

REX KINGDON ON STORM ISLAND

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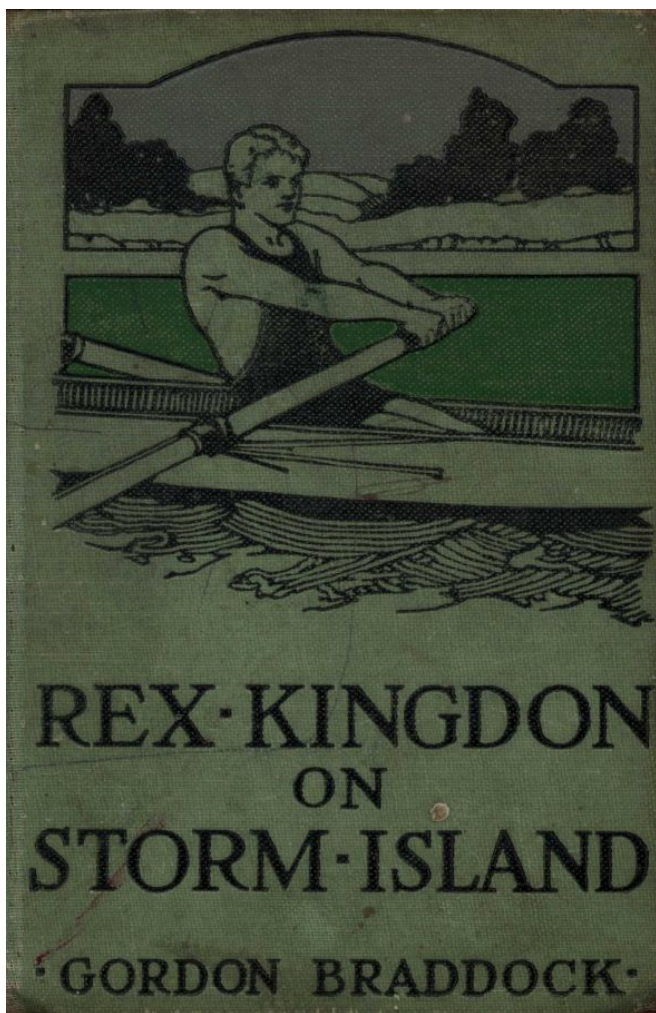
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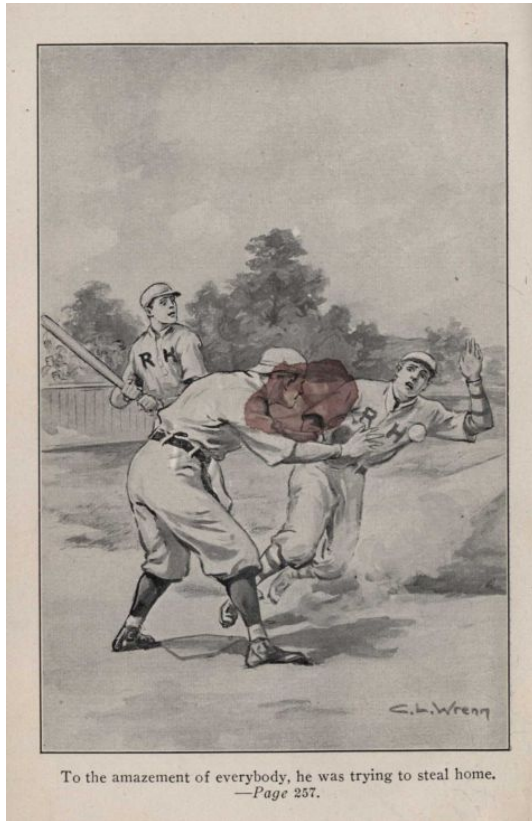
*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK REX KINGDON ON
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Cover art



To the amazement of everybody, he was trying to steal home.
—Page 257.

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REX KINGDON ON STORM ISLAND

By GORDON BRADDOCK

AUTHOR OF
"Rex Kingdon of Ridgewood High," "Rex Kingdon in the
the North Woods," "Rex Kingdon at Walcott Hall,"
"Rex Kingdon Behind the Bat," etc.



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AUTHOR'S FOREWORD.

How would you like to spend a summer vacation on an uninhabited island off the Maine coast,—not alone, of course, but in company with a few chosen chums, all good fellows in their way and all of them ready for any sort of sport or adventure that might be found or borrowed? Surely, such a vacation would provide plenty of good fun, as well as some troubles and annoyances; but no vigorous, high-spirited American boy would mind a certain amount of inconveniences when he sets out to have a good time on a camping trip. In fact, he looks for some unpleasant things to happen, and he has a way of going right ahead and making the best of everything, so that many a time a source of irritation is turned into a spring of enjoyment and delight.

It was so with Rex Kingdon and his friends of the present story. When they arrived at Storm Island and found another party of campers located there, they at first were annoyed. They had understood that no one else would be given a permit to camp on that island. Imagine their astonishment when they discovered that the other party had deceived a local officer into letting them remain on the

island by representing themselves to be "Rex Kingdon and friends," rightful holders of the camping permit. Trouble? Could anything spell trouble more plainly? But, after all, they managed to get more real fun out of it than they could have had if they had been the only campers on Storm Island. And, in the end, Rex wins a new recruit for Walcott Hall—and the prep. school baseball team.

This is the fifth story of The Rex Kingdon Series. It will be followed by the sixth and final volume of the series, which will bear the title, "Rex Kingdon and His Chums." In that forthcoming story Rex will finish his course at the Hall. As he regretfully bids good-by to the old school, the reader who has faithfully followed his career since he made his first bow in "Rex Kingdon of Ridgewood High" will have to bid good-by to him—as regretfully, I hope.

GORDON BRADDOCK.

New York, February 14, 1917.

Rex Kingdon on Storm Island.

CHAPTER I.

THE MENACE OF THE LAW.

"What's that noise? Say, Pudge, wake up and take a look."

"Hey? What noise?" stammered Pudge MacComber, startled out of serene slumber.

"Hear it? Sounds like a lot of soda-water bottles popping. Take a squint, Lazy."

The fat youth might have returned the compliment. Ben Comas lay on his back in the shade and did not even remove the cap over his eyes. Pudge, however, knew his cousin too well, and was too much in his debt, to file any objection to this command. Heaving a sigh, he struggled heavily to his feet. As he did so he became aware of a half-muffled *put, put, put-a-put* rising from the water which the camp site overlooked.

"Why, that's a motorboat!" he exclaimed before spying the craft in question.

"Noisy thing," grunted Ben, without moving.

"It's aiming this way," Pudge said, "right for our landing."

"Going to have visitors? Thought nobody ever came here."

"Wouldn't think many folks would, with the signs the Manatee Company have stuck up," chuckled Pudge. "Say!"

"Say it," grunted Ben.

"Only one man in the launch, an' I see something flash. Yes," Pudge gurgled, "I bet it is!"

"What's the matter with you?" grumbled Ben, finally sitting up. "You talk like a frog. What d'ye see?"

"He's got a badge," the fat boy said, solemnly. "I wish I could see his face."

"What d'ye mean?" Ben was now vastly and suddenly aroused. "Is it a constable? Where's Joe? He knows everybody 'round here—or he ought to."

"Joe's asleep."

"Wake him up. We didn't hire him to sleep, did we? Go on, you snail," ordered Ben.

Behind one of the two tents, pitched in this open glade on the rather steep northern shore of Storm Island, sprawled a roughly-dressed fellow. When Pudge had done Ben's bidding and aroused this individual, the latter uncovered his face, revealing features unmistakably those of an Indian boy. He came sullenly down to the other two lads.

"What y'want?" he asked, yawning.

"Who's that coming this way, Joe?" Ben Comas questioned. "That fellow in the launch?"

The Indian's eyes snapped open and he stooped a little, shading them with his hand, the better to view the approaching boat and its single occupant. Then he straightened up again, turning as though to retreat.

"Know him," he said.

"Who is he?" Pudge put in. "A cop?"

"Him Quibb."

"What'd I tell you?" cried Pudge. "That's the name of the constable we saw at Blackport—Enos Quibb."

"The one Horrors had the growl with," Ben agreed, rather faintly. "He's coming straight for us."

The Indian youth had already disappeared. The motorboat was nearing the shore of the island just below the camp. The cousins could plainly see the constable's face, as well as the big star upon his vest. Enos Quibb was not a handsome person at best, and just now his face was inflamed with anger and his frown was most portentous.

"He's got it in for us," said Pudge, apprehensively.

"All because of that fresh up there tossing the ball. It's up to him—that's what it is," declared Ben warmly. "Run, tell Horrors to come down here."

With a groan, the fat youth turned and waddled up the path into the thicker wood which seemed to crown the island. In the very middle of Storm Island, however, lay about two acres of open and level lawn. While yet Pudge was some distance from this spot the resonant slap of a ball as it landed in the catcher's mitt echoed flatly from the wall of tall trees completely surrounding the natural amphitheater.

"Hey! That's enough, Horrors!" the puffing fat boy heard Harry Kirby shout. "It's too hot to keep at it any longer. Quit, I say!"

Evidently he had flung the ball to the pitcher after removing his padded glove, and, just as Pudge came in sight of the two, the one called "Horrors" wound up again and whipped a sizzler over the marked square on the turf serving as the home plate.

"Quit, I say!" again yelled the backstop, as he leaped into the air, letting the low ball pass between his legs. "Think I'd be silly enough to try to stop that with my bare hands? That arm of yours has got dynamite in it, Horrors."

The pitcher was grinning in reply when a wild yell sounded from Pudge at the edge of the wood behind the catcher's station.

"Hey, you fellers! What're you tryin' to do—kill me? Nobody but a wild squawpaw could send in such a bullet. Ouch!"

Pudge limped forward, rubbing his shin where the pitched ball had nicked him.

"Come on—retrieve it," ordered the pitcher, strolling toward the platter.

"Chase your own ball," returned Pudge. "I didn't come 'way up here to play Fido. Why'd Kirby let it go by him?"

The backstop was wiping his brow with a torn shirtsleeve. "Catch me trying to stop one of Horrors' fast ones without my mitt. Not much!"

"Say, you fellers!" exclaimed Pudge, remembering his errand. "Ben says come on down to the camp—and in a hurry. There's a motor launch in sight."

"Didn't you fellers ever see a motor launch before?" demanded Kirby.

"But it's aiming right for our landing."

"What if?" drawled the tall fellow whom his mates called "Horrors."

"Who's in the launch?" asked Kirby.

"It's that constable Horrors had the fuss with at Blackport. Remember?"

"Shall I ever forget him?" murmured the tall lad. "The chap with the big tin star and the lovely yellow freckles."

"Enos Quibb," Kirby said, chuckling. "He's one sure enough farmer—that's right."

"Just the same," said the fat boy, wagging his head, "I wish he'd keep away from here—and so does Ben."

"Poof!" scoffed Kirby. "If Ben expressed a dislike for the sunshine or the sweet air, you'd keep in the shade and put on an overcoat, Pudge. What Ben says is law and gospel for you."

"We-ell," drawled Pudge MacComber frankly. "You know I wouldn't be up here if it wasn't for Cousin Ben. He paid my way."

"Yes," muttered Kirby to the taller fellow, "and I know Ben didn't give Pudge any return ticket, either. Keeps Pudge in leash better if he has no money in his jeans."

The fat youth did not hear this aside. He was saying: "We shouldn't have camped down there so near the shore. It's too exposed. Ben said that in the first place."

"Aw—Ben!" scoffed Kirby, while the tall chap smiled quizzically at the fat boy.

"He was right just the same. Here comes Enos Quibb, and we're going to get the boot, sure. We haven't permission from the Manatee Lumber Company to camp here, and you fellows know it. We'll have to sing 'It's Moving Day,' all right-o—and just as we got comfortably settled, too," finished Pudge with a groan.

"Come on," said Kirby. "Don't stand there weeping over it."

Already their leader was striding into the wood, and Kirby hastened to catch up with him. Pudge MacComber plodded on behind. It was a hot day, and he suffered from his exertions.

"What'll we do?" asked Kirby, at the tall fellow's elbow.

"About what?" countered the other, with a lift of his eyebrows and a tantalizing smile that seemed an index of his character. "What's fussing you up, Harry?"

"This Quibb can put us off the island. Of course, the Lumber Company *did* issue a permit for a party to camp here—and we're here first—huh?"

His friend had grabbed his arm suddenly, stopping dead in the path. "You *do* have an idea once in a while in that cranium of yours, Harry," he drawled.

"I don't feel any different from usual," said Kirby, rubbing his head and grinning. "If there's an idea milling around in there I don't sense it."

"But I do. Leave it to me." His friend started onward again, leading the procession to the encampment.

It was a beautiful spot they had selected in which to set up their tents—an open grove sloping easily to the edge of Manatee Sound which lay, on this particular June day, as smooth as a millpond between the island and Manatee Head, five miles away.

Ben Comas, much excited, hurried toward them. "Whatchu goin' to do

about this, Horrors? See that fellow? He's mad's a hatter."

"He'll have a stroke—I shouldn't wonder," drawled the tall lad. "Too hot a day to let one's dander rise."

"You can joke," snapped Ben. "But he means business."

The launch was now close to the shore, and the exhaust ceased popping. Enos Quibb, the Blackport constable, stood in the bow boathook in hand, scowling threateningly at the group above him.

CHAPTER II. IN STOLEN PLUMAGE.

"My, my!" murmured the only member of the camping party who seemed to take the visit of the constable with any degree of composure. "He seems savage enough to eat nails."

"Now, don't, Horrors!" begged Ben Comas. "Don't make it worse!"

"Better be smooth with him, old man," urged Kirby.

"See if you can pacify him," groaned Pudge. "I worked like a dog helping Joe get this camp fixed."

Their leader chuckled as he walked down to the natural dock where the two canoes, in which the party had reached Storm Island, were moored. The view of the sound, the rugged, well-wooded and scantily-inhabited mainland in the distance, expanded before his gaze. For several miles in either direction this mainland, as well as Storm Island itself, was either owned or leased by the Manatee Lumber Company. On the mainland the timber was properly policed by the company's guards; but Storm Island, far off shore, was considered secure from invasion by irresponsible fishing parties and the like, by the trespass signs posted upon its beaches. Blackport, the nearest town, ten miles from the western point of the island, was hidden from it by the wooded and rocky "crabclaw" sheltering Blackport Cove.

There was scarcely a habitation to be seen from the spot where the boys' camp had been established. There were fish-weirs visible at several points along the shore; but the catches gathered from these traps were, as a usual thing, taken to Blackport to be cleaned and iced, and then shipped to Portland or Boston by train. The locality was, therefore, as deserted as any spot along the entire stretch of the Maine coast.

Enos Quibb caught his boathook in the exposed root of one of the two great trees at the landing, drew the launch closer, and moored it. Then he sprang ashore. He was not a very big man save in his sense of importance. Being of a sandy complexion, his innumerable freckles were painfully yellow and prominent. His large, high-bridged nose was of a cold blue color even on this hot summer's day.

"Say, you boys!" he began. "Can't ye read them signs?"

"What signs, kind sir?" asked Horrors, languidly. Ben Comas, at his elbow, nudged the taller lad and whispered:

"Don't make it worse! Don't nag him!"

"Them 'No Trespass' signs," said the constable. "You know well enough they was put up to warn such chaps as you be off the island."

"But suppose we don't believe in signs? You know, I never was superstitious myself; I'd just as soon walk under a ladder—or take a bath on a Friday—as not."

Pudge began to chuckle, and the wrath of the constable was flagged in his thin cheeks by a rising flush.

"Stop it! Stop it!" ejaculated Ben Comas, under his breath. "We're in a bad enough scrape as it is."

The other gave no heed. He showed his even teeth in a sudden smile, that was all. Enos Quibb said, harshly:

"You're one smart boy, I don't dispute; but if you and your friends don't pack up and git off of this island shortly, you'll be smarter. Don't you know I can arrest you for trespass?"

"No," was the quiet reply. "I don't know that."

"Well, you'll find out!" declared the constable. "Nobody's allowed to camp on this island—not even to land here—"

"No-body?" put in the youth he addressed, in the same gentle tone.

"Why—we—well, say! The company did give a permit to one party for this summer."

"Well?" was the suave query.

"Say! Be you them?" demanded Quibb, flushing again. "I remember seeing you in Blackport, and you didn't say nothing to me then about comin' over here. Le's see," and he began fumbling in the inside pocket of his coat. "I got notice of this crowd that got permission from the Manatee Company to camp here—"

He drew out a letter. Ben Comas groaned. Kirby whispered emphatically: "Good-night! It's all off!" The constable unfolded the letter, and then quickly glanced up again at the quartette.

"This permit's issued to 'Rexford Kingdon and friends.'" Again he addressed the tall lad. "Does your name happen to be Kingdon?"

"Now you've said a mouthful," returned the leader of the camping party airily.

"Well! Well!" ejaculated the constable. "Why didn't you say so before?"

"You didn't ask me," the other returned, shrugging his shoulders, while his mates behind him stood in speechless amazement.

"Well! Well!" Enos Quibb exclaimed again, his watery eyes blinking. "If you air the right party I ain't got nothin' more to say. Only ye might have told me over to the port yesterday who ye was. I'd ha' been saved this trip, an' gas is mighty expensive." He seemed aggrieved.

The tall lad, who had dominated the situation so easily, may have considered the part of the pacifist just then a wise move.

"You didn't ask me who we were, my friend. You bawled us out over there at Blackport—told us we were blocking the sidewalk with our canoes, and drove us into the gutter. I suppose you had to do something like that," he added, gently, "or we might have overlooked the fact that there was a constable around."

