

## **Hardy Boys Mysteries - 18**

### **The Twisted Claw**

**By  
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**(This is the original 1939 text.)**

**The Hardy Boys defeat "The Order of The Twisted Claw" smuggling gang.**

## **CHAPTER I A Mysterious Cry**

**"Why, what's the matter, Frank?" exclaimed Joe Hardy as his elder brother suddenly stopped walking and began to search his pockets frantically.**

**"I've - I've lost my wallet!" The tall, dark-haired lad was big-eyed with alarm. "I'm certain I had it while we were watching the ball game!"**

**"Golly, do you suppose somebody picked your pocket!" burst out Chet Morton, their stout chum.**

**The boys stood breathless as Frank searched his clothing.**

**"Well, no more pockets and no more wallet," announced Frank at length when his hurried search proved fruitless. "I can't imagine - "**

**"It'll turn up somewhere," interrupted the light-haired Hardy lad, two years his brother's junior. He was inclined to be optimistic over such misfortunes. "I shouldn't be surprised if you had left it at home on your dresser."**

**Frank smiled wanly. "I hope you're right but I doubt it. Anyhow, let's go and find out."**

**As the chums moved toward the large stone Hardy residence on the next corner, Chet took his leave. The fat lad's home was at the opposite end of the town of Bayport.**

**"So long, fellows," he waved. "Here's hoping you find your money, Frank!"**

**When Chet had departed Joe looked at his brother teasingly. "I never saw you so worried over losing your wallet, Frank. Anybody'd think it was the first time. What's the matter, did you have a million dollars in it?"**

**"That's just the trouble, Joe, I did. A million dollars' worth of information, anyhow."**

**The younger - Hardy looked at his brother questioningly. "What do you mean, Frank?"**

**"Do you recall the secret code Dad gave us the other day for use in emergencies? I wrote it down and put the paper in my wallet. Stupid thing to do!"**

Joe whistled in dismay. "That puts things in a different light. Come on, let's start looking around!"

The brothers broke into a run and dashed up the front steps of their home, only to be interrupted in the front hallway by a shrill voice.

"Well, it's about time you young rascals came back! Joe! Frank! Come here this moment!"

Although the Hardy lads were really fond of their Aunt Gertrude-for the voice was hers - the elderly maiden lady's meddlesome interference with their activities when she visited their home often annoyed them. Now, before they had time to move, there came the rat - tat - tat of footsteps. Their aunt emerged from the parlor, scowling darkly.

"Your father has been looking for you all afternoon! Where on earth have you been?"

"Sorry, Aunt Gertrude, we didn't know Dad wanted us," Joe answered. "Is he at home?"

"Yes, he is, and it's high time you were too! Goodness me, am I supposed to have to pay for police protection around here, with two perfectly able-bodied boys to take care of me?"

"Police protection? Why?" Frank queried with a puzzled expression.

"Why indeed!" exclaimed the old lady. "All manner of horrible looking men come around knocking at the door and ringing the bell at all hours! The house is surrounded with - with -"

"With salesmen," Frank finished. "They're probably just ordinary harmless salesmen, aren't they, Aunt Gertrude?"

For an instant the old lady pondered the matter. "Well, perhaps they are," she admitted.

"At least they say they're selling something, But I think they're posing!" she added defiantly. "They're probably robbers and jailbirds trying to find a way to get in here! It won't be my fault if -"

"Nonsense, Gertrude!" boomed a hearty voice, and a tall, pleasant-faced man strode into the room, "What's all this talk about robbers?"

"Hello, Dad!" exclaimed Frank. "You're just in time to solve the latest mystery!"

"So I couldn't help hearing!" laughed Fenton Hardy, the famous detective.

"As I was saying, Fenton," Aunt Gertrude began, but Mr. Hardy held up his hand.

"Never mind, we'll talk that over later. Just now I've some important business to discuss with my boys."

Muttering to herself the old lady scuttled off, none too pleased that nobody would listen to her. Mrs. Hardy, the boys' mother, ordinarily could be relied upon to calm down their relative on such occasions, but she was away visiting at the moment.

Frank and Joe faced their father eagerly, for they liked nothing so well as a chance to be of assistance to him on one of his cases.

"Boys, I've a hard problem on my hands this time," the detective began, crossing the room to his desk and removing some papers.

"What's up, Dad?" queried Joe excitedly.

"There's a clever gang of smugglers operating in this part of the country, and from what I've learned already they're as dangerous a mob as any that exists. Our government must defeat such business." Mr. Hardy paused and eyed his sons narrowly. "I think I'm going to need your help before I'm through," he added impressively.

"We'll do anything you say, Dad!" Frank promised enthusiastically. "Just give us the high-sign."

"That's just what I was coming to," said the detective gravely. "I want you to be sure to remember that secret message-code I gave you the other day, for when we need it we must

have it in a hurry!"

Joe glanced suddenly at his brother, but Frank said nothing about the lost wallet. The older Hardy lad had resolved not to upset his father by telling him of the missing paper, but rather to start searching for it as soon as possible.

"We're with you, Dad!" Joe exclaimed. "What do you want us to do?"

"Nothing just now. Wait until you hear from me. It may be tomorrow or it may be a month from now. Whatever you do, remember the code and be ready to act if you get a message from me."

Joe looked crestfallen. "Golly, Dad, anybody can sit around and wait for messages. Why can't you give us something real to do to help you?"

Fenton Hardy laughed. "Once upon a time I thought you boys would make good detectives," he said jokingly, "but I'm afraid you've both become complete failures."

"Dad!" exclaimed Frank in dismay. "What do you mean?"

The brothers were proud, and justly so, of their record as aids to their father on many of his important cases. They failed to note the twinkle in Mr. Hardy's eye as he spoke to them.

"Remember my telling you about six months ago that I wanted you to find a certain old book on criminology?" the detective asked.

Joe exclaimed with relief, "Why, that's just a book on the study of criminals. Anybody can find it."

Fenton Hardy chuckled. "Ah, that's the trouble, anybody can't! It's a very rare work and has been out of print for years. If you're really good detectives you should be able to dig it up in some bookstore."

"Of course we should, Joe!" said Frank. "What's been the matter with us, anyway?"

The boys enjoyed a round of good-natured banter with their father, and concluded by promising to renew their search for the volume as soon as possible.

"In the meantime," broke in the detective, rising from his chair, "I must pack."

"Taking any disguises, Dad?" asked Joe, referring to Mr. Hardy's large assortment of clothes, masks, wigs and the like for use in imitating any character he might wish.

Before his father could reply, Frank, who had been looking out the window, uttered a low exclamation.

"Dad, Joe, look over there across the street! Isn't somebody hiding behind that big bush and watching our house?"

Joe bounded over to the window, closely followed by his father. "You're right!" whispered the younger Hardy boy. "Now, who do you suppose it is?"

"I shall have to be careful about leaving," said Mr. Hardy, peering out at what was unmistakably the figure of a man half hidden in a clump of foliage.

"Do you think he's a spy for the gang of smugglers, Dad!" suggested Joe tensely.

"I shouldn't be surprised," replied the boys' father grimly. "At any rate, I've an idea.

Frank, phone Mr. Callahan and ask him to drive right over in his plumber's truck. Joe, you and I will get busy upstairs."

The brothers sprang to obey, though neither of them could guess at the moment just what was in their father's mind.

A few moments later the back door bell rang, Frank admitted a tall, thin man dressed in greasy-looking overalls and wearing thick hornrimmed spectacles.

"Come right in, Mr. Callahan. Dad will - "

Before Frank could finish there was a sudden scream. Aunt Gertrude in the hallway

collapsed in a convenient chair. "Oh!" she moaned, rocking to and fro and pointing at the surprised plumber, "another gangster, and he's in the house! Why doesn't somebody do something!"

The old lady shrieked again. This time she pointed to the stairway. On the bottom step stood Mr. Callahan's exact double, greasy overalls, spectacles and all.

"Wonderful, Dad!" Frank exclaimed. "Mr. Callahan couldn't tell the difference himself!"

"Doubt if I could!" muttered the amazed plumber. "He looks more like me than I do myself!"

Quickly Fenton Hardy explained his plan. "Can you spare your truck for ten minutes, Mr. Callahan?"

The plumber, an old and trusted friend of the family, readily agreed.

"Fine," returned Mr. Hardy. "Frank, you drive me to the station. There's a train in twelve minutes. Whoever our friend out there is," and he waved a finger toward the window through which the partly-concealed stranger could still be seen watching them, "whoever he is, he'll never suspect that it's I instead of Mr. Callahan driving away in the truck!"

"And won't the spy get a shock when he sees Frank bring the truck back and another Mr. Callahan climb in!" Joe laughed.

With a hurried farewell Fenton Hardy drove off rapidly in the machine with Frank. The others meanwhile settled down to await the older Hardy lad's return, Joe keeping an eye in the direction of the hidden stranger.

Suddenly, from somewhere in the rear of the house there came a cry for help!

## **CHAPTER II**

### **The Missing Code**

"Jumpin' pipes, what's that!" cried the elderly plumber, leaping to his feet in alarm.

In a flash Joe was off in the direction of the kitchen with Mr. Callahan hesitantly following him.

"Help! Murder! Help!"

The scream undoubtedly came from Aunt Gertrude. When Joe reached the old lady's side she was lying in a faint on the floor.

"Quick! Some water!" he called, but before the slow-moving plumber could act Joe had dashed a cupful in his relative's face.

"Oh!" she gasped, opening her eyes and blinking uncertainly. "Get the police quick! The house is being raided! The house is full of robbers! There's another!" She uttered a piercing scream at the sight of Callahan peering at her.

"Now, now, Aunt Gertrude, please!" Joe attempted to soothe the woman. "The house isn't

being raided and Mr. Callahan is only our plumber."

"He is not!" wailed Aunt Gertrude. "I just saw another one. He opened the back door and came right in! He's in the cellar. Oh, get the police quick!"

For an instant Joe was in doubt. Maybe somebody had come in. The kitchen door stood ajar. He was interrupted in his thoughts by the sound of the front door slamming. A moment later Frank peered wonderingly into the kitchen.

"Aunt Gertrude says she just saw a man walk into the house and go down cellar," Joe explained. "Frank, suppose you and Mr. Callahan guard the doors while I take a look?" Cautiously the younger Hardy had descended the narrow steps while his brother stood watch in the kitchen and Callahan guarded the front door. Reaching the furnace room, Joe stopped and gazed around in the gloom. Suddenly he heard a slight rustling. Then came a muffled cry, as a huge figure lunged at him from the shadows.

Joe was not caught wholly by surprise, for both he and Frank, as true sons of their famous father, knew the value of preparedness against sudden attacks. Indeed, so quick were the boys at mastering the detective art that Fenton Hardy had come to depend a great deal upon them.

In many instances the boys had become involved in solving cases of their own. Their first success had occurred when they had located valuable loot which a dying criminal had confessed to them was hidden "in the tower." Recently they had become deep-sea divers in a successful effort to thwart the plans of a dangerous underwater criminal.

"Frank!"

Joe uttered the warning cry at the instant the hurtling figure collided with him.

Simultaneously he swung his fist in a desperate effort to stop the fugitive but the man was already well on his way toward a large window near by. There was a crash of splintering glass and the figure was gone.

Just then Frank rushed down the cellar steps. "Joe! What happened?"

"He got to the window before I could stop him!" panted the younger lad, who had dashed after the mysterious fellow only to be stopped by jagged glass.

By the time the brothers had reached outdoors through the cellar exit no one was in sight. Together they returned to the house, speculating on the identity of their strange visitor.

"I'm sure that whoever he is, he has something to do with Dad's smuggling case," Joe decided.

"He's probably the same fellow who was hiding across the street," Frank suggested. "At any rate we'll have to be on the lookout from now on."

Although the boys felt themselves fully capable of handling whatever emergency might arise, their Aunt Gertrude insisted that Mary, the laundress, should come at once to the house and stay all the time. In a short while the woman arrived and by ten o'clock the household "was ready for bed."

"I'd sleep better if I knew where my wallet and Dad's code are," sighed Frank in the darkness.

"So would I," Joe admitted, "but I think they'll turn up somewhere."

"They'll have to," returned his brother. "Otherwise we'll be in a fine fix if Dad should send us a code message!"

The night proved uneventful. The brothers were up and dressed early.

"How about looking around for that criminology book Dad wants?" Frank suggested over breakfast.

"Good idea," Joe agreed. "No use wasting time while we're waiting for that cellar-hider, whoever he is, to come back. Let's go."

The brothers had already looked in the better class stores for the rare volume. Now they set out for the waterfront district. Making their way along the crowded streets, they soon found an old second-hand book shop.

"Hartley's Science of Criminology?" mused the wizened, bespectacled proprietor at Joe's question. "Hmmm. Been out of print for years, but I'm certain we had a copy several months ago. Let's look through the stacks."

For an hour or more they poked among the dusty piles of old books in the rear of the shop. Then Joe gave a shout and emerged from a murky corner. "Here it is, Frank! Here's the book!"

The lad hurried to his brother's side and the two excitedly examined the old masterpiece. "Dad'll be tickled pink, won't he?" Joe exclaimed. "Say, what's that?" he asked as he noticed a book under Frank's arm.

"Don't know just what it is. Ran across it a minute ago."

"'Fifty Thousand Dead Men.' Golly, what a title! \_ Joe squealed, scanning the cover which was yellowed with age. "By Captain Gronger! Frank, he was a pirate!"

"This must be his autobiography." Excitedly Frank showed his find to the proprietor.

"Oh yes, I'd forgotten we had it," said the latter. "It's yours for a dollar."

The brothers returned home highly elated, no less by their discovery of the strange old pirate book than because they had found the volume their father wanted. That evening just as they settled down to read the former the phone rang.

"Who was it, Frank?" Joe asked when his brother clicked the receiver back on the hook.

"Some man who wouldn't give his name says Dad wants his brief case right away!" Frank exclaimed. "Says to deliver it to Riley's Inn."

"Sounds fishy to me," commented Joe. "Dad said he'd use the code if he wanted us."

"I tell you what," Frank suggested. "We'll deliver the brief case but we'll take out the papers, just to be safe."

"And put in a note instead asking Dad to use the code!" concluded his brother. "Fine, let's go!"

Frank dashed upstairs to find the brief case and remove its contents while Joe scribbled off a hasty note reading:

"Dad, if you want papers use Hardy method."

This the boys inserted in the leather pouch. As darkness fell they set out for Riley's Inn.

"Do you know where the place is, Frank?"

"Down by the docks. I recall seeing it once when we were cruising around in the Sleuth."

Frank referred to their motorboat, which was one of the brothers' prized possessions. Half an hour's rapid walking brought them to a section of untidy, tumble-down shacks clustered about the wharves on Barmet Bay.

"Look, is that the place?" Frank nudged his brother and pointed to a ramshackle wooden building near the water's edge. "What a dump!"

As they approached, sounds of music and the thump of dancing feet mingled with the shouts and laughter of merry-making dockhands and sailors.

"Well, let's go in and see what happens," Frank suggested dubiously.

No sooner had the brothers entered the reeking atmosphere of the place than a lean, swarthy man with a hooked nose sidled up to them. "You air ze Hardy boys?" he asked

hoarsely.

"Yes, we are," replied Frank with a queer feeling in the pit of his stomach. "Are you the gentleman who called us?"

The stranger's face was expressionless. "Geev Pierre ze brief case. I work for your papa." Frank hesitated an instant, then handed over the case without saying a word. A faint smile played over the man's thin lips. "Tank you. Goo' bye." He stalked off into the crowded room adjoining.

Outside Joe said to his brother, "Let's look in that window. Maybe we'll find out something!"

Through a dirty pane in the shadows they could see the stranger who called himself Pierre elbowing his way across the crowded dance floor into an adjoining room.

"Come on, the next window!" Frank whispered, and the two boys glided along the side of the old building to another blotch of light.

"Just as I thought!" the older Hardy lad exclaimed under his breath as he and Joe peered inside.

"You're right! Look, he's opening the brief case. Watch him when he sees the surprise we put in there!"

The hooked-nosed man was standing in a bare, dimly-lighted room, fumbling with the catch on the brief case. As the flap came open he plunged a bony hand inside. Suddenly, with a surprised jerk, he pulled out a single, small scrap of paper.

"Our note, Frank!" Joe whispered excitedly.

As Pierre scanned the paper his face twisted itself into a horrible scowl. With a roar of rage he dashed the brief case to the floor and stormed out of the room.

"We'd better keep an eye on him, Frank. Dad may be in some sort of trouble!"

"You're right. On the other hand we're supposed to be keeping a watch at home, too. Maybe-say, look over there under that street light!"

"Chet!" squealed Joe, recognizing their plump friend moving hesitantly along the alley. In a jiffy the boys had overtaken him.

"Why - why, hello!" the stout lad exclaimed with a look of relief. "I'm certainly glad to see somebody I know around here! "What a place!"

"Whatever gave you the idea of taking your hikes down here?" Frank asked in amazement, knowing their chum was not overly courageous after dark.

"Don't worry, I'll never make this mistake again!" the Morton lad declared emphatically.

"I felt like eating some lobster so I thought I could get one cheap - "

"Joe, I've an idea!" Frank interrupted. "Let's have Chet follow Pierre while we go home and see if anything's doing. We might - "

"What's that? Me follow who!" the plump lad blinked. "No thanks!"

Rapidly Frank related to Chet the incident of Pierre and the brief case. At length, under protest, the stout boy agreed to trail the man.

"But how will I know him when I see him?" he objected.

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than the sagging front door of Riley's Inn opened and a tall, thin figure slipped out.

"There he is, Chet!" whispered Frank hoarsely. "Go ahead and follow him, but don't let him see you!"

"You needn't worry, I won't!" the stout lad declared fervently, sinking back into the shadows. "So long!"

The brothers immediately started for home, satisfied that Chet would report to them soon concerning the movements of the stranger who had posed as one of their father's agents. As Frank opened the door of the Hardy home some thirty minutes later he uttered an exclamation. "What do you suppose this is, Joe?" he asked, holding out a small package addressed to him and bearing a special delivery stamp. Quickly ripping open the package, he pulled forth the lost wallet. "Do you suppose the secret code is still inside?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **The Black Parrot**

"There it is, Joe, there's the code!"

Frank in his excitement had dumped the contents of the wallet onto a table. Among keys, postage stamps, photographs and other such items was a small, neatly-folded paper which the lad quickly retrieved and spread open.

"Thank goodness!" he breathed, scanning the page. "It looks as if it hasn't been unfolded."

"We'd better save the package. The handwriting might give us a clue some time as to who sent it. Probably - "

The jangle of the telephone cut him off. "Maybe that's Dad!" Joe cried, hurrying to the instrument in the next room. A moment later he was back. "Chet wants us right away, Frank! Says he followed our friend Pierre to some boat."

In a jiffy the brothers were off in Frank's new roadster. Twenty minutes later they drew up at the Morton homestead on the outskirts of town.

"I hope Chet's family won't mind our calling at such an hour!" Joe muttered dryly as they tumbled out. "It's past midnight."

When they reached the porch the front door opened. "Come in, fellows," drawled a sleepy voice.

"You're certainly a fast worker, Chet!" Frank exclaimed in praise. "We didn't expect to hear from you until tomorrow!"

"Humph! It's just about tomorrow now!" grunted their fat chum. "What's more, I think I deserve a good meal after all the walking and trailing I've been doing!"

"Same old Chet, always thinking of his bed and his stomach!" Joe laughed.

This remark was a true one, for their good-natured friend was usually either hungry or sleepy. Easy-going as he was, however, he did not resent in the least being teased by his friends and was often their companion when the brothers were involved in some thrilling adventure. Occasionally Chet proved to be of real assistance, though more often it was his good humor under all circumstances that made him so helpful in tense situations.



The plump lad grinned. "You'd think of your stomach and bed if you'd hiked as far as I have!"

"It's good for you, Chet, takes off some of your waist-line!" Joe teased. "But let's hear what happened!"

Chet's eyes suddenly widened and he lost his sleepy look. "Say, you certainly picked out a nice fellow for me to get acquainted with!" he said ironically. "I followed him for about two miles along the waterfront, or maybe it was three miles. At least - "

"Never mind how far it was, Chet, tell us what happened," Frank interrupted impatiently.

"Well, we came to an old fishing schooner, that is, he came to it and he went on board. The Black Parrot, I think the name was. Couldn't see it very well in the dark."

"Is that all?" Joe asked disappointedly.

"No, worse luck!" Chet grumbled. "When he disappeared on board I decided to follow him. I walked over the gangplank and just as I got on deck he jumped out of a doorway or whatever you call the - "

"Yes-go on!" Frank was breathless.

"And he gave me a smack over the ear that just about knocked me overboard. Then he called some sailors and they threw me back on the dock." The fat lad ruefully rubbed his shins.

"Good work, Chet!" Frank commended. "At least we've a clue to help us."

"Right!" came Joe's hearty agreement. "Thanks a lot, Chet, and we'll let you know what develops."

"Never mind," retorted the stout lad. "Just call me up when you're going to the movies or doing something peaceful. I've had about enough detective work for this week!"

The brothers bade their chum good night and drove rapidly home.

"Look, a light in the kitchen!" Joe exclaimed as they turned into the Hardy driveway.

"Who in the world can it be ?"

They were greeted at the kitchen door by the familiar figure of Mary, the laundress.

"Shure, an' it's high time ye came back! Half after one in the mornin', it is!"

"Hello, Mary!" Frank exclaimed. "Why aren't you in bed?" he teased.

"Shure, an' I ain't sleepin' here any more," the woman replied. "I'm lavin', an' right now."

"What's the matter?" Joe asked. "Has Aunt Gertrude been scolding you again?"

"It ain't that, lads! But when your fayther goes a-ravin' mad in the middle o' the night an' the likes o' that, an' talks about watermelons an' sich an' dacent folks is asleep-then I'm lavin'."

For an instant the boys were puzzled, but suddenly the laundress produced a slip of paper containing a hastily-scrawled message. "Here, me lads, read!"

Frank took the note. "Watermelons formerly ripening-now in full bloom-rush shipment Bayport Beanpot," he read aloud, squinting at the poor handwriting. "There, now, did ye ever hear o' such a thing

Joe looked significantly at his brother. The two boys, with considerable persuasion, managed to induce the woman to return to her room and forget the incident.

"Now let's do some translating!" Joe whispered excitedly when the two were alone.

"Where's Dad's code?"

"Right here," Frank replied, placing the sheet beside the strange telephone message so the two could be compared.

"I have it, Frank," Joe cried a moment later. "We're supposed to deliver the papers, the

ones we took from the brief case, to a messenger at the Beanpot Restaurant immediately!" The older Hardy lad frowned. "Joe, I've a hunch something's wrong somewhere. Dad has never asked us to deliver his private papers to strange messengers before."

"Golly, that's a thought," Joe commented. "But still the message came in Dad's own code." "That's just it, we haven't proved for sure that whoever found my wallet didn't figure out the code."

"Frank, I've an idea. Why not examine the code-sheet for finger-prints? It'll take only a minute!"

The brothers dashed down into the basement where they had set up a completely-equipped finger-print laboratory.

"Hand me the powder, Joe, and turn on the microscope light," Frank said, spreading out the code-sheet on the table.

In a jiffy he had covered the paper with a special pulverized chemical Mr. Hardy had obtained for them through his official connections. He waited a moment, then blew off the surplus powder and inserted the paper under the microscope.

"Take a look, Joe, while I get our own fingerprint chart for comparison."

For several moments the boys took turn studying the finger marks on the code-sheet.

"Just what I was afraid of," Frank remarked at length, squinting into the microscope.

"Somebody else's finger-prints are on that code-sheet!"

"Jumping crickets, what are we going to do now!" groaned Joe. "We certainly can't take chances with Dad's papers."

"There's only one thing we can do, and that is deliver another note asking Dad to confirm his message to us."

Joe scratched his head thoughtfully. "If we do that, how will we know whether or not the answer is genuine?" he objected. "Now that we've proved somebody knows our code - " Frank rapidly scribbled a note on a scrap of paper, then read the result aloud. "Dad-we found book you wanted-send title in exchange for papers."

"That's great, Frank! Nobody but Dad could possibly know the name of the book he asked us to find, so this time nobody can fake an answer. Come on, let's go!"

Before they left Frank procured a large envelope which he stuffed with blank sheets of paper. To them he attached their note and sealed the envelope. Twenty minutes later they were seated at a counter in the well-known Bayport Beanpot, the town's only all-night restaurant.

"Nothing much to do but eat," Joe laughed. "I don't see anybody looking for us."

The younger Hardy lad had no sooner spoken when the door opened and a tall, bony individual with a felt hat jammed down over his eyes walked in.

"You're wrong, Joe," Frank whispered.

Despite the fact that his hat-brim hid part of his face, the boys had no difficulty in recognizing Pierre, the man who had met them in Riley's inn. The sinister looking fellow idled up to them.

"Haff you got ze papairs, young men? Your fathair, he send me. He very mad when you play joke las' time." Pierre's face appeared expressionless, though Frank thought he detected a cruel glint in the man's beady black eyes.

"Look here, Mister - Mister Pierre, we'd like to know where Mr. Hardy is," Joe demanded. A sarcastic smile came to the fellow's lips. "Pierre, he tell nothing weethout ordairs. Meestair Hardy he say no tell yet where he ees. Geef me ze papairs!"

"We'll give you nothing of the sort until you - " Joe began with rising anger, but Frank nudged him.

"Here are the papers, Pierre," the older lad said, handing the bulky envelope to the mysterious messenger who was now staring coldly over their heads. "Come on, Joe, it's high time we had some sleep."

Reluctantly Joe followed his brother into the darkness outside. "Now's our big chance!" Frank whispered. "When he comes out we'll follow him!"

"I think we ought to tackle him!" retorted Joe impulsively. "This business has gone far enough!"

Before either of them could make any move the restaurant door opened and Pierre stepped out. For a moment he gazed furtively about him, Then, apparently satisfied that no one had observed him, he walked rapidly away in the direction of Barmet Bay.

