*," remarked Desmond.

"But we've the best part of the day before us," Mr. Graham reminded him.

"We're afloat," declared Bedford. "That's the main thing."

He no longer had cause to complain of the cold. The day grew hotter and hotter as the sun rose and the wind dropped, till by ten o'clock the thermometer in the cabin registered 90 degrees.

So far the *Spindrift* was not alone. She was in company with nearly twenty Brixham trawlers, all practically drifting. They made a pretty sight, with their huge tanned sails casting shimmering reflections on the gently heaving water.

At noon the wind sprang up again and quickly rose to a fresh sailing breeze from the sou'-west. Sheets were soon trimmed, and once more the "kick of the helm"—that delightful sensation to keen sailor-men—asserted itself.

It was not until four in the afternoon that Portland Bill became visible. It was now too late to attempt to round the Bill close to and make for Portland Harbour. To have attempted to do so would have resulted in the little craft being swept into the dreaded Race. Accordingly, a course was shaped to pass four miles south of that notorious headland.

As long as the breeze held, there was little to worry about; but should it fail, as it often does towards evening in summer, there was the prospect of another night afloat. Mr. Graham was anxious to make Swanage or even Poole Harbour. He did not hanker after another night in the Channel, but the Sea Scouts rather hoped for one.

The Brixham fleet was no longer in sight. The boats had stood well away to the south'ard. All around the horizon was unbroken, save to the east'ard, where the wedge-shaped Bill cut the skyline.

At tea-time all hands went below, with the exception of Bedford at the helm. There was now a fairly heavy sea running, for there was a weather-going tide.

In the midst of the meal there was a violent crash. The yacht heeled over on the opposite tack, nearly capsizing the Sea Scouts on the port settee, and flinging most of the things off the table.

Instantly, there was a wild rush on deck. A scene of confusion met their eyes. The helmsman had let the yacht gybe all standing, and before he could check the main sheet the boom had flown violently against the set-up runners on the starboard side. The sudden shock had carried away that part of the gear, and the strain was thrown upon the mast. It had parted fifteen feet above the deck, letting mainsail and headsails down in utter confusion. The mizzen, being still set, was tending to turn the yacht head to wind, with the trailing canvas dragging over the bows.

It was not an occasion to demand or receive explanations. The first thing to be done was to get the yacht under control.

Under the Scoutmaster's directions, the broken-off portion of the mast was parbuckled on board and secured, and the headsails recovered and stowed. The next step was to set up temporary halliards and shrouds on the fractured mast, a difficult business owing to the erratic motion of the yacht.

Working quickly and well, Desmond and Findlay succeeded in passing three strops round the top of the broken mast and shackling blocks to them—two for'ard and one aft. Then the shrouds, shortened by means of sheepshanks, were sent aloft and secured sufficiently to take up a considerable amount of strain. [5]

"Now we can set the headsail," announced Mr. Graham. "Take two reefs in the staysail, or you won't get it right home; and set No. 2 jib."

All hands were so busy that they failed to notice the approach of a steam drifter until she gave a warning blast on her syren. Slowing down, she drew within twenty yards of the *Spindrift*.

"Want a tow into Weymouth?" shouted her skipper.

Mr. Graham had to decide quickly. On the one hand he was responsible for the safety of the lads under his charge; on the other he did not like the idea of "chucking up the sponge" so quickly, especially as he would have to pay for the salvage. He glanced to wind'ard; the breeze was fair. The barometer was high and steady. It was a strong temptation when he looked from the disabled

*Spindrift* to the powerful steam drifter.

"How much?" he asked.

"Twenty-five p'un," shouted the skipper.

"Don't do it, sir," said Desmond in a low voice. "We'll be all right without having to pay that."

"Sorry, nothing doing!" replied the Scoutmaster, then turning to the Patrol Leader he added: "Desmond, you're a brick!"

The skipper of the drifter pulled up the window of the wheelhouse with a savage jerk, that implied plainly enough what he thought of Mr. Graham.