Quibb flushed again at this last suggestion, but made no reply. He stepped into the launch, seized the boathook, and shoved off.

Kirby grabbed at his friend's arm. "He's never going to go without asking to see the permit?" he whispered.

But that is exactly what Quibb did. He spun the flywheel, and the exhaust began to spit.

"Dear me!" sighed Horrors. "And he's going without even bidding us good-by."

"Great Peter's uncle!" exploded Kirby. "The nerve of you, Horrors!"

"Now you've done it!" fretted Ben Comas. "What do you suppose he'll do to us when he finds out—"

"Dear, dear Bennie," sighed the bold youth. "You're at it again, are you? Always looking for trouble."

"Just as well be prepared for trouble when you're bossing things, that's sure," grumbled Ben.

"Oh, jumping mackerel!" giggled Pudge, who had dropped to the sod and was now having difficulty in smothering his desire to give broader vent to his delight. "The way you did it, Horrors! You're a dandy! You're a bird! And he swallowed it whole."

"He didn't have much to swallow," the leader of the party said quietly.

"Huh? 'Tain't much, I suppose, for you to string him along that you are this Rex Kingdon? Oh, no!"

"I didn't tell him I was," said the tall lad, smiling easily.

"What's that?" exclaimed Kirby. "Well, you just as good as did."

"I let him think so if he wanted to," the other returned, plainly enjoying the

admiration of his companions. "Quibb did it all. He can't blame me."

"But you don't get me," continued Pudge, sitting up and with tears of laughter running over his fat cheeks. "You don't get me, Horrors. You to pose as this Kingdon chap."

"Well, why not?" asked the tall lad.

"You as black as Joe, yonder—almost; and him a strawberry blond. I remember him plain enough now. Saw him play against Winchester last year. In size you are not far out, old boy; but blond and brunette were never farther apart—believe me!"

"What do I care?"

"Maybe you will," Ben Comas put in. He begrudged Horrors the admiration of the other lads. He was not generous enough in any particular to be a leader himself, and he envied the good-looking youth's lordly ways and the subservience that he commanded so easily of his mates. "This business isn't finished."

"Well, we'll stay till the finish, Bennie," drawled the other. "What's the use of crossing bridges till you come to them? That doesn't get you anywhere."

"Aw—well," muttered Comas, shaking his head.

"But suppose this Kingdon and his gang walk in on us?" asked Harry Kirby, suddenly. "What about that?"

"The island's big enough, isn't it, for two camps?" demanded Horrors.

"Mebbe it isn't," grunted Pudge. "This Rex Kingdon is a fighter."

"Pshaw! You don't mean it, Pudge? Who told you so much, and your hair not curly?" drawled Horrors with lifted brows and his usual lazy smile that displayed the line of his white and even teeth.

That smile marred his rather attractive countenance, for the lift of the lip was almost canine. He was dark-haired, and his brows seemed painted over his steady eyes, so clear was his olive complexion. The contrast of his black hair and brows with his almost colorless skin was somewhat startling. The budding mustache on his lip was jet black, too. This "down" on a blond fellow would scarcely have been observed; it made Horace Pence seem several years older than he actually was.

"I suppose," he pursued, his drawling accents making Pudge MacComber flush, "you think this constable is going to put us all in the calaboose over at Blackport? That is what is troubling all you fellows."

"Well, of course he can do that. We're trespassing. Goodness knows there are enough signs all around the island forbidding landing upon it," Harry Kirby said.

"Bosh!" sneered Horace Pence. "I know the law against trespassing. They've got to prove we've done some damage by landing here and setting up

our tents.”

”And building fires,” put in Kirby.

”That’s all right,” agreed the leader, quite unruffled. ”We’ve only built one fire, and it is properly guarded. I saw to that. And Joe knows the fire law, you bet. Don’t you fellows fret; I know what I am about.”

”You seem to,” admitted Harry Kirby admiringly. ”I never knew a fellow like you, Horrors. You are always just skirting the edge of trouble, but never get into it.”

”He’ll get into it now, all right-o,” grumbled Ben Comas. ”We know well enough that there’s a party *did* get a permit to camp here this summer; that’s why my father couldn’t work it for us—and he owns some stock in the Manatee Company, too.”

”We heard about that before,” said Kirby. ”Is it true or just one of your false alarms?”

”That’s no false alarm,” defended Ben, vigorously. ”It’s straight. A bunch from that prep. school out Scarsdale way, with this Rex Kingdon at their head, got permission to come here, and the company wouldn’t allow two camps on Storm Island.”

”What prep. school’s that?” demanded Kirby.

It was Horace Pence that made answer, to the surprise of his companions. ”Walcott Hall,” he said briefly.

”Huh!” exploded Pudge. ”How’d you know?”

”I heard about this crowd coming here, in town before we started,” confessed the leader of the camping party.

”Say! An’ you never told us!” Kirby complained.

”Because that Rex Kingdon and his crew were coming is why I suggested Storm Island. Say, Kirby! don’t you remember that slim, slick, blond chap who played with the Ridgewood High only a couple of years ago when they beat our nine so badly? I haven’t forgotten him, if you fellows have. That’s Rex Kingdon, and I’ve had it in for him ever since they gave us such a wallop. Kingdon and I had words after the game, too—some!”

”Why didn’t you lick him then, and get it over with?” scoffed Ben Comas.

”He got out o’ town with his crowd, that’s why,” Pence responded rather more earnestly than was his wont.

”And did Kingdon go to this Walcott Hall School?” asked Kirby.

Horace nodded. He was not much of a talker and, if he could convey his meaning without speech, he seldom troubled to open his lips. He felt as though he had been actually garrulous in speaking of Rex Kingdon.

”I know who you mean,” Pudge said; ”he’s catching for the Walcott nine. And he’s a bear at football, too. Played on the Hall ’leven against Winchester last

fall I tell you. And, say, Horrors!"

The tall youth looked at him questioningly, and the fat boy continued:

"You don't want to be too sure of that blond fellow. He's a fighter. He can use his fists."

"So can I," said Pence succinctly. "If he and his crowd land here and make camp, maybe we'll find out who's who, eh?" His lip lifted again with a sneering smile.

"Hoh!" ejaculated young MacComber. "You don't suppose those prep-school fellers would stand for us being here, too, do you?"

"Why not?"

"Why, if they've got a permit, and know that they're responsible for what's done over here——"

"Forget it!" exclaimed Pence, now rather tired of the controversy. "Let's wait till they come. You're as bad as your cousin, Pudge. Maybe this Kingdon fellow and his gang won't show up at all. If they do——"

"Well, what if they do, Horrors?" asked Kirby eagerly, as the tall fellow became silent.

"We're here first. I don't know why we shouldn't stay. Quibb says we can. Let the other fellows worry—not us."

"Whew!" murmured Kirby, his eyes flashing. "I see. As one of our professors says, 'the onus of proving the case is on the other party.'"

"I s'pose you're right," grudgingly admitted Ben Comas. "My father says that 'Possession is nine points of the law.'"

When Joe Bootleg, the Indian, appeared and asked for particulars, Pence left it to his mates to answer.

Without being in the least "grumpy" Horace Pence was a strangely silent lad. He had a good mind and a quick wit. Had he not been lazy he might have already matriculated at college, for his people were in circumstances to send him there. But for nearly two years he had loafed around his home town, having had trouble with his instructors in the last school at which he was entered, and thenceforth refusing to go to another.

In a fair way of becoming rather a useless member of society, if he maintained his present irresponsible attitude toward the world, Pence had thus far been saved from any very pronounced vices by a natural distaste for them. Honor meant little to him, however, as his present action showed. He had usurped the name and status of another fellow to his own advantage, and he really thought that he had turned a very smart trick by doing so.

If he and his friends, being first on the island, could "put over" this substitution of identity, Pence considered only the fun of the situation and the fact that they would not have to move camp. There was no place for miles along the

mainland where they could make camp without being warned off by the lumber company's fire warden. Storm Island was a "beauty spot," and Horace determined to remain here with his companions.

The sound offered sheltered and quiet water for small craft while the Atlantic billows souged upon the southern beaches and, in time of storm, the foam-crested surf drove high against the rocky interland of the island. These outer beaches of Storm Island were not considered perilous to shipping, however, as the course of deep-bottomed craft lay well off shore. The nearest light was at Garford Point, just visible in the East, while the only life-saving station within twenty miles was on Blackport Beach beyond the mouth of the cove.

It seemed as though there might be plenty of fun and chance for adventure on and about Storm Island, but these five fellows, who had established their camp here, had made a false step at the very outset of their vacation.

CHAPTER III. THE CATBOAT IN THE SQUALL.

"If we had some more fellows here," Kirby said as he stopped another of Pence's hot ones, Pudge having swung at it with a ferocious grunt, "we might at least get up a decent game of two-old-cat. But Joe's struck; says he won't chase any more balls. And Pudge and Ben want to bat all the time."

Idleness was beginning to wear on the party of campers. Horace Pence was satisfied to exercise his pitching arm a little every day. They had plenty to eat, and nobody seemed to care much for fishing. If idleness can be condoned, it is not in camp—that is one sure thing. Something doing all the time is the only way to spend a pleasant vacation. One kind of work offsets another. If the mind goes stale, rest it by vigorously using the body; if the latter is overworked, nothing so quickly and easily aids in resting it as mental exercise.

These boys in camp on Storm Island were using neither their minds nor their muscles sufficiently. They were not happy. The days already began to seem too long, although they had not been in camp a week. They were becoming more and more quarrelsome. Instead of enjoying their vacation, they were likely to be bored to distinction very shortly.

Pudge threw away his bat. Horace came in from the mound and seated himself with the others upon the turf under a spreading tree.

"We ought to do something," complained Kirby.

"You'll have a chance shortly," drawled Horace Pence, squinting skyward. "A home run for the tents. It's going to rain."

"Those are thunder-heads all right," Ben admitted.

"Let's go over to t'other side of the island. Can see the storm roll up. She's coming from seaward," proposed Kirby.

"Let 'er come," grunted Pudge.

"I've seen a thunder storm before," stated Ben, without moving.

"Never on Storm Island," snapped Kirby. He was fretful from lack of occupation. But it was not until Horace stood up that Harry moved. "What, ho?" he cried.

"Good idea," said the languid Horace. "I never saw a tempest at sea."

"Then you're going to improve your mind?" asked Pudge.

"Aren't you coming?"

"My mind doesn't need improving," announced the fat youth, lolling back again and pulling the cap over his eyes.

As Pudge stretched out his short legs more comfortably, Horace and Kirby passed, one on either side of him. At a given signal from the former, they stopped, each seizing one of the fat youth's ankles. They started off at a trot, dragging Pudge with them over the smoothly slipping pine needles that covered the ground.

"Leggo! Stop it!" bawled Pudge as his coat crawled up his back and he lost his cap and a suspender button in his struggles. He flopped about like a sea turtle turned on its upper shell—and just as gracefully—to the delight of Ben Comas who followed, kicking his cousin's cap.

"You'd oughtn't to complain, Pudge," Ben said. "You're going without any exertion on your part."

"Hey! Quit, you fellers!" cried the fat lad. "What d'ye think I am? There goes another of my suspender buttons. Ouch! stop it—"

He managed to kick free of Kirby's hold, and the laughing Pence had to release the fat boy's other ankle to save himself from being kicked. Pudge scrambled up, breathing dire threatenings.

"How'd you think I'm going to hold up my pants—two buttons busted off?" he grumbled. "And they're lost, too."

"Use a belt, like a normal human being, son," advised the much amused Pence.

"Huh!" Pudge responded, patting his protuberant waistline ruefully. "I don't like a belt. 'Tain't comferble. Ow!"

A startling clap of thunder broke directly over their heads. A chill breath of air swept through the aisles of the wood.

"We're going to get wet," sang out Ben.

"Well, we're neither sugar nor salt. We won't melt," Kirby returned. "There's the sea. My! Get onto the whitecaps, boys!"

A vivid flash of lightning stained the slate-colored horizon. Again the thunder broke and rolled away in reverberating echoes. The sky was completely overcast on the seaward side of the island, and the clouds were now rolling up to the zenith. The sun was wiped out, while the wind soughed in the treetops.

"My!" murmured Pudge, having recovered his cap and his good temper. "Going to be some storm."

It was Pence who spied the catboat. Not a sail nor a smudge of smoke betrayed the presence of any larger vessel upon the skyline; but close in under the island—so close that it seemed Horace might have thrown the ball in his hand into her cockpit—sailed a catrigged boat, perhaps twenty-four feet long, and broad of beam.

She was just tacking and, as her boom swung heavily to port, the boys on the brink of the wooded cliff noted that there were five figures visible in the boat. They were evidently preparing for the coming squall, although no reef had been as yet taken in the sail.

"Getting into their slickers," said Harry Kirby. "They're all young chaps, aren't they?"

"Don't see any that look as though they'd voted many times," drawled Horace.

"See!" cried Pudge. "One's just a kid—that little feller."

"There's one with hair as red as a rheumatic bandage," chuckled Kirby. "Some hair, that! Now he's put on his hat and quenched the sunset."

"How about the fellow steering?" asked Ben. "Hi! There goes his hat."

The sou'wester the steersman had carelessly clapped upon his head, without fastening the chinstrap, suddenly sailed like a hydroplane over the leaping whitecaps. The wind tossed his blond hair like a girl's.

"Observe that football mop!" yelled Pudge. "That's some hirsute adornment, Harry—eh?"

"Look at that sail belly, will you?" Kirby was saying, for he knew something about boat-sailing and was keenly watching the handling of the catboat. "He must be mighty sure of his stick."

"Got to claw off shore," Horace said briefly, likewise watching the maneuvering of the craft with interest. "This squall came suddenly when the wind shifted. She's too close in for comfort."

"Suppose they'll be capsized?" asked Ben.

"Wouldn't want to be in their shoes right now," grunted Kirby. "There! The wind's puffing again. This squall is dangerous."

"Here comes the rain, fellows," cried Pudge in his high-pitched voice.

The curtain of falling rain swept over the sea, beating down for the moment the jumping waves. It struck the staggering catboat. Through the half-opaque wall of it the watchers on the cliff could still see the tall fellow standing at the tiller, hanging on with both hands.

"Looka that feller!" gasped the excited and admiring Pudge. "Some lad that—what d' you say, Horrors?"

"He's no quitter," admitted the tall lad, his gaze never leaving the chap managing the staggering catboat.

"Shucks!" grunted Ben. "He's just got to hang on. Who wouldn't?"

"You!" snapped Kirby like the bark of a spaniel. "You never scarcely smelt salt water before. You don't know what it means to cling to that kicking tiller!"

"You've said it," rejoined Horace softly.

The curtain of rain lifted a little. The boys in the catboat had managed to reduce sail; but if she lost headway and fell into the trough between two waves, she might wallow over, and turn turtle entirely.

"He's trying to keep in the shelter of the island, isn't he?" Pudge asked.

"Trying to wear 'round the easterly point of it. The water'll be smooth there, and the island will break the force of the wind," Kirby replied. "Ah! Good for him! 'Atta boy!"

The fellow with the flying hair had tacked again—a move calling for much judgment and no little courage. When the boom went over it almost carried the craft upon her beam ends.

Her counter rose till the watchers could see the green water wash into the cockpit over the starboard rail.

But she righted, and before the rain-curtain shut down again the spectators saw that the boat was headed right for the sheltered point of the island.

"Say, you fellows," Ben objected, "this rain is no fun. I'm going to hustle for the camp."

"Me, too," agreed his cousin, clutching at the waistband of his trousers. "I wish I could find them buttons."

"We'll all go," Horace Pence said. "That boat will show up in the sound in half an hour—or she won't show up at all."

"She won't be swamped? Not as bad as that?" cried Pudge, somewhat worried.

"She'll pull through," said Horace more confidently.

"Of course," agreed Kirby. "I'd like to see that fellow close to," with increasing admiration. "The one sailing her I mean. He's some pilot, all right."

The heavily falling rain now shut out all view of the staggering catboat. How she fared could not be learned from the point where the quartette stood.

They returned through the wood, the rain drumming sharply upon the leaves overhead.

CHAPTER IV. A LANDING IN THE DARK.

As suddenly as it had swept down upon the catboat, the squall passed. But the veering wind drove the billows in from the open sea until, before it arrived in the shelter of the eastern point of Storm Island, the *Spoondrift* was riding a series of rising waves that would have threatened the safety of a much larger craft.

Her centerboard, however, aided in keeping the boat on even keel. The coolness of her steersman, and his knowledge of how to handle a cat, did the rest. The wind, driving behind, threatened no danger once the craft was headed right. There were five young fellows aboard the *Spoondrift*. Four of them were lined up along the weather rail and hanging on for dear life. Their expressions of countenance were as varied as their characters.

The red-haired chap, stout and stocky of build, looked calm enough; but the lids of his eyes were narrowed and his steady glance seldom left the foaming seas boiling under the lifting bow of the boat. His keen attention was given to what lay ahead.

Beside him was a little fellow with rosy cheeks, who clutched the "lubber line" till his knuckles were white. He was plainly excited and, perhaps, not a little fearful. At every plunge or kick of the boat he seemed to jump and grip the line more tightly if possible.

The third youth in the row was a long-limbed chap—a giant beside the little fellow—whose brick-red countenance, glistening with spray, gave no hint of fear, only of wonder. He was staring out over the tumbling waves with wide open orbs.

"What d'ye think of it, Applejack?" squealed the younger lad shrilly. "Not much like your bounding plains, eh?"

"She's a-bounding all right," croaked the one addressed. "And then some!"