Frank motioned to Joe. Together the brothers dodged through the shadows, keeping the hawk-faced stranger barely in sight in the gleam of an occasional street lamp. After nearly an hour of the risky chase a great, gaunt outline loomed up ahead of them.

"A ship!" Joe exclaimed under his breath.

"The Black Parrot!" Frank added. "Look, there goes Pierre aboard!"

"Somebody's with him. Maybe just a sailor. Shall we follow?" Joe whispered hoarsely.

"We'll have to find a good excuse. I've an idea. They're loading freight. Let's get a box somewhere and make a fake delivery!"

"Good! You watch while I get one!"

Leaving his brother in the shadow of an old lobster shack near the wharf Joe disappeared in the gloom. In a moment he was back, tiptoeing quietly with a large empty carton over his shoulder.

"What luck, Frank! Stumbled on this thing on some junk-pile over there by that other shack."

Quietly the boys filled the box with large pebbles, after which Frank, who fortunately had a piece of stout twine in his pocket, tied the parcel firmly shut. Then in large letters they addressed it.

"We'd better disguise ourselves a little or Pierre may recognize us," Joe suggested.

Accordingly they removed their neckties, rumpled their clothes, and Frank rubbed a handful of dirt over his face.

"All ready, Joe? Keep your hat down over your face. I hardly think Pierre will recognize us, at least not in the dark."

The boys picked up the heavily-laden box and trudged down to the gangplank of a large, old-fashioned schooner tied up alongside. Dock-hands and sailors milled about carrying boxes and crates aboard, while several gruff looking men stood near by supervising the work.

"Here, what you two young fellers got?" demanded one, detaching himself from the group and thrusting a grizzled chin at the boys.

Joe pointed to the address. On the side of the carton was a mark "Salt Pork."

"Salt pork, eh? Thought we had that all on board. Well, stow it away in the hold!"

Joe's pounding heart steadied as the man waved the lads on board. Following the line of deckhands who were likewise burdened, they soon found themselves in a large room below deck, dimly-lit with two ship's lanterns suspended from the ceiling.

"Come on!" a sailor shouted, as the boys hesitated, hoping to look around them. "Git

movin'!"

He shoved the boys up the companionway. Just as Frank reached the deck a gruff, unfamiliar voice sounded from the darkness almost at his elbow.

"Did you get the papers?"

"Yeah. I got 'em," came a muttered reply.

Before the older Hardy lad could hear more, he and Joe found themselves on the wharf.

"Game's up around here for the time being, I guess," whispered Joe. "Anyhow, we'd better get home in case there's another message."

They walked rapidly, discussing the mystery of Pierre's connection with the Black Parrot.

"Did you hear that fellow on the deck talking about getting the papers, Frank!" Joe asked as they turned into Locust Street.

"Yes, I did. I think he must have been talking about the sailing papers. What time is it anyhow?"

Joe squinted at his watch under a street light. "Golly, it's nearly four-thirty! I hope Aunt Gertrude hasn't missed us."

As Frank opened the door of the Hardy home he stopped short. "Listen, Joe!" he whispered.

A muffled cry came from somewhere deep in the interior of the dark house.

## CHAPTER IV

### A Chase in the Dark

"Listen! There it goes again!"

"Sounds as if it's in the cellar, Frank!"

Both boys rushed for the narrow basement staircase. Frank snapped on the light. As they reached the bottom step the cry sounded again, this time from a shadowy corner.

"Frank, look!" Joe yelled, bounding over. "Why, Aunt Gertrude-and Mary! What in the world?"

"Good night!" exclaimed Frank as he peered at the figures of the two women, tied securely with stout cord to a drain-pipe, their mouths stuffed with rags.

In a twinkling the brothers had set the captives free. "For goodness\* sake, Aunt Gertrude, tell us what happened!" Joe pleaded as their relative made no attempt to speak.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" she managed to gasp. "I knew it would happen! All those strange men trying to get in - " Her voice trailed away and she appeared about to faint.

"Here's some water, Aunt Gertrude, and for you too, Mary," said Frank, getting some from the laundry.

"Just you wait until your father comes home, you young brats!" exploded Aunt Gertrude,

whose wrath was returning. "Going out all night and leaving - "

"There now," interrupted the laundress. "Sure, and it wasn't the boys' fault."

"Who did it?" Frank exclaimed impatiently.

"B 'gorry, lad, and it's that I wish I knew! I 'was lyin' in bed as peaceful-like as you please, when the fellow wakes me up with a right smart lick of a rope, and he says, 'Git up, you!', and a-fore I knows it he has me down here with your Auntie!"

"Yes, that's exactly what happened to me!" agreed Aunt Gertrude, scowling at the boys.

"Why, I can't believe yet that we haven't been murdered!"

The brothers helped their relative and the laundress to the kitchen, but a moment later Aunt Gertrude suddenly turned pale and fainted.

"Quick, put a cold cloth on her face, Joe!" Frank ordered. "I'll call Doctor Bates."

"And if ye'll excuse me, I'm a-lavin'!" said Mary firmly, "I think this place is a mite too excitin' for me!"

With that she walked tremblingly to the telephone and called a taxi. A few minutes later 'she departed, declaring that so far as she was concerned the laundry work would be left undone in the future.

A few applications of the cold cloth restored the boys' aunt to consciousness, but there was no doubt that the old lady was badly shaken. At that moment the doorbell rang and Doctor Bates strode in. After a rapid examination he announced that the boys' aunt had had a severe nervous shock.

"She will have to remain quietly in bed for a few days," he said. "I'll write out a prescription for some medicine. Joe, get me a fountain pen, will you, please? I've forgotten mine."

"Shall we engage a nurse?" asked Frank.

"I'll send one over in an hour," replied the physician. "Thanks, Joe," he added as the younger Hardy lad returned with the pen. "Here's a prescription. Have it filled as soon as possible."

The doctor left, promising to return later in the day. The brothers immediately moved their relative to her room on the second floor.

"Now, don't you two boys dare go out!" she whined. "If you do I shall certainly go raving mad! Never will I stay here alone again. I don't know why I wasn't tortured to death before now!"

The lads remained with their aunt until Miss Menninger, the nurse, arrived an hour later.

"Now you young men go downstairs and get yourselves some breakfast," she commanded, waving them out. "I'll take good care of your aunt."

Down in the kitchen Frank suddenly looked at his brother. "What's the matter, Joe? You're as white as a sheet."

"Remember when Doctor Bates sent me for the fountain pen? Well, I took it from Dad's desk. Isn't that where you left the papers you removed from his brief case?"

"Yes, of course," Frank replied, suddenly feeling a chill along his spine. "Joe, don't tell me - >>

"They're gone!"

Frank gasped. "Now we'll have to catch Pierre! I'm certain he has them."

"How can he? He was on the Black Parrot when the thief was here."

"Whoever it was who came here a couple of hours ago and tied up Aunt Gertrude was after the papers, Joe, sure as shooting. And he wanted them for Pierre, I'll bet."

"I shouldn't be surprised. He got them too, worse luck. He has probably handed them over to Pierre by this time. Frank, do you recall that conversation we overheard about papers? Maybe - "

Breakfast forgotten, the boys jumped into their roadster and made for the wharf, determined to board the vessel by whatever method seemed the easiest at the moment.

"We'll have to get on, Joe!" Frank muttered between clenched teeth. He gripped the wheel and they spun around a corner into the dirt road leading to the Black Parrot's dock.

"She's left!" groaned Joe as an empty void greeted them where the vessel's great hulk had been but a few hours before.

"Golly, she has!" Frank whistled in dismay. "Now we'll have to chase her."

"Right! We'll get out the Sleuth in a hurry. But while we're here let's inquire at the dock office and see where she went."

Frank drew the car alongside the office but the door was locked.

"The Black Parrot couldn't have left very long ago, for it's only seven o'clock now," Joe commented. "We ought to be able to catch her before she gets out of the bay."

The boys drove rapidly to the far end of town, where they kept their own motorboat, the Sleuth, in a boathouse. As Joe pressed the starter of the craft the engine sprang into life. Frank twisted the helm and the long, powerful launch eased out into the choppy waters of the bay.

"Not a ship in-sight," said Joe a few minutes later.

"It's fifteen miles to the ocean, though. The Black Parrot couldn't have made that distance yet."

"Don't know about that. There's a pretty good following-wind."

The wind, in fact, was rising rapidly and the Sleuth bounced violently as the bay grew wider and the protecting shore-line gradually disappeared. The boys seldom ventured out toward the ocean. Their boat, though stoutly constructed, was not intended for heavy seas. Frank strained his eyes and looked ahead of him. "Getting misty," he stated. "Another half hour and we won't be able to see three feet in front of us."

"We're making thirty knots, Frank. Shouldn't have to chase that old schooner much longer."

With a sudden loud cough the motor of the Sleuth stopped. At the same time a huge wave rolled down upon them. If Frank had not instantly twisted the prow into the wind they would have capsized.

"Boy, what a close call!" breathed Joe, mopping his brow. "Frank, you should have been a sea captain!"

"We'll certainly need one now!" exclaimed his brother. "What are we going to do about that motor?"

Joe, in the meantime, had begun a quick inspection of the engine.

"Doesn't take much of a mechanic to know what's wrong with this motor, Frank," he reported glumly a few moments later. "No gas!" There was nothing to do but unship the heavy emergency oars and row back. However, after ten minutes of desperate struggling the boys knew that unless help should come soon they would be swept out to sea!

## **CHAPTER V**

### **A Secret Message**

The Sleuth became like a wild animal, lurching and rolling in a hundred directions at once, climbing to the top of a giant wave only to plunge down madly into another. The deck was a smother of boiling foam, and the two Hardy boys had all they could do to remain aboard as the seething waters battered them unmercifully.

"Joe, the flares!" Frank yelled above the roar of wind and sea, referring to the magnesium signals they kept in the tiny cabin.

Without replying, the younger Hardy lad climbed down carefully from his perch alongside a stanchion, to which he was clinging with whitened knuckles. Picking his way desperately across the cluttered cockpit between the waves that broke over him, he managed to reach under the spinning helm into a small cabinet. From it he drew out a long object similar to a Roman candle. Quickly he shoved the flare under his jacket to protect it from the flying water. Frank meanwhile had been approaching his brother from the opposite side of the boat.

"Here's a match!" he gasped as the spray from a wave hit him full in the face.

As Joe braced himself, holding the flare in readiness, Frank attempted to light a match and touch it to the dampened fuse. He struck five of them in quick succession on the box-cover, but with no success. The sixth, however, burst into flame. With difficulty the lad managed to shield it from the wind for a fraction of a second and touch it to Joe's flare. There was a sudden loud swish, followed an instant later by a burst of fire high overhead, then a thunderous report.

"The other one!" Frank yelled.

His brother nodded and the boys managed to repeat the procedure with the single remaining rocket.

"Think these'll do any good?" Joe shouted in his brother's ear. "It's pretty light."

It was true that although the mist was so heavy it was almost impossible to see a thing, it was not dark, and the flare probably would not be noticed unless another boat were very close.

Nothing happened. The storm continued with a never-ending fury. Then suddenly the air was filled with a wailing sound.

"Ship's whistle!" cried Frank, almost forgetting to hold to the railing in his excitement.

An instant later a powerful searchlight pierced the mist. The boys could hear hoarse shouts in the distance. The beam grew brighter, and suddenly a large Diesel yacht bore down on them. Between giant waves that buried the ship's prow every few seconds the brothers could see its Coast Guard insignia.

"Get the tow-line!" shouted a sailor as the cutter swept dangerously close.

There was a puff of smoke, and a huge coil of rope snaked through the air, landing miraculously in the cockpit of the Sleuth.

**"Quick, Joe, before it's pulled off!"**

**In a twinkling Joe seized its end and sprang to the forward mooring cleat where he knotted it fast. Frank was at his brother's heels with the surplus rope, which he tossed overboard before it should be pulled off and become tangled in the propeller or rudder.**

**"Right ahead!" sang out a voice on the Coast Guard vessel an instant later.**

**The cutter speeded up. The Sleuth strained through the boiling waters behind. An hour later the shore-line which loomed up ahead proved to be Bayport's water-front.**

**"O.K., fellows. Cast loose and row in!" shouted a voice from the Coast Guard cutter as it began to swing around.**

**Frank loosed the cable, which was quickly taken up by the other boat, and the brothers rowed the Sleuth alongside the nearest empty wharf.**

**"Golly!" Frank burst out when they were safely tied up. "That was about the closest we've come to - "**

**"Look, we're tied up at the Black Parrot's dock!" interrupted Joe.**

**The mist had cleared away, and the sign Black Parrot was to be seen on the window of the office they had visited previously.**

**"By jiminy, you're right, and it's open, too! Let's go in and see what we can find out."**

**Frank summoned a laborer who was idling near by, instructing him to get some gasoline for the Sleuth. A moment later the boys entered the Black Parrot's dock office, where the lone occupant looked up from his work at a desk.**

**"We'd like information about the Black Parrot," said Frank. "Where it's going, and whether there's a man named Pierre aboard," Frank explained.**

**"Humph! You don't want to know much, do you?" growled the other. "Well, I can't answer you."**

**"Why not?" Joe quizzed impulsively.**

**"Because I don't know where the schooner's going, young feller."**

**"Maybe you could give us a general idea," Frank suggested.**

**"Well, east part of Canada some place is usually where he sails 'er. She's a tramp schooner, you see, runs around every which way wherever there's cargo."**

**"Thank you," said Frank. "One more question: is there a man named Pierre on board?"**

**The office clerk laughed. "Sure there is! Why, I'll bet there's a dozen of 'em! In fact, just about everybody in the crew's named Pierre so far's I could tell before they left!"**

**He leaned back in his chair, laughing uproariously, and when Frank and Joe departed he was still laughing.**

**"Tank's full, sir," announced the deckhand who was waiting for them.**

**Frank paid the man and a moment later the Sleuth nosed out into the bay, once more under her own power.**

**"We'll tie up in the boathouse, I guess," said Frank. "Not much use trying to catch up with the Black Parrot now."**

**" 'Fraid not," Joe agreed. "We'd better travel on home and see what's doing."**

**"And get some sleep too! We've been up all night, don't forget!"**

**In the excitement of the past several hours the brothers had forgotten completely that they had not been to bed at all. Now, as they moored their boat and drove homeward, they felt fatigued. Being in excellent physical trim, however, they required only a brief rest before they were again ready for action.**

**"Joe, let's investigate Dad's study once more," Frank suggested when the two had finished**



a sound nap. "Maybe those papers are around there some place."

"No, they aren't, for I hunted very carefully. But it might not be a bad idea to see if we can find some fingerprints."

"You're right! Let's get the stuff and start!"

Twenty minutes later the boys had assembled their equipment in their father's study and were deeply absorbed in photographing finger-prints revealed on the desk-top by the special chemical they had used before. As each picture was snapped, Joe would rush it to their photographic developing room in the cellar and return shortly with the developed plates.

"That's enough," Frank declared at length. "Now let's see what we have."

He snapped on the microscope light and began a detailed comparison of the photographs just taken with some previously made of fingerprints on their father's code-sheet.

"See anything?" Joe cried eagerly. "The impressions on the code-sheet are bound to be the same as those on the desk-top, don't you think?"

"I did think so but I don't now," returned Frank mysteriously. "Joe, the fingerprints are different!"

"Whew! More puzzles! That means at least two people are mixed up in this, doesn't it?"

"At least two," murmured Frank as he squinted into the microscope. "Maybe three. Here's something I haven't seen before, Joe. Half a finger-print!"

"Half? Maybe you didn't have enough powder on it before we took the picture."

"No, the lines are sort of chopped off. They don't fade away gradually as if I hadn't put on enough powder. Looks like an injury to the fellow's finger."

"Let's see." The younger Hardy lad sprang eagerly to the instrument and peered at the strange maze of curly-cued lines under the eyepiece. "Say, there are a lot of them, Frank!"

"Yes, so I found out. They're mostly in one corner of the picture so I didn't see them at first."

For more than an hour the boys studied the photographs but could arrive at no conclusion as to the identity of the owners of the prints.

"About all we know is that one of them has a broken finger and that he isn't the one who had your wallet," Joe summed up their efforts. "Now what?"

"I think - "

Frank was interrupted by the phone ringing. Joe picked up the receiver.

"Hello ? Why, hello, Mother!" he exclaimed. "What's that? We'll be right over!" He clicked back the receiver and turned to his brother. "Frank, Mother's at the airport. She just came in from New York and says she has a peculiar message for us!"

"Maybe it's from Dad. Let's get going!"

The brothers jumped into their car and hurried to the Bayport airport.

"It's good to see you, Mother!" Joe cried as they ran up to greet a medium-sized, smartly dressed woman with a bright smile.

"We've missed you," Frank chimed in.

As Mrs. Hardy was bundled into the roadster her face became serious. "Boys, I received a strange telephone message this morning. Perhaps you can explain it."

"What sort of message, Mother?"

"I have it written down here, just as the hotel clerk received it on the phone. He said the man, whoever he was, did not want to speak to me direct but asked to have the message delivered to me. Listen: 'Tell Mrs. Hardy that Fenton doesn't like oysters. That goats must

camp at Third British.' "

Mrs. Hardy looked at her sons questioningly. "Now, if that's some practical joke -" Frank laughed. " Don't worry, Mother, we'll tell you what it means when we get home." During the remainder of the ride the boys recounted the episode of the previous night. Mrs. Hardy naturally was distressed, but she had long since learned to expect whatever might happen in a household containing three detectives.

"How we all manage to live through it is more than I can explain!" she smiled resignedly. When they reached the house, she proceeded at once to Aunt Gertrude's room. The boys took the opportunity to bring out their father's code for comparison with the latest message.

"Fenton does not like oysters," Joe repeated, scanning the code-sheet. "Oysters, oysters, let's see, that word means fishing or fishing boat here in the code."

"That's right," agreed Frank, peering over his brother's shoulder. "And the rest of the message means that we're supposed to go to the Canadian woods!\_

"What does this fishing-boat business mean, Frank?" asked Joe as the boys studied the message further. "He doesn't tell us where in the Canadian woods to go, nor what to go for," he complained, scratching his head doubtfully. "This message is only half here."

"You've got it, Joe!" Frank exclaimed, suddenly jumping up. "That's just it. The message is only half here."

"Then Dad's been kidnaped or hurt!" Joe gasped, instantly grasping his brother's thought. "I'm afraid so," Frank said gloomily. "Something undoubtedly happened to Dad while he was sending that message. We must do something quickly!"

## CHAPTER VI

### Lost

"Go! Get out o'here!"

A huge fist crashed on the desk top in the Black Parrot dock office. Its owner, a large, ugly looking man, scowled at the Hardy brothers. "Get out of here, I said! I ain't got all day to spend tellin' ye the Black Parrot ain't to be found!"

"But-" Frank attempted to speak, but the stranger would not listen, so the lads went out. Joe turned to his brother. "Listen, there's something funny about all this. Did you ever hear of a shipping company that didn't know where its ships were bound for?"

"You're right. They know but they're not telling, for some reason or other."

Joe pursed his lips. "Say Frank, don't a lot of these schooners go up around the lumber country in eastern Canada?"

"Some of them do, I guess. They take supplies to the lumber camps and do some fishing on

the way. Why?"

"I was just thinking."

Frank suddenly clapped a hand on his brother's shoulder. "Joe, I believe I have the same idea! The Black Parrot's probably headed for some lumber camp."

"While we're up there we can look around. Maybe we can catch up with it sooner or later!\_ Excitedly discussing their latest idea, the brothers hurried home to break the news of their departure to Mrs. Hardy.

"Are you certain that message about the Canadian woods was from your father?" she asked doubtfully.

"We think this one was really from him," Frank assured his parent. "We must reach Dad as soon as possible!"

Though Mrs. Hardy was none too enthusiastic over the idea of allowing her sons to go, she was at the same time somewhat alarmed over her husband's whereabouts and gave her consent. It was decided that, in view of recent happenings, someone should stay with Mrs. Hardy and Aunt Gertrude while the boys were away in. order to guard them from further intrusions.

"How about Chet?" Joe suggested. "He'll come over and stay while we're gone."

Frank called their stout friend on the phone and explained the situation to him.

"Sure, I'll come over!" agreed the Morton boy. "Long as I have plenty to eat and don't have to do much detecting!"

The brothers decided to travel by train to St. Johns, New Brunswick, and from there to go into the lumber country of eastern Canada by whatever means of travel they could find.

That evening shortly after a hasty supper they had Chet drive them to the station.

"You fellows are always leaving for some place right in the middle of a meal!" complained the plump lad, who had taken along a slice of bread and butter.

"Never mind, Chet, you can go back and eat steadily from now until we return!" Joe taunted.

A few moments later the express boomed into the station and the brothers scrambled aboard.

"So long, fellows!" Chet waved. "Be careful!"

The train roared off in the gathering darkness and the boys prepared for a long evening, Joe with his assortment of finger-print photographs and Frank with the pirate story he had bought at the old bookshop.

"Let me read it when you get tired," Joe requested, eyeing his brother a trifle enviously.

"It's hard to read," Frank commented. "Must have been printed by hand, it's so wobbly!" For an hour or more neither said a word, each being completely absorbed in what he was doing. Suddenly Frank uttered an exclamation.

"Listen to this, Joe! Captain Gronger-the one who wrote the book-tells about a pet parrot of his that gets a broken leg. It wouldn't knit properly and the bird had a twisted claw all the rest of its life. The pirate was so attached to the parrot that he had a twisted claw painted on his boat and used it for his insignia! Wouldn't it have been great to have lived back in those days?"

Joe laughed. "I think we're doing pretty well right here in the twentieth century. Maybe we'll even meet with some pirates. From what I saw of that Black Parrot outfit I shouldn't be surprised!"

At length, tired by the day's activities, the brothers turned in and slept soundly until the

porter called them at seven the next morning.

"St. Johns, Massa!" he rapped, coming in with a tray of breakfast. "Yo' all got half an hour befo' it's time to get off."

The lads dressed hastily and finished eating just as the train reached the station.

"This being a seaport town, why don't we do a little checking up at the docks before we start for the lumber camps?" Frank suggested.

"Good idea. There's a cab. Let's take it. Docks," he ordered the driver.

The cabby nodded and piloted them through the narrow winding streets and alleys to the waterfront.

"Looks like Bayport," Frank said as they got out and paid the fare.

"Now what'll we do?" asked Joe.

"Go around to all the steamship offices and ask if anyone ever heard of the Black Parrot," his brother suggested.

This the boys did, only to have their efforts go unrewarded. No one they approached had ever seen or heard of the schooner.

"We'd better not waste any more time, Joe. I've a map here. Let's head for the nearest lumber town."

"With the help of a travel agency in the center of the city the brothers decided to go to Woodsville, a small town on the outskirts of the lumber country. From there they could explore further. Accordingly they took a train and later transferred to another which went to Woodsville. After a rough ride of nearly eight hours they arrived late at night.

"Jumping crickets!" Joe exclaimed as they got off at the tumble-down, one-room railroad station. "I'll bet they forgot to lay the rails on this branch and we came all the way on the tires!"

Frank grinned. "Besides that, I think the car we were on was riding on the axles!"

Their laughter was short-lived, for when the train departed, they were left alone in the unlighted station.

"Fine town this is!" Frank muttered, peering around.

"What town!" Joe queried, scowling. "I don't see even a light, much less a town!"

All about them were thick woods, save for one spot behind the station where, by the feeble rays of the moon, they could make out a dirt road disappearing among the giant trees.

"I guess we'd better start hiking," Frank decided after they had looked at the scene for several moments.

Fortunately the Hardys had packed their bags lightly, knowing from previous experience the importance of light luggage. Side by side the brothers stepped off into the blackness of the forest country. Presently there was a great clatter ahead of them, which increased in intensity every instant.

A moment later the sounds turned out to be the thunder of horses' hoofs and the rattle of a buckboard. A brilliant flashlight beam cut the air and came to rest on the two boys, who had had to jump into a ditch alongside the road to keep from being run down.

"Whoa! Whoa!" cried a hoarse voice. "Hollo, there! Are ye off the train!"

"Right!" called Frank. «' You from Woodsville!"

"Aye! Hop right in. I'm the taxi!"

The boys could hardly keep from smiling as they climbed into the creaking old wagon. The driver motioned for them to sit alongside him, whereupon he seized the reins, wheeled the horses about, and they were off.

**"Where you want to go-hotel?" queried the fellow, who was short and fat.**

**"Yes, if you please," Frank replied, wondering how they would ever get there at the rate they were traveling along such a pitch-black road. The driver seemed to know his art perfectly, however, for though the wagon swayed and tossed and scraped the foliage on either side of the road, no accident occurred. After nearly an hour a light loomed up ahead of them.**

**"Town," announced their chauffeur. "Hotel on the right."**

**They drew up beside a log building. The boys climbed down followed by the driver, who carried their luggage into the hotel. An elderly, dark-faced man advanced to meet them.**

**"Haff only von room left," he croaked without introduction or greeting. "Eet is veeth two othair men. You don' mind?" He stared at the boys with little interest.**

**"All right," said Frank, realizing that there was nothing else to do but agree at the moment. The man led them upstairs in the old two-story building to a room at the end of a corridor. Beneath the loosely-hung door the boys could see a gleam of light.**

**"Dese men still avake. Go in an' grab a bed," said their host, dropping their bags and taking off.**

**"Nice, friendly kind of a place!" exclaimed Joe.**

**"Just a big happy family, I guess!" returned his brother with a snort. "Well, let's go in and see what's what."**

**He twisted the handle of the door. The two boys marched into a dimly-lighted, musty-smelling room containing three cots and little else. The rays of the single kerosene lamp fell on two men who were playing cards on a cot.**

**As the Hardys entered, one of the players gave a yell. Staring at the boys as if he had seen a ghost, he ran from the room, closely followed by his companion.**

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **The Claw King**

**"After them, Frank!" Joe yelled on a sudden impulse.**

**With a bound he was out of the room, his brother close behind him. The strangers were well on their way out the front door by the time the boys reached the staircase. The moment they burst into the open a powerful motor spluttered, caught hold, and roared away into the night.**

**"Sure as I'm alive I've seen one of those fellows somewhere," Joe declared as they stood on the hotel porch. "The big fellow-he was the man who was hiding in our cellar."**

**Just then the door opened and the proprietor's head was poked out. "What goes on here ?" he demanded.**

Quick as a flash Joe had an idea. "Couple of thieves, I think, sir. If you can find a car for us we'll chase them."