"Carry on, lads!" exclaimed the Scoutmaster. "Up with the staysail!"

As the flapping canvas rose, the skipper of the drifter lowered the pane and thrust his head through the window.

"Ahoy!" he bawled. "Make it twenty. It's 'ard earned money."

Mr. Graham shook his head.

"Fifteen, then; I likes to do a good turn to a fellow in distress."

"No, not for five pounds," shouted the Scoutmaster resolutely. "We don't want any assistance, thank you." The engine-room telegraph bell clanged, and the drifter began to draw astern. The crew of the *Spindrift* paid slight attention to her: they were busy at their own job.

Under reefed staysail, the yacht paid off, and began to gather way. The setting of the jib helped still more, so that with three sails drawing well she began to make a good three knots.

"Now the mainsail," continued Mr. Graham. "We can't set the peak, so we must set it as a trysail. We'll have to double reef first, or we cannot hoist the throat close up."

"Look, sir! There's something wrong with that drifter!" exclaimed Coles.

All eyes were directed upon the would-be Good Samaritan (at a price). Her engines were stopped, but she still carried way. Clouds of steam were issuing through the fidleys.

Raising his binoculars, Mr. Graham kept the vessel under observation. She was now about two cable lengths away, and slowing down steadily. Through the hatchway appeared the engineer, with his hands to his face and steam coming from his clothes.

"Main steam pipe burst," exclaimed Mr. Graham.

"She won't sink?" asked Hayes.

"No; she can set fore and aft sail. It's that poor fellow, the engineer, who has suffered by the accident. He looks badly scalded."

"First aid, sir?" asked Findlay hopefully.

"We'll ask them," was the reply. "Stand by to semaphore."

It was five minutes or more before Findlay attracted the attention of the skipper of the drifter.

"Do—you—require—first—aid?" semaphored Jock. The answer was emphatic if not to the point.

"You go to blazes!" was the message given by the irate skipper's arms.

By this time the drifter had set her headsails and mizzen, but the *Spindrift* was gaining rapidly on her.

"It will be a race," declared Hayes. "We are beating her already, and we haven't our motor going."

"Wait till she sets her mainsail," said Desmond. "Then she'll show us her heels."

"We may as well set ours," added Mr. Graham. "All reef points secured? Good—hoist away on your throat halliards."



The mainsail was set as a trysail, the peak lowered to its full extent. Even that comparatively small expanse of canvas made a difference, for the yacht quickly drew abreast of the drifter.

Up went the latter's mainsail. She too increased her pace, but it was soon evident that the under-canvased yacht more than held her own with her bulky rival, hampered as she was with the drag of her three-bladed propeller.

"We've company," observed Bedford, "although a surly fellow at that. Is he making for Weymouth, do you think, sir?"

"If he does, he'll have his work cut out to work up the east side of the Bill," replied Mr. Graham. "We won't risk it."

The *Spindrift* had now obtained and was holding a useful lead. An hour later she was a quarter of a mile ahead, with the drifter following dead in her wake. Portland Bill was abeam at last; the drifter starboarded helm and made towards the Shambles Lightship, while the yacht shaped a course for the distant St. Alban's Head.

"She's making for Weymouth by the east side of the Race," said the Scoutmaster. "More than likely she'll get a tow into harbour. Well, we've saved money this time."

The tide was now setting strongly to the east'ard. Under its favourable influence the *Spindrift* quickly reeled off the distance between the Bill and St. Alban's, passing through the Race off the latter headland without taking much water on board.

The wind had now veered a couple of points, and on rounding St. Alban's Head the change of direction of the coast line necessitated a close haul on the port tack if the yacht were to make Swanage or Poole.

Mr. Graham glanced at his watch, consulted the barometer, and took a survey of the sky to wind'ard.

"Lads!" he exclaimed. "We'll carry on for the Solent. We've four hours' fair tide, and with decent luck we'll be inside the Wight before dark."