The fourth chap uttered a harsh laugh. "It's only a squall. Wait till you see a real storm, Cloudman," he said.

"This is sufficient—ab-so-lute-ly!" squealed the little fellow. "Old Mid takes this like he does everything else—as though it were for the good of his soul."

The person thus referred to was rather a grim looking chap. His eyes were gloomy, his brow frowning, his lips set in a tight line. There was more strength and determination in his features than beauty, that was sure. Only when his gaze turned upon the steersman, standing like a young Viking at the helm, did his expression seem to soften.

The latter was curly haired and comely of both face and figure. Even the bulky oilskins he wore could not hide the grace of his posture. He smiled, too, as he handled the kicking tiller and gazed out over the tumbling sea as though he really enjoyed it and was exhilarated by the danger of the moment.

The red-haired youth turned suddenly and yelled to the steersman: "Hi! You peroxide beauty, you're running in too close to that point! You'll have her stubbing her toe on some sandbar, first you know."

"No such animal hereabout, Larry," drawled the helmsman serenely. "I didn't wrestle with that chart for nothing. Leave it to your noble pilot. The beach there drops away to four fathoms within thirty yards of high water mark. Hold your breath, fellows; I'm going to tack again.

"Great glory, Rex! You'll have the stick out of her!" shrieked the more than a little frightened Peewee Hicks.

"Calm yourself," urged the other, smiling indulgently at the little fellow. "Don't be such a calamity howler. Now! Low bridge, everybody."

Larry Phillips—he of the auburn hair—handled the sheet. The boom swung over, the hand's breadth of sail filled on the other tack, and it seemed as though on the instant the *Spoondrift* darted into comparatively calm water, the shoulder of the island intervening between them and the wind. But the rain, now descending in torrents, quite blotted out all view of the land so close to them.

"Get over the iron, Jawn," advised the fellow at the tiller, speaking to the dark and gloomy-looking chap. "We don't want her to climb aboard the island. Careful, boy! Don't throw yourself after the anchor. Whew! I think this shower will lay the dust on the ocean."

"Now you've said something, Blue Eyes," grunted Phillips. "It's just as wet rain as ever I felt."

"Looka the boat," complained Peewee Hicks. "It's all a-wash."

"Reach into the locker there, get a bailer and set to work," ordered the skipper of the *Spoondrift*. "You need exercise, Runt."

"I didn't ship aboard this old hooker to work."

"We know you came to give us the pleasure of your society, but right now it's up to you to imitate the busy little bee."

"Didn't you tell us this would be a pleasure trip?" demanded Hicks. "I thought I could bank on your word, Rex Kingdon."

"Of all the ungrateful persons!" cried Red Phillips. "You shipped as cabin

boy, and you haven't done a lick of work yet."

"I feel like I'd been working for the last hour, all right. Hand's blistered holding onto that line to keep from flopping overboard. Ouch!"

"Never mind that," grunted the serious Midkiff. "It would have been small loss."

"And that's off your chest, Grouch," laughed Phillips.

"There aren't any of you fellows worked on this voyage but Kingdon and me," quoth the heretofore silent Cloudman. Despite the pouring rain he had fished an apple out of some pocket underneath his oilskins, and now he bit deeply into it.

"Oh, we'll do our share later," Phillips said airily. "Don't worry about the division of labor, Applejack."

"That's right, Rusty; but I always notice you dodge everything that looks like work, if you can," Cloudman returned.

"That's what he does," sputtered Hicks, who was splashing about in the cockpit, his trousers rolled up to his knees, and trying to use a tin bailer effectively. "And the rest of you are in the same class. Why don't you come on and help me? Think I can bail the whole Atlantic Ocean out of this blame' boat, alone?"

Midkiff had come aft after pitching the anchor overboard. The catboat tugged at this mooring with the action of a calf jerking at a lead-line. It was not at all an easy matter to move about in the jouncing craft.

"Say," said Midkiff to Kingdon, who seemed not at all troubled by either the beating rain or the pitching of the boat. "Say, can't we crawl into the cuddy and get dry? I'm not in love with this."

"Jawn," drawled the good-looking skipper, "I've got a hunch."

"What about?" asked Midkiff. "If it's anything to do with getting dry and comfortable, I vote we follow it."

"I think we'd better get our feet on terra firma as soon as possible," said his friend more seriously.

"In this rain? We'll get everything sopping wet. And it's going to be dark pretty soon anyway."

"You'll find most of our plunder extremely damp, as it is," returned Kingdon. "We took aboard a heavy cargo of water out there. Another night in this crowded cabin isn't a thing I yearn for with joy, old scout. And then—I want to get on to that island as soon as possible."

"Why the haste?" asked Midkiff eyeing Rex curiously.

"To satisfy an ingrowing suspicion," was the smiling answer. "I don't know that you saw what I saw when we were out yonder. Up on the heights of the island, I mean."

"Didn't see anything on the island," grunted his friend. "Wasn't even looking that way. The sea filled my eye, literally. And I should think it would have yours while we were floundering through those waves in this clumsy old cat."

"Don't imbitter your sweet young life, Jawn, by dwelling upon troubles past and gone," drawled the skipper. "The old *Spoondrift* is considerable of a tub, I admit. She'd been all right, though, if that auxiliary engine hadn't fainted dead away. But we'll fix that."

"Well, what about your hunch? What did you say you saw on the island?"

"Didn't say."

"Well, for the love of peace, say it!" implored Midkiff impatiently.

"Keep your hair on, Jawn," drawled the blue-eyed chap, casting a hasty glance at their trio of friends and drawing Midkiff into the stern. Here, with their backs to the beating rain, they were quite out of earshot of the others. "Listen. Didn't you see those fellows up there on the island?"

"What fellows?" demanded John Midkiff. "You told us the island was uninhabited, and that nobody would be allowed to camp there but us."

"Ke-*rect!* The Manatee Company's mighty strict, too. Just the same, my eagle eye perceived several figures on the heights on the other side of the island just as the squall broke," Kingdon declared earnestly.

"How many? Men or boys?"

"The deponent knoweth not. I was too busy to scrutinize them with care," admitted Kingdon. "But I yearn to know who, what and why they are—and particularly if they intend to linger around here."

"There's room enough for us all, I suppose," muttered Midkiff.

"Probably. But I know right well, old man, that the company has only issued one permit for a party to camp on Storm Island this season. We got it. Anybody else is here without authority."

"What'll we do—run 'em off?"

"If they don't run us off," and Kingdon chuckled. "But we're not hired to police the Manatee Company's property, that's sure. We're not wearing bristles, either. Only—"

"What?"

"I have a remote notion that fellows who would come to Storm Island, where it is so well known that trespassing is forbidden, should not be clasped at once to our friendly bosoms."

"I get your point. Perhaps they're crooks hiding out from the police, or something like that."

"Your perspicacity," drawled the other, "is something wonderful. These fellows may be a bothersome crew. We should know what and who they are before we set up our lares and penates on these savage shores. Maybe they are pirates."

Yo, ho, ho! And a bottle of grape-juice! I don't want to get you infants into trouble with real bad men. I am weighted down by my responsibilities in the matter, Jawn."

"I see," said Midkiff. "It isn't your idea that all of us shall pile ashore, then—"

"Nay! Nay! You and I, Jawn—just we-uns. Methinks this rain is going to keep on the job all evening. It will be dark soon. Those fellows must hole up somewhere for the night. I want to know where, and I want to know how they are fixed—if they are passing or permanent guests."

"You're going to call on them?" grunted Midkiff.

"That's according," Rex said lightly. "Say nothing to the other fellows. It's going to be a dusty time getting supper, but we might's well get it over with. Then you and I will adorn our manly forms in bathing suits and go reconnoitering."

Midkiff had his doubts about the advisability of this venture in the dark, and on an island quite unfamiliar to them. But he was loyal and had to confess that Rex Kingdon's ideas were almost always good.

As evening fell, the rain decreased in violence.

The bulk of the island was merely a huge shadow not more than two cable-lengths away. No light appeared upon it, nor did the crew of the *Spoondrift* hear a sound from the wooded shore.

Being curious when Rex and John got into their bathing togs, the others demanded an explanation.

"An exploring party," said Rex briefly. "We're going—Jawn and I—like those Thingumbobs of old, to see if this promised land is flowing with milk and honey. You're in command here, Red. See that little Hicks doesn't fall overboard and make a dent in the water, or that Cloudman doesn't choke on an appleseed. We'll return anon."

He and Midkiff slipped silently into the water and struck out for the shore. In the shelter of the island the surge of the sea was not difficult to breast. Both being strong swimmers, they soon came close in under the black bulk of the land.

The beach was narrow. The island rising, almost from the edge of the sound, was heavily wooded. Their vision having become adjusted to that partial light always present on the surface of moving water even in the darkest night, they made an easy landing upon the pebbly beach.

CHAPTER V.

BEHIND THE LIGHTED CANVAS.

"Now what?" Midkiff asked in a whisper, the water dripping from every part of his big body. Then he jumped, for a light flashed in his friend's hand. "What you got there—a lamp?"

"A tiny glow worm. 'You, in your small corner, and I in mine,' Jawn. You remember the old infant class 'rondeloo'? Won't do for us to go stumbling about here, mauling ourselves and announcing our presence—perhaps—to the enemy," chuckled Rex.

"If they're still here," grumbled his friend. "If they're not, so much the better. But I have a sneaking idea that nobody got off this island in the storm."

"Looks reasonable."

"Quite. Maybe, at that," Kingdon added, "they have no intention of remaining for more than over night. Fishing party, maybe—picnic bunch."

"Then, for goodness' sake what are we mouching around here in the dark for?" snarled the short-tempered Midkiff, for he had already barked his bare shin on a tree root.

"Sh! sh! and a couple of hushes," advised his mentor. "Ha! Jawn, I see a light."

The other's reply was another growl: "Let me see that light you've got, will you? Not right in my eyes. That blinds a fellow."

It was true Kingdon was chuckling softly. He took his finger off the latch of the electric spotlight, and they were again in gloom; but, having scrambled up the rough bank from the water a few yards, there was visible before them—at least, to his eyes—a faint glow.

"That isn't a campfire," grunted Midkiff, finally observing the odd illumination.

"A campfire wouldn't have much of a chance in this rain," suggested Kingdon. "That light's behind canvas."

"A tent!" exclaimed Midkiff.

"You can risk your last iron man on it, old boy and—listen to the voices!"

"I hear 'em," admitted his comrade. "What you going to do? Sneak up and stretch your ear?"

Rex nodded, but gestured for Midkiff to remain where he was. They had drawn too near to the encampment for further conversation to be wise.

The radiance of the lantern inside the nearest tent rendered approach to it easy. The second, and totally dark canvas shelter, was beyond.

"Eavesdropping isn't my long suit," thought Rex Kingdon, "but all's fair in love and war—and several other things! We've got the rights of this. Whoever

these chaps are, they're in wrong."

"'Tis no casual fishing party; they're here with tents and boats, I fancy—all the trappings of a stable camp. The unmitigated gall of them!"

In a minute he learned more important things. There were four in the tent, and they were playing cards. One fellow was whining:

"I don't wanta play any more. Ben has all the luck. I've lost too much now."

"Why, you poor fish!" said another voice. "This isn't real money we're playing for. It's only for fun."

"Just the same, Kirby, Ben always sets it down against me when he wins; and I owe him enough already—more'n I can pay," was the frank statement.

"Aw, come on, Pudge! Be a sport," urged a third speaker.

"So Cousin Ben keeps a day-book account on you, does he?" drawled the fourth player. "Ben's going to be a wealthier man than his father some day."

"Mind your own business, Horrors," snapped the one called "Ben." "If you and Harry Kirby are silly enough to play for matches, not me. I want some go in the game—and so does Pudge."

"That so, Pudge?" drawled the same laughing voice.

"I wouldn't mind if I won once in a while," confessed the fat youth, whose humped shoulders were so near Rex Kingdon on the other side of the canvas that the listener could have trumped him—and was tempted to!

The brief dialogue, however, had told the eavesdropper much. There were four in the tent, and all boys. From the manner of their talk and their occupation, he was sure that they were fellows who would not be too squeamish about breaking trespass laws. Rex was confident, too, that they must be settled here on Storm Island for some time.

Rex did not much fancy his situation and would have crept away almost immediately, having discovered enough for the time being, had not a topic of conversation arisen between the quartette in the tent that could not fail to hold his attention.

"Wonder if that catboat got around the point all right?" Kirby ruminated, evidently scanning his cards. "Say, Pudge! You're some poor dealer."

"Didn't see a thing of it after we got back to camp," the fat fellow said.

"Too dark," grunted Ben's voice.

"May be lying off there at anchor—shouldn't wonder," the fourth fellow lazily observed.

"You don't think so, do you, Horrors?"

"Why not?"

"If they anchored here they mean to land on the island in the morning—what?"

"Thought nobody ever came here," complained Ben.

"There's *one* party we can expect—is that your idea, Harry?" drawled the languid fellow.

"You get me, Horrors. Kingdon and his gang."

"Whooh!" puffed Pudge. "That couldn't be them in the cat?"

"It might," Ben Comas said in evident gloom.

"Those fellows aren't cannibals, I suppose?" proposed the laughing Pence.

"Supposin' Enos Quibb shows up again?" retorted Ben. "Then we *will* be in a pickle."

"Bah! you're a reg'lar grumbler, Ben," scoffed Kirby.

"Well, if it's those Walcott Hall fellows out there—"

"If anybody's out there," drawled Pence. "Let's wait till daylight before worrying over that. Your lead, Pudge."

At that moment Rex was startled—if those under the canvas were not—by a half smothered cry from the other side of the tent, and the fall of a heavy body.

"Ugh!" was expelled from the lungs of the victim of this accident, and Rex knew he must have fallen over a guy rope. He darted swiftly around the lighted tent, hearing a sibilant "Sh!" from within as the quartette forgot their cards to listen. Rex was convinced that he knew the meaning of the disturbance—and who caused it; but before spying the victim of the accident he saw the fly of the second tent parted, and a crouching figure darted out.

There was a larger party than he supposed in this encampment. In another minute the whole crowd would be in action.

"Hey, Mid!" hissed Rex.

He got no reply from his friend, but the individual from the second tent turned as quick as a flash and sprang to tackle him. The charge was so unexpected that Rex went down under the weight of his silent opponent. Whoever the fellow was he didn't shout for help.

Rex twisted and heaved, using every wrestling trick he knew to break the hold of his antagonist. It was like a band of steel about his middle. Rex was too plucky himself, however, to call again for his friend, as long as this stranger fought the battle in silence.

They rolled over and over upon the saturated ground. Rex realized that there was confusion inside the lighted tent. The cardplayers had jumped up and were stumbling over each other to get outside and investigate the disturbance.

"Whole pack will be on me in a minute!" thought the Walcott Hall youth, and the idea stirred him to additional effort.

He managed to get a grip on the other fellow's shoulders, and held him off. His thumbs sought the bunch of muscles and nerves at the joint of the upper arm and shoulder. Pressure here brought a pained grunt from his victim's lips.

His grip on Kingdon relaxed. Slippery as an eel in his bathing suit, the

latter wriggled free, rolled over, and leaped to his feet.

Between him and the lighted tent loomed suddenly an unmistakably lanky figure. "Hold 'em in the tent, Jawn," Rex panted, "till I find out what sort of a thing this is that grabbed me. It strikes me it's deaf and dumb."

"Right-o!" agreed the big fellow, and a sudden *smack* upon the wet canvas, and a wild roar inside, betrayed the collision of the spare tent stake in Midkiff's hands athwart the parting fly of the main tent.

"Ow! Let us out!" yelled the beleaguered boys as Midkiff slammed the canvas curtain a second time with his weapon.

"Joe! Joe Bootleg!" shrieked Ben Comas.

The fellow who had tackled Rex had scrambled to his feet. The Walcott boy cried: "Believe I'm favored with the attention of Mr. Shoetop—or whatever he's called. Ah! Would ye?"

He parried a swing dealt at him, and the next instant he and the silent Indian were clinched again.

"Want—help?" panted Midkiff, who had brought on all this trouble by disobeying Kingdon's order.

"No!" was expelled from Rex's lips. "I'm—going—to take—this—Boot—let apart—and see how it's made. Ah! would ye?"

His apparel did not gain Rex so much advantage after all. Joe had gone to bed with his boots on. Now he unceremoniously trampled on the other's bare feet. Rex could not entirely repress a cry of pain, and for the second time the Indian uttered a sound. He laughed.

If anything was needed to make Kingdon fighting mad, it was that. He broke away from the Indian, dancing back a pace or two. As Joe Bootleg came at him again, Rex sent in a quick right drive to the point of the other's chin.

His antagonist went to the earth, and lay there.

CHAPTER VI. GETTING BACK TO THE BOAT.

At another time Rex Kingdon would have been more careful about striking such a blow with his bare fist, no matter how angry he might have been with his opponent, for there is danger of cracking a knuckle when one's hand is ungloved.

The foot Joe Bootleg had trampled on, hurt him cruelly, however; he saw,

too, that the Indian meant to repeat his unfair tactics. So it was "down and out" for the Indian, and the Walcott youth sprang away.

"Run, Mid!" he hissed. "This bunch is getting lively. There!"

Inside the tent somebody suddenly yelled: "That's right, Horrors! Slit up the back canvas. We'll show 'em!"

"They know there are only two of us, I guess," said Midkiff. "But don't you hate to show the white feather?"

"Too dark right now for anybody to see whether our plumage is white or some other color," chuckled Rex. "The race is not always to the swift or the battle to the strong."