The man pointed to a shiny object under a nearby tree and took a key from his pocket. He handed it to Frank.

"Den get 'em," he said.

Frank sprang to the wheel of the car indicated. His brother tumbled in beside him.

"Some machine for this kind of a place!" said the older lad as he stepped on the starter and snapped on the headlights.

"Great treat to be able to see something, too! I'll bet these headlights are the only electric ones in the whole town."

"Except those on that other car," Frank muttered as he swung the wheel around sharply and headed in the direction the other vehicle had taken.

For nearly half an hour the brothers careened along the bumpy, winding dirt road without spotting a trace of the fugitives. Suddenly there was a loud report and the auto lurched violently. Quickly Frank stopped.

"Flat tire. Can you beat that!" he groaned. "Don't we have the worst luck lately!"

"Maybe there's a spare," Joe suggested. A swift examination revealed the fact that the spare tire, while perfectly all right, had no air in it.

"Well, I guess - Listen! Is it my imagination or do I hear something?" Frank asked, as a faint crackling sound could be heard in the distance.

"Maybe it's that taxi fellow picking up some more fares," Joe suggested. "Let's go out and find him."

Leaving the car standing on the side of the road, the brothers set out in the direction of the noise. A few moments later as they came around a bend in the road they could see the dull outline of a horse and buggy.

"Hello, there!" Frank sang out as they drew near.

The wagon stopped abruptly and the driver, spying the boys, stepped off into the road.

"Howdy, strangers!" he greeted. "You're a heap sight fur from home, ain't ye?"

"Did an auto pass you a few minutes ago!" Frank queried.

"I'll say it did!" replied the man with emphasis. "A-goin' so fast I never did see naw-thin' but a blotch o' light! You know them fellers, do you?"

"No, we don't, Mister - "

"McDonald's the name, boys."

"Could you tell us who those fellows are?"

"Wai, o' course I couldn't see 'em, but I knowed the car by the sound o' the engine. Belongs to that young upstart Jim Hoskin, so I suppose he was a-runnin' it."

"Is he a good-sized chap, Mr. McDonald?" Frank asked, hoping his questions would not by some chance arouse suspicions in the stranger. Mr. McDonald, however, seemed quite willing to talk.

"Yep, he's a big one, all right. Got a lot o' money, really too muck He's old Jim Hoskin's son, and there ain't a better feller nowhere than old Jim Hoskin. Wish I could say as much for the young 'un."

Satisfied that young Jim would bear investigating, the brothers asked the stranger for a lift to their car. McDonald readily agreed. As luck would have it, the man lived at the hotel, so he took the boys all the way back there. The proprietor, now in a nightshirt, eyed them in dismay.

"My auto! Where has she gone ? " he gurgled.

The brothers quickly explained what had happened, and the man, greatly relieved, went back to bed.

"We'd better do likewise," Joe suggested. "We'll find Hoskin first thing in the morning."

Though the boys still were not certain that they were on the right track, the behavior of young Hoskin when he had spied them on their arrival made the circumstances suspicious. It seemed too good to be true that they should happen to run into the fellow who had been hiding in the Hardy cellar, yet appearances seemed to point that way.

Dawn found Frank and Joe dressed and eating a breakfast of hot-cakes and sausage in the kitchen-dining room of the hotel.

The proprietor, who was chief cook also, now stood over a large coal range near their table.

"Does old Mr. Hoskin live around here?" asked Frank.

"You bet!" came the reply from clouds of smoke and steam. "He leefs in a cabin about seven mile away. I draw you a map."

Breakfast over, their host brought out a sheet of wrapping paper and with a stubby pencil indicated where the Hoskin home was situated.

"Whew! Looks like some jaunt!" Joe whistled as the boys later started out along a narrow trail leading into the forest.

"How Chet would love it!" Frank laughed, for their stout chum heartily disliked exercise.

The brothers hiked steadily for three hours, pausing only briefly to rest. At length they came to a sharp turn in the trail where a strong smell of wood smoke greeted them.

"Can't be far from here, Joe," Frank whispered. "We'd better start circling back."

"Let's find the front of the cabin before we look for the rear, Frank. Let's - "

The older Hardy lad suddenly held up his hand in a warning signal. "Ssssh!"

A loud voice could be heard just ahead. "Wait till you bust into New York like I did!" someone was bragging.

The Hardys jumped back into the heavy underbrush along the trail. A second later two figures appeared directly opposite them. The owner of the rasping, uncouth voice was tall, large, and well-dressed in civilian clothes. The other, a thin, short individual, was attired in a seaman's blue uniform.

The tall young man continued his bragging. "When I was in New York I cleaned up a fortune, and I didn't do any work at all!" he exclaimed. In a moment the two had passed from earshot.

"Hoskin!" Frank whispered jubilantly. "We'll get him this time!"

"Shall we follow them?" Joe wondered.

"They'll probably be back. They're no doubt walking around while Hoskin boasts about himself," Frank decided. "When they come alongside us we'll tackle them."

Presently there was a sound of steps on the path and the tall stranger appeared, this time walking rapidly alone.

"I'll take him, Frank!" Joe said under his breath. "You'd better go after the other fellow before he gets away from us!"

When the man reached the brothers' hiding place Joe stepped out. "Hold on, there!" he ordered sharply. "Are you Jim Hoskin!"

The fellow stopped abruptly. "Why, er, why, who are you?" he stuttered, backing away in alarm.

"I asked if you are Jim Hoskin!" Joe snapped.

**"Why - er-yes, I am. What of it!"**

The man was noticeably shaken. He gazed about wildly, then all of a sudden sprang past the Hardy lad, disappearing in the direction of the cabin. Joe started after him but stopped short when the shack came in sight and young Hoskin tumbled inside. Frank in the meantime had caught up with the short thin individual, who whirled around when he heard footsteps.

**"What do you want?" he growled.**

**"Have you ever worked on the Black Parrot?" Frank asked pointedly.**

The short man reddened suddenly. Then before the boy could move a muscle the stranger had knocked him flat. In a second Frank was on his feet. He swung a right that missed the wiry fellow's ear by a fraction of an inch, and followed with a left hook that caught the man in the pit of the stomach and brought forth a yell of pain.

The stranger, however, was extremely swift. He flung a fist at the point of Frank's chin and the Hardy lad ducked not a second too soon. Before he could strike back the man flew at him and the two crashed to the ground, rolling over and over. In a moment they came to rest, with the sailor, who was older and heavier than Frank, on top.

The Hardy lad struggled desperately as the man grabbed him around the neck. Just as he was about to faint from pain and lack of air there was a shout, and a figure hurtled through the air. In a twinkling the ruffian was flat on his back with Joe on top of him.

**"Good work!" Frank managed to gasp, picking himself up.**

Before the younger lad could answer, his victim gave a sudden twist, rolled himself free, and took to his heels.

**"Never mind, we'll catch him later," declared Frank.**

Joe related the incident of his chase of Hoskin. The boys decided to return to town for the time being and await developments.

**"We'll keep track of him and his pal for a few days," Frank said wisely. "Sooner or later they'll give themselves away if they're up to any mischief."**

**"You're right, Frank," Joe agreed. "But as far as I'm concerned they've already done so by the way they've been acting."**

Retracing their steps along the winding trail, the brothers reached the hotel by supper time.

**"You know, I've a hunch," Frank whispered across the table, not wishing the proprietor - cook to hear him. "I'll bet those two fellows came to town tonight to see what we're up to!"**

**"Shouldn't be surprised," his brother remarked. "Maybe we'd better stay on guard."**

The boys decided to retire immediately after supper and be up again by midnight. **"If they're going to do any prowling, Joe, they'll wait until after twelve,"** Frank decided as the two climbed into their cots in the narrow hotel room. Joe had asked the proprietor to call them. It seemed as if they had been asleep only a few moments when a face thrust itself into their room.

**"T'velf o'clock, boys," he called.**

In a jiffy the Hardys were up, for they had not removed their clothes.

**"Frank, why don't you stay here and sleep some more while I do a little sleuthing outside?"**

**"All right. Come back soon and I'll take a turn."**

The tiny village was utterly black. Not a sound could be heard save the faint rustle of the wind. Joe decided to walk to the outskirts where the trail they had taken to the Hoskin cabin began. If he should see nothing he would return to their room and report to Frank.



Feeling his way along the road, he suddenly saw a twin beam of light filter through the trees on the opposite side of the village square. Oddly enough, however, there was no sound of an auto engine even though the headlights were approaching rapidly.

In a moment Joe realized the reason for this. Whoever was driving had thrown out the clutch so the car would coast through the silent village street. As it swept past him the lad recognized the driver as Hoskin, and his companion as the sailor in the woods.

On a sudden impulse Joe dived for the rear luggage trunk of the car and hauled himself up. He tried to balance himself as the vehicle, reaching the outskirts of the town, suddenly speeded up.

"Guess it's all right to give her the gas now!" snorted a loud voice from the front seat, easily heard by Joe. "Those Hardy fools are probably sound asleep!"

"That was a swell idea of yours, Jim, coastin' through town so's they wouldn't wake up!" cut in the second voice.

"Now we can get to work," said Hoskin, "though I'm getting pretty fed up with doing all the dirty work for Pierre!"

"Yeah," agreed the other. "He acts as if he thought he was the Claw King himself

The car was gaining speed, although where it was going Joe had not the slightest idea.

Without warning the auto hit a terrific bump, flinging the youth against a maze of metal braces and knobs on the luggage rack. He felt a lightning-like stab of pain in his knee and to his consternation cried out. Instantly the limb became numb. Before he could move, Hoskin stopped the car.

"Get out, Slim," he ordered, "and see what's the matter."

Joe was panic-stricken. Try as he might he could not move his leg to climb off the car. As Slim came behind the machine the rays of his flashlight fell full on Joe.

"Well, I'll be - !" spluttered the ugly fellow, unbelieving. "Hey, Jim, look what we got!"

Hoskin jumped from the automobile and ran to the rear.

"Joe Hardy!" he hissed, his eyes narrowing. "Joe Hardy, that's who he is! Well, smart fellow, why don't you get off o' there?"

Desperately Joe tried to keep from showing his agony.

"Come on, young fellow," Hoskin taunted, grabbing Joe by the wrists and yanking him off the machine. With a groan of pain the lad tumbled into the road.

"Come on! Get up and walk!" Slim barked, kicking the boy roughly.

Joe remained silent, partly from pain and partly because he was determined not to give the ruffians the slightest cause for satisfaction.

"He won't talk and he won't walk, but that doesn't mean he can't go for a boat ride, eh, Slim?" Hoskin laughed meaningly.

Joe felt a chill of alarm. What was this strange boat ride all about? He had not long to be curious. The two men picked him up and stumbled into the underbrush. Grunting and cursing, they pulled and twisted their burden for what seemed to Joe like hours before they put him down in a clearing.

"O.K., Slim, shine that light over there!" Hoskin ordered.

Joe could hear the sound of running water. A river, probably, he decided.

"There's a good-sized log jammed in the mud over that way, Jim," suggested Slim. "How'll that do?"

"That'll be fine. Got some rope! All right, let's get our friend here fixed up for his boat ride!"

The two men laughed harshly. Picking Joe up again, they dumped him on top of a large spruce log which lay in the water against the shore.

With a chill of horror Joe realized the fate planned for him. Bound to the log, he was to be cast adrift in the rapidly flowing water of the black, unknown river!

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **A Fight for Life!**

Frank awoke with a start. "Golly, what time is it?" he wondered, looking at his watch. It was two o'clock in the morning, and no sign of Joe, who had said he would be back shortly from his investigation of the grounds. Where was he? There was nothing to do but look for him.

It was only a matter of minutes before Frank had covered the whole village square, with still no sign of his brother. The older Hardy lad began to grow alarmed.

Returning to their hotel room, Frank dug out a large flashlight from his luggage. Vaguely he hoped to find footprints of his brother in the soft dirt path outside the building. Sure enough, there they were, two sets of fresh impressions; one his own, the other undoubtedly Joe's. Playing the light over the path the lad picked his way along until he reached the outskirts of the town. Here the footprints suddenly ended.

"How could they end?" Frank speculated.

He turned his light toward the roadway, and what he saw there made him utter a low exclamation. Fresh tire tracks swerved close by, and Joe's footprints could be seen leading up to the tracks. There was only one conclusion: his brother either had been kidnaped or else had jumped onto a car going by.

Could the tire marks be followed? He decided to make the attempt. The dirt was soft, so it was clear that only one automobile had passed over that way recently.

At three o'clock in the morning Frank was still plodding along the road, following the tracks with his flashlight. As the first streak of dawn broke, he saw that the tire marks wavered and ran off to the side.

"Must have stopped for some reason or other," Frank said to himself, pausing to study the imprints.

Suddenly a strange sound caused him to jump up in alarm. For an instant he could hear nothing. Then the sound came again—a low, weird cry in the distance.

At the same time he sensed footsteps approaching from the darkness of the road. Presently Frank spied a young boy dressed in overalls walking in his direction. The lad faltered and seemed about to take to his heels.

"Hello, there!" Frank called out. "Don't be afraid!"

The little fellow came up. "Hello, Mister," he greeted. "(Join' to the jam? I'm a goin' 'cause Pop's workin' in it."

"Jam? What jam? Do you mean a log jam?" Frank queried.

The young boy nodded. "They's a terr'ble jam down by Wogg's crick! Four men kill't yesterday by the logs! Oh, boy, I can't wait till I grow up and get to be a - "

Frank held up a warning finger. "Listen!" Once more the weird cry sounded from the depths of the forest.

"Funny," said the boy. "Jest like somebody lost in the woods."

"Come on, young fellow, we'll have a look!" Frank jumped into the tangled underbrush with the little chap close behind him.

"Tommy's my name," said the latter in his high-pitched voice. "If you'll let me lead the way I'll take you to the river 'cause that's where the sound came from."

Frank, realizing that the little native probably knew the woods thoroughly, let the youngster take the lead. After fifteen minutes of floundering about in the dense thicket they found themselves standing in a small clearing. Frank could hear the rush and tumble of water not far off.

"Well, here we are," announced Tommy. "I don't hear no thin', do you?"

The answer was a shrill cry from the direction of the water. "Help! Help!" screamed a hoarse voice.

The stream had a very powerful current. At first nothing but water was visible. Then Frank made out a dark blotch in the river to the right of them.

"What's that, Tommy ? " he asked, pointing to the shadow.

"That's the beginning of the jam, looks like," the boy explained. "Can't see it very good. It's not light enough yet."

"Help! Help!" screamed a voice from the blackness over the water.

"Where is he?" cried Frank.

Then the full horror of what was happening swept over him. Somebody was out there in the river about to be crushed by the logs! Could he be Joe? The Hardy lad's heart skipped at the thought, and he could feel cold perspiration oozing out over his forehead. The cry was too hoarse to be recognizable as Joe's voice. But supposing it were he ?

Desperately Frank strained his eyes in the dim light. For several minutes there was no sound but that of rushing waters, with an occasional dull thump as two great spruce logs collided.

Tommy stood close to Frank. "They's a lot of men down there tryin' to break the jam," he offered.

"Down where? That won't help us any," Frank muttered, still trying to locate the source of the cry.

"Down t' Wogg's crick, the place where the jam started. Shall I go there and get somebody?"

"How long will it take you?"

"About an hour, comin' and goin'."

"Well, hurry up, Tommy. I'm afraid you'll be too late, though."

In a twinkling the youngster had melted back into the gloomy forest, leaving Frank alone at his task.

"Help!" came the cry again, this time considerably fainter.

Frank yelled at the top of his lungs. There was no answer. Then his eyes fell on a whitish

object on the edge of the log jam to the right of where he stood on the shore.

"Joe!"

Still bound to the heavy log, the younger Hardy boy lay powerless. Fortunately his craft had come to rest on the edge of the jam, so that he had not rolled over. But this might change at any moment. Other logs were swirling around. At any time the boy might be crushed to a pulp.

"Joe! I'm coming!" Frank yelled.

Throwing all caution to the winds, Frank plunged into the boiling black river. He began swimming with desperate strokes toward the point where he had seen Joe a moment before.

"Help!" came the cry again, but this time it was barely audible.

A dozen more strokes, and Frank stopped, panting, to tread water and get his bearings. He looked up just in time to see a huge log rushing down upon him!

## CHAPTER IX

### A Daring Rescue

With a desperate lunge Frank dived, and not a second too soon. The giant log swept over him, scraping the calf of one leg like a red-hot flame. With lungs nearly bursting the swimmer shot back to the surface.

"Joe!" he shouted with all the effort he could muster, but the result was hardly more than a feeble gurgle.

The black waters rushed about him, sweeping him downstream at a terrific rate.

"This will never do!" he said grimly to himself. "I must find Joe."

He flung out his arms in a renewed attempt to swim and found one hand against the rough bark of a log. To his surprise it resisted his weight and he realized with a thrill of joy that the wood was anchored firmly. With difficulty he pulled himself onto it.

Frank saw that he had gone no farther than the upper edge of the log jam. There was still a chance that Joe was near by.

"Joe! Where are you?" he cried.

"Here! Over here!" came a faint splutter through the dim light.

Frank began to pick his way across the tops of giant logs packed close to his own. One slip, the lad knew, would mean almost certain death, and a horrible one, too.

"Where-are you?" came a gasp that seemed only a dozen yards away.

Before Frank could answer there was a rumble in the distance, which rapidly increased in intensity until the air became filled with a terrific roar. Terror-stricken, the lad realized that the jam had been broken up below. It would be only a matter of minutes before both

he and Joe Would be ground to bits between crushing logs!

There was no time now for caution. Joe must be saved instantly or not at all.

Frank leaped across the logs remaining between them. Once his foot slipped but he regained his balance and flung himself onward. At last he reached Joe. Whipping out a sheath-knife he slashed through the cords binding his brother.

"Quick, Joe, the jam's broken!"

Desperately the lad summoned what little strength he had left. "Can't move my leg," he gasped. "Give me a hand."

Frank instantly caught his brother around the waist and struggled to keep their balance. The roar grew louder, while all about them logs were bobbing and tumbling in the swirling water.

"There's the shore, Joe. Hang on tight!"

They struggled to balance themselves as they crossed the few remaining tree-trunks between them and the bank.

Frank reached the shore just in time to escape the onrush of four huge logs. Drenched and dizzy, they sank down on the ground. Frank was too exhausted for the moment to move. After a few seconds he realized Joe had fainted.

Frank must get help at once. Catching the gleam of firelight among the trees, he set out to investigate.

"Who's there?" a voice called as he stumbled through the underbrush.

A moment later the boy staggered into a clearing where a group of roughly-dressed men stood around a huge fire.

"Need help!" Frank gasped, too tired to care who they were. "Get - get Joe-down by the river!" Then everything went black before him.

"Well, I'll be - !" exclaimed one of the men, a grizzled veteran of the woods. "Who'd you suppose this feller is?"

"Don't know, Jed, but we'd better do some-thin' fer 'im. Pete, you and Jake go down the river and see if you can find the one he called Joe."

When Frank came to he was lying beside the fire with an assortment of bearded faces peering anxiously down at him. Remembering where he was, he tried to jump up.

"Now, now, jes' take it easy, young feller," said one of the men soothingly. "Ye'll be all right in a little bit."

"Wh - where's Joe? Where's my brother?"

Frank managed to turn his head far enough to see Joe lying near by, likewise surrounded by anxious lumberjacks.

Half an hour later, warmed by a plate of hot stew from a huge pot hanging over the fire, both boys felt considerably strengthened. It turned out that Frank had stumbled on a party of lumbermen who had set up camp after having broken up the log jam at Wogg's Creek.

"Now that ye're feelin' stronger, young lad," said one of the men looking at Joe, "mebbe you'd better let Doc Watkins look at thet knee o' yours and see what's the trouble."

"Might I ask, Doctor, how you happen to be around here?" Joe Hardy asked curiously the physician knelt beside him.

"Lumbering's a hobby of mine," the man of medicine explained as he proceeded with an examination. "Whenever I get a chance for a vacation I take it up here with Pete and Jed and the rest of the gang."

"And there ain't a better doctor no place!" declared one of the men, while the others

echoed their agreement.

"Joe," announced the physician at length, "you've nothing more nor less than a displaced cartilage in your knee joint. Not a sign of a break. Just lie still for a minute."

The onlookers crowded around wonderingly as Doctor Watkins performed a skillful adjustment. There was a sudden snap and instantly Joe's throbbing pain ceased.

"Why, why, it's all right!\_ exclaimed the lad. "I can't believe it!" he added, as a murmur of amazement buzzed through the onlookers.

For the next hour or so the boys sat around the roaring fire with their friendly hosts, listening to tales of the Canadian woods and thrilling stories of log-jams such as they themselves had just experienced.

"By the way," said Frank during a lull in the talk, "do any of you men happen to know a Jim Hoskin?"

"Hoskin? Sure!" came a chorus of replies.

"Old Jim or young Jim, feller!" asked the lumberman known as Pete.

"Young Jim is the one we've met," Joe asserted. "Know anything about him?"

"Got too much money," said Jake. "Comes around these parts every now'n then to buy up lumber. Kinda thinks he's a mite better'n the rest o' the folks."

"Ain't he the feller who pals around with that little guy with the sailor suit?" queried Jed.

"That's Slim Wetzel," Pete offered. "He don't come from these parts. Jim's been pallin' with him lately."

When Frank asked whether any of the men present had heard of a tall, hook-nosed person named Pierre, the lumbermen shook their heads. A Pierre Bateaux whom they knew failed to fit the description, for he was very fat.

The boys rolled themselves up in borrowed blankets for a short sleep. It seemed only a matter of seconds when Jed called them to a breakfast of Canadian bacon and flapjacks. Then the Hardys thanked their friends and set off for Woodsville, guided by directions from them.

"Hope we can make it, Frank! I'm still a little shaky," confessed Joe with a laugh.

"Ditto here," Frank agreed. "But we've done things like this before. Don't forget, Dad may be waiting for us somewhere in this wilderness!\_"

Mile after mile over the rough trail the boys plodded on, taking time out frequently for brief rests. At length, as the sun was sinking beyond the horizon in a blaze of color, the tiny village of Woodsville appeared at the end of the path ahead.

"I've a feeling we ought to call home and see if everything's all right," his brother suggested as they reached the hotel.

It was over twenty minutes before the younger lad joined his brother to give him the news from home.

"Somebody tried to climb in a pantry window night before last, Chet said. He went to get a snack and scared the fellow away!"

"Good work for Chet! It's too bad he didn't get a look at the visitor."

"He did, Frank, or rather he took a picture of the fingerprints on the window sill."

"Really! Did they turn out ? "

"Chet says one of them looks like a claw! Not human at all!"

Frank gazed at his brother doubtfully. "That sounds weird enough, Joe, but I'm not sure I see any connection between that and - "

"There is a connection," Joe interrupted. "I haven't had time to tell you, but when I caught

a ride on Hoskin's car last night I heard him say something very strange to that fellow Slim."

"What, Joe?"

"Hoskin said he was tired of working for Pierre, because Pierre acted as if he were the Claw King himself!"

## **CHAPTER X**

### **Trouble!**

"I'm beginning to see a little daylight!" said Frank. "You didn't tell me Hoskin worked for Pierre!"

Joe smiled. "Thought I'd wait until we had a good chance to talk it all over."

"What's all this about a Claw King?"

"I don't know any more about it than what I just told you. Yet I'd be willing to stake my last nickel on the fact that there's some connection between the claw print Chet found and this Claw King business!"

"I shouldn't be surprised," Frank admitted thoughtfully. "At any rate, it's up to us to find out, and do so right away!"

"We'll have to learn more about Hoskin. That's our only hope at this point."

The boys decided at length that the quickest method would be to call upon the young dandy's father. As they already knew the location of his cabin they set out for it early the next day.

"Good morning, Mister Hoskin," said Frank, introducing Joe and himself as vacationers in the Canadian woods.

For fifteen minutes they kept leading up to the subject of the whereabouts of young Jim, but could learn nothing.

"I don't know anything about where my son went. He was here yesterday but left. Said he would be gone a long time."

The trapper seemed to find it painful to discuss the matter, so the boys took their leave.

"The old gentleman doesn't seem to know much about young Jim, does he?" Frank mused as they headed back over the long trail to Woodsville.

"Probably the fellow is a black sheep, and doesn't tell his parent what he's up to," Joe suggested. "More than likely he runs around spending all his father's hard-earned money."

"I'm not at all certain it's his dad's money he's spending," Frank commented mysteriously. They walked on in silence, each secretly worried because they had made so little progress in the search for their own parent. Finally Frank spoke up.

"Tell you what we'd better do, Joe. Start looking for Dad himself instead of trying to get

clues from Hoskin and his pal."

"We'll make the rounds of all the lumber camps in the vicinity. Sooner or later we should find out something. Maybe Mr. Hendrick can help us."

After an hour of rummaging in the loft of the old hotel, the proprietor descended with an ancient, dog-eared map of the region. It showed the location of a dozen or more lumber camps.

"Here you be, boys," he said. "Mebbe you could use horses, yes?"

"That's not a bad idea!" Joe exclaimed. "We've certainly done our share of walking."

The only spare horses in the village belonged to the innkeeper. Two of them he would be able to rent for a short period of time. The boys eagerly accepted their host's offer and retired early, planning to start out at dawn the next morning.

By sunrise they were dressed and downstairs, eager to be off. Mr. Hendrick had already saddled their mounts and stowed away some food in the saddlebags.