"Good enough, sir!" agreed the crew in chorus.

## CHAPTER XXV

### And Last

"What are we going to do with the *Spindrift* when we get her back to Wootton, sir?" asked Findlay.

"Find a suitable spar, use the old fittings and make a new mast," replied Mr. Graham.

"I don't mean that exactly, sir," continued Jock. "Do you intend to keep her there or sail her back to the East Coast?"

"That is a matter for all of you to decide," said the Scoutmaster. "Personally, I think she draws too much water for the Essex estuaries. That would limit us to the deeper channels. Here, on the South Coast, are plenty of harbours capable of taking her at any state of the tide, and it would take two seasons to explore the Solent, Portsmouth, Langston, and Chichester Harbours, to say nothing of Poole Harbour."

"I vote we keep her on the South Coast, sir," suggested Desmond. "It's a new cruising ground, and we can get six weeks every summer. We still have our cutter at Southend to go afloat in during the week-ends."

To this the others agreed.

"That settles it, then," added Mr. Graham. "We can go into details later. What's that on your starboard bow?"

The lads looked in the direction indicated. Just above the horizon was a faint, triangular-shaped patch of white.

"Looks like a sail, sir," said Coles.

"Six hundred feet in height, eh?" exclaimed the Scoutmaster. "No, it's not a sail, Coles, it's the chalk cliff at the western end of the Isle of Wight, sixteen miles away."

At eight o'clock Christchurch Head was abeam, distance two miles, with the needle-like shaft of Hurst High Light showing ahead against the sky.

"We'll do it if the breeze holds," declared Desmond. "How much petrol have we on board, Jock?"

"Three full tins and one about half full," replied Findlay.

"You took in enough while you were about it," commented the Patrol Leader.

"Nothing like being on the safe side," was Findlay's rejoinder.

"Look!" exclaimed Hayes, pointing to a craft about a mile on the starboard bow. "Isn't that the *Olivette*?"

"Believe it is," said Desmond, picking up his binoculars. Then, leaning over the companion, he announced:

"*Olivette* in sight, sir."

Mr. Graham, who was consulting a chart in the cabin, came on deck.

"She's spotted us," he exclaimed. "She's slowed down to have a run in company. Perhaps they've noticed our broken mast."

"Jolly decent of them," said Hayes.

A quarter of an hour later, the two vessels were within hailing distance.

"Hello! Armitage," called out Mr. Graham. "Going to give us a tow in?"

"Wish we could," was the reply. "We're broken down—out of fuel."

"Tank's leaking," supplemented Woodleigh, to dispel any suggestion that the fault lay in not providing sufficient fuel. "It's done that before, but we thought we'd fixed it up all right."

The *Spindrift* ran alongside the "fifty-four footer", and a line was thrown and made fast. Although the breeze still held, the sea was comparatively smooth.

"You can't tow us," objected Mr. Armitage. "You've as much as you can do to carry on with that broken mast. I was about to send a boat ashore for some paraffin."

"No need," replied Mr. Graham. "Your engine will run on petrol. We can let you have a couple of tins—three if necessary, and we've about three gallons of paraffin for the stove. You can have that."

"What are you doing with petrol, then?" asked Mr. Armitage.

"Oh, we've a motor too," replied Desmond proudly. "A dinky little outboard."

The offer of the petrol and paraffin was gladly accepted. Already the leak in the tank had been soldered, and all that was required was to fill up and restart the engine.

"Stow your canvas, Graham," said Mr. Armitage. "You won't want that again this evening. We'll tow you into Keyhaven. That will suit, I hope?"

"Perfectly," was the reply.

The *Olivette* gathered way, the *Spindrift* following meekly at the end of a four-inch grass hawser, and well before dark both boats were safely moored in the narrow and sheltered waters of Keyhaven.