"Huh!" grunted his friend. "Where's that fellow who downed you?"

"I downed him. But he's coming back to life again," Rex said, having gone back for another look at the dazed Indian boy to make sure. "Whew! He's strong, that chap. But he don't know much about using his fists. Here they come! Scoot!"

He picked up the flash-lamp he had dropped in the fracas, and set the pace down the hill. But he hobbled, and Midkiff immediately noticed his chum's lameness, although they were out of the radiance of the lighted tent in half a minute.

"That fellow hurt you, Rex," exclaimed the big chap.

"Maybe I didn't hurt him!" returned the other lightly. "Drop over this bank and get under cover. The hounds will scent the trail in a minute."

Midkiff did not like to run. That wasn't his way when he got into a row. But Rex was chuckling in spite of the pain he suffered.

"I believe we could have licked 'em if we had stayed," growled the big fellow.

"Doubtless, Jawn. You could go out and slay a host of the Philistines with a jawbone—"

"The knuckle bones are good enough for me," put in his friend, still disgruntled. "You always have all the luck, Rex. You're the only one who struck a blow."

"How about you hammering on that canvas?" demanded Kingdon.

"With your fist, I mean."

"True. And I'm not so happy over that," muttered the other.

They had scrambled down upon a narrow strip of beach under the high bank. This was not the spot where they had landed, as Kingdon well knew.

They hobbled along the beach where it was hard going, and Midkiff stepped on a pebble that gave him a pretty stone bruise.

"Let's take to the water," the big fellow proposed. "This is no fun."

"Right! It doesn't tickle one's funny-bone to any extensive degree," rejoined his friend. "But do you know where the *Spoondrift* is?"

"Of course not. That's up to you."

"Thanks. Well, I don't know its location—not from here. We've got to get

around to that place where we landed. I marked that.”

”Come on—” Midkiff choked his words short as there came a shout over their heads.

”This way, Horrors!” yelled the voice of the chap named Kirby. ”They came this way. I heard ’em then.”

”Heard ’em what—splashing? They came in a boat—if they didn’t fly to the island,” was the reply.

”Heard ’em talking,” Kirby called back.

The two Walcott Hall youths had seized each other’s hand simultaneously, warning each other to silence. Now Kingdon stooped, secured a branch upon which he had stepped the moment before, and began to splash in the water with it.

”Sh, Clumsy!” gasped Midkiff, in a panic. ”Want to bring the whole gang down upon us?”

Rex was splashing the water in quick, but rhythmic time. One of the fellows on the bank above cried out:

”They’ve got a rowboat—they’re getting away in it.”

”Then it can’t be that crew from the cat,” retorted the languid voice of the one called Horrors. ”There was no tender trailing her.”

”Come on!” whispered Rex to his companion. ”Let ’em stand there and argue about it.”

The two friends went hurriedly on along the beach, taking care how they stepped. When they were far enough away so that the voices of the campers were merely murmurs in the fog and rain, the big fellow said admiringly:

”Cute trick, Rex. They still believe we are at sea.”

”Whereas they are at sea,” chuckled his friend.

”What are we going to do about them in the morning? Reckon they’re a gang of toughs, eh?”

”Just about as tough as you and Red are,” returned Rex. ”They’re only boys, same as ourselves.”

”That was no boy you were walloping,” exclaimed Midkiff.

”Wasn’t much more, I guess. One of these tame Indians that hire out for camp work to summer parties. Joe Bootleg is a famous name.”

”Huh?”

”Maine is full of ’em. ’Bootleggers,” Rex chuckled. ”The decent majority are fighting them all the time.”

”So you had to do your share?” grinned Midkiff.

”He’s strong as a bull, and as ugly. Sorry I had a muss with him,” Rex Kingdon confessed. ”These people with Indian blood in their veins aren’t like white folks. They’re revengeful and unforgiving. Have to watch out for Joe

Bootleg.”

”Pshaw! I wouldn’t lose any sleep over it,” Midkiff said. ”These fellows will have to get off the island. That’s plain.”

”Not as plain as the nose on your face, Jawn,” chuckled Rex.

”We’re not going to let them have the island and we go somewhere else?” demanded the big fellow in surprise.

”Hardly.”

”Going to fight ’em, then?”

”Arbitrate. Maybe. Oh! Great smoke!”

Suddenly he had tripped over something and splashed on hands and knees into shallow water. It was as dark as a pocket down there under the bank.

”Rope,” explained Midkiff, having caught hold of it.

”Don’t tell me!” murmured Rex, touching his shin tenderly. ”It raked me up and down. Lost some peeling that time, I did!”

”It’s hitched to a boat,” whispered Midkiff.

”That’s what I thought,” grunted Rex. ”Haul her in. Reckon we’ve found something now.”

”Give us a flash of your lamp, Rex,” begged the other. ”Let’s see what sort of a tub this is.”

The other did so, and the bow of a heavy canoe was revealed.

”There’s another,” Kingdon exclaimed under his breath. ”Two-paddle boats, each. Bet that’s what these fellows came in. They must have hired a dory to bring over their camp stuff.”

”Well, come on!” urged his friend. ”Let’s get back to our own boat. What’s the good of fooling here? What are you doing, Rex? Untying that canoe?”

”Untie the other, Buddie,” whispered Rex. ”And don’t raise your voice again. You’ll have that bunch down here.”

”Going to set them adrift? Then they can’t get away if they want to,” grumbled Midkiff, yet obeying the other’s command. ”What’s the idea?”

”Give me the other rope. Now into the water with you, Jawn. We’re going to coax these away—not set them adrift.”

”Steal ’em?” gasped Midkiff.

”Don’t use such rude language,” advised his friend. ”Hypothecate—embezzling—spoliation—my boy! There are lots nicer terms than the vulgar ’stealing.’”

”Huh!” grunted Midkiff. ”They all lead to the same old vulgar jail.”

Rex chuckled. Both waded in to shoulder depth. Midkiff said, shortly: ”Where are the paddles?”

”Ashore, I should hope. Those chaps couldn’t have been foolish enough to leave ’em in the canoes. Come on! We’ll tow ’em out to the *Spoondrift*. We don’t

need paddles.”

”Don’t see what good it’s going to do us,” grumbled his friend.

”How would you feel yourself if you were stuck on that island without any means of getting off?”

”Huh?”

”Think it over. Those chaps might object to our landing there in the morning—and there’s sure as many of them as there is of us.”

”But we got a right there, haven’t we?” demanded Midkiff, excitedly. ”Can’t we go to the authorities?”

”You don’t mean that, Jawn,” drawled Rex. ”You wouldn’t be a tattle-tale?”

”Aw—”

”We’ll arbitrate, just as I said,” chuckled Rex. ”They’ll be willing to concede several things—perhaps—for the sake of getting these canoes back. Anyway, we’ll wait and see.”

”Oh!”

”Come on, now, and swim. The cat’s just off yonder. Push along, Jawn.”

”But I don’t get you,” sputtered his friend. ”Why do you want to mix it up with these fellows at all?”

”Maybe for instance,” laughed Rex. He did not tell Midkiff that he suspected the party encamped on Storm Island was actually expecting the arrival of the crowd from Walcott Hall.

CHAPTER VII. ON THE VERGE OF SOMETHING.

Through the smother of fine rain the mast and rigging of the *Spoondrift* loomed above the two swimmers. Midkiff observed, as he caught the anchor cable:

”Must be the boys are asleep. Anybody could steal ’em.”

”What for?” chuckled Rex. ”Nobody’d want to kidnap this bunch. Tie that painter securely, old man. We don’t want to lose the canoes.”

”Going to keep watch?” asked Midkiff as they swung over the catboat’s rail.

”For what?”

”Those fellows over there may have more boats.”

”Not likely. They’d have ’em all moored at one point—below their camp. No. We’ve appropriated all their means of water locomotion.”

"Like to know what good it's going to do?" was Midkiff's characteristic grumble.

"Don't let it worry you, Jawn. Come on down and dry off—and see if the others have left us room to stretch out for a sleep. 'Sleep, baby, sleep! Close your sweet eyes!'"

"Huh!" grunted Midkiff again; but he went to bed without further argument.

Rolling mists masked island and sound at daybreak; the crew of the catboat was astir, however, without anybody having rung the rising bell. Four of the Walcott Hall crowd hopped into their bathing suits and prepared for the early plunge.

"This beats waiting in turn at the showers. What say?" cried Red Phillips, at the rail. "Hey! where's Peewee?"

"Why, the little fox!" said Cloudman, sticking his head down the hatchway. "He's rolled up tight in his blanket."

"Oh! Oh!" gasped the auburn-haired youth. "Say not so! Trying to grab another nap, is he?"

"It shouldn't be. Bad for children to sleep too long," the Westerner said.

"Bad? It's awful! Come on! We've got to save him from the effects of such a course."

Rex and Midkiff were struggling to get into their own wet suits, so were behind the others. But little Hicks was not allowed to be last into the rather chilly sound. Red and Applejack brought him on deck in his shirt, struggling and sputtering.

"Lemme go! Rex! King! Middy, old boy! Give a hand!"

"Can't," chuckled Kingdon. "Both of 'em's busy."

"You go fish," growled Midkiff. "I'd like to see you get started early in the morning for once. You're the laziest young one I ever saw."

"One!" sing-songed Red, he and the Colorado youth swinging the squalling Peewee. "Two! Three—and over!"

They chucked him, feet foremost, over the side. Peewee sank like a plummet, his nightshirt floating up around his neck.

"That shirt will strangle him," suggested Rex, with some seriousness. "He can't swim in a thing like that."

"Then why doesn't he wear pajamas, like a sane male human being?" growled Red Phillips.

"Cause his mother won't make 'em for him. And he's just come from home with a new outfit. Say, you murderers, go after him!"

Thus adjured, both Red and Cloudman went overboard, each in his own way. Red made a long, graceful dive; the Colorado youth went in like a frog.

It was a fact that some seconds passed and Peewee Hicks did not come up. Midkiff stared over the rail, with his shirt half on, growling:

"What's the matter with those microbes? Can't they have a little fun without drowning the child? Red Phillips is as gentle as a wild dog, and Cloudman's no better—"

Phillips' hectic thatch shot to the surface. He rose breast high, dashed the water from his eyes, and squawked:

"Where is he?"

"Hasn't come up!" roared Midkiff. "He's tangled up in that nightshirt somewhere down there."

Red disappeared, and John wrenched his way into the clinging woolen upper half of his bathing suit. Cloudman's red face appeared. He blew like a whale.

"Didn't the kid come up, fellers?" he gasped, having cleared his mouth of water.

"No. He's down there. Get after him!" commanded Midkiff, preparing to throw himself over the boat's side.

A mellow chuckle from behind him made the big fellow pause. He glanced over his shoulder, wondering what Rex Kingdon found to laugh about in this serious moment. There were two hands clinging to the port rail, and the grinning face of Peewee was in sight above it, as he hung on. He had dived under the catboat's keel, and was perfectly safe while Red and Cloudman combed the depths on the other side.

"Let 'em look," he begged. "Big loafers! Took two of 'em to throw me in, at that."

This amused Kingdon much more than it did his roommate. Midkiff glowered at the shrewd face of the youngster.

Up came Red again, evidently greatly excited. He wanted to know, choking and sputtering:

"Hasn't he come up at all? What's the matter with him? Is he made of lead? That boy ought to be an anchor; he'd never drag on any kind of a bottom—"

Cloudman shot to the surface. He wasn't as good a swimmer as Red, and he was about all in.

"I—I can't find him!" he chattered. "Got to get aboard and get my wind. Hey! why ain't you fellows doing something?"

"We are," said Rex, broadly smiling. "We're crying over your distress. Come on in and eat an apple, Cloudman." With one hand he reached for Hicks and hauled him over the rail by his wet shirt.

Hicks declared himself satisfied with his temporary bath. In fact, a single plunge seemed about all any of the party cared for, the water being several degrees cooler than the inland streams and lakes with which the boys were familiar,

as well as the tempered needle-showers of the Walcott Gym.

Before they were dressed the sun broke through the mist, and then they saw something that was worth looking at—Storm Island glorified by the morning sun. It blazed like a green jewel, surrounded by the rolling sea fog—the upper reaches of the isle at first revealed, and then, gradually, all the wooded northern shore down to the lapping little waves that kissed it.

"Some ugly spot, old man!" Red said, addressing Kingdon. "You certainly pick lemons!"

"Purty as a little red wagon with yellow wheels," announced Cloudman.

"I wish I was an artist," murmured Peewee.

Midkiff had nothing to say until the mists were dissipated sufficiently to reveal the spot where he and Rex had had their nocturnal adventure. Then he said, grumpily enough:

"They're there yet, Rex."

The two tents were plainly visible from the *Spoondrift*.

"Well, you wise owl!" was the polite response. "How'd you think they'd leave? Swim?"

At that moment Peewee spied the two canoes moored to the *Spoondrift's* stern. The excitement attending the brief morning bath had quite dimmed the eyes of those of the crowd who had not been ashore.

"Where'd they come from?" Hicks wanted to know. "You fellows bring 'em out last night? What did you find on that island, anyway?"

Cloudman had spied the tents as well. He drawled: "Guess there's somebody ahead of us. Is that what took you and Midkiff ashore?"

"Who are those fellows, Rex?" demanded Red Phillips. "And how did you clutch on to their canoes? Don't you know

'It is a sin
To steal a pin;
It is a greater
To steal a "tater"?"

"Maybe those fellows stole the canoes first," muttered Midkiff.

"Hustle up the breakfast, Cloudman," Rex commanded. "And I'll tell you all our tale of woe. It's some tale, too. How's your stone-bruise, Jawn?"

"About the same as your scraped shin, I reckon; and your foot. Why, that's badly bruised, Rex," he added, with sudden commiseration, as he saw how tenderly the skipper of the *Spoondrift* was bathing his injured foot with arnica.

"Goodness gracious! Yes!" barked Rex. "Hospital job, very likely. That

Indian has a foot like an elephant's."

"Vicious scoundrel," acclaimed his friend.

"He's a hard hitter—with his feet. Perhaps the rest of them are when they're not hived up in a tent."

"We'd better sail over to that Blackport place and get a constable," the older boy suggested. "Those chaps are trespassers, all right."

"Leave it to yours truly," Rex said, putting on his canvas shoe with care.

"What's your scheme?"

"Haven't any. I'll roll my sleeves up to prove my innocence," returned Rex. "But I am awfully curious."

"I believe, on my soul," said Midkiff with vigor, "that you'd rather get into trouble than not."

"No, I like to get out of it," confessed Rex. "Of course, a fellow can't slip out of a row unless he first gets into it. See?"

"Sounds foolish," declared the older fellow. "That's because you don't know all the facts in these premises, as old Yad would say. Wait till we're hitting the eats, then I'll talk. Don't that smell good?"

For some minutes the sputtering of pork, frying out in the pan, had come from below. Now the fragrance of frying fish was wafted to the nostrils of those in the cockpit. Cloudman and Peewee were busy with the breakfast. Red came up, fully dressed, and began to spy out the encampment and its surroundings through a pair of opera glasses.

"What do you see, Father William?" queried Rex.

"Not much," grunted Phillips.

"They must be sleeping late after our call last night," muttered Midkiff.

"Sleep? They must be dead," said the red-haired youth. "What do you know about fellows camping out, sleeping till this time of day?"

"They are rich. Don't have to work," said Cloudman, coming up to breathe.

"Say, King," little Hicks begged to know, "did you and Mid call on those chaps last night? I suppose they gave you the canoes?"

"Sure," Red grumbled. "Bet there was a pretty mess—and the rest of us out of it."

"You could have my lame foot, for all I care," Rex said sweetly. "Keep your hair on, Reddy. Maybe it isn't as bad as you think. At any rate, I fancy you will be in plenty of time for the next mess—if it comes off."

Cloudman darted down to dish out the first relay of fried soup and potatoes. Hardtack took the place of bread, and the coffee was good. The cowboy had not lived most of his life on the plains for nothing.

"You're a pretty fine cook, Applejack," admitted Rex, beginning on his plateful with gusto.

"Don't jolly me," said the Westerner. "I've pretty near got fed up with *that*. When we get ashore, it's somebody's turn beside mine—don't you forget it."

"Are we going to get ashore—on this island, I mean?" put in Midkiff.

"Come on," Red urged. "Give us the yarn, Rex. Who are those fellows over there?"

"Haven't the first idea—only I got their names down pat. But I never heard of them before, that I know. However, that makes no difference. They know us."

"They do?" exploded Midkiff.

"One-sided introduction, eh?" giggled Peewee.

"At least," explained Kingdon more fully, "they are expecting us on the island. Our coming to camp here is known to them, and they know that they are in for trouble. Of course, the signs along shore would tell them that much, even were they greenhorns from afar."

"What do you know about that?" said Red, scowling.

"We'd better sail over to Blackport and bring the constable," urged the cautious Midkiff.

"Let's go put 'em off, bag and baggage," cried Phillips.

"They can't get off if we don't give 'em back their canoes," cried Peewee.

"Hi, King! What do you mean to do?"

Just then, while all eyes were fastened upon the encampment on the shore of Storm Island, the first of the lazy campers appeared from the main tent. He was a tall, black-haired fellow; they could see that easily enough without the use of Red's glasses.

He came down toward the place where the canoes had been moored, wearing a scarlet bathing suit and carrying a towel over his arm. Suddenly he appreciated the fact that the canoes were gone. A glance showed him the catboat with the missing craft tied to her stern.

He turned to shout something to his friends still in the tent. Midkiff muttered:

"Now there'll be a stir!"

CHAPTER VIII. A BARGAIN IS STRUCK.