"Thanks, Mister Hendrick!" Joe waved, giving his beautiful coal-black mare full rein.

"We'll see you later!"

The boys took a trail leading to the neighboring village of Scrub Oak as their first stop. Both lads were accomplished horsemen, and had it not been for the seriousness of their mission they would have greatly enjoyed the outing. As it was they could think of only one thing-to find their father as quickly as possible, before some harm should befall him.

"Whoa!" exclaimed Frank several hours later, reining his horse as they reached the edge of a clearing in which lay the entire town of Scrub Oak. "Where do we go from here, Joe?"

"Looks like another thriving hotel there on the right."

They trotted over to a fairly large wooden structure similar to the one in Woodsville. A bearded old man sitting on the porch nodded at them.

"Howdy, strangers! Whar from?"

"Down in the States, sir," Frank replied as he and his brother dismounted. "Tell us, where's the nearest lumber camp around here?"

The old man stroked his whiskers thoughtfully. "Well, they's a dozen of 'em around these parts, boys, an' I jes' couldn't say which is the nearest!"

Joe stifled a smile at the speaker's earnestness. "Perhaps, sir, you could give us the names of two or three in the immediate vicinity."

Before he could reply the door of the hotel swung open and a tall, squarely-built young man with clean-cut features stepped out onto the porch.

"Hello, Pappy!" he said, nodding at the old man. Then, noticing the Hardy lads, he added, "Howdy, strangers!"

Swinging past the boys with a friendly smile, he started down the road. The old man called him back. "Whar you goin' in sech a hurry, Lem?"

"Got to go to St. Johns, Pappy, fer some medicine a fellow wants. See you in a couple of days. Must rush - "

The bearded old man shook a bony finger in Lem's handsome face. "Listen here, you young whippersnapper, you ain't a'goin' to run all around the country without tellin' old Pappy about it, are ye!"

Lem winked at the boys. "He wants to know everything!"

"Cain't find things out by guessin'!"

"With a shrug of his shoulders Lem sat down on the porch railing, which creaked loudly.

"Well, Pappy, it's like this," he explained with a bored look. "Two men came here last



night and wanted some sleeping-powder for somebody they said was out of his head."

The boys suddenly pricked up their ears.

"Somebody out'n his head?" squeaked the old man, unbelieving.

Lem nodded. "Yes, Pappy, that's what they said. I looked every place and found we've run out of sleeping powders, so I sent the fellows over to Hicksberg, where Doc Watkins is spending his vacation."

"Did you happen to know the men who called last night?" Frank inquired as casually as he could.

"Well, come to think of it one of 'em did look familiar, but I couldn't place him," Lem replied. "Tall fellow, about my size, and spoke twice as loud as he needed to."

Joe looked at his brother with a start. "Do you mind my asking, Lem, what the other fellow looked like?"

"He was sort of short and skinny. Had a funny looking outfit on, more like that of a sailor than a lumberjack. I didn't notice him specially."

"First one sounds like old Jim Hoskin's brat, Young Jim, they calls him," chimed in Pappy.

"Don't ye know Young Jim, Lem?"

"Can't say I've ever met him, or maybe I did once and forgot about it. I know I never saw the fellow outside in the - " Abruptly Lem halted and gazed awkwardly at the others.

"Lem, you're a - holdin' somethin' back!" accused the old man, pointing a knotty finger at the handsome young man. "Come on, 'fess up!"

Lem reddened with embarrassment. "Oh, it's nothing much, Pappy, only they asked me not to tell anybody about the maniac. They said he was a rich lumbermill owner here on a visit, and that if it got around that he was crazy he'd be ruined when he got well."

"Did you see him, Lem?" Pappy asked.

"Well, I went out to the car to show them where the road to Hicksberg starts, and I got a glimpse of the fellow. Looked about forty-five years old but I couldn't tell in the dark very well. He was lying there on the back seat moaning and raving something about frogs climb double trees, whatever that means."

The Hardy boys' pulses raced. There was little doubt now that their father had been kidnaped by Hoskin and his pal. Whether he was really ill or merely trying to trick his captors, Frank could not decide at the moment. The immediate task was to take up the chase.

Waving good-bye, the boys jumped on their horses. With Frank in the lead they rode around the village square to a signpost marking the beginning of a trail.

"What do you think about all that, Joe?" the older Hardy lad exclaimed, pulling up his horse.

"Golly, I couldn't wait to get away. That person was Dad!"

"The question is, what did he mean by frogs climb double trees? I can't make head nor tail of it in the code-sheet here." Frank had withdrawn the precious paper from an inside pocket and was puzzling over it.

"Let's have a look," Joe said, dismounting.

For several moments the boys studied the paper together.

"It means the police should raid some place in the woods," decided Frank at length. "The word 'double' ought to tell us which one, but it isn't on the code."

"Maybe it means a settlement with a name like Twin Oaks or Twin Pines," Joe suggested.

"Jiminy, that's an idea. Let's see the map. Yes, there's a Twin Spruce Camp about ten

miles from here."

Joe leaped back on his horse.

"It's worth a try, anyhow," he said as they spurred their mounts.

For an hour the brothers galloped and walked their horses, tingling with anticipation at the prospects ahead. Night was falling rapidly when Frank suddenly sniffed the air.

"I smell smoke, Joe."

Instinctively they reined in and went forward cautiously. Suddenly, without warning, a vicious snarl came from the dense thicket alongside the trail and a huge animal leaped out at them.

"Watch it, Joe!" cried Frank as his brother's horse sprang sideways in terror.

## **CHAPTER XI**

### **Captured!**

Before the younger Hardy lad could realize what was happening his horse bolted up the trail. Tugging with all his strength, Joe managed to stop the frightened animal a quarter of a mile away. Instantly he wheeled the mare around but she refused to budge, so he hobbled the animal and dashed back on foot.

Frank was nowhere to be seen. Presently Joe heard the thundering of hoof-beats. His brother's riderless mount came flying past him. With a pang of anxiety the lad pushed on toward the spot where they had been stopped by the mysterious animal.

As Joe was beginning to wonder whether he had gone beyond the place, he spied a huge, hulking form on the trail ahead. Stopping in his tracks, he watched with racing pulses as it moved slightly, then disappeared in the bushes. A moment later a second shadow detached itself from the path and silently advanced toward him.

"That you, Joe?" came a hoarse whisper.

"Are you all right, Frank?" Joe asked with feelings of mingled relief and anxiety as his brother came up, rubbing his shins.

"Golly, that was a close call in more ways than one!" he smiled ruefully. "That beast looked like a ferocious wolf, but I suppose it really is a huge vicious dog. After my horse threw me I lay as still as I could, wondering whether the fellow would chew off my ear or go away."

"I'll bet he's guarding that Twin Spruce Camp and that Dad's a prisoner there," said Joe excitedly.

In a twinkling the boys had selected a large oak on the edge of the trail. Joe pulled himself into the tangle of low-hanging branches. Frank, waiting impatiently, heard the scraping of bark. Then there was silence. Two minutes later his brother slipped deftly to the ground.

**"Frank, you're right! There's a cabin with a light in it not two hundred yards off! While I was watching, the door opened and somebody dragged that dog or wolf or whatever it is inside!"**

**The brothers held a hasty conference. They decided to return to Woodsville as quickly as possible and get in touch with the constable. When they reached the place where Joe had hobbled his horse they were overjoyed to see Frank's mount lingering near by.**

**"Supposing that cabin is just part of a perfectly innocent lumber camp?" the younger Hardy boy said doubtfully as they urged their steeds back up the trail.**

**"We'll find out pretty quickly, I think, from Mr. Hendrick," his brother said. "He ought to know these camps as well as anybody."**

**It was after midnight when they reached the darkened village of Woodsville. The weary boys tumbled into bed. They were awakened hours later by the aroma of hot-cakes and bacon. In a few minutes they were seated at a table.**

**"Mister Hendrick, do you know anything about the Twin Spruce Camp?" Frank inquired between mouthfuls of food.**

**The genial proprietor shrugged. "What should I know about eet, yes? She is empty since four year. Nobody go there no more!"**

**Frank looked at his brother knowingly. Then, pretending to change the subject, he asked about the local police. Returning to their room, they held a further conference and decided that for their kind of errand the wisest move would be to call on the Canadian Mounted Police for assistance. Accordingly they rode some miles out of town to the nearby headquarters.**

**"Good morning, boys," said an officer at a desk. "Can I help you? I'm Sergeant Johnson." In a jiffy the boys had introduced themselves and told their story, adding that although they were not certain of the correctness of their suspicions, they had reason to believe their father was being held prisoner at the camp. At mention of Fenton Hardy's name the officer looked at them narrowly.**

**"Fenton Hardy, the American detective?" he queried. "You say he's your father?"**

**"He is," Frank replied. "And we're positive that he is in trouble, Officer!"**

**The sergeant's face hardened. "We all know about Fenton Hardy up here," he said crisply. "If he's in trouble around these parts you can be sure he won't be for long! Come on, boys!"**

**The Bayport lads were thrilled at the prospect of riding with a Canadian Mounted Police Officer, although Joe was inclined to be apologetic lest their search turn out to be a wild goose chase.**

**"Never mind about that, Joe," consoled the friendly sergeant. "Twin Spruce was closed down four years ago and nobody's supposed to be there, whether your suspicions are correct or not."**

**They flew on at a gallop with the officer in the lead riding a shiny black stallion. Almost before they realized it they had passed through Scrub Oak in a flurry of lather and dust and were well on their way to the mysterious encampment.**

**The boys recognized the spot a short distance ahead of them where the animal had leaped out at them. Just as Frank was about to suggest that they halt, the officer reined in and held up a warning finger. There was not a sound to be heard save the slight sighing of the wind through the trees.**

**"We'll ride back a quarter of a mile and tie the horses in the woods," Sergeant Johnson**

announced, wheeling his steed about.

The boys followed, and soon the mounts were well secured deep in the forest. Then the officer busied himself unloading an odd looking bundle from his horse. "Joe, climb a tree while I fix this. See what's doing at the cabin."

The lad found a tall tree and disappeared in its thick foliage. Frank in the meantime was busy inspecting the net, a large device made of heavy rope with half a dozen iron balls attached at intervals along its rim.

"What are the cannonballs for, Sergeant?" Frank inquired wonderingly.

Johnson smiled. "They look like cannon-balls, don't they? The idea is to hold down the net once we get that wolf or dog trapped inside, until we can tie him up."

"Do you think that animal might really be a wolf, Sergeant?"

"A wolf dog, at least," replied the officer. "Plenty of them around, and if those men are what you say they are, they probably wouldn't have an ordinary house pet for a watch dog!"

As the man spoke he completed the task of refolding the net and inspecting his service revolver. Just then Joe emerged from the thicket.

"I could make out the cabin, Sergeant! But no smoke is coming from the chimney."

"Sounds as if everybody's either out or asleep," muttered the officer dryly. "Too chilly to be sitting around with no fire. Well, boys, let's go into a huddle and lay some plans."

It was decided that Joe would go as close to the cabin as possible and see whether or not its occupants were there. If the place should appear empty he would give two low whistles. If he should see anybody inside he would give three. Frank and the sergeant were to wait near by with the net and use it in case the mysterious watchdog still were about.

The three picked their way as quietly as possible in the direction of the cabin. Presently the shack appeared to their view.

"All right, Joe," whispered the officer. "Go ahead and we'll wait for your signal."

With rapidly beating heart Joe Hardy set out.

## **CHAPTER XII**

### **Lost in the Forest**

"Ought to get your brother's signal any minute now!" whispered Sergeant Johnson to Frank as they stood waiting to hear Joe's whistle.

"Yes, he's been gone nearly ten minutes," replied the older Hardy lad. He was growing more uneasy with each passing moment. What if Joe should be attacked by the wolf dog? What if Hoskin and Slim should catch sight of him?

"Listen! Hear anything?" whispered Johnson.

Frank strained his ears. Rattling sounds in the distance.

"Horses!" the sergeant exclaimed under his breath. "I think your men are coming back!"

"We'd better warn J - !"

Before Frank could finish the word there was a sudden loud rustle in the bushes. A second later came a horrible growl as a huge figure hurtled toward them.

"Throw your irons!" yelled the sergeant.

Frank, who had been instructed on how to handle the net in case of emergency, flung the weighted rim of the device directly over the flying hulk. In a moment a huge, gaunt animal was trying frenziedly to free itself of the tangle of rope. In a twinkling Johnson brought the butt end of his service revolver down over the skull of the beast with a crushing blow.

"Nice work, Frank!" he panted admiringly. "If you hadn't landed him when you did we'd both have been torn to shreds by that wolf dog."

Before Frank had time to venture so much as a glimpse at the dead animal Johnson grabbed him by the arm.

"Come on!" he whispered hoarsely. "The riders are just around the trail!"

The clatter of horses' hoofs rose to a loud rumble, then suddenly ceased. The two listeners could hear shouts and curses coming from the direction of the cabin.

Swiftly the sergeant and Frank plunged through the woods and a moment later were standing on the edge of the clearing. Two horses were tied to a rail at the cabin door but their riders were nowhere to be seen. Joe was not in evidence, either.

"Let's go in, Sergeant!" Frank urged under his breath, starting for the shack.

The officer pulled him back.

"Wait a minute. We want to be sure they're inside. They may give a sign."

A moment later a wisp of smoke soared from the chimney.

"O. K., Frank," said the officer. "Now let's have a look. Guess they didn't hear the racket their wolf dog made when we picked him off."

Silently they kept in the shadow of the trees at the edge of the clearing and advanced to the window of the shack. Frank thought he detected a moving figure out of the corner of his eye. At the same instant a low whistle sounded, followed immediately by another. Frank responded with the same signal, his heart pounding with relief as Joe sidled up to them. "Thought you were having trouble back there so I'd about decided to tackle these fellows alone in the meantime," he said under his breath.

"Good thing you waited, Joe!" declared the sergeant. "Now listen, here's my plan. When Frank pounds at the back door, you and I'll go in through the front, Joe. That will split them up in there and we'll have an easier job getting them under control!"

The Hardys crept up to the side window and covering their heads, all but their eyes, peered inside. There, sprawled on a cot, lay young Jim Hoskin. In a chair near by sat Slim, scanning what appeared to be an envelope.

"Recognize them?" the sergeant whispered, and the Hardy lads nodded their heads vigorously.

Frank ran to the back of the cabin. In a moment a succession of loud thumps echoed throughout the shack. Hoskin and his crony were up like a shot. Jim dashed from the room.

"Come on, Joe! Let's give them the works!" cried Johnson.

Johnson, the mounty, taking a running start, flung open the door. Joe, at his heels, spied Slim heading for a narrow staircase. Springing after the rowdy, he tackled him neatly and the two crashed to the floor with the younger Hardy lad pinning his opponent to the rough

planking.

Johnson meanwhile had disappeared. Just as Joe was about to call for assistance in holding down the wiry, struggling sailor, the officer came back, grinning.

"I must say you two young fellows certainly know your hammerlocks!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Your brother has that other fellow down on the back steps and from the looks of him I think he'll never get up!"

In the meantime Slim was cursing furiously. "You'll pay for this, you - you young fool!" he fairly screamed in Joe's face. "Think you're so smart? Well, you'll find out!"

The sergeant, still smiling, whipped forth a coil of stout cord. "Cut out the noise!" he ordered the storming ruffian, at the same time slipping the rope around the man's arms and legs and deftly knotting it. "All right, Joe, I think he'll stay put now."

"I'll have a look around, Sergeant, while you're taking care of Frank's man," the younger Hardy suggested above the noise of a struggle in the rear of the cabin. He could hear Hoskin raging.

Johnson made for the back of the house while Joe cautiously climbed the narrow staircase. At the top landing he heard a low moan close at hand. Snapping on his flashlight, he saw that he was facing a large, musty room utterly bare of anything save an old chair. He crossed the floor and closely examined the ceiling-rafters and walls. Again he heard the moan. It seemed to be coming from somewhere in the room despite the fact that Joe's light revealed nothing.

Mystified, the Hardy lad stood rooted to the spot, listening closely. Just then the rays of the electric torch fell on a large, door-sized wooden panel on the wall at the far end of the room. Eyeing the board suspiciously, Joe stole across the floor and tapped on it. A hollow echo rolled out. Was there a secret room behind?

With rapidly beating heart the boy leaned against the panel, which yielded slightly. At the same instant a muffled cry sounded, apparently from the other side. Joe threw his entire weight against the false door and with a splintering crash tumbled headlong into a tiny room hardly larger than a good-sized closet. In a twinkling he was back on his feet, pointing the flashlight in front of him. There, on a pile of blankets on the floor, lay Fenton Hardy, blinking his eyes at the sudden illumination.

"Dad!" exclaimed Joe, springing to his father's side.

The detective feebly struggled to raise himself up but could not.

"I'll be back in a minute, Dad!" Joe dashed from the room and down the narrow staircase.

"Frank! Sergeant Johnson! For goodness sake, where is everybody?"

"Right here, Joe!" his brother sang out, appearing in the front doorway. "I was just - why Joe! What's the matter?"

"Dad's upstairs! In a secret room! Frank, he's in a terrible state. He's too weak even to talk!"

"Those scoundrels must have been starving him!" cried his brother.

"Where are Sergeant Johnson and the prisoners?"

"The officer left with the men. Said he had a long ride ahead and wanted to get started. I told him we'd stay here on guard until he gets back."

Frank bounded up the stairway to see his father, while Joe fixed a stimulant from the tiny kit in his pocket.

"It's good to see you, sons," Fenton Hardy gasped as the hot drink took effect. "I'll be all right in a minute. What's that smoke I smell?"

The boys had not noticed until now that the musty air of the room reeked strongly of the odor of burning wood.

"Probably it's the fireplace downstairs, Dad," Frank said. "I think I'll have a look."

The lad found the fire burning brightly and giving off but little smoke, although the air was blue. He was about to return upstairs when Joe came down.

"Dad's a lot better already, Frank. Have you found out where all the smoke is coming from?"

"Joe, I've some news for you," said his brother, ignoring the question.

"Really? What's up?"

"When I was helping Sergeant Johnson tie Hoskin and Slim on their horses I happened to notice something. Both those fellows have the imprint of a twisted claw branded on the tips of their index fingers!"

"Great Scott, Frank!" the younger Hardy lad exclaimed. "A claw-branded - Then Chet - " "Wasn't so dumb after all!" Frank finished.

"I've an idea we're getting mixed up in something a lot bigger than we thought at first," said Joe.

"I'm afraid you're right, but let's go back to Dad. Maybe he'll be able to tell us what happened."

Frank carried up a kerosene lamp and the boys knelt beside their father, who still looked pale and wan.

"We'll have to get a doctor for you, Dad," Frank decided, looking at his parent anxiously. Fenton Hardy smiled. "I'll be all right in a day or so, boys, and then we can make the trip to the nearest village. Hoskin and his sailor friend have been starving me, trying to make me tell what information I have about their smuggling ring."

"Then they really are in the gang?" Joe asked.

"You mean they were!" Frank said.

He briefly related their experiences up to the time of the capture of the ruffians. Mr. Hardy congratulated his sons highly at the end of the story and then went on to tell them his own.

"I found one of their hide-outs near St. Johns," he said, "but I was afraid a member of the group had spotted me. I called your mother and gave her the message she told you about at the airport."

"What happened then, Dad?" Joe could hardly wait for his father's tale to unfold.

"I walked out of the drug store where I had put through the call, and the first thing I knew somebody grabbed me and threw me into a car. They blindfolded me and carried me away."

Mr. Hardy paused, trying to muster up sufficient strength to continue. "I finally decided to make believe I'd suddenly become delirious," he went on. "I thought maybe they would dump me out somewhere, but all they did was to stop at different places and try to get some sleeping pills for me."

Joe looked at his brother as both recalled Lem's account of the incident at the Scrub Oak hotel.

"As a last resort I kept repeating the message you boys fortunately got-'Frogs climb double trees.' Remember?"

"Do we!" Frank exclaimed. "Thank goodness we happened to be around - "

He was interrupted as his father was seized with a violent coughing spell. "Boys, the smoke!" Mr. Hardy gasped.

Frank looked around him in sudden alarm. Then he dashed from the room. A second later he was back, white and trembling.

"Dad! Frank! The forest is on fire!"

## **CHAPTER XIII**

### **Fire!**

In a few minutes the cabin seemed to be surrounded by a gigantic wall of flame. To make matters worse, a strong wind sent showers of sparks over the roof every few seconds.

"We've still a little time to get away," said Frank, peering out a window. He and Joe had come to the first floor to decide what to do. "The fire looks nearer than it really is. I'd say it is still half a mile away."

There was a footstep on the stairs and Mr. Hardy appeared, white and trembling. At a glance he took in the entire situation.

"Boys, I want you to get away as fast as you can and leave me here. I'm too far gone to make the attempt. What's more, to break up the smuggling ring is more important than my safety. You must leave and save yourselves, Smash that gang!" Despite his weakness, Fenton Hardy's voice boomed out almost normally.

Joe looked horrified. "Leave you here! Never!"

"Dad, we wouldn't desert you for all the smuggling gangs in the world!" Frank exclaimed.

"Come on, Joe, let's look around in a hurry. There must be a break somewhere in that circle of fire."

Together the boys went upstairs where Frank, with a rusty axe he had found in the kitchen, smashed a jagged hole in the cabin roof. He pulled himself through the gap and looked around. What he saw made him shudder. All means of escape were shut off. The rapidly decreasing circle of flame around them was completely closed, almost as if the fire had been deliberately planned and set.

"I'll bet it has been!" Frank exclaimed angrily as he watched the terrifying sight. "I'll bet somebody besides Hoskin and Slim has been watching us all this time!"

"I shouldn't doubt it," muttered Joe. "We should have thought of that sooner."

"We're not going to stay here and be burned up like rats in a trap without trying something," Frank exclaimed in sudden desperation. "Joe, you go down and stay with Dad. I'm going out and see if I can find some kind of an opening!"

Tying a wet handkerchief over his face, he dashed out the rear door where the heat and smoke seemed to be somewhat less intense. Once on ground level he saw at a glance that the situation was apparently hopeless. The air was filled with flying sparks, and the roar of the flames was like thunder. The horses, which had been brought to the cabin and tied, were



neighing pitifully.

Suddenly he heard a wild shout, and to his amazement the figure of a charging horse and rider burst through the sheet of flame directly in front of him. Before he could believe his eyes Sergeant Johnson thundered up to the cabin.

"Come on!" he yelled to Frank above the roar of the flames. "We have about five minutes before we'll be trapped!"

"There are three of us, Sergeant!" Frank shouted into the officer's ear. "We found Dad in there after you left!"

Johnson gave a start of surprise. "Good! We'll get him out all right if two of you ride one horse. But we'll have to make it fast!"

With Frank in the lead they dashed back into the cabin just as Joe came running to investigate the voices he had heard.

"Sergeant Johnson! How on earth - !"

"Never mind, I'll tell you later," the officer interrupted. "Here, boys, tie on these - why, your Dad's fainted!"

The excitement had been too much for the detective in his weakened condition. Joe ran for some water and a moment later Mr. Hardy was revived.

"We'll have to strap him to a horse, boys.

It'll be brutal, but it's our only chance to get through the fire. Come on!"

Springing to obey, the brothers with the officer's assistance carried their father. Skillfully the officer bound Mr. Hardy in a lying-down position over the back of Joe's mare.

"Frank, you and Joe ride my stallion. He'll take you through the spot I show you! I'll ride Frank's horse and pull your father through with me."

There was not a second to lose. The heat was so intense now that their eyes stung and their faces smarted. Johnson swiftly drew out a small bundle from his saddle bag. There were several large wet bandanas which they tied over the noses and mouths of the men and the horses.

"Let's go!" shouted the officer, spurring his mount and winding the reins of Joe's mare, bearing their father, tightly around one wrist. "Keep yelling, boys, or your horse won't go through!"

Frank and Joe needed no urging. They started screaming. At a touch of Frank's heels their horse fairly leaped into the air and was off like a shot. A second later Johnson thundered past them.

"Follow me!" he cried above the fury of the advancing flames.

The boys' hearts were in their mouths as they watched the dense smoke swallow up the officer and their father. In another five seconds they were ready to go through the same spot.

"Ready, Joe! Hold on!" Frank yelled into his brother's ear.

He dug his heels into the stallion's flanks. The animal fairly flew through. Instinctively both boys lowered their heads and screwed their eyes shut. There was a terrific blast of scorching heat.

Then, almost before they knew it, a rush of coolness fanned the air. Frank squinted out from one eye and saw that they were clear of the flames and smoke. The stallion thundered on. The brilliance died down gradually. Then they heard a shout.

"Pull up, boys!"

Dimly they saw what appeared to be a huddle of figures ahead of them. When Frank finally

managed to rein in the panting animal, Johnson rode up to them, still leading Joe's mare with its silent burden.

"Is Dad all right?" Frank breathed, scarcely daring to ask the question.

The sergeant nodded, wiping the grime and soot from his eyes. "He's all right for the moment, boys. How about yourselves?"

"We're still in one piece as far as we can tell!" Joe smiled grimly. "Where are we bound for, Sergeant?"

"We're going to Scrub Oak as fast as we can if the fire hasn't jumped over there by now!"

He wheeled his horse around and beckoned for the boys to follow him. To their surprise they realized that they were on the same trail they had taken before.

Because of their father's condition they were forced to proceed slowly, stopping frequently while Sergeant Johnson administered stimulants to the stricken detective. After what seemed like days, though in reality it was only a few hours, the village of Scrub Oak came into sight. Ten minutes later, to the boys' bewildered delight, Doctor Watkins arrived at the hotel, where they were putting Mr. Hardy to bed.

"Golly, are we glad to see you, Doctor!" Joe exclaimed.

After a hurried exchange of greetings the genial physician took charge.

"You lads have been through a lot. Better get yourselves cleaned up and have a square meal!" the doctor suggested. "I'll take care of your Dad."

Happily the brothers scrubbed off the accumulated grime and then sought the dining room, where Johnson was already seated.