"I think we can fix you up with a spar to-morrow," said Mr. Armitage, when the Milford Sea Scouts boarded the *Spindrift* to see what sort of craft the Southend lads had obtained. "A yacht came ashore at Milford last month and became a total wreck. We bought a lot of her gear, including her mast. I think it would just suit you."

"Thanks awfully," replied Mr. Graham. "What do you want for it?"

"Pooh, pooh!" protested Mr. Armitage. "We are not dealers in marine stores. We bought the stick for a mere song, thinking it might come in handy for a signal mast for our hut. But it would be a jolly sight more useful in a yacht, I take it."

"And we have all the tools for the job in our boathouse," added Woodleigh. "We'll all turn out to-morrow and lend a hand. Many hands make light work."

"And too many cooks spoil the broth," laughed Flemming. "However, we'll all see if we can help without tumbling over each other."

Early next morning, as soon as the dew had vanished, the Milford Sea Scouts gathered at their boat store. The mast and a couple of stout scaffold-poles were placed on a truck and wheeled down to the quay.

Here they were joined by the crew of the *Spindrift*, and while one party sandpapered down the mast and applied a coat of quick-drying varnish, the others brought the yacht alongside and rigged up a pair of sheer legs. These were set up with their heels wedged alongside the shroud plates, and guyed fore and aft with strong tackles.

By this means the broken mast was lifted out and carried ashore. The running and standing rigging and halliards were then removed and transferred to the new mast, which by this time was quite dry.

It was a tricky job shipping the new mast. Not only was it longer than the broken spar but considerably heavier, and the height of the sheer legs was not enough to hoist it in an almost perpendicular position.

"We can hold the heel down," said Findlay.

"No," objected Mr. Graham, peremptorily. "I'm not going to allow anyone under those sheer legs in case anything carries away."

"I don't see how we can do it otherwise, sir," remarked Jock.

"There is a way," observed the Scoutmaster. "We'll have to make the mast heavier."

The Sea Scouts looked at him to see if he were joking, but Mr. Graham was perfectly grave.

"Yes," he continued. "If we get a pig of ballast and secure it to the mast three feet above the heel, that will cant the mast at the required angle. We can then guide the heel to the proper position by means of rope, and lower away."

This task was successfully accomplished, and by noon the mast wedges were driven home and caulked, the shrouds set up, and the boom and gaff placed in position.

"Now you're all shipshape and Bristol fashion!" exclaimed Mr. Armitage.

"Thanks largely to your assistance," added Mr. Graham.

The Scoutmaster of the Milford Troop made a deprecatory gesture.

"That's nothing much," he protested. "It's all part of the game—the Brotherhood of the Sea. We've been helped out of difficulties before to-day, and much of the zest of life is derived from helping others."

"I hope we may never have to do you a good turn of this sort, Armitage," said Mr. Graham, "but, if we do, you will know that it will be a pleasure for us to do so. One never knows."

"That's a fact," declared Mr. Armitage sententiously. "No doubt we'll come across you again, especially as you're keeping the *Spindrift* in commission on the Solent."

At two o'clock the *Spindrift* got under way, amidst an exchange of hearty cheers between the two troops. Outside Keyhaven they picked up a favourable breeze, but progress was slow owing to the foul tide. Nevertheless, it was a pleasant sail, and it was six o'clock before the tide changed and swept the yacht quickly through Cowes Roads.

"There's our home port," exclaimed Desmond, as the yacht rounded Old Castle Point and opened up the wooded shores of Osborne Bay. "Wonder if the other fellows will spot us when we're abreast of Wootton Rocks."

"Sure thing," declared Findlay. "Patrol Leader Bradley is dead nuts on watchkeeping. I don't suppose many craft pass within sight of the guardship without his knowing it."

"We shall see," rejoined Desmond. "I don't suppose they expect us before the beginning of next week."

"Give Bradley a chance, anyway," said Hayes. "Let's hoist our patrol burgee.

Are you starting the motor, Findlay?"

Findlay looked inquiringly at Mr. Graham.