The fellow in the red bathing suit descended to the edge of the water and plunged

in without hesitation. Three others came running from the larger tent—a fat chap, a lean one, and the third almost as stocky as Red Phillips. Rex Kingdon could identify them all by what he had heard the night before.

After a minute a fifth youth appeared from the smaller tent, and by his look and dress Rex knew this last must be the Joe Bootleg with whom he had had the struggle.

"Five of 'em," said Peewee. "Even Stephen."

"We ought to be able to hold our own with that crowd," Red murmured.

"You can have my share of the Indian, Red," Kingdon drawled.

"Well, what are you going to do?" demanded Midkiff.

Only the tall fellow of the party of campers ventured into the water. The others dressed hastily, chattering excitedly the while. The tall fellow went ashore, stripped, rubbed himself down, and got into his own clothes leisurely.

"Well set up lad, that," Phillips said to Rex, admiringly. "He looks about your build, Beauty. Made of whipcord and wire cable, too. Notice those biceps when he put on his shirt?"

Red had been looking through the glasses, and forgot that the rest were not eagle-eyed. Hicks chuckled:

"If it comes to a rough-and-tumble, I choose the fat one for my meat. He must be so clumsy he can't get out of the way of his own feet."

"Always looking for the easy work, infant," said Rex. "Go wash up the dishes; that's your job. We'll up anchor and—"

"Make sail for Blackport?" put in Midkiff.

"Like fun we will!" cried Phillips. "Aren't going to turn tail and run from those chaps, are you, Rex?"

"Guess we'd better have a pow-wow first," admitted Kingdon. "Time enough to shout for help when we find we need it."

"I wouldn't say a word to them," complained John Midkiff.

"Gentle lamb, Jawn is," drawled Kingdon. "He doesn't like a fuss, of course—oh, no!"

"Not for the sake of the fuss, as you and Red do," snapped Midkiff. "You two are always hunting trouble."

They paid little attention to Midkiff's complaints. The anchor was dragged over the bows. The sail was hoisted. It filled, and the *Spoondrift* began to move. She was not a graceful craft, but she slid through the water rapidly. The painters of the canoes tautened and they hobbled along astern. Rex shortened the line of one so that they would not bump and damage each other. He steered the cat for the deep mooring place under the two arching trees below the encampment.

"They chose a pretty place to set up their tents," Peewee said, lying on his stomach and trailing dish after dish overboard to wash them. "Just as pretty

places all along the shore here," Rex said. "A hundred parties could easily find room on the island."

Midkiff stared at him. "I know you're getting ready to do something foolish," he declared, sourly.

"I'd hate to have your suspicious nature, Jawn," was the retort as Kingdon skillfully steered the *Spoondrift* shoreward.

"Hey! What are you doing with our canoes?" was the shouted greeting of the fellow whom Rex suspected was named Ben.

"Why, I declare! are these your boats?" drawled the blond chap. "Don't you think you were mighty careless with them?"

"Now you said a mouthful," barked the belligerent Kirby. "But we didn't know there were thieves about."

"No?"

"We hadn't seen anybody who looked dishonest before," said the good-looking, black-haired fellow they called Horrors, as Red Phillips let out the sheet at a gesture from Rex and the flapping sail came down on the run.

"What's the matter?" squealed little Hicks in reply to the last speech. "Did you all forget to bring your pocket mirrors?"

"You come ashore here, you little chipmunk," blustered Ben Comas, "and I'll show you something. It won't be in a looking-glass, either."

"Naughty! Naughty!" laughed Kingdon. "Don't threaten; it isn't nice. Drop the anchor again, Jawn. You fellows let me do a little of the talking, will you?"

"Aw, well——" began Hicks. But Cloudman reached for him and laid him carefully on his back.

"Hush up, infant!" the Westerner advised. "We can't hear ourselves think for your chatter."

"Going to give us back our canoes?" shouted Kirby.

"For a price," Kingdon coolly told him. "Of course, you don't expect to get anything for nothing? It isn't done, my boy; it isn't done."

Before Harry Kirby could sputter again, the tall, dark fellow interfered. The catboat now swung so near the shore on the morning tide that a conversational tone between the two parties was all that was necessary.

"I say," Horace Pence said, "you're Rex Kingdon, aren't you?"

"Bull's-eye," admitted the blond youth lazily. "But I haven't the pleasure, have I?"

"That makes no difference. I suppose it was you who came ashore here last night?"

"Seems to me I remember something like that," admitted Rex suddenly a-smile. He saw the Indian behind the group of other boys, and the smile was for him. But Joe Bootleg did not respond; only stared down at his erstwhile

antagonist threateningly.

"What do you want here at Storm Island, anyway?" demanded Pence boldly.

"You ought to go ashore and tell him, Rex," declared Red Phillips in disgust. "The gall of him!"

"We ought to go to Blackport and get a constable to put the whole gang off the island," added Midkiff.

"Why be childish?" said Rex. "I rather like our neighbor with the black eyebrows."

"Well?" demanded Pence. "Lost your voice?"

"Not any," quoth Kingdon. "Was just wondering how much you fellows would be willing to pay for your canoes? We might keep 'em, you know."

"You'd better not!" yelled Ben Comas, red in the face and shaking his fist at the catboat's crew.

"My father——"

"Drop it!" growled Kirby, yet loud enough for the Walcott Hall boys to hear. "If your father knew where you were——"

"They're a bunch of thieves," declared Ben, just as wildly. "Ain't they, Pudge?"

The fat boy kept discreetly silent. The black-haired youth said:

"Stop your yipping, you fellows, and let somebody talk sense. Hey, Kingdon! You needn't think you've got us caged here for the rest of the summer. We could hail a fishing party before the day's over, and get a boat from Blackport. Don't fool yourself."

"Got it all planned out, haven't you?" said Cloudman.

Rex made a gesture to quiet Applejack, and said:

"I have an idea you don't care to stir up any inquiry at the port. Am I right? Let's settle this between ourselves—right in the bosom of the family, as it were. What do you say?"

"Shoot!" said Pence. "Let's have your idea."

"We give up the canoes. You let us land and set up our camp, and let us alone. Is it understood?" asked Rex with more seriousness.

The expressions on the faces of the fat fellow, Ben, and Kirby showed relief. Horace Pence said:

"It's a bargain. The island's big enough."

"All agreed?" drawled Rex.

"I think we are," Kirby said.

"Sure!" chimed in Ben and Pudge MacComber. Yet the former murmured: "There's something up his sleeve. There must be!" Pudge looked doubtful, too. Joe Bootleg scowled in the background, saying nothing.

"Hope you may die, cross your heart, and all the rest of it," said Rex, cheer-

fully. "I put you all on honor. It may be an awful strain; but they say a singed cat is often better than it looks. We're to camp where we choose, and let you alone. You fellows ditto with us. Is it agreed?"

"Come along," invited the black-haired chap. "You needn't waste so much breath over it."

Rex looked inquiringly at the others. Kirby, Ben and Pudge nodded. But it was noticeable that the Indian youth made no sign of acquiescence.

CHAPTER IX. A CHALLENGE.

They chose a pretty cove, half way along the northern shore of the island, where there was a little beach but where the water deepened quickly so that the *Spoon-drift* could be moored inshore. With her centerboard raised, her draught was small.

"We should have a tender, King, just as I said," Red Phillips declared. "What's the good of a fellow getting wet to his waist every time he wants to board ship?"

"Hold your horses, you scarlet pimpernel," requested Rex. "Maybe this isn't the only water vehicle we'll have. The summer's young yet."

"And you're fresh," growled Red. "Pimpernel, indeed! I'm a healthy looking roadside flower."

"We might have kept one of those canoes," suggested Peewee, with one of his impish grins.

"I don't want anything to do with them or their canoes," Midkiff announced. "I've a mighty poor opinion of that gang."

"Here, too," said Red. "I've a notion they're not going to be good neighbors."

"They promised," Hicks observed seriously.

"What's a promise to fellows like them?" growled he of the auburn hair.

"What do you know about them, Reddy?" Kingdon asked. "Jumping at conclusions, aren't you?"

"If a dog shows his teeth I take it for granted he can bite," was the prompt reply. "I don't have to go up to him and put my hand in his mouth to make sure."

"True, true, Carrots. And quite philosophical. You are improving."

Suddenly, Cloudman appeared from the wood that covered the heights of

the island behind the camping place. He came scrambling down toward the tent that had already been set up and secured.

"Here comes the P.L.," said Phillips, squinting up at the lank Western youth.

"What's that?" asked Midkiff. "P.L.—pretty lucky? He's missed most of the work."

"Principal Loafer," explained Red. "And my hands are sore tugging at those guy-ropes."

"You said something," agreed Hicks. "Cloudman's a regular pet, isn't he? He's too strong for work."

"He's got a bad wing, and you know it," Kingdon put in admonishingly. "Don't want him to make it worse. He's had a lame arm ever since that chap from Winchester—the one that nicked Henderson's brother for his roll—hit Cloud with a club. I told him to go easy."

"How about me?" growled Midkiff. "That same fellow took a twist at my arm, too. If he'd been trying to break up our nine so Winchester could win the pennant, that scoundrel couldn't have done better."

"But you showed 'em, Middy, in the last game—didn't he, fellows?" cried Peewee. "You put the starch into those last few innings, believe me!"

"And near ruined your arm," said Kingdon, eyeing his roommate with lazy pride. "I've got a couple of cripples on my hands. That's why I was particularly anxious for you and Applejack to come on this cruise, Midkiff."

"How's that?" asked the Colorado lad, landing suddenly with a crash beside them.

"Want you both to get into A-1 shape by fall. We'll have a series to play off in September and October, and you two fellows must be able to do your very best on the mound."

"How 'bout Henderson?"

"Hen's promised to keep in trim, too. Walcott is mighty weak in its pitching staff. We've got three—three, mind you! And we ought to have half a dozen good twirlers."

"Don't you suppose any of those fellows Stanley Downs was nursing along on the scrub nines will develop, Rex?" Red Phillips asked anxiously.

His place was fixed in the infield, but Red was thoroughly loyal to old Walcott. Indeed, it had been his scouting for athletic material that had brought Rex Kingdon to the school.

"About as much chance of the coach developing a comer out of that bunch as you have of developing a love for mathematics, Sunset," responded Rex.

"There isn't a natural born pitcher among 'em, and if there's no natural talent, what can we expect of the coach? It isn't his fault."

"I'm going right to work with John and Applejack, here. If there's a level

spot on this whole island—”

”I’ve found it,” interposed Cloudman.

”Eh?”

”Found just the place. Right on the top of this hill. Big enough for a three-ring circus.”

”Fine!” Kingdon exclaimed. ”Let’s have dinner and a nap, and then go up and look it over. If we could get those chaps over there into it, we could have a half decent ball game—all positions filled and somebody to rap out a few.”

”Oh, prunes!” grunted Red. ”They don’t look as though they could play beanbag.”

”Don’t you get attached to that idea so that you can’t be pried loose, old man,” Kingdon advised. ”That tall fellow looks good to me.”

They had drawn lots and it had fallen to Rex to get dinner, with Phillips to assist. Hunger urged them to prepare a ”bounteous repast,” but neither of the cooks would ever win a medal from the Association of Chefs, and Peewee so declared.

”If it wasn’t for the canned beans, this layout would be a frost,” croaked that diminutive critic. ”Who couldn’t warm over beans? Is that dish going to be about all we get our teeth clamped on this week?”

”I’ll try some flapjacks for supper,” promised Phillips.

Cloudman grinned. ”Ever make any?” he asked.

”No. But we’ve got a cook at home that makes ’em fine.”

”What are you going to make ’em out of?”

”There’s a package of flapjack flour. All you got to do is to mix ’em up and fry ’em, I s’pose.”

”The directions say, ’Mix with buttermilk,’” chuckled Applejack.

”Huh!”

”Oh, my!” chortled Peewee. ”Where you going to get buttermilk, Red?”

”We got canned milk and butter. Can’t we combine ’em and make buttermilk? Nothing to it!”

”Listen to that!” cried Midkiff. ”This red-headed lunatic will poison us before he gets through.”

”Wish we’d hired an Injun to cook for us, same as that other crowd have,” Cloudman said.

”Not a bad idea,” Peewee agreed patronizingly. ”You’re pretty near as wild as any Indian, Cloud. I move you be made permanent cook.”

”Like fun!” said the Colorado youth. ”I cooked all the way over in that boat. No more.”

”What do you know about this, Red?” Rex said. ”Mutiny, hey?”

”And the worst kind,” agreed Phillips. ”It’s a great deal worse to mutiny

against the cook than against the skipper and other officers.”

”Here we have both forms of the iniquity. What, ho! call the guard! Sentinels to their places! Let the pork and cabbage fall—I mean the portcullis! I sentence the entire mutinous gang to sharp practice at three o’clock. Let the dishes alone, Red, till later. I hanker for forty winks. Talk as you please, fellows, canned beans are filling.”

The island, which had been steaming all the morning after the rain, was beginning to cool off by three o’clock. The five Walcott Hall lads climbed the stiff hill to the hidden lawn, and were delighted with it. It was not long before they discovered that others had been ahead of them.

”Those interlopers, I suppose,” Midkiff said, sniffing.

”Here’s where they laid out their diamond,” said Hicks. ”Home plate, first base, third. Yonder’s second. Looks like the real thing.”

”And the box,” Cloudman said, stepping into place, vigorously swinging his arm the while. ”Somebody’s pitched ball from here, Kingdon, that’s sure.”

”And now you’re going to pitch some,” Rex told him, adjusting his mitt. ”See if you can put something on it, Wild-and-Woolly.”

Cloudman’s performance pleased him. Midkiff was taking his turn on the mound when there was a sudden sound of voices in the wood behind the catcher’s station. The Walcott lads turned to see the crowd from the other camp appear.

”Oh, see who’s here!” murmured Hicks.

The four approached the spot where Midkiff was shooting them over. Kirby swung his catcher’s mask and mitt while Pence juggled a couple of balls. Pudge trudged behind the scowling Ben Comas, bearing the bats.

”Hoh!” grunted Ben. ”What did I tell you? These prep. school fellows have grabbed our place. You might have known it.”

Rex put up his hand to stop Midkiff in the middle of his wind-up, and looked over his shoulder.

”Why don’t you keep a dog and let him do the growling for you?” he asked Comas. ”Any crime in our tossing a few here? ’Bout the only level spot on the island—what?”

”It’s our place,” said Ben, weakly.

”I don’t suppose you mean to camp here all day?” Pence said lazily. Then to Ben: ”There’s time enough. Let ’em go ahead with their practice,” he added, patronizingly. ”Let’s see what they can do.”

Phillips, who had got up from his seat in the shade, sat down again, with a grunt. Pence threw himself beside the red-haired youth. Midkiff scowled, but took the signal from Kingdon.

”Sure,” the latter flung at Pence with a laugh. ”There’s nothing secret about this warming up. Now, old man, put something on it.”

Midkiff whipped in a fast one, but it was wide.

"Very bad," said Horace Pence, pleasantly.

"Rather," agreed Kirby.

"They didn't like that one, Jawn," Rex Kingdon said sadly. "Didn't think so much of it myself. Try again."

In a regular game John Midkiff could stand the chaffing of the enemy pretty well, but the remarks of these strangers, looking on at practice, seemed to fret him. He tried to curve his ball, and made a mess of it. Kirby laughed. Pence drawled:

"Strike one—*not!*"

Even Pudge MacComber giggled at the next one, it was so wild. Midkiff turned to glare at the group.

"Look out, Horrors!" Kirby said to Pence. "He's going to bean you."

"If he did," said Red Phillips, "old Kid Horrors would certainly have something in his bean beside atmospheric pressure. He'd have a dent in it."

"Never mind the remarks from the side lines, Jawn," Rex found it necessary to say. "Keep your mind on that spherical object in your lily white hand. Let's do something with it. Now—"

He signaled again, and squatted to get the drop he had called for. Midkiff, steadied as he usually was by the captain's voice, sent in one that fairly grooved the pan.

"Bravo!" acclaimed Pence. "Quite pretty. But no speed."

Kingdon would not let his roommate use all his speed. Midkiff had not been using his arm much for a fortnight, and there was a reason for petting it a little. After a few more passes, Harry Kirby said impatiently:

"You fellers make me ill. Stop throwing kisses at each other, and let a *real* man pitch."

"I'd like to catch for a real swift ball tosser," Rex said meekly.

"Believe me, you'd think you were doing it if you tried to hold Horrors."

"Is he good as all that?" queried Kingdon, picking a rather wild one of Midkiff's out of the air.

"He is," declared Kirby.

"Maybe I couldn't hold him," Rex said gently.

"You'd know you'd been catching something when you got through," the other laughed sneeringly.

Kingdon looked quizzically over at the silent Pence.

"You've got a good booster," he said. "Wish you'd show me a few."

"Oh, I can wait my turn," Pence drawled.

"No time like the present. Come on in, Mid. Our friend here is going to show us something fancy."

"Think you can hold me, do you?" asked Pence.

"I can try," Rex rejoined modestly.

"I've heard you think yourself the real thing," said Pence, rising languidly as the scowling Midkiff came in.

"Put 'em anywhere within reach and I'll grab at 'em," Rex promised.

CHAPTER X. KINGDON STATES A DETERMINATION.

"Minds me of Wash Hornbrook, Red. 'Member?" whispered Peewee Hicks, watching the tall, dark fellow going out to the mound.

Kingdon had already noted the resemblance of Pence to the clever, good-looking athlete who had once been the leading spirit at Walcott Hall. Horace Pence did not look at all like Hornbrook, but his manner suggested the prep school hero, now gone to college.