"Well, boys, you're probably wondering what happened to Hoskin and his sailor friend," he said.

"You're right, Sergeant, we are," replied Joe eagerly. "How did you ever manage to get them back?"

The officer unfolded a graphic story of how he had returned as far as Scrub Oak with his captives, when he had been met by a fellow officer who told him a forest fire had been spotted from a nearby look-out tower.

"I sent him back to headquarters with Hoskin and the sailor in tow," he went on to explain, "and then I climbed the look-out myself. I could see smoke over in the direction where you boys were, so I called headquarters and told them to round up some fire-fighters. I then rushed back to you as fast as good old Victor - that's the horse you rode-could make it."

The officer was interrupted by the appearance of another member of the Royal Mounted Police.

"Sergeant Johnson!" said the newcomer, "the fire has jumped over to Woodsville and vicinity. Get a detail of men from headquarters and proceed there at once. I'll take charge here."

"Yes sir!" Johnson saluted, bade the boys good-bye, and the two men disappeared.

"Frank, hadn't we better put in a call to Chet?" suggested Joe. "Might have some news for us."

The older Hardy lad agreed that the idea was a good one. Joe was directed by old Pappy to the ancient hotel telephone. Twenty minutes later he was back with his brother, his eyes gleaming.

"Frank, what do you think! Chet thought he'd try to help us find out more about the Black Parrot, and he says there are any number of Parrot boats, such as White Parrot, Green Parrot, Blue Parrot, and other colors!"

**"Golly, do you suppose they're all mixed up somehow in the smuggling gang!" Frank exclaimed.**

**"Just what I was thinking! There's no doubt about it, that mob is a whole lot bigger than even Dad must have thought! Wait till I tell him!"**

**"At this moment I'm thinking of the forest fire," said Frank. "Remember that officer said it had spread to Woodsville ? What if the hotel has burned down!"**

**"Gee, I almost forgot we left most of our stuff there."**

**"It's not so much our luggage I'm worried about, but what of the pirate book? I was counting on it to supply us with possible clues about the smuggling gang!"**

**Joe smiled doubtfully. "Jumping crickets, Frank, that volume was written a couple of generations ago! You don't think-----?"**

**"I certainly do! From what I've read in the book, I'll bet the fellows we're after have read it too and got some ideas from it!"**

## **CHAPTER XIV**

### **The Valuable Book**

**Before Frank and Joe were ready to leave, their father summoned them. He was so much better that he greeted his sons with his old enthusiasm.**

**"Boys, now that the excitement of the fire is over I've a job for you. Our friend Sergeant Johnson has just sent a confidential messenger from headquarters with a note."**

**"A note ? What about?" Frank inquired.**

**"It seems that Johnson overheard Hoskin and Slim in their cell say something about a boat named the Black Parrot."**

**"The Black Parrot!" exclaimed the brothers together.**

**"The ship is due to dock at a place called Little Cove. He heard them say it was to arrive there some time this week."**

**"Then you want us to meet her, Dad?" Joe asked excitedly.**

**Mr. Hardy's face grew very grave. "I want you to do more than that. I want you to ship on it to Bayport if you can possibly manage to do so! From all you've told me about your experiences with that fellow Pierre and some of the others connected with the Black Parrot, I think you may be able to solve our whole case if you can ride aboard her for a while."**

**"Then we'll do it, Dad!" Frank exclaimed. "We'll manage it somehow!"**

**"It's going to be a very dangerous mission for you boys," warned their father, "so remember to be careful. I'd go myself if I could!"**

**"Don't worry," said Joe. "Stay here and get back your strength. We'll obtain all the information we can and report to you."**

At Doctor Watkins' insistence the brothers took time for a few hours' sleep despite their impatience to be off. Then, just as night began to fall, they bade good-bye to their father and the kindly physician and spurred their horses in the direction of Woodsville.

"Wonder if there's anything left of the place?" Frank speculated as they galloped along the dark trail.

"No way of telling until we get there. Shall we sleep any tonight or go straight through!"

"We just woke up!" his brother laughed. "I'm not tired. Are you?"

"Not in the least!"

As they approached the vicinity of Woodsville they could detect the odor of charred embers and smoke.

"Do you suppose we'll have to run through any more fires? I think our record's good enough as it stands!"

"So do I!" agreed Frank heartily.

As they progressed they were happy to note that the smell of smoke grew no stronger.

"The fire may have been over toward one side of town," Joe suggested, "and didn't touch the burg itself."

Frank hoped with all his heart that Joe was correct, for he was intensely eager to get back the pirate book and search for further clues. Presently his brother gave a shout.

"Woodsville ahead! See the light?"

Ten minutes later they clattered into the village square and dismounted before the hotel, which had not been touched by fire. A heavy ball of smoke hung in the air, indicating that the blaze was still burning not far away.

Inside the hostelry Mr. Hendrick met the lads with a puzzled smile. "You have come back like ze prodigal sons, eh? You go away now?"

Quickly the boys explained that they wanted to leave for Little Cove as soon as their belongings were packed. While Joe inquired where the port was located, Frank dashed upstairs. After making sure the pirate book was still in his suitcase, he brought down their luggage.

"Luck for us," his brother exclaimed. "Mr. Hendrick says there's a train leaving in an hour. It's going for more men to fight the forest fire!"

"Good! Joe, what about Hoskin and Slim? I'd like to see them and find out anything I can about the claw prints on their fingers."

"If we could do so we might have a major clue to work on when we get to the Black Parrot," agreed his brother.

It was decided that Joe would borrow Mr. Hendrick's car, if possible, and drive to police headquarters at Williamsburg, where the men were being held, there to get some information from the prisoners if he could. The proprietor, who had taken a fancy to the Hardys, readily agreed to lend them his machine again.

Day was breaking as Joe drew up alongside a large, solidly-built log structure and knocked at the door. To his delight Sergeant Johnson admitted him.

"Hello, Joe, come right in!" boomed the mounty heartily. "Thought you might show up, so I came over from our headquarters. Want to see your captives, I suppose?"

After a brief exchange of their recent experiences the officer led young Hardy to a stoutly-barred cell in the rear of the cabin, where two dejected looking figures slumped on their cots.

"Wake up, you two!" ordered the Sergeant sternly. "Here's a young man who's going to

ask you some questions."

He unlocked the cell door and Joe walked in as the ruffians scowled blackly.

"What're you lookin' for?" muttered Slim with a grimace. The sailor, whose face had long been unshaven and whose clothes were in tatters, looked more repulsive than ever. Hoskin gave Joe a glance full of hate, but said nothing.

"Let me see your hands," Joe ordered as Johnson went back to the other room.

"Want a jab on the end of your nose?" Hoskin growled.

Joe braced himself, ready for the other to strike. The big rowdy apparently was a coward at heart for he lapsed into silence again.

"Come on, hold out your hands!" Joe commanded again sharply.

Sullenly the two men obeyed. Quickly inspecting their index finger-tips he saw the faint claw marks which apparently had been branded into the flesh.

"What about these?" the lad demanded. "What do they mean?"

Joe did not think for a moment that the prisoners would tell him the truth, but he hoped that they might let slip some chance remark that would provide him with the information he sought.

"Tell 'im, Jim, then maybe he'll get out o\* here!" mumbled Slim, glaring at Joe.

Hoskin forced a laugh. "Oh, those! Huh, they're nothin'. Slim and I used to belong to the same secret club back in school!"

Joe could hardly suppress a smile at Hoskin's evasive answer. Seeing that further questioning would be of no use, he decided to leave.

"Don't worry, Joe, they'll have to spend a long time here, and they may talk later,"

Sergeant Johnson assured him as he bade the friendly officer good-bye. "Kidnaping is a very serious offense."

Satisfied that Hoskin and Slim would be safe with the authorities until his suspicions of their connection with the smuggling ring could be proven a fact, Joe hurried back to Woodsville. There Frank informed him they had missed the train. "But Mr. Hendrick is going to drive us to Little Cove!" he added.

"Really ? That's a lucky break!"

The genial hotel manager turned over the running of his establishment to a friend for the time being, and the trio set out. At midnight they emerged from the forest-lined road. Soon the lights of Little Cove greeted them from the distance. Mr. Hendrick, who was familiar with the village, led them to a dingy structure on the water front.

"Eet ees ze only hotel here, but my friend Henri he run eet. Goo'bye. I go back now!"

The boys thanked their escort and promised to visit him again at the Woodsville hotel. Half an hour later they were sound asleep in their new quarters.

Morning found them up early. Though they scoured the town for news of the Black Parrot, no one could give them the slightest information about the schooner. Late that afternoon Frank suggested that they return to the hotel.

"I want to show you something, Joe. You can read it for yourself."

Back in their room Frank Hardy brought forth the old, yellowed pirate book in which he had marked a chapter. For the greater part of an hour Joe read eagerly.

"Great guns, I can hardly believe all this!" he exclaimed suddenly, jumping up. "It's the most fantastic thing I ever heard of!"

"I'm sure," said Frank, "that somehow those smugglers have secured a copy of the book and have followed the idea of that chapter!"

"Sounds impossible, but I've a hunch you're right," agreed Joe. "Golly, think of it! A pirate captain plans to build a fleet of ships and start a world-wide smuggling ring!" He thumbed through the pages of the book again, pausing now and then to read aloud to himself.

"Did you see all that about the claw?"

"Certainly did! Here it is. Tells how every member of his band would be branded with a twisted claw mark and would be tortured to death if he should do anything disloyal."

"I agree with you, Joe, it all sounds impossible. But we've found two men with the strange imprints on their fingers, and Chet says the Black Parrot is only one of a lot of ships with parrot names!"

The boys speculated on their strange discovery until supper time, when they went down to the hotel dining room. Over pea soup, beefsteak and fried potatoes they discussed the problem of how long they should wait in town for the schooner to dock, if indeed she did plan to anchor there.

"We'd better stay around here for a week," Frank suggested. "If she doesn't show up then, we'll have to figure out what to do next."

"In the meantime, Frank, what do you say we go to a movie tonight?"

Frank agreed heartily, and shortly after supper the boys seated themselves in a stuffy little moving picture theatre. Suddenly Joe caught his breath as a tall, thin figure brushed past them on its way down the aisle.

"Frank! Isn't that - isn't that Pierre?" whispered the younger Hardy excitedly.

## **CHAPTER XV**

### **On the High Seas**

Before Frank could follow Joe's gaze, the thin man had seated himself somewhere in the crowd in front of them.

"Are you sure he is Pierre!" the elder Hardy lad whispered.

"Absolutely! I couldn't forget that face!"

"We'll wait and follow - "

Frank was interrupted as a woman behind them leaned over. "Will you boys keep your tongues from a-waggin'!" she cackled.

Frank and Joe chuckled and lapsed into silence. The picture seemed hours long. Just before it ended, a figure in front of them arose.

"He's going out, Joe! Come on!"

As the thin man whom Joe thought to be Pierre passed by them, the brothers silently got up and followed him out of the theatre.

**"That's our man, all right!" Frank said under his breath. "Thank goodness the street lights are dim in this place. He won't be likely to see us!"**

**Pierre walked rapidly away from the direction of the river while the Hardy boys stole through the shadows of the deserted streets a block behind him. Soon they found themselves on the outskirts of the village where the houses were few and far apart.**

**"Do you suppose he's going all the way to Woodsville?" Frank asked ironically.**

**"Maybe he likes exercise!" his brother laughed. "Look, he's turning in somewhere!"**

**Pierre suddenly disappeared among the deep shadows ahead.**

**"We'll have to hurry, Joe, or we'll lose him!"**

**The boys quickened their pace, and a moment later found themselves in front of a large, rambling house, utterly in darkness. Just then they heard a click as the front door opened and shut again. A light suddenly appeared in the hallway, followed shortly by a second one in an upstairs window.**

**"Guess he's going to bed," said Frank. "Let's figure out where this place is and come back tomorrow."**

**"Sure as shooting he's here to wait for the Black Parrot to dock, Frank!" "Without a doubt."**

**They retraced their steps, making a note of the street names as they proceeded. An hour later they were back in the hotel where a portly, middle-aged man was sitting at the desk in the lobby reading a newspaper.**

**"Hello, boys!" called the man genially.**

**The brothers nodded and made a few casual remarks concerning the picture.**

**"By the way, Henri," Frank asked, "do you know anybody around here named Pierre! Tall, thin fellow with a hooked nose?"**

**"Pierre - Pierre," repeated the proprietor. "Pierre what? There are lots of Pierres around here." He gazed steadily at the boys for a moment. Then he went on, "Oh, Pierre Pierre, perhaps you mean! There's a steamship agent named Pierre Pierre who lives on D'Arcy Street about two miles from here."**

**Joe nodded vigorously. "That's the man! Does he live in a big house?"**

**"Yes, as far as I can remember. Sort of a rambling old place. Want to get hold of him?"**

**Frank suppressed a smile. "There's no particular hurry, Henri. We have some business to transact with him."**

**The proprietor nodded. "I see. Well, you can probably get him at his house or else down at the docks in the day time."**

**The boys thanked their informer and retired, full of plans for tomorrow. At sunrise they were sitting over the breakfast table.**

**"We'd better stay around the docks all day," Frank suggested. "No telling but that the Parrot'll come in. In the meantime Pierre may be there too."**

**As the boys were about to depart for the wharves, which were only a stone's throw from their hotel, Frank suddenly stopped.**

**"Joe, suppose we should run into Pierre down there," he said. "Everything would be spoiled if he were to recognize us."**

**"You're right," his brother agreed. "Maybe we'd better figure out something in the way of a disguise."**

**After a hasty discussion they agreed that sailor uniforms would serve their purpose as well as anything. Before heading toward the docks they began a hunt for a clothing store. They**

found several, but none were open at that early hour.

"We'll have to wait around here for some time, I suppose," fretted Joe. "Why didn't we think of this yesterday!"

They had selected as a waiting point a dingy shop overlooking the docks. Frank, who was gazing out over the wide bay, uttered a low exclamation.

"Joe, there goes Pierre again!"

Even at that distance the gaunt figure of the thin man rose head and shoulders above the crowds swarming over the docks.

"Oh, hang the disguises!" Joe suddenly exploded. "Let's go down there and see what he's up to!"

Frank shook his head. "No, we'd better do it right. Pierre won't get away from us if we've guessed right about the Black Parrot planning to dock."

Just then a squat, swarthy fellow came toward them.

"You want something, yes?" he asked, brushing past and unlocking the door of his shop.

Eagerly the boys followed him in, and emerged within a few minutes, each carrying a bundle. Half an hour later Henri, sitting at the hotel desk, gaped in astonishment as he beheld two disheveled looking young men in tattered seaman's clothing come down the stairs.

"Well, upon my - !"

Before he could finish, Frank and Joe had disappeared out the doorway.

"If only we could find some way to see whether Pierre has a twisted claw mark on his finger-tip!" the latter said as they approached the docks. "What a surprise that would be."

At first the boys could find no trace of the man they sought among the sailors and fishermen milling about the wharves. On impulse Joe decided to make inquiries at a nearby shack. The owner, a roughly-dressed fisherman, brightened at the boy's question.

"Pierre Pierre?" he exclaimed. "Sure I know 'im. Everybody around these parts knows 'im! Why, lad, he's one of the smartest men in the sailin' game!"

"Smartest? How?" pressed Joe curiously.

"Well, he knows French, and German, and Portugees, and Swedish and I don't know how many other languages! And they say he has a house in a dozen or two ports all over the world! Yep, he's been around!"

Joe came out and repeated the conversation to Frank, who suddenly nudged his brother.

"There he is now, and he's leaving! Say, I've an idea!"

"Is it any good?" teased Joe.

"Remember all the junk in that shop where we got these sailor duds? I saw a pair of binoculars in there. Why couldn't we use them to see whether or not Pierre has a twisted claw print on his finger?"

Joe clucked his tongue skeptically. "You'd never be able to see that tiny imprint with those glasses. It wasn't put on as an advertisement! A microscope is what you need."

The brothers argued for a moment, with Frank finally winning out that his idea was the only possible way of getting the desired information. Accordingly they purchased the glasses, and just after dark that night set out for Pierre's house.

"He's at home!" Joe exclaimed softly as they reached the structure and saw lights in several windows.

"Do you see what I see, Joe?" whispered Frank. "Either I'm crazy, or that's Pierre right up against that first-floor window!"



Moving closer, they saw that Frank was correct. By a lucky chance the mysterious thin man was sitting at a desk which was placed directly against a window, thus bringing him within a few feet of Frank's binoculars on the other side of the pane.

After peering intently for a moment, the lad silently handed over the article to Joe. The boy took one long look, then nodded.

"You're a genius, Frank!" he whispered. "He has the claw mark, all right. It's plain as day through this thing!"

Pierre, who apparently was writing a letter, now arose and moved away. The boys accordingly retraced their steps to the hotel.

The following morning at dawn Frank suddenly awoke with a feeling that something was going to happen. On impulse he jumped from bed and looked out the window over the harbor.

"Joe! Joe! Wake up! There's the Black Parrot!" he called, whirling around and picking up his binoculars.

His brother was up in a twinkling. "The Black Parrot? Where?"

Frank handed over the glasses. Joe watched in astonishment as the stately old schooner, her name clearly visible through the binoculars, eased up to an empty wharf.

"Well," announced Frank at length, "now's our chance to accomplish something! We'll go down there and sign up with the crew. We'll learn a lot about smuggling before we reach Bayport."

Soon the boys were standing unobserved in the crowd watching for a favorable opportunity to approach one of the officers.

"Listen, Joe," Frank whispered, "if we can get a chance to meet the captain don't forget to look at his index finger. I'll do the same."

Presently a huge grizzled giant with an officer's cap jammed over his weather-beaten face strode down the gangplank, gazing around authoritatively.

"That's the captain, I'm sure," Joe said under his breath. "Let's see what happens!"

They elbowed their way to the end of the gangplank just in time to meet the officer as he stepped off.

"Captain, may we speak to you a minute?" Frank asked.

The man stared at the boys irritably. "Haven't time now," he replied brusquely, pushing on.

Frank caught the giant's arm eagerly. "Please, sir, we want to ship with your crew!"

The man shook him off. "Out of my way!" he roared, striding into the crowd. "Go see the first mate."

This was not an easy thing to do, because that person could not be found. As the boys were about to leave for the time being they saw a ship's officer approaching hurriedly from the street.

"There's the man ye're lookin' for," said a dockhand to the Hardys.

The officer looked so angry the boys decided probably this would not be a good time to speak to him. Directly behind him came two members of the crew, laughing uproariously and rolling from side to side. Presently one of them called out in a sing-song voice:

"Hi ho, and what care we, We'll put the mate down in the sea-----"

Suddenly the officer turned around and glared at the seamen. "Swine!" he cried. "Get out o'my sight. You're through! I told you two once and for all if you got gay on land you'd never set foot on the ship again."

The dazed crew members began with, "Aw,, we didn't mean no harm. "We - "  
"You're through!" yelled the mate, turning and taking long strides across the dock.  
Frank, thinking this was his chance, stepped up to the man. "We'd like to take their places, sir. We'll do any kind of work."  
Still angry, the officer looked at them and bellowed, "You young whippersnappers! What d'you know about a boat?"  
The boys' hopes sank. Then suddenly the man's attitude changed. "Come to think of it," he said, "it might not be a bad idea at that. You two look sober enough."  
"Yes sir, we are," put in Joe eagerly. "And we'll do any kind of work you say."  
The officer pondered as the boys' hearts beat excitedly. "I expect you wouldn't think you know it all like some o' the older ones. Yep," he concluded suddenly, "I'll do it. Come to my quarters and sign the papers."  
This was better luck than the boys had hoped for. Furthermore, they were relieved when the officer, beyond getting the names Frank and Joe Hedley, did not even look at the answers to the questions which the lads found difficult to fill out and still keep their identity secret.  
"Report at sunrise!" the mate ordered and dismissed them, as he tucked the papers into a drawer.  
The brothers were exultant. Congratulating themselves, they rushed back to the hotel to make final arrangements. Frank wrote out a telegram to Mr. Hardy, explaining in code what he and Joe were about to do.  
"We'd better send another to Chet," suggested Joe, observing what his brother was doing. Frank agreed, and gave the messages to the night man in the lobby. It was now time to prepare for their departure. Sunrise the next morning found them standing before a grizzled seaman at the gangplank of the Black Parrot.  
"We're reporting for duty," Frank said.  
The brothers waited in silence, their hearts pounding. For a moment the man said nothing. Then he bellowed:  
"Well, what're ye standin' there for? Go on up and stow ye're duffle! Go on! Get a move on!"  
Frank and Joe scampered up on deck where sailor shoved them down the companionway. "Stow that stuff in the fo'castle!" he shouted. "And get back here right away!"  
From that moment on until the schooner weighed anchor late that night the boys were kept constantly at work, scrubbing decks, stacking cargo and executing a hundred other tasks-As the great hulking craft finally slipped from the dock. Frank and Joe were told that they could rest for an hour.  
"What did I tell you, Joe? The captain has a twisted claw print on his finger!" Frank whispered to his brother as they stood high in the bow, watching the ship rise and fall with the waves.  
"Really! Well, wait till I tell you what I found out, Frank!"  
"Go ahead! Shoot!"  
"Pierre's aboard!"  
"No! Is he really? I've wondered whether he'd get on at the last minute!"  
"And that's not all, either! He went into the captain's cabin while I was holystoning the deck just outside the porthole and I heard them talking!"  
Frank nudged his brother violently as the man on watch at the bow swung close to them.

Fortunately the fellow passed them without showing any apparent curiosity.

"O. K., Joe, what did you hear?"

The younger Hardy lad glanced quickly around at the watchman who was gazing off to one side absently.

"I heard Pierre and the captain say we are sailing to King Barracuda's Island, wherever that is. It is the time for a meeting of all the King's subjects the world over!"

Frank stared at his brother in mingled wonder and consternation. "You mean we're not going to Bayport! We're going to some mysterious island?"

## CHAPTER XVI

### The Stolen Papers

"All hands on deck!"

The hoarse shout resounded throughout the ship. The boys, who had only shortly before been permitted to turn into their bunks, were promptly aroused and put to work helping to reef the main-sail. Others in the crew climbed high in the rigging to furl the main top-sail.

"What's happening?" Joe asked a seaman.

"Due for a blow!" replied the other. "It's one thing after another on this ship!"

The mates strode to and fro along the deck, barking out orders. "Come on there, Lubber!" yelled one of the officers at Frank. "Haul in that sheet and make it quick!"

He gave the lad a cuff over the ear that nearly sent him sprawling. Not to be considered a slacker, Frank sprang back to his position at the heavy rope and pulled for all he was worth.

"Don't let that rotter get ye're goat!" muttered a swarthy sailor in his ear. "One o' these days we're goin' to keel-haul 'im!"

"What's that?" roared a voice in the darkness, and Frank turned to see the officer glaring at the sailor who had just spoken. "Did I hear you say somethin' about keel-haulin'?"

"Aye, sir, and they's plenty to back me up!" retorted the other fearlessly. "Red Jack! Bring the gang and come on over here!" he shouted, yelling through cupped hands.

"Relay that!" bellowed the officer, advancing toward the sailor, who was suddenly joined by half a dozen others. The group scowled sullenly at the raging mate.

"Go back to your stations!" snapped the officer. Not a man moved. Then one of them stepped forward.

"Listen, Mr. Benson, we've stood about all we're a - goin' to take on this ship!"

"That so? Well, and what's eatin' you, Carson?" asked the mate sarcastically.

"Nothin' eaksin' me, Mr. Benson, and we ain't eatin', neither! The mess you're a-servin' on this ship ain't fit to feed to pigs! Salt pork's full o' vermin and the hardtack ain't seen a

bakery since Columbus. Look here, Mr. Benson, we - !"

Before he could finish his sentence a sudden uneasy hush swept over the grumbling band of men as Captain Mundy stalked out from his cabin.

"Mutiny, eh? Where's the man who dares to start trouble on this ship? Let him step for'd!"

He scowled fiercely at the little herd of sailors facing him. Not a man moved.

"Nobody wants to start trouble, eh? All right, I'll promise you snivelers somethin'. I'll promise you that the first man I hear causin' trouble is goin' overside to the sharks! Put that in ye're pipes! Now, get back where you b'long!"

The men, cowed by their fierce commander, moved instantly to obey, and soon the ship had been trimmed. The reason soon became apparent to Frank and Joe, for the wind was rising steadily, and the old schooner rose and fell violently.

"Seen anything of Pierre yet?" Frank inquired of Joe as they returned at last to their bunks in the stuffy fore-castle.

"No, and I think it would be just as well if we keep out of his sight as much as possible."

"You're right. We wouldn't gain anything by having him recognize us. On the other hand - "

"On the other hand we haven't gained anything anyway," his brother finished. "We must find a way to crawl into the good graces of Captain Mundy if we want to get any worthwhile information about this smuggling business."

On the third day out Joe happened to peer into the Captain's cabin as he passed along the deck. The elderly officer, much to the lad's surprise, was playing solitaire. On impulse the lad knocked on the door. A gruff voice ordered him to enter.

"Pardon me, Captain Mundy - "

The officer looked up and scowled. "Who told you to come in here?" he growled. "Get back on that deck!"

"You told me to come in, sir!" Joe smiled engagingly.

For an instant a faint grin flickered on the gruff, weatherbeaten features. "All right, young fellow, what can I do for you?"

"I happened to notice that you are playing solitaire, sir."

A huge fist crashed down on the desk. "Who told you to go around here snoopin'?" thundered the captain.

"I wondered if you'd ever heard of a game called Sea-Horse Solitaire?"

"You young whippersnapper, get out of - !" The roar suddenly ceased. Then, "What's Sea-horse Solitaire? Never heard of it!"

"It's three times as exciting as ordinary solitaire, Captain Mundy. I'll show - "

"You'll do nothin' of the sort, you brainless young infant! Wait! Where'd you learn it?"

Before many minutes had passed the Hardy lad had all but hypnotized the eccentric officer with his card game. The man made Joe watch him while he played it no less than five times.