"It would show your seamanship if you beat into the creek," remarked the Scoutmaster.

"Very good, sir," replied Desmond. "We won't use the engine. A pull on the main sheet there!"

The *Spindrift*, hitherto running, was now close hauled on the starboard tack. This would take her up the "boomed" channel, but above the coastguard slipway it would mean almost a dead beat before squaring off for the final reach.

"Ready about—lee-o!" ordered Desmond as the beat began.

Mr. Graham sat on the top of the companion ladder, watching the manoeuvre but resolving to let the crew carry on under the Patrol Leader's orders.

It was a narrow channel and the wind was fluky, but the crew were smart at their work, and by this time they knew their ship. She was fairly slow at coming about, but sure. Not once did she show a tendency to miss stays.

Every board brought the *Spindrift* nearer and nearer to the guardship. The crew could see the *Ocean Bride* moored astern of her, but on neither craft was there any sign of animation.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Desmond. "We've got 'em cold! We'll run right under her lee, and give them our Patrol call."

Blanketed by the high wooded ground to starboard, the *Spindrift* was now making very little way. At intervals faint puffs of wind swept down upon the land-locked estuary, but the faint flood-tide was sweeping the yacht steadily inward.

"Down mainsail!" ordered Desmond. "Stand by to lower headsails and mizzen smartly. Bedford, you tend the for'ard warp; Hayes, look out for the quarter-rope—a bowline round the guardship's bollard as we go alongside, but check her gently."

Like a band of conspirators, the crew of the *Spindrift* prepared for the surprise of their chums on the guardship. The *Ocean Bride* was passed without attracting the attention of the Collinsons. Then her bows drew level with the stern of the guardship.

Desmond made a sign with his hand. Down fluttered the rest of the canvas, with hardly a sound, save for the *cheep* of a stiff running-block. Deftly the securing ropes were thrown and belayed. The Patrol Leader raised his hand again.

Instantly the crew yelled their hardest, making the wooded shore echo and re-echo to their ear-splitting Patrol call.

The effect was almost instantaneous. At every open lower-deck port, one, two, or three heads were thrust out—wide-eyed astonished Sea Scouts who could hardly grasp the fact that their comrades had returned from their long coast-wise voyage. And with them were Mr. Collinson and his wife.

"Caught you napping, lads!" exclaimed Mr. Graham.

"Spoilt my yarn, you mean," rejoined Mr. Collinson laughing. "I'll admit I kept their attention pretty well until you fellows raised that infernal din. That tore it! So you've brought the old ship round: what do you think of her?"

"A rattling good little craft," replied the Scoutmaster.

"Thought you'd find her so," rejoined Mr. Collinson. Then he looked up with a puzzled air. "I say, you've got a new stick?"

"Yes, mast carried away in an accidental gybe in West Bay," said Mr. Graham. "We haven't had an uneventful time, and it's been quite enjoyable."

"It has," added Desmond. "I'm sorry it's over."

"The holidays aren't over yet," remarked Findlay optimistically.

"And you have a large and new cruising ground open to you," said Mr. Collinson. "If the *Spindrift* serves you as well as she has me, you'll have no cause for complaint. Well, lads, here's good luck to the *Spindrift* and her crew."



Transcriber's Notes:

This book contains a number of misprints.  
The following misprints have been corrected:

[\[Binstard Hard\] —>](#)

[\[Binstead Hard\]](#)

Taking into account that "Binstead" does exist  
(and "Binstard" doesn't) and "Binstead" is also mentioned  
in this book, and furthermore that "Binstard Hard" is  
supposed to be at an hours' rowing distance from  
"Wootton Creek", this probably is a typographical error.

[\[Scoutmaster and Sea Souts\] —>](#)

[\[Scoutmaster and Sea Scouts\]](#)

[\[to summons assistance\] —>](#)

[\[to summon assistance\]](#)

Obvious punctuation/spelling errors were corrected without note.

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