That Pence was a leader the attitude of his mates plainly revealed. He was a personable fellow, and as graceful as a panther. Kingdon smiled and settled himself to receive the first pitched ball.

Kingdon had succeeded as captain of the school ball team, principally because he was a good reader of character. He gave less attention now to the muscular development of Horace Pence than he did to his face.

He saw in Pence's handsome, reckless visage with its sneeringly uplifted lip, a certain cool determination that Rex could not but admire. The black-haired chap was going out there with the intention of making the Walcott Hall backstop flinch before his speed. He saw, likewise, that Pence was a left-hander; for when the chap reached the pitcher's station he turned his right side to Kingdon. He took little time for his wind-up, merely tossing over his shoulder:

"Ready?"

"Waiting," answered Rex.

The horsehide struck the catcher's mitt, seemingly the next second.

"Oh, boy!" yelled Red Phillips, giving credit where credit was due. "Some speed!"

Kingdon tossed the sphere back. The bullet that next shot over hummed like a bee. Kingdon spread his legs wider and waited impassively for the third ball. Pence took more time about it and put even more speed into his throw. It

was a wonder. The Walcott Hall lads, camped in the shade, gasped.

A flush had come into the dark fellow's face. He rolled up his sleeve with a vexed motion, spat upon his hand, grinned at the waiting backstop, and drove in his fourth ball.

It was caught as the others had been, but the force of the delivery was so great that Kingdon stepped back to recover his balance. Then he drawled:

"That's four balls. Man takes his base. Say, the speed is all right; why not put over a strike now and then?"

"Your eyesight's bad," declared Pence, poised for another throw. "You're weakening."

"Maybe," Kingdon said, holding up his hand. "But I don't think so. What's the use of having all that speed if you have no control?"

The pitcher's black eyes flashed. "Who says I don't get 'em over?" he snapped.

Kingdon beckoned to Harry Kirby. "You umpire," he invited.

Kirby looked at Pence for permission. The latter said:

"Oh, go ahead. The blond person's beginning to feel weary already. When I've poured a few more into him he'll claim his lip's cracked, or something, and quit."

Kingdon smiled as Kirby ran to take his station, adjusting his mask.

"Now, son," muttered the Walcott Hall backstop, "keep your eye on the ball."

The southpaw wound up again, and the ball whizzed in and slapped against Kingdon's glove. The latter held it and looked at Kirby.

"Ball!" Kirby was forced to proclaim.

"What?" ejaculated the boy on the mound. "Give me that—"

He caught Kingdon's accurate throw, and immediately flung another hot one. "How's that?" he demanded exultantly.

Kirby actually flushed. "Ball again," he said.

"Why, you poor bat!" Pence exclaimed. "Can't you see anything?"

Kingdon chuckled and tossed up the ball. "Two to one, Mister," he said. "You've got to do better than that. Your speed's all right; but you're as wild as an Igorote. Come down to Mother Earth."

Horace Pence recovered from his momentary display of spleen, and smiled. That uplift of his lip was not pleasant to observe. He was cool again.

He marked the plate well, poised himself with more care for the throw, and grooved the pan. Kingdon caught the ball in his ungloved hand.

"Right over," he said. "But the batter could have poled it over the fence, if he'd had any kind of luck at all."

"That's all right," Pence said easily. "I'll work up to my speed in a minute or two. You don't want to stop many of them with your bare hand."

He flung another that cut the corner of the plate. Then another. His arm seemed tireless, and the balls were soon whizzing in again with terrific speed. About half of them the prejudiced Kirby pronounced strikes.

Kingdon beckoned to Red Phillips. "Let's see how these limited expresses look to a real batsman," he said. "Bring your club, Red. See if you can aeroplane one of these hot ones. Run down toward center, Peewee, and watch it sail."

"Don't let that lanky chap hit me, King," said the red-haired youth. "He's as wild as a hawk."

Pence smiled his canine smile and waited for Red to take his position. Without accepting any advice from the catcher, he sent in the first ball. Red was not on the job, and Kirby shouted:

"Strike!"

"Hold your bat out, Carrots, and I'll hit it," drawled the black-haired chap.

"See that I don't hit *you* one," warned Phillips. Then he swung, with a grunt. The ball came like a shot from a cannon, but Red was well used to fast ones. Bat and ball connected, and the latter sailed high over Horace Pence's head into center field. Peewee retrieved it; and it was relayed home; for Midkiff had gone out by the second bag rather than sit with the crew from the other camp.

"You see," said Kingdon softly, "that's what a real good batsman would do to your fast balls when you got 'em over."

"Not to all of 'em," returned Pence, his black eyes flashing and the red deepening in his cheeks.

"Enough to make you tired," drawled Kingdon.

"You're mighty smart!" scoffed Kirby, as Pence made no reply. "Who told you so much, Curly?"

Phillips continued to connect with about two out of every three balls Pence pitched. And the dark chap grew hotter and hotter—inside. On the surface he was like ice. Kingdon admired him.

"Red," the backstop whispered while Peewee and Midkiff were relaying the ball on one occasion, "that lad will be a pitcher some day."

"He thinks he is now," returned the batter.

"You're the only man I know could bump his speed this way. Things aren't breaking good for him, but he keeps his head. And he's a southpaw. Red, I'd give all my old hats to have that chap at Walcott Hall!"

Phillips stared at him. "What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "Some of your gears are loose."

"Believe me," said Kingdon, softly, "if it can be did, your uncle is going to bring it about. Don't you think that *you* are the only real, blow-in-the-bottle scout for the old school. There are others. You lassoed me into the Hall, didn't you?"

"Aw—well—you—"

"I wasn't as good as this Pence," admitted Kingdon, honestly. "I tell you I yearn for Blacky on our pitching staff, and I hope to see him there."

"The foolish factory's where you belong," returned Red.

CHAPTER XI. ENOS QUIBB AGAIN.

Pence got down to curving a few, and Red Phillips did not find it so easy to hammer the ball. The black-haired fellow's benders weren't remarkable; it was evident that he had gone in for speed almost entirely, and had not tried for control.

Without doubt Horace Pence felt that his showing was not of the first class. Used as he was to lording it over his fellows, being superior to them in almost every sport and pastime, it cut him to be criticized right where he felt himself to be strongest.

He was a small town ball-player, used to playing with High School nines and factory teams on Saturday afternoons. No real coach had ever trained Pence, and it is doubtful if he—with his excellent opinion of himself—would have taken at all kindly to the advice of an ordinary coach. That was really the principal trouble with Horace Pence; he had never been disciplined.

Rex Kingdon was different from the ordinary coach. Pence had gone up to the pitcher's position with every expectation of making the blond chap flinch and cry quits. Kirby was a husky fellow, with hands toughened by hard toil; for his father made him work in his coal and wood yard when he was out of school. Harry at times had difficulty in holding Pence.

This catcher from Walcott Hall was not feazed by all the speed at Pence's command. He came up smiling every time. Not only that, but he had used Kirby to display the fact that few of those speedy balls would ever pass muster in a regular game where there were good batters.

Kirby had scoffed at Kingdon and Red Phillips; Ben Comas had sneered; while Pudge's expression of countenance was disdainful. Nevertheless, Pence knew his exhibition had not been distinctly brilliant.

These Walcott Hall fellows knew more about baseball than he and his friends. The confidence of that red-haired chap with the stick, the force and

accuracy with which Midkiff flung the ball from behind second, and Kingdon's ease and attitude of nonchalance, showed Pence that they all had attainments superior to his own.

He remembered Rex Kingdon from the time when the latter had come down out of the backwoods with the Ridgewood High nine to play a local team of which Pence was a member. Rex had pitched part of that game. The black-browed chap had nursed a grudge against Kingdon since that occasion because of some few personal remarks that were passed in the heat of argument over a play. Kingdon, of course, had forgotten all about it long ago.

At the time of that gone-by game Horace was sure he was a better pitcher than Rex, though he had little opportunity of learning much about Kingdon's all-round ability in the game. Learning, through the refusal of the Manatee Lumber Company to grant Ben Comas and his friends permission to camp on Storm Island, that Rex Kingdon was to be there for the summer, Horace had instantly made up his mind that he desired to cross swords with the blond fellow of whom he had taken such a dislike.

With the two parties encamped upon the island, there would be plenty of opportunity to try conclusions with Kingdon. Pence had no intention of having the meetings of his party with the Walcott Hall boys to be so friendly. Somehow, Kingdon's careless good nature had removed the friction.

Horace had the elements of a decent chap in his makeup. His standard of honor was not high; yet he was not of the caliber of Ben Comas. Having actually challenged Kingdon, and having been given a square deal, Horace could not bring himself to end the session in an open wrangle with Rex and his crowd.

"There!" he finally observed, sending in a twister that quite puzzled Red Phillips. "That's my last for to-day. I've amused you chaps enough."

"Didn't want to suggest it," Kingdon said seriously, coming forward to meet the black-haired fellow, "but I do think, old chap, that you rather overdo it. No wing will stand such a steady strain. You've got a lot of speed in that left arm, and you ought to take care of it. Where's your sweater?"

"This hot day?" laughed Pence, uncertain that Kingdon was not chaffing.

The backstop picked up his own discarded jacket and held it out so that Pence could easily slip his arms into it.

"No josh," he said as Horace slowly got into the coat. "I'm going to make my cripples work a little—if you fellows don't want your diamond for a while."

"Your cripples?" repeated Horace, interested in spite of himself.

"Cloudman and Midkiff, our two star pitchers. Both have done some good work this last term. And both of 'em have the spring halt in their elbows." Kingdon laughed.

"Help yourself," said Horace carelessly. "I want a rest, and Harry and the

others won't play if I don't."

Kingdon's voice dropped a point or two as he said:

"I'd like to show you a few, Pence, if you'll stand without hitching. You don't play regularly with any team, do you?"

"No."

"If our coach could get hold of you he'd turn out a real ball-player before he got through with you, believe me!"

"Indeed?" drawled Horace. "I had no idea you had a coach at that fresh-water kindergarten. Thought you were the whole cheese there."

"Oh, no," laughed Kingdon, apparently not at all ruffled. "There are other cheeses at Walcott Hall."

He turned away and called his crew together, while Pence went back to his friends and sat down in the shade.

"Say!" exploded Ben Comas. "You're thicker'n hasty-puddin' with that blond fellow. What's the idea?"

"Why didn't you knock his head off?" growled the glowering Kirby. "He's too fresh!"

"He wasn't fresh with me," Horace Pence returned cheerfully. "Knock his head off yourself, Harry—if you think you can do it."

"Huh!" grunted Ben. "You said you was going to fix him if he came to Storm Island. Didn't he, Pudge?"

"That's what you did, Horrors," agreed the fat chap.

"Wait till he gives me an opening, will you?" snapped Horace with some fretfulness.

"What sort of an opening do you want?" demanded Ben. "Look what he did to us last night."

"Old stuff," responded Horace, cool again. "We've made a bargain, haven't we, that wipes that out?"

"Bargain!" sneered Ben.

"He stole our canoes," said Kirby.

"And he did it to make the bargain," laughed Pence. "Smart chap, that Rex King. You got to hand it to him."

"Wait till Joe Bootleg gets a chance at him," said Ben. "He'll hand him something he won't forget. Joe's eye is in mourning, and he's as lame and bruised as though he'd been through a threshing machine."

Horace remained silent.

Kingdon sent out his men to bat and practice base running, and Hicks gave an exhibition of his ability to steal sacks, being highly successful. Horace Pence was really interested in this practice. Such snappy work he had never seen before. Kirby and Ben Comas lighted cigarettes.

"You fellows better cut out the coffin-nails if you want to keep your wind," Kingdon advised them.

"You better smoke a few yourself, Blondy," growled Kirby, "if they'll really reduce your supply of hot air."

"He's right," drawled Horace. "I guess I won't smoke now." But his real reason for not smoking was that he had discovered he was not wearing his own coat.

The sun was getting low when Kingdon called it a day's work. Horace and his party scrambled to their feet, too, when the Walcott Hall boys collected their possessions and prepared to go down to their camp. Horace tossed the borrowed jacket to Kingdon, saying:

"Much obliged."

"Same to you," Kingdon returned, "for the use of your lay-out here."

"You're welcome whenever we're not playing," Horace said lazily and walked off with his crowd.

"What d'ye think of that bunch?" Cloudman said as the Walcott Hall boys approached camp.

"That Horrors has some speed," little Hicks stated wisely.

"He's an ugly brute," was Red's opinion.

"So are you," laughed Kingdon. "There are no medals on you, Bricktop, for politeness. And as for Mid—he's got a grouch that won't rub off."

"Well," said Midkiff, decidedly, "I don't like one little thing about that gang."

"And here is this blue-eyed beauty," said Red, "wants to inveigle Horrors into——"

He broke off suddenly; but it wasn't a warning from Kingdon that hushed Phillips. They had come in sight of the camp. Moored to the bank below it was a motorboat. A fellow with a straw-colored chin whisker and a plentiful sprinkling of freckles on his red face, sat on a rock before their tent.

"Hullo! Who's the guest?" drawled Kingdon.

"Look!" whispered Hicks. "It's a constable! See his badge, fellows?"

The freckle-faced officer was none other than Enos Quibb, of Blackport.

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNEXPECTED DIFFICULTY.

Quibb was eyeing the Walcott Hall boys with disfavor as they approached. In truth, his usual expression seemed to be sour, and his look now registered nothing pleasant for Rex Kingdon and his friends.

"That's what I thought," he said sharply, squinting at Kingdon. "You ain't—narry one o' ye—the boys I seen over to t'other camp when I was here before."

"Do tell!" drawled Kingdon. "Your eyesight hasn't gone back on you. You are just as unfamiliar to our eyes as we are to yours."

"Ha!" said Enos. "Who d'ye s'pose I be?"

"The Czar of all the Russias—in disgeeze," said Rex airily. "I see you're not toting your scepter, and it's too hot a day, of course, to wear a crown. You'd ruin the sweatband."

The constable glared. "I'll tell you who I be. I'm Constable Quibb, of Blackport, that's who I be! And I wanter know by what right you boys air camping on this here island?"

"Oh, buttons and buttonhooks!" murmured Red Phillips. "I knew he couldn't be toting that tin star just for decorative purposes. You can see he's round shouldered from carrying it."

"Come on!" commanded Enos Quibb, rising threateningly from his seat. "Who are you youngsters, and what are ye doin' here?"

"How abrupt you are," Kingdon said soothingly. His hand was fumbling in the inner pocket of his jacket. "Suppose we have a permit to camp on Storm Island?"

"Wal, s'pose you have," snapped Enos. "Le's see it."

"All in good time——"

"Ye can't fool me none," interrupted the constable. "I know who's got the permit from the Manatee Company. And there ain't but one party been give it, neither. Can't fool me."

"I wouldn't try," Rex said with apparent awe. "It would be *Lèse Majesté*—no less."

"Huh? I dunno what ye're sayin'," said Quibb suspiciously. "Le's see your letter from the Manatee Lumber Company."

The other fellows were by this time staring at Kingdon wonderingly. He did not produce the permit.

"Oh, we have it," the blond chap said, waving his hand. "Don't let it worry you, Mr. Constable."

"Ya-as. So ye say. An' I s'pose you'll tell me, too, that your name is Kingdon?"

"Why, yes, that does happen to be my name," said Rex. He stopped searching his pockets and stared at Enos Quibb with increasing interest. Quibb broke into a raucous laugh.

"There's a big fam'bly of you Kingdons, I reckon?" he rasped out. "Ain't you ashamed—lyin' like that? Your name ain't no more Kingdon than mine is Obediah Smoke! I'm ready for you city chaps, I be. And you git off this island. You ain't got no permit from the Manatee Company—and you ain't Kingdon and his party. Now, git!"

Kingdon laughed as though highly amused. But, aside from Peewee's echoing giggle, the remainder of the company seemed more vexed than amused.

"Aw, show him the letter, Rex, and put the poor thing out of his misery," Midkiff urged.

"He's too noisy for comfort, Kingdon," said Applejack. "Why torture him so?"

"I'm warnin' ye," Enos sputtered. "I was goin' over east to Collings Point on an errand, and I see your boat. I knowed only one party belonged here——"

"How do you know we're not that party?" asked Rex, with sudden seriousness.

"Cause I already been to that other camp—t'other day. And they told me who they was all right."

"Did they?" drawled Kingdon. "Did you see their permit?"

"Huh? Wal—I can't say I did—exactly," admitted the constable. "But 'twarn't necessary. I knew who they was."

"How did you know?"

"Why, they told me," said Enos, in a most innocent manner.

"Say!" snickered Hicks. "Who did they say they were?"

Kingdon made a gesture for Hicks, as well as the others, to keep quiet and let him do the talking. "If you didn't ask to see their permit, Mr. Constable," he said, argumentatively, "I don't see how you could know for sure who they are. Why should you expect to see ours?"

"Never you mind about that," returned Enos, very red in the face again. "I'll do my own business in my own way. You show me your permit."

"No," Kingdon refused quite earnestly. "The other crowd was here first. Take a squint at their permit—if they have one. That's only fair."

Midkiff grumbled. "What's the matter with you, Rex?" he demanded. "Always hunting trouble."

"Aw, give him a squint at the letter, and let him be on his way," said Red. "He wearies me."

But Kingdon was obdurate. When Enos insisted, the blond youth waved him airily aside.

"See those other chaps," he said. "Ask to see their permit from the Manatee Company. Why try to play favorites, Mr. Constable?"

"I tell you what!" cried Enos Quibb threateningly. "You'll jest take down

your tent and pack your duds aboard that boat to-night. That's what you'll do."