"Well, I guess I know the rules by now, young feller, thanks to you! What's your name ag'in?"

"Hedley, sir. Joe Hedley," replied the boy, using the surname he and Frank had given to the mate when they signed on board.

"All right, Joe, if ye know any more o' these games come up when ye're off duty and show me!"

Joe hurried out and joyfully raced to Frank with the news. Fortunately the older Hardy lad

was unoccupied at the moment and listened eagerly as his brother spoke.

"Have you seen anything suspicious looking in the cabin?" he asked.

"Didn't have a chance to look, Frank, but I hope to next time!"

The windstorm had abated so the boys were able to stroll along the deck with comparative ease. It was dark, and no one was in sight save the sailors on watch.

"How'd you ever get the idea of tackling the captain with card games?" Frank wondered, still amazed at Joe's accomplishment.

"Just had a sudden thought-more luck than anything. Frank, the man's crazy on the subject!"

"That's the funniest thing imaginable for a tough old sea-dog like him!"

The two brothers decided that Joe should continue to visit the captain in an endeavor to learn something more of King Barracuda. Frank in turn would attempt to make friends with the wireless operator.

"No telling when we may need his assistance if we can get it," the older Hardy lad commented. "I'd like to get a message home, but of course that's out of the question."

As the ship plowed onward the weather grew warmer and the boys soon became deeply tanned. The officers were noticeably kinder to them now that Joe and the captain were on good terms. Although their meals were far from appetizing their work was not disagreeable.

Both boys were continually tense from excitement over prospects of soon arriving at their mysterious destination. They had long since formed the habit of meeting on deck after nightfall, whenever both were off duty at the same time, to discuss the possibilities ahead. On the afternoon of the tenth day out a seaman tapped Joe on the shoulder as the lad was busily occupied scrubbing the deck.

"Cap'n wants you, Hedley."

Joe was not surprised, for the old officer often called him for advice concerning card playing.

"Come in, Joe!" greeted Captain Mundy in answer to the lad's knock. "Look, these cards don't come out right. What did I do wrong! That three of clubs - "

A second knock at the cabin door interrupted him, and the bos'n stuck in his head. "The men're havin' trouble with the main to'gallant, sir!" he reported, referring to one of the numerous sails on the vessel.

"Drat the to'gallant!" exclaimed the captain impatiently. "Joe, wait here, I'll be back in ten minutes." The bos'n stepped aside as the officer strode out with his subordinate behind him.

Joe's opportunity had come at last. Peering through the porthole and seeing no one about, he stole quickly across the room to the desk, which was cluttered with papers. His eye fell on a familiar looking letterhead. With a whoop of joy, which he stifled at once, he pounced on the sheet, recognizing one of Mr. Hardy's valuable case-notes regarding the operations of the smuggling ring. At the bottom of the page was a pencil scrawl in unfamiliar handwriting.

"Gee, won't Frank - !" His exclamation was interrupted by a heavy footstep on the deck. Joe had no sooner reached his place at the card table when the captain came in.

"Cursed fools!" the officer was muttering. "Must've learned to sail in their nurseries, the way they act!" Seeing Joe he suddenly brightened. "Well, lad, let's get down to our game ag'in!"

Excitedly Joe related the incident to Frank when they met on deck late that night.

"What did that note at the bottom of Dad's paper say?" the older Hardy lad asked breathlessly.

"I was coming to that. It said Hoskin had put Dad out of the way, and it was signed by Pierre! Sort of a report, apparently."

Frank whistled in surprise. "So that was what Hoskin was supposed to do! Well, he almost succeeded!"

"I guess Pierre still thinks he did," Joe remarked. "It's a cinch Hoskin and Slim haven't been able to let him know otherwise!"

It was time to turn in, so the boys went down the companionway into the fore-castle, where half a dozen sailors were lounging about on their bunks.

"Here they come-the kid sisters!" snarled one as the brothers entered the dingy, dimly-lighted room.

The Hardys started in surprise. Up till now their crew-mates, while gruff, had been friendly.

"Play cards with the cap'n, will you?" sneered another. "Y'know what we do with lubbers as tries to get friendly with the officers?"

Joe felt his anger rising. "Who's got anything to say about it?" he snapped, gazing at the motley crowd, his eyes flashing.

"Hah, fresh guy, eh?" drawled an ugly fellow, rising menacingly. "Maybe ye'll take back them words, Lubber!"

"Yeah, what's the idea o' trying to get favors around here?" cut in the bos'n. "What makes you two kids think ye're any better'n the rest of us?"

"Who's trying to get favors?" Joe demanded, now thoroughly aroused.

"You are!" came a chorus of angry shouts from the sailors.

The ugly fellow advanced toward Joe and raised a bony finger. "Ain't you been playin' cards with the cap'n for a week, and ain't you," he pointed scornfully at Frank, "ain't you been pallin' around with Sparks up'n the radio shack?"

"And ain't the officers been nice and good to ye ever since?" added a shriveled-up man whom the boys recognized as the ship's sail-mender.

The ugly sailor who had spoken previously suddenly swung his fist at Joe's head. As the lad ducked the blow the fore-castle door creaked open and a gaunt figure appeared. Out of the corner of his eye young Hardy recognized Pierre!

## **CHAPTER XVII**

### **Mutiny!**

In a flash both boys realized the danger of being recognized by the mysterious man, so they dived for their bunks. A chorus of taunts and catcalls went up.

"relay that!" roared Pierre, stepping into the room, which instantly became hushed.

"What goes on there?"

"Oh, nothin'," muttered one of the sailors. "Just a friendly tussle."

Pierre gazed around, his beady eyes shifting rapidly. At length, apparently satisfied, he turned toward the doorway. "Don't let me hear another sound out of you!" he flung back, and disappeared.

The sailors immediately renewed their taunts and jibes.

"Look at 'em, they're yellow!" hissed the sail-mender, pointing at the boys on their bunks, while Frank and Joe burned with rage.

"Afraid you might knock their blocks off, Bed?" remarked a seaman sneeringly to the ugly fellow who had done most of the talking.

Frank suddenly sat up. "If you fellows think we're afraid to fight any of you, you're wrong!" he rapped out, his eyes flashing. "The only reason we don't is because you men know just as well as I do that if there's any rumpus, somebody's going to the brig."

There was a momentary silence. "He's right, ye blarsted tars!" croaked an elderly member of the crew who had here before been friendly with the brothers. "If there's a - goin' to be any fightin', let it be on shore! I don't fancy no ship's prison, no sir - ee."

"Maybe we ought to set here and look at card cricks, like the young feller shows the Cap'n!, suggested the ship's carpenter sarcastically.

Joe jumped up. "All right, I'll show you some!" he flung at the group impulsively. "Get me a deck of cards."

A roar of laughter went up. Now it happened that one of the lad's hobbies was the performance of sleight-of-hand feats, so he went right ahead with a number of startling card tricks in rapid succession.

"Say, the kid's not so dumb after all!" one of the men exclaimed, staring in astonishment at the lad's flying fingers.

There was a murmur of excited agreement as the others leaned forward to watch him. Joe entertained the simple-minded crew for nearly an hour before they would let him stop. By that time they were avowed friends of the brothers. Frank contributed his share of the performance by playing skillfully on an old ukulele belonging to a sailor who could not play it himself.

"Now that we've won over the crew and the captain, maybe we'll have an easier time finding out a thing or two," Frank remarked as they took their customary walk on the deck together the following night.

"I hope so, Frank! So far they've certainly been a close-mouthed bunch. I've asked Pete and Charlie and a dozen other sailors where we're bound for and they all say they don't know."

Frank nodded. "I've done the same thing and got the same answer. Even Sparks up in the radio room doesn't know, or at least he won't say if he does."

As the brothers watched the prow rise and dip in the waves, and listened to the creak and groan of the rigging and sails, they heard a familiar voice behind them.

"Be right in, Mundy. Wait for me."

Joe cautiously peered around. "Pierre. I Guess he and the captain are about to have a conference."

"I'd give a million to hear it," his brother declared. "Say, did you notice that Pierre hasn't his accent any more?"

"Yes. He probably put that on for our benefit back in Bayport, just to make himself sound mysterious."

"Or at least to disguise his real voice," Frank suggested.

A moment later a door clicked open, then closed with a bang.

"Must have been Pierre going into Mundy's cabin," whispered Joe, afraid to turn around too often lest the bow watchman's suspicions be aroused. A moment later they were startled when the sailor came up to them.

"Hello, lads," he greeted disarmingly.

The brothers recognized a seaman they knew as Jack. "Just wondered if you'd mind doin' us boys in the crew a little favor," the man added under his breath.

"Hello, Jack." Frank was instantly on guard, wondering what was to come.

"Well, uh - " the sailor faltered.

"Go ahead, Jack, what's on your mind?" Joe urged.

The seaman came closer, gazing around furtively at the empty deck. "Seein' as how ye two're in with Cap 'n Mundy, maybe ye can find out where we're bound for."

"Where we're bound for? Doesn't anybody in the crew know that?" Frank queried.

"Nary a soul, lad, and the men's gettin' uneasy."

"Well, we don't know where we're going, either, Jack, but what's there to be uneasy about!" Joe fenced.

"Listen, boys, this ship's bad luck! Some-thin's a-goin' to happen. You lads just wait!" The sailor plainly was becoming more agitated. "Did ye see them albatrosses cut across the bow day before yesterday! They dipped, they did! When albatrosses dips, ain't a man aboard a ship a-goin' to see land ag'in!"

Frank could barely keep back a smile at the superstitious fellow's remarks. On the other hand, both he and Joe knew better than to ridicule a sailor's fears, however absurd they might be.

"Well, Jack, now that the albatrosses have dipped, there's nothing much we can do about it, is there!" the younger Hardy kid commented.

The fellow shrugged. "Mebbe if we could get to land right away we might break the spell," he said earnestly. "You lads might ask the Cap'n if we're goin' to head toward land pretty quick. Then I can go back and quiet down the boys."

The simple sailor looked at them almost pleadingly.

"All right, Jack, we'll ask the captain some time tonight," Frank declared. "You can tell the men we'll find out as soon as we can."

"Thanks, lads!"

Jack pressed their hands in turn and continued his briefly-interrupted lookout duty in the bow. A few moments later as the ship's clock struck eight bells, he was relieved by another seaman and disappeared below.

"Now we're in a mess!" Joe whispered to his brother in dismay. "Why did you ever make such a rash promise?"

Frank smiled. "Joe, didn't you notice the seaweed floating around us today! That means we're getting close to land."

"What's all that got to do with telling the men something tonight? They must have noticed the seaweed too."



**"I may be wrong but I've a hunch we'll hear something right now if we hurry!"**

**Joe instantly gleaned his brother's thought, and together they tiptoed along the deck to a lighted porthole. Frank flattened himself against the outside of the cabin and motioned to his brother to do likewise.**

**"What day did you say we'd make Barracuda Island, Mundy?" a voice was inquiring.**

**" 'Long about Wednesday night, Pierre. Wind ain't been followin' us like it should this time o' year, otherwise we'd made port sooner."**

**"Wonder when the king's going to junk all these old-time schooners and buy a fleet with some engines in them?" fretted Pierre.**

**They could hear Captain Mundy shifting in his chair. "Well," he drawled, "I been a-sailin' these smugglers fer the king nigh onto fifty year an' my father skippered fer the old king fer about thirty year before me, and I ain't heard no rumors 'bout changin' to steam. I expect a government's not so apt to be suspicious of an old tramp schooner as it would a speedier kind o' boat."**

**For a moment there was silence, then Pierre spoke again. "Eighty years your family's been smuggling, eh? That's a good record, Mundy. Funny, isn't it, how just about every captain in the fleet now is a son of one of the original captains?"**

**Their voices dropped as they apparently began to recall old times. The boys could hear no more of what they were saying.**

**"What do you think of that?" whooped Joe when they were out of danger of being heard by the cabin's occupants.**

**"It all sounds tremendous to me," his brother muttered. "If we can only solve the mystery and round up the smugglers without being caught ourselves!"**

**"We must figure out something to quiet down the men. I think if we just say we're landing Wednesday they'll be satisfied."**

**"But Wednesday's six days off!"**

**He was interrupted by a sudden rush of feet up the nearby companionway, and to the boys' alarm a swarm of sailors poured out on deck and swooped down on the captain's cabin.**

**Two or three at the head of the group pounded on the door.**

**"Who's there! What's going on?" came a roar from within.**

**When the door was opened the air became filled with shouts and curses. In a twinkling both boys were in the thick of the mob, vainly striving to force their way inside the cabin to see what was happening.**

**A sailor seized Joe roughly. "Out of the way, lad, this is a job fer men!"**

**He sent young Hardy sprawling. Frank met with the same fate at the hands of a burly quartermaster. In a flash he was up, however, and at length managed to push his way through the jam of shouting seamen at the doorway.**

**He was just in time to see Red stuff a filthy rag into Captain Mundy's mouth. The skipper, purple with rage, had been securely bound with heavy rope. Pierre had been similarly treated.**

**"Put 'em in the brig!" shrieked the mob, "Throw 'em overboard!"**

**"Keel-haul the blighters! Make 'em walk the plank, Red!" yelled an agitated sailor in the crowd.**

**The boys were horrified, but at the moment there seemed to be little they could do.**

**"Get the mates!" came another shout. "Get Benson and Swazy and MacDonald!"**

**"They're already in the brig!" answered a hoarse voice.**

Accompanied by loud yells and curses, the captain and Pierre were pushed down into the foul-smelling hold of the vessel to the door of a tiny cell. It was barely large enough for one man, yet it already held the three mates, bound and gagged. Red stuck a huge key in the lock and yanked open the barred door.

"In ye go!" shouted the mob, all heaving at once.

Mundy and Pierre crashed to the plank floor as Red swung the door shut and shot home the bolt. The sailor then turned to the frenzied crowd of seamen and held up his hand.

"From now on I'm givin' the orders on this ship," he bellowed, "and anybody who turns a hair to cause trouble goes to the brig with the rest o' the rats. Hear?"

The men listened silently.

"All right!" Red went on. "Pete, you'll be first mate. Long Jim, you'll be second, and Jacques here'll be third. Harry, go up and take the wheel. Pete and I'll chart you a course right away. Men, we ain't a-goin' along no further with the Old Man keepin' everything a secret. We're a - goin' back north!"

At Red's concluding words a resounding cheer went up and the men dispersed to their stations, disregarding Frank and Joe, who had watched the entire procedure. The boys decided to talk things over in the fore-castle, which for the moment was deserted.

"This is something we didn't count on, that's a cinch!" Joe said, bitterly disappointed at the interruption.

Frank pursed his lips. "I'm not so sure but that it's a good thing for us."

"What do you mean?"

"I've an idea that a search of Pierre's cabin might be worth while."

"Great idea! Go ahead and look, while I see what else I can find in the captain's desk!"

"Fine. Let's meet in the galley at six bells. The cook will be off then."

Although Frank knew where Pierre's room was located he had never had an opportunity even to look in through the porthole, for the man who had posed as their father's messenger was almost invariably in his cabin. Now Frank hurried to the place and forced the lock.

For a short while he rummaged around, finding nothing of significance. Suddenly he caught his breath as his eyes fell on a bulky document consisting of several bound pages with a printed cover. Hurriedly Frank scanned the manuscript, then stuffed it carefully into his pocket and slipped out of the room. At eleven o'clock he stole into the darkened galley. A whisper greeted him.

"Frank?"

"Yes! Wait till you see what I've found!"

"Think we dare light the lamp?"

"No! We don't want the crew poking around. I have a flashlight. If we stand over there behind the door nobody'll see us!"

Excitedly Frank brought out the roll of papers and snapped on his light, shielding it carefully.

"Good night!" Joe exclaimed under his breath, examining the printed cover. He read the contents in a hoarse whisper:

''' Current Annual Report of Schooner Black Parrot ... To Be Presented at Grand Meeting Before King of Barracuda.' Great Scott, Frank!" he exclaimed.

"Look at the rest of the pages, Joe! Talk about smuggling on a big scale. Wow!"

The closely-typewritten pages revealed a story of world-wide smuggling operations so

tremendous that the boys were aghast.

"And think of it, Frank, this fleet has been doing this sort of thing for years and years without having been caught! Can you imagine it!"

For a moment the boys were silent, meditating on the astounding discovery they had made. Then the older lad frowned.

"Joe, we've a bigger problem on our hands than ever. If we don't follow this thing up, and if we don't find out where the island is, we might as well quit the whole thing."

Joe scratched his head. "You're right, Frank. Somehow we'll have to stop the mutiny and give the Black Parrot back to Captain Mundy."

In their absorption over the problem at hand the boys failed to notice a shadowy figure lurking just outside the doorway of the galley.

## **CHAPTER XVIII**

### **Land Ho!**

As the ship gave a great lurch there was a crash in the passageway, followed by a groan. The Hardy boys started in alarm.

"Better have a look, I guess," Frank decided. "Somebody's been listening to us so he might as well see us."

With Joe just behind him the older lad pointed the flashlight out the doorway and peered beyond the rays. There, sitting on the rough planking, was one of the sailors.

"What are you doing here?" Frank demanded, recognizing the man as the one who helped the cook prepare mess.

"Nothin', lad, nothin', honest! I jus' come to get a bite to eat. Really!" The poor fellow was obviously in terror that the boys would tattle about his breaking orders.

"Never mind, get up," Joe ordered sternly. "Are you hurt?"

The sailor shook his head and was off like a shot, while the brothers heaved sighs of relief.

"Thank goodness, it wasn't somebody else who might have been more curious!" Joe exclaimed. "If the crew ever gets hold of this report we'll never be able to stop them from going back home!"

The vessel gave another violent lurch that all but sent the lads sprawling. At the same instant the bos'n's pipe sounded and a cry went up.

"All hands to shorten sail!"

There was a rush of feet from every part of the ship. "Guess we'd better join in, Frank. Must be a storm coming up."

They were met on deck by a blast of wind that nearly knocked them off their feet. Low scudding clouds whipped across the black sky and salty spray flew over the deck.

**"Furl the tops'Is!" came another shout.**

**Half a dozen men clambered up the ratlines like monkeys, perching high in the masts. Frank and Joe were given positions at the main-sheet to be ready to trim the huge billowing sail as soon as necessary.**

**The seas were piling up to tremendous heights. Every now and then a giant comber would crash over the deck, threatening to wash every man overboard.**

**"Reef the mizzen!" yelled Pete, who was standing at the wheel beside the quartermaster and his three assistants, all of whom were required to help turn the shuddering helm.**

**"Lay off the mizzen-reef the mains!" came a contradictory shout from the poop deck where Red stood with arms akimbo.**

**Pete whirled around and glared at his superior through the flying spray. "I said 'reef the mizzen!' " he shrieked.**

**"Who's commandin' this ship, you or me?" came an answering roar as Red staggered across the rolling deck to where Pete was standing.**

**He grabbed the new chief mate by the collar of his sou'wester. As he did so the latter swung a giant fist that sent Red sprawling. Before the self-appointed captain could pick himself up a tremendous wave smashed over the deck. When the confusion of thundering water and stinging spume momentarily cleared away, Red had disappeared.**

**"Man overboard!" shrieked the quartermaster, letting go the wheel.**

**There was a chorus of yells as the wheel spun madly out of control. In half a second the great vessel plunged into the next mountainous wave and swung away from the wind.**

**"Hold 'er, hold 'er!" screamed Pete, springing to the quartermaster's place too late. There was a terrific, ear-splitting crash. To the boys' horror the mizzen-mast thundered down onto the deck, covering them in a hopeless tangle of sails and rigging.**

**Frank Hardy found himself suddenly freed, due to the fact that the heavy sail over him had been torn to ribbons. Where was Joe? There was no time to look. The vessel was filling up rapidly. Frank climbed to the poop deck, where Pete and two other sailors were clinging fast to a railing.**

**"We're lost! We're lost!" the mate was yelling. "Get to the boats, somebody!" The roar of the wind drowned out his words.**

**"Chop that mast loose!" screeched the sailor beside him, but there was nobody left to obey and the man himself continued to cling in terror to a stanchion.**

**Frank moved swiftly. "Give me the key to the brig!" he shouted in Pete's ear.**

**The man looked at him wild-eyed and clung to his support more desperately. He was too terror-stricken even to notice that the boy plunged a hand into his pocket and pulled out a bunch of keys.**

**With a desperate rush Frank reached the main companionway. Half a moment later he stood at the door of the ship's prison cell. The five men were lying in a huddle on the floor, tossing violently with every lurch of the vessel.**

**"Captain Mundy!" Frank cried, twisting a key in the heavy lock. " Captain Mundy! Get up!"**

**In a jiffy he had cut the ropes binding the officer and removed the gag from his mouth. The burly skipper jerked himself to his feet with a roar, and was gone.**

**In quick succession the boy freed the others, his heart pounding as he came to Pierre. The thin man, however, gave no sign of recognition. "Thank you, young fellow," he muttered weakly and disappeared with the others.**

The air was filled with shouts as Frank emerged on deck again. With a thrill of joy he saw the gruff old skipper at his usual place, bellowing orders like a lion. Most of the crew had now extricated themselves from the wreckage and were working madly to chop it free and relieve the wallowing vessel of its burden. Several sailors were struggling with the helm, and bit by bit under the skillful supervision of the Black Parrot's veteran master the ship waa headed back into the wind.

"Frank!" came a cry. "Cap'n wants ye!" Frank stumbled over the cluttered deck.

"Go down and help man the bilge pumps, will ye, lad?" the skipper shouted above the roar of the wind.

Torn between an urge to find Joe and the impulse to obey the captain immediately, Frank naturally did the latter, for the Black Parrot was deep in the water and still in imminent danger of foundering. Down in the hold sailors, stripped to their waists, were pumping furiously. With every lurch of the vessel masses of water, already chest deep, sloshed over them.

"Frank! Golly, I thought you'd gone overboard !" panted Joe, who suddenly appeared in the midst of the struggling group.

"And I thought you had!"

Freed from his apprehension over his brother's safety, Frank jumped to one of the pumps and tugged furiously at the heavy handle.

Throughout the next day the storm raged and the crew slaved heroically. By night all hands breathed sighs of relief as the wind died down and the ocean quieted.

The men had worked with a will, realizing that their captain had been responsible for saving their lives; nor did they forget, including Mundy himself, that Frank was the one who had actually saved them by releasing the skipper and his mates. As for Pete and the other ringleaders of the mutiny, they were promptly locked in the brig where they could incite no further rebellion.

By the middle of the week, her sails repaired, the Black Parrot was as good as before save for her missing mizzen mast. She was put back on her original course and began making up for lost time.

"Well, here it is Sunday," Frank remarked to his brother late one afternoon when they happened to be off duty. "We ought to be making port at that mysterious isle, wherever it is, any time now. We were due there last Wednesday."

"You're right, Frank. Things should be happening pretty soon, and I'll wager - "

The younger Hardy lad was interrupted by a long, drawn-out cry from the lookout high in the mainmast. "L - a - n - d   A - h - o - y!"

There was a chorus of rushing feet as all hands made for the bow, whooping and yelling excitedly. The shore line grew larger and soon they could see clusters of tall palm trees.

Benson, the chief mate, strode past the joyful band of men.

"What land is that, sir?" one of the sailors hailed. "It's off the lane o' regular travelin' ships."

"Barracuda Island. What's the difference? You ain't goin' ashore!"

A roar of consternation went up. "We ain't goin' ashore?" cried a seaman. "What do you mean, we ain't goin' to - "

"Just what I said!" snapped the mate. "Cap'n says 'no!'"

A subdued grumbling rippled through the huddled crew as Benson turned on his heel and walked away. A moment later Captain Mundy himself appeared.

"Men, nobody's a - goin' to get off this ship while we're off Barracuda Island. D'you hear? Nobody!" Without further explanation he strode back and commenced barking orders. Sullenly the men obeyed.

"Old Man's tryin' to get back at us fer the mutiny," one of the sailors muttered to Frank.

"Now, what do you think o' that!"

Three hours later the Black Parrot anchored a mile off shore.

"They're certainly careful about staying a good distance away from land," Joe remarked as he and his brother stood in the bow.

"It looks as if we might have a little trouble getting to the island, after the orders," Frank replied.

The brothers decided that, on the strength of their friendship with Captain Mundy, they would ask his permission to leave with him, Before Joe had a chance to carry out their plan, Frank called him back.

"On second thought, Joe, I think we better not do that. Pierre'll be along too, you know, and we want to keep away from him as much as we can."

"That's right. I'd almost forgotten the fellow. He's never around. What'll we do then? How are we going to get there?"

"Swim tonight!" Frank whispered just as the bos'n's whistle called them for a crew meeting.

Captain Mundy addressed the group. "Mr.

Pierre and I and some of the officers are goin' ashore in one o' the boats. Mr. Benson will see to it that not a man o' ye leaves this ship. If ye tiy swimmin', the barracudas'll make short work o' ye. If anybody tries to steal a boat, he'll hang from a yardarm afore Christmas! Mind ye, now, I ain't a-triflin' with ye any longer!"

With that he ordered a boat lowered. The men climbed in, and a few moments later they dwindled to a speck on the waves.

The brothers decided to take the crew in the fore-castle into their confidence concerning their plan to swim to shore. A weather-beaten old sailor shook his head when they revealed their project.

"If Mr. Benson don't catch ye the deadly killer fish will!" he warned. "One way or t'other ye ain't got a chance, lads!"

"Don't worry, men, we'll get there somehow," Joe said, relying on the idea that they had a better chance at night when the barracudas would not be so active.

Another seaman reached under his mattress and brought out two stout cutlasses. "Hold these knives between y'er teeth, lads. Ye may need 'em."

When darkness fell the boys dispatched one of the crew to find out where Benson was at the moment.

"They're playin' cards in the cap'n's cabin," the man reported a few moments later.

"Guess it's all right now."

Silently the brothers, stripped to their waists and biting on the knives, stole up on deck.

"We'll slide down the anchor cable and then we won't make a splash!" Frank whispered.

"Ready?"

The boy started his climb to the water. Joe followed his brother overside. With hardly a sound they let themselves down the heavy chain and slipped into the sea, scarcely daring to breathe. Then, satisfied that each was ready, they commenced to swim toward the distant beach.

## **CHAPTER XIX**

### **The Mysterious City**

Fortunately the surf was calm. The brothers, both powerful swimmers, found themselves after a time nearing the scattered lights on the mysterious island. Joe's foot scraped bottom, and a moment later Frank's did the same.

"Well, here we are still in one piece and not a sign of a barracuda!" Joe panted.

"Come on, let's get out of this old ocean while we have a chance!" his brother cried, thankful for their good fortune in having escaped any killer fish.

They found themselves on a broad expanse of sand fringed with giant palm and cocoanut trees. Apparently the beach was deserted.

"Now what are we going to do for clothes?" Frank wondered. "We can't go prowling around like this!"

Joe flung the water from his eyes. "Whatever we do, I think we'd better not stand out here in the moonlight. Remember, Pierre and Mundy are somewhere around."

They decided first to seek refuge among the palm trees and then possibly explore further.

"Seem to be plenty of lights beyond the woods, Frank," Joe remarked as they approached a dense grove. "That must be a town."

"Look," said his brother, "isn't that a cabin over there under that tree?"

Joe gave the door a gentle push and to their surprise it opened. The interior, illuminated by the moon, was bare of any furnishings save a long row of hooks across one wall.

Suddenly Joe stiffened. "Did you hear anything, Frank?"

For an instant the boys stood stock still. Then from somewhere outside there came the unmistakable sound of footsteps and boisterous talking.

"Quick, let's get out behind that tree!" Frank whispered hoarsely.

They were not a second too soon. In a moment it was apparent that the oncoming group consisted of perhaps twenty young men dressed in the same kind of clothing the Hardys would wear in summertime. Their faces were very white in the bright moonlight, and to the boys' astonishment they were speaking English.

"Keep out of sight, Joe. I think they're heading for the cabin!"

The words were no sooner out of Frank's mouth than the group turned toward the building. Laughing and joking, they entered the structure.

"What do you suppose they're doing in there, Frank?" Joe muttered.

"Maybe it's a bathhouse. Yes, it is. Look!"

Several of the party were already coming out in bathing suits, and the others soon followed. In a moment a protected cove of the beach near by was swarming with midnight bathers.

**"Now's our chance, Frank. Let's borrow some of those clothes!"**

**"Good idea! You stay here and keep watch. I'll get enough for us."**

Frank slipped from behind the tree and went into the cabin, where an ample assortment of clothing hung on the hooks. Selecting two complete suits that appeared to be good fits, he went out again and hurried back to their shelter.

**"Here! How do you like these?"**

**"Good work! Let's put them on and get out of here!"**

Before they had finished dressing the young men returned. They entered the cabin.

Immediately the muffled voices turned to shouts of anger.

**"Who stole my clothes?"**

**"Who stole mine?"**

A third voice chimed in, **"Those natives again, fellows! We'll have to do something about them!"**

**"We'll report them to the king!"** suggested the first voice.

**"Shucks,"** said another. **"Try to get an audience with him these days, Not with the ships in and a convention going on!"**

The hubbub continued for several moments, renewed each time another swimmer came back to the cabin and discovered that two of his friends had lost their clothing.

**"I'll get some more,"** cut in a voice at length. **"Wait here, fellows, I'll be back in half an hour."**

The speaker emerged and disappeared up the path toward the distant lights. The Hardys, in the meantime, dared not stir from their hiding place. At length the young man returned carrying a large bundle, and soon afterward the party left. As soon as they were out of earshot Frank turned to Joe.

**"What about it ? Shall we go to town?"**

**"It's probably around two o'clock in the morning, Frank. Let's lie down here and grab some sleep. We better go in early today."**

Accordingly they slept soundly on the soft earth, fatigued to the point of exhaustion from the excitement of their arrival and the exertion of the swim. At sunrise Frank awoke to the loud chatter of a monkey swinging in a tree directly over his head.

**"Joe! Joe! Time to get up!"**

The younger Hardy lad awakened and rubbed his eyes. Just then a large, brilliantly-colored parrot flew over him and alighted on a near by stump.

**"Whew, are we in Paradise?"** Joe exclaimed Incredulously.

**"Goodness only knows. Look at all those birds!"**

A swarm of feathered creatures the size of peacocks soared gracefully near by. The boys stared until their eyes ached. The palm grove was alive with gorgeously-plumaged birds and chattering monkeys.

**"Well, no matter what all this means, I'm hungry!"** Joe exclaimed at length. **"Let's do a little exploring and find some breakfast!"**

After a hasty inspection of the near by cabin they strolled along a soft dirt path toward a cluster of houses in the distance. Now and then a dark-skinned native, clad in a loin cloth, would pass them and to the boys' relief would show no particular curiosity.

**"What do you suppose would happen if we should run into Captain Mundy and Pierre!"**

Joe speculated as they plodded along in the dazzling sunlight.

**"Not much danger of that. We'd spot them long before they could see us."**



Houses were beginning to appear by the side of the path. To the brothers' surprise they were very much like those in their own country, except that they were constructed for warm weather.

"Somebody's coming!" Joe whispered as a figure approached in their direction. A moment later it turned out to be a well-dressed young man of their own age.

"Good morning!" the youth smiled politely. "Going to town? What's your work today?"

"Yes, we are going to town," Joe replied.

The stranger stood still, regarding the two boys in astonishment when they said no more to him.

"You're newcomers to Barracuda, aren't you?" he asked, looking from one to the other of the brothers quizzically.

It would have been folly on the part of the Hardys to evade the fellow's question.

"Yes, we are," Frank answered, feeling a pang of unexplained alarm steal over him.

"Then let me welcome you!" said the youth warmly. "You must have come here on the Black Parrot, for she's the only ship in thus far!"

Instinctively the boys realized that they had divulged so much that the stranger had learned more than he should have about them. It was too late now for them to take back their words, so Frank decided on a bold move.

"Mr. - " he began.

"Lanny Lowe is my name, young men. Shake hands!"

Following the brothers' introduction, during which they gave Hedley as their last name, Frank continued:

"Mr. Lowe, you're right. We've come from the Black Parrot, and - "

"Hedley?" interrupted Lanny, apparently puzzling over something. "Hedley? I didn't see your names on the Grand Announcement. Are you sure you're supposed to be here?"

"Look here, Mr. Lowe," Frank went on, "we don't know anything about any Grand Announcement. We just came off the ship for a visit!"

The young man eyed them in consternation. "Why, do you realize-do you realize that now since you're here you'll have to stay?"

"Stay how long?" inquired Joe, beginning to grow impatient over the mystery occasioned by their presence.

"Stay as long as you live, of course! Don't you know that none except the fleet captains and officers and the king's high officials may ever leave here?"

Joe felt himself turning pale. "Well," he faltered, "I - I guess - "

"I'll have to take you to the Town Hall to register."

"Oh, please don't do that," begged Frank.

The young man laughed. "Do you know, I like you two fellows. In fact, I wish you hadn't been foolish enough to come here, for I'm afraid you're trapped so far as ever getting away is concerned."

For a moment the brothers were silent. On the face of it there seemed to be nothing they could do, now that they had been discovered as newcomers by Lanny. Then Frank had an idea.

"Mr. Lowe, I mean Lanny, haven't you ever wanted to get away and see the outside world?" he asked boldly.

The young man gazed toward the sea wistfully. "How did you guess it?" he said softly. "I know little of the outside world for I was very young when our boat was shipwrecked here.

We have no communication. Our only news is what comes on the boats. We are taught never to think of anything but our own Island. It's wonderful here, I guess, but I've often wished I could leave!"

"Then we'll help you!" exclaimed Joe, sensing what plan his brother had in mind.

"Help me-to leave? Oh, that would be impossible! The king's guards would kill us before we had a chance!"

"No they won't, Lanny. We'll fix that! But we'll help you on only one condition-that you don't tell anyone we're here," Frank said.

The young man eyed the ground thoughtfully. "I don't know - " he mused doubtfully.

"We are taught to report newcomers to the King's Council at once. If we do not and are caught, we are punished!"

Suddenly the clatter of hoof-beats sounded from around a bend in the road, and a moment later the brothers were alarmed at the sight of an armed soldier in a brilliantly colored uniform galloping toward them.

"It's one of the king's soldiers," announced Lanny. "He's making his morning rounds on this part of Barracuda to make sure no crew members or strangers have landed from the fleet ships." The young man looked at them with ominous significance.

Frank and Joe knew that a moment hence they would be prisoners.

## CHAPTER XX

### A Living Statue

"I'll save you!" said Lanny. "Run ahead of me into my house!"

The Hardys scooted across the lawn and fled through an open doorway. Lowe, behind them, looked over his shoulder just as the soldier rode past.

"Good morning, Officer Henry," he called.

"Good morning!" replied the king's guard as he clattered off.

Frank and Joe instantly turned to Lanny, filled with gratitude.

"Never mind that, fellows," said the young man, "but you'll have to be very careful."

The Hardys had many questions to ask, so the trio went to a secluded spot on the beach.

Lanny had brought some tropical fruit. As Frank ate a piece of melon he asked:

"What do you do here when boats that aren't in the fleet stop? Surely you don't keep every one of its passengers on Barracuda."

"Very rarely do other ships come here," Lanny replied. "Not once in several years. Every person who gets off is given a soldier to be with him every minute. They aren't here long.

We don't want to become subjects of any country, so we are very careful."

"Who owns the island?" asked Joe.

**"It belongs to the people. The grandfather of the present king of Barracuda first settled here."**

**Frank asked several more questions and was amazed to learn that Lanny, and apparently the majority of the citizens, were not aware of the smuggling activities being carried on, with their own island as headquarters. What an ideal spot it was for such a scheme. Off the lanes of the regular ships, and no export nor import trade to make it known. In fact, no reason for the rest of the "world to bother with Barracuda!**

**At length Lanny stood up. "I tell you what, fellows. You can stay in the bath house cabin at night, and somehow I'll get food to you while you're here. But remember, if any of us gets caught at this stage of the game we'll be severely punished!"**

**"Don't worry," consoled Frank. "If worst comes to worst we'll get away somehow and try to take you with us in any event!"**

**Despite his reassuring words the Hardy lad was by no means certain that they could investigate the island safely. He was determined, however, to make the attempt, come what might, and he knew that Joe felt the same way about the matter.**

**After their friendly benefactor had gone down the road the boys decided to find the king's palace first and if possible gain entrance. Accordingly they set out once more toward the town. To their amazement they found themselves in one of the most attractive but unusual cities either of them had ever seen.**

**"I feel like Aladdin in Bagdad!" whispered Joe.**

**Before them the boys could see tall palm trees waving along well-ordered avenues, and rows of stately houses, each with a large green lawn. The most awe-inspiring sight of all was what undoubtedly was the ruler's palace, a huge, turreted structure rising from a hill on the opposite end of the city. It sparkled in the tropical sun like jewels. For a moment the brothers were too overcome to speak, but they soon realized that the entire civilization of Barracuda had been built on a foundation of smuggling.**

**"It all looks wonderful," Frank remarked, "but when you get right down to it it's nothing more nor less than a robbers' paradise!"**

**"You're right!" his brother agreed with emphasis. "And it's up to us to do something about it!"**

**The Hardys strolled along one of the spacious avenues. It was now mid-morning, and as they approached the heart of the city the streets grew crowded with joyous throngs of merry-makers.**

**"Looks like a regular mardi gras!" Frank exclaimed. "Do you suppose all this is because of the Grand Meeting!"**

**"Without a doubt! Look at the posters in the shop windows!"**

**Everywhere were signs proclaiming a three-day holiday in celebration of the King's Grand Meeting for the Fleet. Tingling with excitement, Frank and Joe suddenly found themselves in front of a wall ten feet high and running as far as they could see in either direction. Near by was a towering white gate adorned with garlands of flowers.**

**"Golly!" Joe exclaimed in a hushed voice. "How are we ever going to get inside the palace grounds, let alone the palace itself?"**

**The street beside the great wall was filled with singing, laughing and dancing towns folk. Even the soldiers on guard at the gate left their posts every moment or so for a brief sortie into the happy throng.**

**"Do you see what's happening, Joe?" Frank whispered. "Those soldiers are about as much**

interested in guarding the gate as we are! Let's watch our chance and slip inside while they're out in the street!"

"Good idea, but don't you think we'd better wait until tonight?"

Frank agreed that his brother's suggestion was a wise one, so they spent the remainder of the day strolling about the strange and wonderful city, ever on the alert lest by some chance they might run into Captain Mundy or Pierre. As soon as dusk fell they returned to the castle gate, where the crowds were as noisy as before. -- Suddenly they heard the blare of trumpets, and a tremendous chorus of shouts went up from the throng.

"The parade is coming! Make way for the parade!"

The sounds of music grew louder as a brilliant procession moved toward the great palace gate, headed by a band which burst forth into martial strains.

"Whew! I wish we had a picture of all this!" Joe yelled above the noise of the music and shouting.

Frank nodded, but his face suddenly became serious. He put his lips to his brother's ear.

"I think we'll be able to go in with the parade, Joe! There'll be a lot of confusion."

A few moments later they edged up to the gate among a crowd of spectators. The band passed through, playing majestically. Just behind moved a long procession of gaudily-decorated floats bearing the names of each of the ships in the fleet. With a thrill the brothers read Black Parrot on the side of the first float.

"There're Captain Mundy and Pierre!" Frank said excitedly. The two men, smiling and bowing at the cheering crowds, stood on the huge four-wheeled vehicle beside a large stack of boxes and crates.

Behind them came other floats, all named after colored parrots and each of them bearing stacks of cargo with the captains riding alongside. Winding up the procession came a group of dignified looking individuals in blue pantaloons and scarlet jackets, with numerous medals and decorations dangling from their breasts. Among them were officers from the Black Parrot.

"The king's henchmen!" smiled Joe. His brother suddenly caught his arm.

"Look! The crowd is closing in behind them! Now's our chance to get through!"

In the confusion of the mob excitedly following the end of the parade, the brothers were just able to slip past as the guards slammed shut the gate. Instantly Frank and Joe flattened themselves against the inside of the wall. A hundred yards of grass and huge shade trees separated the boys from the brilliantly-lighted palace.

"Wait till the visitors get inside and maybe we'll have a chance!" Frank whispered.

At length the fanfare died away as the procession disappeared within the castle and the doors were closed.

"How on earth are we ever going to get in now?" Joe queried despairingly.

"We'll try a door - a door at the back. Must be a lot of them. Maybe they're not all guarded."

With eyes and ears alert for the slightest sign of danger, they slipped among the trees to the rear of the massive structure. To their delight a distant wing of the castle was in darkness.

"Suppose we try that, Joe! If all the doors are locked let's smash one. Nobody would hear us with such a racket going on inside!"

They tip-toed to a massive door and Frank tried the handle.

"Hurray! It's unlocked!" he exclaimed under his breath. "Let's go!"

They entered a dark corridor and felt their way along. From somewhere deep within the

great building the hum of voices could be heard. The boys decided to get as close to them as possible.

Frank, in the lead, came to a door at the end of the long hall. Opening it, he discovered a steep staircase which the boys mounted cautiously.

"I can't see a thing!" Joe whispered, tense with excitement.

"Neither can I. It gets blacker and blacker! Wait, here's another door!"

The older Hardy lad tugged at the knob. The boys peeked through. Ahead of them was a large, spacious hallway, brilliantly lighted. The place was empty save for a large statue of a soldier at the opposite end.

"Come on, Joe. There's nobody around!"

Peering about them furtively, they stole across the hallway to the opposite door. Just as Frank caught hold of the knob the large figure they had mistaken for a statue suddenly came to life.

"Hold on!" boomed a steutorian voice, and a large spear fell across the doorway just in front of the boy's face.

## **CHAPTER XXI**

### **Pierre Speaks**

In a flash Joe decided on a bold move.

"Lead us to Pierre!" he commanded in as stern a tone as he could muster.

To their utter astonishment the soldier lowered his spear.

"Follow me!" he chanted without the slightest change of expression.

Turning on his heel, he led the boys through the doorway and up another flight of stairs.

He stopped at the edge of a long, brilliantly-lighted corridor similar to the other.

"Third door to the right," he intoned, pointing.

Hesitatingly the brothers advanced, while the soldier disappeared the way they had come.

"Shall we try it, Frank?" Joe whispered.

"Let's see if - wait - here's a vacant room!"

The two dodged inside an open doorway next to the one the guard had indicated. Instantly the sound of a familiar voice became audible to them from beyond one wall of the room

"Is everything ready?" it boomed

"Yes, Pierre!" came the answer in gruff tones.

"Captain Mundy!" Joe whispered excitedly. "What luck!"

There was silence; then the voices began again.

"What about Hoskin and Slim!" the captain asked. "The king will want to know why they aren't here."

Pierre cleared his throat. "I tell you, Mundy, I don't know where they went nor what happened to them. They were supposed to bump off that detective and get on the Black Parrot at Little Cove. They never showed up."

"We'll have to tell the ruler somethin'," growled the captain. "Let's say they got hurt or sick or somethin'."

"Tell him they were burned in a forest fire. There was one around there."

Excitedly the boys listened for more, but the voices were drowned by a sudden blare of trumpets followed by the thunder of feet and the sounds of talking just outside their room. Joe peered out cautiously.

"Golly, Frank, look at those court robes! Ermine and velvet and gold braid. Jumping willigers!"

The corridor was crammed with men attired in the most spectacular costumes imaginable. A moment later the trumpets blared forth a second time and the brilliantly garbed throng assembled itself into a long line. Pierre and Mundy emerged from the room next to their own. Both wore the costly looking court robes.

"Each of them has a parrot embroidered on one side and a twisted claw on the other, Frank," Joe whispered from their vantage point at the crack of the door.

Just then the call of music sounded again and the gaudy procession moved down a sweeping marble staircase. In a moment the hallway was empty.

"Let's try that door over there," Joe suggested, pointing down the long room.

They tiptoed to the entry way at the end and Joe cautiously peered through the keyhole. "Look!"

He moved aside and the older Hardy lad knelt down and squinted through the tiny slit.

"The throne room, Joe. Wow, what a place! Let's go in!"

Stealthily they pulled open the door, and to their delight found themselves in a tiny, empty balcony overlooking a brilliantly-lighted chamber. A gold throne on a dais at one end was filled with men in a variety of dazzling costumes.

"Nobody will see us here. Let's settle down and watch!" Joe whispered.

"You bet! I wouldn't miss this for a million dollars! We'd better keep down behind the railing, though. We're in a mighty dangerous position."

They lay on the floor of the balcony with only the tops of their heads and their eyes up enough to peer through. Just then there was another blast of trumpets, followed instantly by the sound of the band. Before their eyes the procession marched in with stately tread. It divided into two groups, leaving an aisle up the center of the room.

"Enter the King! Enter the King!" called a guard with a plumed headdress as he strode through the path left by the assembled gathering.

The visitors bowed low as a huge, bearded individual cloaked in ermine and with a gold crown studded with diamonds on his head swept through the room. Reaching the throne he turned, gazed for an instant over the throng, and sat down.

There was a prolonged hush; then a courtier stepped forward. Bowing to the ruler, he turned to the glittering multitude.

"Most humble subjects of His Majesty, King of Barracuda, Potentate of the Order of the Twisted Claw!" he shouted, pausing for breath at the end of his introduction.

"It's really a secret society!" whispered Joe to Frank.

The courtier went on in a high-pitched voice, "We are gathered here on the annual occasion of our fleet's return. His Majesty will now hear the roll call of his loyal subjects,

the sea captains, who have returned to tell us of their work throughout the year just past, and of the gifts they bring!"

Loud applause rang out, and a buzz of excitement went through the throng. The chamberlain received a large scroll from a courtier, and proceeded to scan it for a moment. Then he cleared his throat.

"Will the captains report as the King's Chamberlain reads aloud their names?" Captain Short!"

"Commandin' the Yellow Parrot. Here, Your Highness!" came a hoarse answer from somewhere in the crowd.

"Captain Gustave!"

The brothers could hardly contain themselves while the chamberlain read off the whole list, which included far more ships than they had imagined. Their anticipation suddenly reached a climax.

"Captain Mundy!"

"Black Parrot. Here, Tour Highness!" came the reply in the familiar gruff voice.

The chamberlain nodded brusquely and rolled up the parchment in his hand.

"We shall now hear a report from His Majesty's official representative to the four corners of the earth, Mr. Pierre Pierre, Who - "

A courtier tapped the announcer on the shoulder. "His Majesty wishes to know first of all what information Mr. Pierre may give concerning the two representatives he was permitted to bring along on his last journey."

The chamberlain acknowledged the courtier's bow and repeated the message to Pierre. The hatchet-faced individual, who looked decidedly out of place in his lavish court robe, hesitated an instant.

"Mr. Pierre!" roared the king impatiently.

"Unfortunately," began the man, flushing, "the two men I had with me for the performance of a duty assigned to me by Your Majesty were caught in a forest fire and - "

"And what?" demanded the king, scowling.

"And were - were burned too badly to be able to return to Barracuda Island," gulped Pierre.

There was a hush of expectancy. Joe winked at his brother as they waited tensely for the next word. The king rose majestically.

"My loyal subjects know the penalty of allowing a member of the Order of the Twisted Claw to escape," he said in measured tones. "Heretofore Mr. Pierre has been not alone my confidential representative in foreign lands, but my principal adviser as well."

He paused while the crowd shifted uneasily and Pierre swallowed hard.

"Under the circumstances and so far as we know," the king continued, "Mr. Pierre has allowed two of our subjects to escape, or at least to be at large. Do you know the penalty, Mr. Pierre?"

"Death, Your Majesty," the man replied dully.

"We shall reserve judgment pending your official report concerning your entire journey and your activities in behalf of the Order. Chamberlain, proceed with the other reports!"

The official continued to call on each of the ships' masters in turn again. This time the captains gave detailed accounts of their smuggling activities during the past year. The boys were astounded at the staggering quantities of merchandise and jewelry reported as having been taken from one country to another on their vessels, and sold at fabulous profits.

**"Think of a thing like this going on all these years, Joe!" whispered Frank. "Wait till we tell Dad!"**

**"Wait is right. We've a lot to go through before we'll see home again. Listen, Captain Reynolds is speaking. Our ship comes next!"**

**A weather-beaten sea captain was just finishing a tale of horror in the course of his work as a smuggler in European ports.**

**"Very good!" commended the king of Barracuda. "Remember, my loyal subjects, the island is forever your first consideration. All else is secondary!"**

**"Bloodthirsty old cabbage!" Joe muttered. "Somebody ought to shoot him!"**

**"Don't talk so loud or someone will be shooting us!" Frank warned.**

**The chamberlain called for Captain Mundy in a voice of authority.**

**"Your Majesty, my work this year has been mostly with Mr. Pierre. My report is the same as his."**

**There was an intense silence as the man sat down.**

**"Mr. Pierre, His Majesty will now listen to your report!" boomed the chamberlain.**

**Excitedly the brothers waited to hear the tale that would complete their evidence against these mysterious smugglers, who called themselves members of a secret order.**

## **CHAPTER XXII**

### **Ghosts**

**Pierre made his way through the crowd to the foot of the king's throne.**

**"Your Majesty," he began, bowing low.**

**"Proceed, Mr. Pierre."**

**"Your Majesty assigned me, in addition to my regular duties, the task of disposing of an American detective by the name of Fenton Hardy who somehow had learned of the activities of the Black Parrot and had begun an investigation."**

**Frank and Joe nearly burst with excitement as Pierre mentioned their father. The king, seated below them, nodded.**

**"Did you carry out my orders, Mr. Pierre?" he asked sternly.**

**"I did, Your Majesty, through Mr. Hoskin and Mr. Slim Wetzel, the two members of our Order dispatched with me for the purpose."**

**"Then Mr. Hardy is-is no longer in a position to do us harm?" pressed the king.**

**"He is not, Your Majesty! And by your leave may I insist that my previous story concerning the whereabouts of the two men is true?"**

**The ruler's stern face relaxed. "Very well, Mr. Pierre, proceed with your report."**

**The hawk-nosed man cleared his throat. "Your Majesty, I have checked, of course, on the**



entire fleet at one time or another at various ports throughout the world during the past year. I have assisted the officers in their activities and made possible many transactions that - "

The king banged a huge fist down on the arm of his throne. "Never mind all that, Pierre. What have been your activities, how much money have you made for the Order, and how did you get it?"

"Five hundred thousand dollars' profit in furs. One million dollars' in jewelry, Your Highness."

A gasp went up all over the crowded room, for this was the largest sum yet mentioned.

"Your Majesty, I obtained these articles by various means and devised a method of concealing them in hollow logs which I got at a lumber camp in Canada. These were floated down the river during the regular log-running season and I was able to pick them up again near Little Cove. There they were filled with our furs or jewels and smuggled into the States, where the articles were sold."

"How did you get them aboard the Black Parrot?" the king asked skeptically. "The port authorities knew the schooner was not a lumber vessel."

"By the simple ruse of telling the authorities that we were taking firewood to a bleak part of the Newfoundland coast where there are no trees. This is done by some vessels, Your Majesty, and we actually did it ourselves once to obtain the necessary stamps on our clearance papers. After that it was easy. We copied the stamps!"

As cheers broke out among the members of the society, the king stood up.

"You have done well, Pierre, and the king accepts you back in his good graces. That is all."

At this point the Hardy boys decided to leave while they had the opportunity, but at that moment the chamberlain held up his hand and made a startling announcement.

"Will the candidates for positions as relief commanders please present themselves now!" he ordered.

A group of young men came forward slowly. A gong startled the Hardys, as four husky, dark-skinned natives appeared from a nearby doorway carrying a flaming kettle. They deposited it on an iron mat in front of the throne. Following them was a gold-braided dignitary with a device resembling a long, thin poker.