"Say not so!" groaned Rex.

"Yes, you will. I'd a mind ter let ye stay till mornin', when I come back from the P'int. But not now. You'll go to-night."

"How about those other campers?" insisted Kingdon. "If they stay, we stay."

"I'm going right along there now, and look at their permit. I neglected to ask for it before, but I meant ter. An' then I'm comin' back. If you boys ain't purty near ready to go aboard that catboat when I return, I'll help ye off this islan' in a way ye won't like."

He stamped down to the shore and clambered over the rail of his motor-launch. In a minute or two the boat chugged away.

CHAPTER XIII.

REX OWNS UP.

"I'd like to know what's on your mind," quizzed Phillips. "It appeared right foolish to me."

"What seems idiotic, Tobasco?" drawled Kingdon beginning to scrape away the ashes of the old fire so as to lay a new one over which supper might be cooked.

"Look here!" exclaimed Midkiff, quite warm. "Why didn't you show that man the letter from the Manatee Company, and let him go about his business?"

"He's gone about his business, Jawn—hasn't he?"

"He's gone to stir up trouble for that gang up at the other camp," said the big fellow.

"Oh, hooky!" chuckled Peewee Hicks. "Was *that* what you was up to, Rex? Just making trouble for Horrors and his crowd?"

"Then you really want 'em put off?" asked Red slowly. "After what you said to me about that slim chap being such good baseball timber?"

Whistling softly, Kingdon made no reply. Cloudman said, with confidence:

"We don't none of us know what he's up to. He's got something in his sleeve."

"Something up his sleeve?" queried little Hicks wonderingly.

"Well, it doesn't matter," Midkiff said, much displeased. "That constable is bound to come back here and pick a quarrel unless King shows him the letter. What's the matter with you, anyway? You're as mysterious as—"

"As Mysterious Billy Smith," chuckled Red, who couldn't hold a grouch long. "I bet it's a joke. Tell us, you Blue-Eyed Beauty. Let us chortle, too."

"You'll chortle when the time comes," Kingdon told him, with a grin that was quickly effaced, however, by a serious expression of countenance. "Now, come on and help get supper. How about those flapjacks you promised?"

But Cloudman advised against the cakes, and canned beans again became the main staple when the meal was announced. Kingdon tossed up some "pan-bread," and there were canned peaches to eat with it. They were making out a pretty good supper when the *put-put-a-put* of the motor-boat was heard again.

"Here we have Mr. Quibb the rural Sherlock," said Peewee. "What will we do to him, Rex? Invite him to supper, or drown him?"

"I vote against wasting food," declared Red. "There isn't enough for guests, anyway."

"Where's your hospitality, Phillips?" demanded Cloudman. "Of course we'll feed him. He deserves something after the way he's been rigged."

"Now, show him that paper, Rex, and let him go," advised Midkiff seriously.

"Hey, you!" yelled the constable from the water.

"Straw, you!" returned Peewee. "Come ashore and join us."

"If I come ashore," threatened the redoubtable Quibb, "you'll all move mighty lively out o' there. Didn't I tell you to git?"

"We're hard of hearing, Mr. Constable," drawled Kingdon, without even turning around to look down at the wrathful officer. "Better come up and talk it over."

"I'll come up there and do suthin' ter you, ye fresh kid, that ye won't like!" threatened Quibb, as he hopped ashore and tied the boat's painter securely to a sapling.

"And I wouldn't blame him," rumbled Midkiff. But he stopped eating and watched the man narrowly as he approached Kingdon. Midkiff was half a foot taller than Enos and much more muscular.

"I wanter know why you raskils ain't makin' no move ter git out o' here?" demanded the constable, glaring at Rex, whom he considered the principal and leader of the crowd.

"Why, now," drawled the blond chap, "I didn't really think there was any need of doing so."

"What d'ye mean?" snapped the constable. "You ain't got no right here——"

"No more than those other fellows?" suggested Rex.

"They're all right. They told me the truth. I knowed who they was before."

"And who are they?" asked Kingdon softly, while his friends stared at Enos Quibb in amazement.

"They're them fellers that the Manatee Company said could camp here for

the summer," declared the constable.

"They told you so?"

"They did. They told me so before, when I come here."

"That they were Rex Kingdon and party?" demanded the blond chap from Walcott Hall, quite seriously.

"Murder!" gasped Red Phillips. "What do you think o' that?"

"The gall of them!" exclaimed Midkiff.

"Prithee, hush," advised Rex, with a gesture. "Tell me, Mr. Quibb, do they claim to be Mr. Kingdon and friends?"

The constable swelled so with importance that he seemed about to burst, "I want yeou to understand that I know my business," he said. "I didn't take their word for it. I seen the permit."

"What permit?" burst from Midkiff.

"From the Manatee Lumber Company, of course," Quibb told him. "I seen it."

"The permit!" chorused Midkiff, Cloudman, Phillips and Little Hicks.

"A letter from the lumber company permitting 'R. Kingdon and party' to camp on Storm Island for the summer?" asked Kingdon, softly.

"That's what I said," declared Enos importantly. "You fellers needn't think you kin gull me. I know—"

"Are you sure the permit was valid?" asked the blond youth, just as seriously as before.

"Huh?"

"For instance," he said, "was it typewritten on a Manatee Lumber Company letter-head?"

"Of course it was!" snapped Enos. "Think I'm a idiot?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say it out loud," returned Rex pleasantly. "Do you know the company's letter-head when you see it?"

"Think you are so smart!" cried the constable. "Look at this."

He drew forth the letter he had received from the company announcing the coming of the camping party to the island. The lumber company gave Quibb a small present each year to look out for Storm Island and see that nobody without authority landed there.

"My goodness, Rex!" whispered Midkiff. "What do you make of this?"

Kingdon made no immediate reply. He was looking seriously at the constable, whose inflamed face was not far from his own.

"You are quite convinced, Mr. Constable," he said politely, "that the party over yonder is the one mentioned in your letter?"

"Of course I am. They got the permit. They showed it to me."

"But you did not see it when you interviewed them on a previous occasion?"

"I didn't ax for it," admitted Enos, "when I was here before. But I've seen it now. You ain't got no right on this island, and off you go."

"Mr. Quibb," Kingdon said, "you're being fooled. I'm the 'R. Kingdon' referred to in that letter and in the permit. Don't suppose anybody over at that other camp declared himself to be Rex Kingdon?"

"Huh? Not in so many words, mebbe," said the puzzled constable.

"I do so declare. Here! I have letters to prove it. Here is my bill-case with my initials stamped on the flap of it. What do you say to that?"

Rex had flashed these articles as he spoke—and so rapidly that Quibb stood open-mouthed, staring.

"You may not believe that I am the 'R. Kingdon' named in your letter; but give me a week and I will prove it to your satisfaction."

"But—but them other fellers?" demanded Enos weakly.

"Oh—now! Don't ask me about them," Kingdon said easily. "I haven't got to swear to their identity, have I?"

"But they've got the permit."

Midkiff began to murmur again. Kingdon turned on him quite savagely.

"Will you keep still, Jawn? You're a regular old Betty." Then to Quibb he said: "There is nothing in your letter, Mr. Constable, and nothing in the permit, limiting the number of Mr. Kingdon's camping party? Am I right?"

"Why—er—no. That's so."

"So I thought," said the suave Kingdon. "I tell you we are members of the party permitted to land and camp here. Never mind if those other fellows *have* the permit; we have just as good right to be here, and we'll show you."

"It don't sound reasonable to me," grumbled Enos Quibb. "One of you two parties is lyin'—an' lyin' like all git aout! I ain't goin' ter be fooled. I'm too smart a man for that. None of you schoolboys can bamboozle me." His chest swelled until there was danger of his shirt losing its buttons.

"We wouldn't think of such a thing," declared Kingdon.

"Huh? Well, I tell ye I *know* those other fellers are all right. I saw their permit. I'll give you fellers till mornin', when I come back along from Collings P'int. No longer! Ye hear me?"

"Thank you, Mr. Squibb," said Rex, meekly.

"Quibb!" snarled the constable.

"Certainly. Fribb; thank you. But I know you'll think differently about it when you've had a good sleep."

Enos turned away. He was fumbling a cigarette that had evidently been given him at the other camp. Now he lit it, puffed it importantly, and scrambled down to his boat, and went aboard.

"Why be such a dunce, Rex?" demanded Red, tartly. "Haven't you strung

the man along far enough? Show him your letter from the Manatee Company.”

”Yes,” Midkiff echoed. ”Why keep up a poor joke?”

”What are you trying to do, King?” demanded Cloudman.

”He’ll only come back and bother us again,” said Peewee Hicks apprehensively. ”What’s the idea?”

Enos, fussing with his flywheel, was out of earshot when Rex spoke.

Rex chuckled. ”I’ve lost the permit, fellows, I don’t know when, or how. I’ve got to stall along until I can get a letter from the lumber company.”

CHAPTER XIV.

A LIVELY TIME.

”You don’t mean it, Rex?” asked Midkiff, seriously. Cloudman and Hicks were open mouthed.

The motorboat began to sputter. They saw Quibb pottering about in her cockpit, the red spark of his cigarette showing plainly as the boat moved slowly out from the island.

She had crossed not more than a cable’s length of the placid sound when there was a dull pop and a flare of light. Enos Quibb squealed affrightedly and tumbled sternward, seemingly surrounded by a halo of flame.

”Great Scott!” shouted Cloudman, bounding shoreward. ”He’s touched off his gas tank with that fool cigarette!”

What had caused the explosion aboard the motorboat did not matter. It was the effect that held the attention of the Walcott Hall boys, who stampeded to the edge of the water after Cloudman. Before any of them reached the shore, Enos Quibb had pitched backward still yelling, over the boat’s stern, and disappeared under the surface of the water.

The boat, now well alight, kept on its way across the sound. There was no other craft in sight save the boats belonging to the two parties of campers on Storm Island.

Kingdon’s wits were quite as active in this emergency as they were while he was bandying words with the unfortunate constable. He hesitated not an instant in hauling on the mooring line of the *Spoondrift*.

”Come on!” he commanded. ”Get aboard and help me up with a hand’s breadth of sail, you fellows. Maybe Quibb will drown if we don’t look sharp.”

"In this calm sea?" sniffed Midkiff, though first to assist his friend.

"You can't tell. Maybe he can't swim."

"He doesn't seem able even to float," squealed little Hicks. "I don't see him come up."

"Keep your eye on the place he went down—hullo! Blacky to the rescue!" exclaimed Rex suddenly.

One of the canoes was darting from the direction of the other camp, and Horace Pence, alone in it, was making his paddle fly. Before Kingdon and his mates were fairly aboard the catboat the canoe was over the spot where Enos Quibb had disappeared.

"He'll get him, King," said Cloudman.

"No chance for us doing the rescue act," Rex observed.

"Get a move on, you fellows!" commanded Rex. "Never know what may happen—"

"There he is!" shouted Hicks from the shore. "He's come up."

"There's a pretty breeze," said Kingdon. "Up with the sail! I wish I'd tinkered with this old engine instead of fooling around on shore to-day."

Midkiff gave the flywheel a sharp turn. The spark began to sputter.

"What's the matter with that?" cried Red. "And she pos-i-tive-ly refused to say a word out there when that squall struck us yesterday."

"Great!" laughed Kingdon. "Give her some gas. That's the boy! Never mind the sheet."

The *Spoondrift* began to move, and Kingdon shoved the tiller down. Hicks shouted again from the shore:

"That man's goin' to have him overboard! There—she—blo-o-ows!"

The constable, perhaps more frightened than hurt, had come to the surface, blowing bubbles and sputtering like a bad exhaust. The moment the canoe came within reach, he had seized its gunwale.

Only one thing could happen then—to a canoe. She dipped and shipped several buckets of water. Pence began to bawl:

"Wait! Let me give you a hand, you idiot! Don't tip her like that."

But Enos Quibb bore his weight on the frail craft, and he was heavier—with all the water he had swallowed—than Horace. The latter could not balance the fragile craft, and, just as little Hicks let out his bellow, the canoe went over, and the black-browed youth was shot in a perfect parabola over the head of the sinking constable.

The latter went down again. It was plain that water was not his natural element. He remained under longer than Pence; but when he came to the surface for the second time, Pence seized him.

"Now we'll see some fun," prophesied Phillips as the *Spoondrift* slowly

moved toward the spot. "Quibby has lost his head completely."

"And no great loss," muttered Midkiff. "Maybe he'd get some sense."

"Hush! Hush! This is a serious moment," breathed Kingdon, manipulating the tiller with care.

And it *was* a serious moment for the two struggling in the water. Quibb got a strangle hold almost immediately on Horace Pence, and they went under. Pence was a strong swimmer, but a person needs a chance to breathe if he is going to do anything in the water.

Their heads again showed above the surface, and the constable let out a gurgling yell. Horace was grimly silent. In that very exciting moment Kingdon felt a thrill of admiration for the leader of the other camping party.

"Hit him a clump on the head!" shouted Red Phillips, leaning over the catboat's rail as she approached the imperiled pair.

Horace, however, was in no position to do that. He had his right arm around the constable, holding his head above water; and, as the man continued to struggle, his rescuer needed his other hand, as well as his feet, to paddle with. Besides, to strike a really heavy blow while in the water is all but impossible.

"Here, Mid! Take the hel-lum!" cried Kingdon.

He had already kicked off his canvas shoes. As his roommate seized the tiller, Rex poised on the dipping rail and took a long dive. He merely skimmed under the surface of the water, rising directly beside the overturned canoe.

"Ray! Rex! King! King!" cheered Peewee from the shore. "That's the lad!"

Midkiff brought the catboat sharply around, and shut off the engine. Kingdon had seized the now weakly struggling Quibb.

"Let him go—I've got him," he advised Horace Pence. "The boys will give you a hand over the rail, and then we'll get this fellow aboard."

But Pence needed no help, once freed of the incubus of Enos Quibb. He scrambled aboard, while Kingdon raised the constable so Red and Cloudman could get hold of him.

"Oh, boys! boys!" gasped Enos. "I'm drowned!"

Kingdon was laughing at him as he climbed aboard. "You would have been, all right, if it hadn't been for Blacky here," he said. "You want to remember him in your will, Mr. Squibb."

"Quibb," corrected Enos faintly.

"Excuse me, Fibb. Hold on, Pence! Where you going?" asked the Walcott Hall youth as the black-browed one started forward with the boathook.

"Want to spear that canoe. I can get her over—and yonder's the paddle," Horace responded.

"Why so hurried a departure?" demanded Kingdon, smiling at him. "Aren't we hospitable enough?"

Horace made no answer, quickly drawing the overturned canoe within reach. Cloudman helped him, and they soon had the canoe out of the water, emptied, and again on its keel.

"Why the rush?" Kingdon asked.

Pence, still speechless, got into the canoe with care. His paddle was within reach, and he seized upon it. Then he drove the canoe back toward his own camp at an easy clip.

"Social sort of a beggar," grumbled Red Phillips. "Didn't even stop to thank us for saving him from a watery grave."

"Better get after that launch, Rex," Midkiff said. "She's still burning."

"Right-o!" agreed the curly-haired chap. "If she keeps on she may bump her nose into those rocks across the sound. See if you can start our engine again, Jawn."

The *Spoondrift's* engine, after some sputtering, concluded to pop regularly, and Rex went back to the helm. The speed of the catboat under its auxiliary was not great; but the breeze was so light that they would have made small progress by hoisting sail.

The constable crept down into the cockpit, coughing and ill.

"You're not much of a fish, Mr. Squibb," Kingdon said, smiling at the man cheerfully. "You'd ought to do your sailing in a shallow spot."

"And you ought to do your smoking ashore," advised Midkiff. "What's the idea of carrying a lighted cigarette near your gas tank?"

"It leaked," said Enos feebly.

"What leaked? The cigarette?" chuckled Red.

"There's a leak somewhere—no fear," Kingdon said with grimness. "Any grown human being who would smoke one of those things—and near gasoline—Well! You want to have a care, Squibb."

"Quibb," faintly corrected the constable.

"Is it your launch?" Cloudman asked.

"Yes," Enos said gloomily. "And I guess 'twon't be wuth much. Oh! I'm jest as sore as a bile where I was burned."

"Gosh!" drawled Phillips. "You're like the man that tried to commit suicide. You was somewhat undecided whether to burn or drown, I s'pose."

"No laffin' matter," whined Enos.

They overhauled the launch without much trouble, for her engine had gone dead. Only the woodwork in the stern was scorched; but the tattered awning had gone up in smoke. There was little serious damage done.

"Better luck than you had a right to expect, Mr. Constable," Kingdon told him cheerfully. "Don't believe you'd better go on to your destination to-night. We'll tow your launch back to our anchorage, and give you some supper. You'll

be welcome.”

”Wal;—I dunno but I’d better,” Enos groaned. ”Oh! them burns do smart.”

When they got back to the camp both boats were carefully moored and far enough apart so that they would not scrape sides in the night. Kingdon was prepared with a first-aid kit, and he anointed the burns of the victim of the accident, while Red Phillips heated up some canned beans and some of the panbread for him.

Mr. Quibb elected to sleep aboard his own boat. When he had departed for the night and the boys crowded together at the tent opening, there was a general—and somewhat excited, if low-voiced—discussion.

”It’s so, I suppose,” Kingdon yielded finally. ”Our black-browed friend, Horrors, has got the permit. Swiped it out of my jacket pocket up there at the diamond. I am positive it was in my coat when we went up there.”

”Sure!” cried Peewee. ”This constable tells us he saw it. Of course Horrors displayed it as his own.”