"Gee, I believe they're going to do some branding!" whispered Joe.

"The imprint of the twisted claw!" said Frank.

"Read the vow, Chamberlain," commanded the king.

The official produced another roll of parchment and read aloud a long list of duties and pledges henceforth to be required of the candidates. As he finished, the gong sounded again.

"All candidates stretch forth the index fingers of the right hand," intoned the chamberlain. Then, while two courtiers held each man in turn, the official with the iron rod thrust the implement into the flaming kettle, drew it out, and touched it to the upturned fingertips. Several of the men cringed but not a sound could be heard save a brief hiss every time the scorching iron would touch a candidate's flesh.

At length the king spoke. When he had finished a tedious address, a courtier handed him a note. The ruler then dismissed the new members of the Order and announced:

"During the initiation of the candidates for relief captaincies, the Council on Prize Awards has deliberated."

The great hall was as hushed as if it had been empty.

**"The Grand Prize of Five Hundred Thousand dollars is hereby awarded, half to Mr. Pierre Pierre and half to Captain Jacques Mundy and the officers of the Black Parrot!"**

**Cheers and shouts thundered throughout the throne room as the two men advanced to receive a chest full of gold coins.**

**"Guess we've seen enough, Joe. We'd better get out while the getting's good!"**

**"Right, Frank. I hope we can find the way!"**

**In the corridor once more they retraced their steps rapidly, and fortunately were seen by no one. Shortly afterward they were back in the court yard.**

**"Now to get to the street, Joe. Have you any good ideas?"**

**"Let's have a look at the gate. Maybe we'll be lucky and find it open."**

**They stole around the castle and glided among the trees to a spot within a few yards of the palace gate. It was shut. Three guards stood alongside.**

**"Nothing doing there, I guess," muttered Frank.**

**"Maybe we can scale the wall."**

**"How?"**

**"Climb up a vine. I saw some this afternoon. If they'll hold us we can do it easily."**

**The boys selected a point in the rear of the grounds where the street appeared to be dark on the other side of the enclosure.**

**"Here's one!" whispered Joe, running his hand along the fibers. "It feels pretty strong, too!"**

**Cautiously the younger Hardy had tested the strength of the vine, which extended from the ground to the top of the wall. Luckily it held. In a jiffy the brothers were back on the street.**

**"Looks as if everybody's gone to bed, Frank."**

**"That means we better be extra careful. Someone's likely to spot us and begin asking questions."**

**The boys walked rapidly in the direction they had come in the morning. Suddenly from the shadows there stepped a figure.**

**"Halt!" came a command. "Your names?"**

**Acting on a sudden impulse, Joe swung his fist with all the strength he could muster and landed a terrific blow on the point of the guard's jaw.**

**"Quick, Frank!" he urged.**

**The brothers headed down the dark road for the sea, running for all they were worth.**

**"Good work, Joe!" panted the older Hardy boy as soon as he could catch his breath.**

**"Whew, I thought we were caught!"**

**Suddenly the ocean appeared ahead through the trees, glittering in the moonlight.**

**"Shall we stop at the cabin, Frank? There's a meal waiting for us there. Remember?"**

**"Never mind the meal. We'll get one on the ship! We'd better not take any chances just now!"**

**Reaching the broad beach they recalled the knives they had carried on their previous swim.**

**"I'll get them," said Frank. "I hid them under that tree."**

**In a moment he was back.**

**"Here's yours, Joe. Golly, look at all the ships! Which one is ours, anyhow?"**

**"I see it, Frank. It still has one mast gone. Thank goodness for that, or we'd never be able to tell them apart!"**

**Quickly the boys stripped to their waists and plunged into the surf, swimming with long strokes toward the distant schooner. At length they reached the anchor cable of the Black**

Parrot. Both caught hold, panting for breath.  
"That's a long pull on an empty stomach!" Joe gasped.  
"You're right! Let's shin up and get a square meal and a good sleep!"  
Frank drew a deep breath and hauled himself to the bowsprit, with Joe just behind. The heavy chain rattled under their combined weights.  
"Who goes there?" came a cry from the deck.  
The sound of hurrying footsteps greeted the boys just as they were about to clamber aboard. A light flashed in Frank's face.  
"It's ghosts!" hissed a terrified voice in the blackness behind the flashlight. "Charlie! Gus! Look!"  
Frank laughed. "Hello, men! We're not ghosts, we're Frank and Joe!"  
Another voice spoke. It sounded more agitated than the first one. "Git away from here! You ain't a - comin' aboard this ship! We don't want no ghosts!"  
Before Frank could answer, a heavy hand knocked him into the sea.

## **CHAPTER XXIII**

### **Locked in the Brig!**

With a gasp Joe peered down from his precarious perch half way up the anchor cable.  
"Frank! Frank! Are you there?" he exclaimed in alarm.  
He heard a succession of splashes and a dark object suddenly appeared on the surface of the water. "I - I guess so!" came a gurgle.  
At the same instant there was a heavy footfall up on deck and a shout. "What goes on here?"  
The rays of a powerful light fell on Joe just as he let go his hold and dived into the water alongside his struggling brother. Frank was obviously dazed and on the point of sinking.  
"Lower a boat!" rang out a command from the deck.  
Dimly Joe heard the clanking of chains and the rattle of the davit-gear. In the meantime he had his hands full, for apparently Frank was unconscious. Joe grasped his brother in a life-saving hold and supported his head above water. A moment later a lifeboat floated up.  
"All right, men, h'ist 'em in!" barked a voice which Joe recognized as that of Benson.  
In a twinkling the boys had been lifted into the boat, which in turn was hauled back on deck. Joe immediately ordered stimulants to be brought from the ship's medicine chest. Presently Frank opened his eyes.  
"Golly, he ain't a ghost after all!" blinked one of the sailors. "It's the lad himself!""And the other'n ain't a ghost neither!" added a second, equally amazed. "I was sure they'd never git back alive with all them man-eatin' fish swimmin' 'round the ship!"

Benson, the mate, apparently satisfied that Frank was all right, suddenly scowled. "You boys been to shore?" he demanded sharply.

Joe knew that their situation was indeed a ticklish one. "It was so hot we decided to take a swim, sir. Captain Mundy didn't say not to swim, did he?"

"Oh, so that's it! And I s'pose you been swimmin' all evenin'!"

With a feeling of relief Joe realized that the mate apparently had not missed them until a few hours before.

"We didn't intend to, Mr. Benson, but you know there're barracudas around and we had a tough time."

The officer eyed them suspiciously. "Don't sound any too true to me. In the first place. There aren't many that live through a fight with barracudas."

The seaman named Gus suddenly spoke up. "The boys is tellin' the truth, Mr. Benson, I'll vouch for that 'cause I give 'em a couple of knives to take along. I warned 'em that they'd better not swim but they went anyhow-just for fun, they said. Ain't that right, men?"

A chorus of shouts in the affirmative went up through the group of sailors.

"Well, all right," said Benson at length. "Mind ye, now, stay on the ship this time and don't do no midnight swimmin'."

He stamped off authoritatively while the boys went down to the fore-castle. The men had hidden some food for them. While they were eating, the curious crew made it plain that they expected a detailed account of the brothers' fight with the barracudas. Frank, realizing that it would be far safer to keep the sailors in ignorance of the fact that they had reached shore, gave a vivid story of their pretended battle with the killers of the deep.

Early the next morning a sailor poked his head into Frank's sleeping face. "Sparks wants ye right away!" he said.

The lad hastened to the radio cabin which was on deck near the helm.

"Hello, Frank!" greeted a tall, rangy fellow whose nickname was Sparks. "Something's wrong with the radio and I can't seem to find the trouble. Thought maybe you'd have a look. Joe says you're clever at the stuff."

The Hardy lad had become friendly with the wireless operator shortly after the voyage had begun, and was only too glad to be of service. Besides, he had kept hoping a chance would come when the man, who here before had guarded his cabin jealously would leave the apparatus long enough for Frank to communicate with the authorities at home.

"I think the trouble is with this coil," the boy reported after a few moments' tinkering.

"Have you a spare?"

"Unfortunately no. There's no chance of getting one on shore either. I understand they haven't any wireless outfits there."

Frank could hardly refrain from telling his friend about his experiences, but his face was a mask.

"No, I suppose they don't have radios either," he said innocently, "but we might be able to make a coil if you have some old wire around."

Sparks reached under his desk and produced wire and cardboard. Half an hour later the radio loud-speaker began to sputter.

"Good for you, Frank!" applauded the fellow. "Much obliged, and come up again."

On deck the lad ran into Joe.

"Hello! Just had to fix the wireless," the older boy whispered. "I wish I could get hold of that thing for ten minutes. I'd have the Island smugglers reported all over the world!\_

"Steady, Frank! You said the outfit could not be heard more than a hundred miles away!"  
"That's right," admitted the other impatiently. "No use trying to send messages now. But after we've been at sea for a few days I'll be able to pick up some other ship if Sparks gives me half a chance!"

"He's evidently under the strictest orders of anybody aboard, Frank. He never gets farther from the wireless shack than the doorway!"

The day wore on without the men ashore appearing. After darkness had fallen there was a cry from across the water. "Black Parrot. Ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" came an answering hail from the sailor on the port watch.

Benson appeared with a flashlight. "Ahoy, Captain Mundy!" he called, waving the beam over the glassy surface of the sea. "Stand by, all hands!" barked the mate and the men came running to the side.

Ten minutes later the dripping lifeboat was pulled aboard and its occupants climbed out. The captain and Pierre were smiling, exceedingly rare for them.

"Bring out that chest, men, and take it to my; cabin!" the former ordered, rubbing his hands together excitedly.

The boys recognized the box of gold coin which had been awarded by the King's Council.

"Gus, you and Charlie carry it in," Benson ordered the two seamen closest to him.

"Prepare to weigh anchor at once, Mr. Benson," said Captain Mundy, turning on his heel and following Pierre into the cabin.

The brothers were thrilled at the prospect of getting away so soon, and worked with a will at the tasks assigned to them. At dawn Benson gave the order to hoist sail, and slowly the great schooner gained headway. The boys watched the island-that faraway headquarters of the king of smugglers-shrink to a mere speck on the horizon and finally vanish altogether.

"Let's turn in, Frank," said Joe at length, stifling a yawn. "We haven't had much sleep of late."

As they entered the companionway they found themselves confronting Pierre. The hatchet-faced man eyed them narrowly, then went outside. Down below Frank's face became grim.

"Do you think he suspects anything, Joe?"

"He certainly looked at us as if he did. We'd better be on the watch for trouble."

The older Hardy lad hesitated as they approached the fore-castle.

"I think I'll go up and disconnect the wireless, just for luck, Joe."

"Disconnect the wireless? "What for?"

"Oh, I don't know. I have a hunch we'd be safer if Pierre were out of touch with his buddies on the other ships."

"All right. I'll turn in and wait for you."

Frank went back to the wireless cabin under the pretext of wishing to rewind the coil he had made.

"I'm afraid it won't last very long unless I do, Sparks," he explained, and the other nodded.

"Go ahead, we won't need the air waves for a bit. Take the coil with you and bring it back tomorrow."

Frank stuffed the device into his pocket and hurried along the deck to the companionway. Suddenly a gaunt figure appeared from behind the mainmast and blocked the boy's path.

"Wait a minute, Frank Hardy!" came a command, rapped out in steel cold terms.

With a pang of dismay the lad recognized Pierre!

## CHAPTER XXIV

### Trapped!

Before Frank could move a muscle, the man's claw-like fingers were around the boy's throat.

"I'll show you and that rascal of a brother of yours what happens to people who trifle with Pierre!" he hissed in Frank's face.

Desperately young Hardy struggled to free himself from the iron grip. Just as he was about to succeed another figure towered beside him.

"Here he is, Mundy. What'll we do with him?"

"The little rat! Double-cross us, will you!" roared the skipper, twisting the lad's arm until he winced with pain. "I'll show ye!" He gave the boy a kick that sent him sprawling.

"George! Gus! Throw this young lubber in the brig!"

Two burly seamen carried the struggling figure down to the dingy cell in the ship's hold and locked him inside.

"Sorry, lad," Gus apologized, "but orders is orders."

The sailors turned away. The next thing Frank knew they were coming back with Joe.

"In ye go!" sang out the men, giving the younger Hardy a shove into the tiny room. "We don't know what ye've done but there ain't much we can do for ye!" Shrugging their shoulders, they tramped back to the companion-way.

"This is a mess!" Frank muttered. "Just as things were turning out perfectly!"

"I've an idea," said Joe. "We're not done for if we can work it out."

"What is it?"

"The crew members don't know what this is all about and they're on good terms with us. What's more, they think Mundy was punishing them by keeping them from going ashore."

"Mundy wasn't punishing them! None of the crews could go ashore."

"That's just the point, Frank. But they don't know that. So they're holding a grudge against the captain and the other officers. Now, if we can - "

"Get them to start another mutiny!" Frank finished, guessing his brother's thoughts.

"Exactly. Then we'll be released and will have a chance to wireless home the news!"

Frank agreed that the idea was good, so the brothers settled down to await the return of one of the crew bringing them food.

"Do you suppose we'll get anything to eat?" Joe wondered pessimistically.

Before Frank could answer, they heard the sound of approaching footsteps and Gus appeared.

"Howdy, lads. Here's some water. Cap'n says ye ain't to have no thin' but water."

He passed two battered tin cups half filled through the bars.

"Listen, Gus, you've been a good friend to us all along and we need help now," Frank began, sounding the man out.

"You're right ye do, lad, but I'm afraid there ain't a thing I can do!"

"Yes, there is, Gus," declared Joe sternly. "You and the men don't like Captain Mundy, do you? Didn't he make you stay on the ship all the time he was on Barracuda Island? Was that fair?" Joe hurled the question at the simple-hearted sailor, who pondered it for several seconds.

"Well," he replied at last, "you're right about all that. But seein' as how he give all us men a mess o' gold coins about half an hour ago - "

"He did what?" Frank gasped in dismay, realizing now the situation he and Joe were up against.

"Give us a pile o' money, he did, so we ain't a-goin' to turn around and do him no hurt!"

The sailor shook his head in resignation and started to leave.

"Just a minute, Gus!" Joe had a sudden inspiration.

"Well, lad, what be it?"

"Do you know what they're going to do with us?"

Gus shook his head blankly. "Ain't got the slightest idea, lad."

Joe caught the man's eyes and stared into them fixedly. "Gus, they're going to kill us, and you know as well as I do that killing a man aboard ship means that the ship will sink in the first storm!"

The seaman's eyes nearly popped from his head. "By Neptune, are they a-goin' to kill ye? Aboard ship?" He blinked at them, transfixed.

"They are. And when they do, mark my words that not a man on this ship will ever see land again!"

The superstitious sailor cringed in terror. "I - I reckon ye're right, lads. I'll go tell the men!" In a flash he had disappeared into the shadows.

"Joe, you're a genius!" Frank exclaimed when the two were alone. "That was a masterpiece of hypnotism!"

"Wait and see if it works!" remarked the younger lad dryly.

The brothers again settled down to await developments. After what seemed hours they heard footsteps once more. A moment later Gus came back. He peered cautiously into the cell.

"If the cap'n hears I been talkin' to ye - " he began, then stopped.

"All right, Gus, tell us quickly what the men said and then leave," Joe whispered.

"The men is afeared to start trouble on the way home, lads. "We'll all hang from the yard-arms if the United States soldiers find out we started a mutiny. That's what Red says, anyhow."

"Don't worry about that, Gus, you'll never swing from a yardarm or anything else. We'll see to that!" Joe urged confidently.

The sailor apparently was not impressed. "Mutinies ain't allowed, lads, and we ain't a - goin' to go out lookin' for trouble. We had one mutiny but the cap'n says he won't say no thin' about it."

Heavy footsteps sounded over their heads, and Gus turned white as a ghost. "It's Benson, and he's comin' down here sure as ye're alive!"

With a bound the man disappeared into a dark corner of the hold just as the mate thundered down the companionway to the brig.

"All right, get up, ye young upstarts! Come along with me and don't try no funny business!" He flung open the door of the cell.

With hearts pounding the Hardys climbed the steps and emerged on deck. Frank noticed several seamen gazing at them curiously.

"Walk to the captain's cabin and make it quick!" came the order from behind them.

Mundy was sitting at his desk inside the cabin. He scowled as the boys entered.

"Traitors, eh? Well, we got only one thing for traitors!"

Pierre, lounging in a corner, was almost overlooked by the boys. The hatchet-faced man sneered at them.

"Yes," he echoed. "There's only one thing for traitors. I think I'll do the little job myself. Do you mind, Mundy?"

"Go ahead, Pierre," growled the skipper. "Better give 'em a chance to say their prayers first."

"All right. Boys, have you anything to say? If you have, better say it quick!"

This was a chance to play for time, thought Frank, and decide what would be best for him to do. How could he summon the crew? How could he persuade them to save him and his brother?

"Yes," he began in a loud voice, "I have something to say."

Joe, sensing his brother's ideas, suddenly screamed out, "Don't kill us! Don't kill us!"

Captain Mundy gave a raucous laugh.

Pierre sneered. There was not a sound on the deck outside.

"Benson," Pierre barked, "blindfold these clever sons of the famous Fenton Hardy and I'll show 'em!"

## **CHAPTER XXV**

### **S.O.S**

Suddenly there was a terrific crash as the door of the captain's cabin buckled and a swarm of excited sailors rushed in. Pierre was tackled by a burly seaman.

"Get Benson! Get Mundy!" yelled someone in the mob.

Before the two officers could move they had been brought to the floor under a heap of snarling men. Gus emerged from the confusion and went up to the brothers, who were still dazed by their narrow escape.

"Well, we got ye, lads!" he exclaimed. "When the men and me lookin' in the porthole heard that they was really a-goin' to kill ye, we wasn't takin' no more chances on havin' the



ship bewitched!"

Frank smiled. "Gus, you're the best friend we ever had!" he said warmly and Joe added his agreement.

In the meantime the rumpus in the cabin began to abate as the officers and Pierre were bound and gagged securely.

"Take 'em to the brig!" Gus commanded.

"This time throw the key overboard. Can't never tell, the boys here might get soft-hearted ag'in!"

There was a roar of laughter as the group thundered down the companionway with their prisoners.

Frank turned to Joe. "Now's our chance to try the wireless. Come on!"

A glowering face met them at the doorway of the wireless shack. "What about that coil?" Sparks demanded.

"I have it right here," Frank replied. "Sorry about all the delay, but Joe and I were in the brig," he added, as he set to work over the apparatus.

"So I understand," the operator said with an affable smile. "How'd you get out, anyhow? I heard a lot of noise in the captain's cabin but I didn't think much of it at the moment."

Something about the fellow's manner caused Joe to be on the alert. "Oh, Captain Mundy changed his mind and-well-here we are!" the lad explained.

"So I see. How are you coming with that coil, Frank!"

"Be ready in a second." The boy fastened the last strand of wire and stood up. "All set, Sparks."

"Then get out!" The man's tone changed suddenly as he shoved the boys to the deck, slammed the door and locked it. "I'll show you two what you can get away with and what you can't!" he yelled. "In five minutes every other ship in the fleet will be on its way here to stop this mutiny!"

He jammed his finger down on the key and commenced pounding out a message. There was a staccato of dull clicks with no answering sound.

"I thought you said this instrument was fixed!" the operator cried out. He looked for the trouble. "The coil! Where's the coil?" he shouted.

Frank winked at Joe. "I guess I must have made a mistake-and put it in my pocket!" he called through the door.

At a shout from the Hardys members of the crew came and imprisoned Sparks. Then the boys rushed into the wireless room. Frank dived for the maze of wires and gadgets he had been tinkering with a few moments before. In a jiffy he had made an adjustment.

"Now she's ready," he said. "Golly, I hope I can pick up some liner around here that'll relay our message to a government station."

"Here's hoping help comes before one of the Parrot ships can get here!" said Joe.

The wireless key squealed as the older Hardy lad drummed out a message. Just then there was a flash of lightning. Frank jumped.

"We would have a storm!" he exploded impatiently.

He waited a moment, then tried again with the same result.

"What are you sending, Frank?"

"I started to tell about a mutiny and ask for a ship to relay the message to the United States Government, but with all this static - "

For an hour Frank rapped out the calls, giving the approximate position of the Black

Parrot, while the thunder and lightning continued unabated. No response came from any station on land or sea. At length the boy arose.

"Don't know whether it's getting through or not, Joe. We'll just have to wait and see."

The following morning, to the lads' consternation, the wireless outfit refused to work.

"Batteries are dead, Joe, I think. But I'll work on the outfit."

"We'll just have to wait until we get home to explain things to the authorities."

"Gus told me this morning that the men want to go to Europe instead of America. Now that all the excitement's over they're afraid they'll be tried for mutiny if we return home."

"Don't they know we'll be able to fix that?"

"They don't believe we can, Joe. All they can think about is the fact that they staged a mutiny and that's the greatest crime on shipboard."

By nightfall Frank gave up the task of trying to make the wireless work.

"No use, Joe. Guess the lightning ruined it."

The brothers sat in Sparks's room disconsolately, wondering what could be done to quiet the fears of the crew. Suddenly the door opened and Gus came in.

"Lads, we're changin' the course and headin' for the Mediterranean. We ain't a - goin' to run no more chances on goin' home and bein' tried for mutiny. Fact is, lads, some o' the men wants to let Captain Mundy out'n the brig."

"Let Captain Mundy out!" exclaimed Frank and Joe in one breath.

"Well, seems the captain says he'll double their money and tell nobody no thin' about the mutinies."

"Gus, you wouldn't do that, would you?" Joe demanded, alarmed at the turn of events.

The man shrugged. "'Tain't what I want to do, it's what the men - "

He was interrupted by a sudden shout from the crow's nest. "Ship ahoy! Two points off the starboard bow!"

Gus looked at the boys with a startled expression. "Who d'ya suppose that is?"

He rushed out on deck with the brothers after him. Over toward the horizon a blotch of smoke could be seen.

"Can you make 'er out, Steve?" Gus shouted to the lookout high in the mast. The latter was peering through a long spyglass.

"Aye, sir, she's a revenue cutter. U.S. revenue cutter, and she's headed this way, sir!"

Frank whooped for joy while Joe wrung Gus's hand until the amazed sailor winced with pain.

"Hold on, lads!" he cried. "Do ye know what that cutter means? It means we're caught, - every man on this here ship!"

Joe laughed aloud. "Gus, you wait! Nobody in the crew needs to worry about that cutter, only Captain Mundy and the other officers and Mr. Pierre!"

The sailors were running about in consternation. In vain the boys tried to calm them, but finally gave up the task.

"Look, Joe, she's coming fast!" Frank cried excitedly as the Hardys stood at the rail watching.

The hull of the vessel could be seen plainly, and the foam at her bow indicated the speed at which she was traveling. Suddenly there was a puff of white smoke from her deck, followed by a thunderous report and the whine of a shell passing high over the masts of the Black Parrot.

"Heave to!" yelled Gus to the men at the helm. "Don't ye hear that signal!"

The schooner nosed into the - wind and lost speed, her sails flapping idly.

"Drop the sea-anchor!" barked Gus. "All hands stand by!"

The long government cutter was now only a few hundred yards distant. As the brothers watched, a lifeboat appeared over her side, and a moment later came toward them filled with men.

"Joe, look in the stern! Isn't that Dad?" Frank yelled as the craft approached.

"By golly it is! It is, Frank, it is!"

Frantically Joe waved and to their joy the figure responded. Twenty minutes later their father stood on the deck of the Black Parrot with a dozen government officers.

"Boys, you've done a wonderful piece of work!" exclaimed Fenton Hardy. "Enough of Frank's message came through to give us an idea of what you've accomplished. Come in here. I want to hear the details!"

For nearly two hours Mr. Hardy and Captain Harrison of the revenue cutter listened to the remarkable tale Frank and Joe unfolded. Then the smugglers' ship was taken in tow by the cutter and conveyed to New York, where federal officials were waiting for them.

An order was broadcast to all nations to be on the lookout for other Parrot vessels and to arrest any of the officers bearing the strange claw imprint. Before many days had passed a fleet of American warships seized the mysterious island and put a quick end to the vast smuggling operations of the King of Barracuda.

"Wow, I'd like to have seen that ruler!" Chet burst out when the brothers had returned to Bayport and told their chum of their adventures.

"You're going to!" Frank exclaimed. "He has been brought to Washington for an official investigation and Dad says we can go down there tomorrow!"

Accompanying his sons and Chet to the federal building where the dethroned king was being detained, Fenton Hardy gained admittance.

"So these are the young men who brought about my downfall!" said the head of the Order of the Twisted Claw. He had lost the fierceness and bravado he had shown as ruler.

Bursting with curiosity, Frank brought forth his strange pirate autobiography and showed it to the king, who turned white.

"It is mine! It is mine!" he cried. "So that is how you discovered our secret."

The fallen potentate went on to reveal to his fascinated listeners that the pirate mentioned in the old book as having founded the Order of the Twisted Claw was his grandfather, Captain Gronger.

"Years ago my grandfather's book, that book, was lost by me," the man went on to explain, "and I have lived in mortal dread of our work as smugglers being discovered by someone who might happen to read it, just as you boys did."

The ageing giant paused, passed his hands over his eyes, then looked up at Frank and Joe.

"You lads are smart! What excellent pirates you would have made, if only you had been working with me instead of against me!"

Inwardly the boys quailed at such an idea. As true sons of Fenton Hardy they would always work against pirates or other lawbreakers. Very soon they were to become involved in a strange mystery known as "The Disappearing Floor" in which clever scoundrels were to be trailed by them.

After Frank and Joe had been home again some little time they were told that all the members of the Order of the Twisted Claw had been captured. The brothers, on the other hand, were rewarded handsomely for their efforts.

**"And the first thing we're going to do with this money, Joe, is to send for Lanny Lowe and pay his way through the best college in the country!"**

**"Frank," replied the younger Hardy lad, "when you get an idea it's a good one!"**

**The End.**