”Then he’s posing under your name, Rex,” Midkiff said, in anger.

”I tell you what!” said Phillips. ”Let’s go over there and take it away from them. The cheap scrubs! I bet that letter isn’t the first thing they’ve stolen.”

”No, Larry,” Kingdon said quietly, and shaking his head. ”That isn’t the way to go about it. I’ve got a better scheme than that.”

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT’S SAUCE FOR THE GOOSE.

Kingdon invited the woebegone Quibb to breakfast the next morning. The constable had passed a painful night, being scorched rather seriously on neck and arms.

”I wouldn’t have that surly old boy around for a minute,” Red Phillips growled, as he helped Rex prepare the morning meal.

”Don’t be so ha’sh, Larry,” Kingdon advised. ”Soft words butter no parsnips, but they help a lot, just the same. Don’t you see, too, that it’s the part of wisdom for us to make a friend of this tin-badger. We should be as wise as serpents but harmless as doves.”

”Huh! Don’t see it! If you’d just be reasonable and let us all go over there to that other camp and wade into that bunch.”

"Would that prove anything?" chuckled Kingdon. "Even to a country constable?"

"Well!"

"Your idea of proving the case smacks of ancient times, my child. It might have worked well five or six hundred years ago," his blond friend said lightly. "'Trial by force of arms,' or something like that. But it isn't done now, Larry; it really isn't done—not in the best circles."

"Great snakes!" rejoined the red-haired youth. "You're the coolest fellow, Rex, to let that Horrors take your name—"

"The black-browed villain!" chuckled Kingdon.

"And let him get away with it!"

"He hasn't got away with anything yet," was the quick rejoinder.

"I'd like to have you show me why he hasn't," returned Red. "He's got that permit and made a monkey of this constable."

"Well," drawled Kingdon, "I don't mind that, you know. Squibb is no relation of mine."

"But why all the tenderness for Horrors? He didn't even thank you for getting him out of his pickle last night."

"Presume he was too full of gratitude for speech."

"He was—like fun! He didn't have the decency to thank you. A fellow that would steal—"

"Hush-a-by-baby!" chided Kingdon. "Old Mid and I pilfered their canoes, didn't we?"

"That was only in fun."

"This is going to be fun before we are through with it, my dear fellow."

"Ah—well—"

"Let it go at that," advised his blond friend cheerfully. "Leave it to yours truly to pull all the chestnuts out of the fire. We must not get into further trouble with the Sheriff of Nottingham. Go on, Red; call him up to breakfast."

So the constable remained to eat with the Walcott Hall boys. If there was a good deal of quiet fun thrust at him, Enos Quibb did not know it. Aside from his high opinion of his own importance as an officer of the law, he was rather a thick-skinned individual.

He seemed to feel, however, that there was something due his hosts. He stood about after breakfast and coughed for a time, finally blurting out:

"Wal, of course, you boys understand I ain't got nothin' personal against you. Quite the contrary—yes, sir! Ye sartainly did me a good turn last night. And I'd like ter do you a good turn in *re*-turn."

"Fly to it, old boy," Peewee Hicks urged. "Put us down in your will for a good fat sum."

Enos did not give heed to this chaff. He added:

"Of course, I know you boys ain't got a mite of right on this island. That Kingdon chap showed me his permit, fair an' square, over to t'other camp. Dunno where *you* got them letters and that wallet with his initials on it that ye give me a peek at," he pursued, looking at Kingdon. "'Tis about as much as my job's wuth, I guess; but I'll try not ter see ye over here when I pass by. But I wish ye *would* find some other place ter camp on."

"Nothing doing. We're just wedded to Storm Island," Kingdon declared.

"Wal, if anybody sees ye and tells me about it, course I gotter take notice *then*. Guess I'll go," finished Enos, evidently much disturbed in spirit. Descending the steep shore to his launch, he got under way this time without accident, and the motorboat chugged away.

"I'll be hanged," muttered Red, "if I'm not rather sorry for the old lad, after all."

"Rex! You've got to send to the lumber company and get a copy of that permit," Midkiff declared with vigor. "Show those fellows up—"

"And get them put off the island?" drawled Kingdon.

"Why not?" Cloudman asked.

"Oh—well—I've another use for that bunch," said Rex. "Why use the rough stuff when guile and strategy—to say nothing of intrigue—are on tap?"

"Aw, drop that, Rex!" begged Midkiff.

"Why so, Grouch? That Horrors chap has got the laugh on us. He got it without honor, to be sure; but he didn't use a blackjack or brass knuckles. Shall we have it said of us that a crowd like that worked something fancy on us, and we had to volley with a knock-down-and-drag-out argument? Say not so! We got away with their canoes, they filched our permit. Tit for tat. Should we cry baby? Where's your sporting instincts?"

"Sporting instincts!" repeated Midkiff with disgust.

"Great snakes alive!" grumbled Red. "Listen to him rave."

"Needn't put me on the same plane as those fellows over yonder," objected Hicks, with a comic show of virtuous importance.

"Reckon you're too easy on 'em, Kingdon," said the Western lad. "That affair of the canoes wasn't serious. Stealing our permit and posing as the rightful owners of it is sure different."

"If your morals are as weak as your reasoning," laughed Kingdon, "I'm sorry for you chaps. What's sauce for the goose is good gravy for the gander."

"Oh, have it your own way; you always do, you blue-eyed mama's darling!" cried Larry Phillips. "No use fighting you. You'd raise a row if you didn't have the biggest apple and the reddest candy cane."

Derision left Kingdon unruffled. Opposition in any form made no differ-

ence to him when he once had a course of action mapped out. As he intimated, he had future use for Horace Pence and his friends on Storm Island. Just what this was Kingdon had no intention of divulging at the moment.

The fellows of the other camp kept well away from the Walcott Hall boys that day, and the next. Rex and his friends on either day went up to the clearing in the center of the island for short practice only, and they saw nothing of Pence and his comrades.

Kingdon insisted upon knocking down the engine of the catboat and going over the parts carefully. Both he and Red knew a good deal about automobile engines, and this was not so much different.

"It looks to your Uncle Edison Marconi," quoth Rex finally, "as though the main trouble with this bunch of junk is that, in a moment of hallucination, the owner mentioned it as an 'engine.' Old age has crept over this machine, and Father Time has left his indelible mark on certain parts of it. They must be renewed if we are to place any dependence at all in this form of motive power this summer."

"To get down to cases," scoffed Midkiff, "you want some new parts?"

"The engine does," Kingdon said sweetly. "I, personally, am fairly new."

"Quite," agreed Red. "And fresh."

"How're you going to get the parts?" Cloudman asked practically.

"Go after them to Blackport. To-morrow, if 'tis fair and there's a breeze ruffling the surface of yon sound."

"All of us going?" questioned Midkiff. "Who's to watch camp?"

"That's right," Phillips said. "I don't trust those chaps yonder."

"They have been keeping away from here, all right," Peewee observed.

"That isn't saying they wouldn't come over and grab all our stuff if we left it unguarded," Red said.

"Don't you think we'll have to risk that sometime, Red?" Kingdon asked.

"Not if you have that gang put off the island as you should," put in Midkiff with tartness.

"Now, is that so?" mocked Rex. "They could hang around and do us plenty of damage if they were put off, I suppose? If we are going to spend our entire summer worrying about a lot of amateur pirates like them, we'll have a fine time—I don't think."

"Well, they've robbed us once."

"And you have embraced Quaker doctrines, Rex," Red added, with some sharpness. "Turn the other cheek stuff, and all that."

The blond youth's eyes twinkled. "If they touch our lares and penates, I agree to lead you against the Philistines, and we will smite them hip and thigh—and on the nose. How's that?"

"It's a promise," grunted Cloudman.

"Most sensible thing I've heard you say since we landed on Storm Island," said Red Phillips.

CHAPTER XVI. WHITE WINGS.

With that understanding, the Walcott Hall lads sought their beds that night, and arose betimes in the morning. The sun was scarcely up when they were aboard the catboat and drifted out of the tiny cove in which she had been anchored.

They selected to have breakfast aboard and, as he knew very little about sailing a boat, Cloudman agreed to be the "doctor" during the cruise.

There is no more comfortable, roomy, or safe boat for her size than a cat, and, despite her broad beam, with a stiff breeze blowing, the *Spoondrift* could walk the water in amazing fashion. Beside, Kingdon was skillful at sailing a craft of her kind.

"How did you learn so much about it, Rex?" asked Peewee Hicks.

"Sailed in pretty near every kind of a one-man or two-man dish all around the seven seas," declared Kingdon airily. "From a catamaran to an outrigger, or an Esquimaux kaiak, yours truly has tempted Father Neptune."

"Wish to goodness you'd be really serious once in a while, Rex," grumbled Midkiff. "Never know whether you're dreaming or just plain fibbing."

"There!" ejaculated Red Phillips. "Some rap that, Old Grouch; right in the solar-plexus."

"But you surely *have* traveled, Kingdon?" put in Cloudman, who had come up from the low-roofed cabin to breathe.

"That used to be my middle name—before my father settled in Maine for the sake of mother's health, and went into the lumber game. Rexford Traveler Kingdon—that's me. Isn't it perfectly delightful to hear me boast like this? I'm so modest about it, what?"

"There's another sail over yonder," cried Peewee suddenly. "Is she heading in, too, Kingdon?"

"She's making a leg that way," announced the skipper. "Blackport Channel is narrow, but deep. We'll have to make about the same number of tacks as she'll make to get in. Another cat, too; but bigger than the *Spoondrift*."

"And a whole lot fancier," Red Phillips declared.

"See her canvas!" cried Peewee. "White as snow."

"And this old tub looks like a slop bucket," complained Midkiff.

"Handsome is as handsome does," laughed Kingdon. "We know how well the *Spoondrift* acted the other day in that squall."

"She certainly spoke her little piece coming up from Boston," Red admitted.

"That other boat's going to cross our bow, Kingdon," Peewee announced excitedly.

"Don't you believe it, infant," was the prompt rejoinder.

"But she is, I tell you—"

"Watch out!" called Kingdon. He swung the tiller hard over and the *Spoondrift* turned almost on her heel. The white spume flew across the decked-over bows into the cockpit, Cloudman getting about half a bucketful down the back of his neck.

"What do you think you're doing?" he yelled, leaping up.

"Hold on!" advised Red, choked with laughter.

The sail of the *Spoondrift* caught and held every ounce of wind possible. She was shooting along, splashing through the waves with a lift of her nose that shook her from stem to stern.

"Hold on to what?" cried the Colorado lad, grabbing the edge of the centerboard well. "She's pitching like a wild bronco!"

"Stick to the saddle," chuckled Peewee. "You should like this."

"I do—like fun!" grumbled Cloudman. "Spilled my kettle of hot water. How can I wash greasy pans without hot water?"

"Let 'em stay greasy till the next meal. Then they're all ready to use again," Red suggested.

"We ought to have a dog," Peewee declared.

"What for?"

"Like the lazy woman's dog. She called it 'Three Waters' and when folks asked her if her dishes were washed clean, she always said, 'Just as clean as Three Waters can make them.'"

"That's an awful chestnut," Red said. "We'll have no such housekeeping as that. Better let 'em stay greasy."

Meanwhile the *Spoondrift* was tearing through the jumping waves, with the wind in the most favorable quarter. The strength of the wind was increasing, too, and the *Spoondrift* was distinctly a heavy-weather craft.

In saving her from being "cross-bowed" by her handsome rival, Kingdon had lost a bit on the length of that leg. Now the *Spoondrift* rushed down toward the opening of the channel like a steam tug. As the other sailing craft was about to tack, the Walcott Hall boys crossed the stranger's bows.

So near were the two catboats that a biscuit might have been tossed from one to the other. No biscuits were tossed, but certain chaff was.

"Oh, you lubbers!" shouted a young fellow in a yachting cap, rising upon the forward deck of the strange catboat, and hanging to a stay for support. "Some sailors! Where are you from? What cart is that?"

There seemed to be half a dozen persons aboard the hailing craft, all young fellows. Kingdon answered the laughing challenge:

"*Spoondrift*, from Storm Island; Kingdon, skipper; bound in. What boat's that?"

"*Nothing To It*, Blackport Boat Club. My name's Yansey. Will see you fellows later. Some tub you got there."

"Tub!" flung back Peewee. "Like your nerve! We've got her entered for the International Cup Races."

"Sure you have. Tea cup races, you mean," gibed the other. "Come, now, get that old catamaran out of our way, so we don't fall over her. We're going to tack."

"Look like a lively lot," Red Phillips remarked as the *Spoondrift* pulled ahead and got into the choppy channel.

"Blackport Boat Club boys. We ought to know them," Kingdon agreed. "I understand they've set up a fancy eight-oared shell, too. That's where we are weak, fellows."

"Where?" Midkiff asked.

"Rowing. Walcott Hall should pull as good an oar as any prep. school in the East. What do we do?"

"It's what the other schools have always done to us, not what *we* do," sighed Red Phillips.

"Why is that?" demanded Cloudman, who knew little about boating of any kind.

"We never seem to develop good rowing material," Midkiff said.

"Don't go after it," Kingdon rejoined, with vigor. "Not as we do after football and baseball timber."

"Ain't that the truth?" drawled Peewee. "I'd like to see Old Hall set up a good eight-oared boat—I'd be cox."

"You're the right size—below your ears," said Red.

"If we had a shell," began Kingdon.

"Where? Here?" Midkiff demanded.

"Yes. Why not? Plenty of quiet water in that sound."

"But there aren't eight of us," squealed Peewee.

"More than eight on the island," Kingdon returned with a sudden grin.

"Jumping jacks!" Red exclaimed. "He's raving again. Thinks he can work

those loafers over there on Storm Island into rowing material. Going to make a Christy Mathewson out o' that Horrors kid, too."

"Like fun he will!" said Cloudman, mockingly.

"What's the matter—jealous, Eat-'em-alive Jack?" drawled Kingdon. "Don't be narrow—don't! If we could put in some practice this summer—"

"Get up a crew and race these Blackport fellows, I suppose?" Midkiff asked, scowling.

"Your supposing is good, Jawn," observed Kingdon, shifting the tiller just a little so as to ship the cap of a wave that came inboard with a mighty splash and broke up the group of critics forward of the centerboard.

The *Spoondrift* kept well ahead of the *Nothing To It* through the channel. It was a fine day, and there were plenty of small sailing craft, as well as motorboats, astir on the ample bosom of Blackport Cove.

To the westward, toward the Beaches, was the anchorage of the Boat Club, where, if any inshore gale did hit them, the small fry would find no rocks to go ashore on.

The *Nothing To It* wended her way to these moorings; the *Spoondrift*, with reefed sail, loafed in to a dock near the middle of the water-front.

Rex and Midkiff went up to a machine shop for the new engine parts and needed repairs. On their way back to the dock, the big fellow again tried to reason with his roommate.

"Why not send a letter while we're here to the Manatee Company, and tell them how the permit was lost?" he begged. "They'd give us another, wouldn't they? That Enos Quibb will be coming around again—and he isn't going to be put off so easy a second time. You can see that."

"Beautiful day, Midkiff," Kingdon observed, his head in the air.

"Don't you hear what I say?"

"We're going to have some job beating back against this wind—if she doesn't change."

"Hang it all, Rex! Come on! Take a fool's advice—"

"No, Jawn; I'm foolish enough myself. Why load up with an overstock of the same goods?"

"Hang it all!" ejaculated Midkiff again.

"Do, Jawn," Kingdon advised mildly. "Hang it all up—and forget it."

"You'd try the patience of a saint!"

"Don't know. Never knew one personally. You don't claim to have been canonized, do you, Jawn?"

Midkiff flung up his hands and fell silent.

CHAPTER XVII. AN OFF-SHORE BLOW.

Before the two friends reached the dock an automobile drove across their path. There were several men in it, but Midkiff did not give the party any attention—being in a retrospective state of mind—until one of the men hailed Kingdon jovially.

"Ahoy, Rex! 'Ullo, boy! How's Rex Kingdon?"

The curly-haired lad looked up, with a smile, and waved his hand in response to the greeting as the automobile whisked away.

"Who's that?" Midkiff asked.

"Ahem!" coughed Kingdon, a twinkle in his eye. "A man who knows my father."

"Humph! He seemed to know your father's son, too," said the dark fellow, and then forgot the incident.

But there was somebody within sight and hearing of the occurrence who was not likely to forget it. The two Walcott Hall boys, however, went on down to the dock without marking the presence of this curious individual.

The fellow, who had said his name was Yansey, skipper of the *Nothing To It*, was sitting on the stringpiece of the wharf, swinging his legs and chaffing with the trio aboard the *Spoondrift*.

He was a smart-looking, cheerful lad, with the spirit of a sparrow—a friendly soul who even made Midkiff warm toward him. He hailed the latter and Rex as though he was an old friend.

"Say," he began on the blond chap, "I hear your name is Rex Kingdon?"

"Who told you so much?"

"These chaps here in the tub."

"Of course. They are devoted to the unadorned truth," said Kingdon whimsically. "You know, Old Till wants a chair of Truth endowed at Walcott Hall."

"Maybe he feels the need of one there?" suggested Yansey cheerfully.

"Don't be so dazzling! What have you come over here for—to try to get our angoras because you couldn't beat us out with that old log of wood you were attempting to sail?"

"Came because I fell in love with you all at first glance," returned Yansey, grinning up at the curly-haired lad. "Bet you can't say that of me."

"Your crew look like good sports," said Rex. "Come aboard?"

"Yes. If you'll sail me over to the clubhouse. I came on purpose for you fellows," explained Yansey. "It's almost lunch time, and we want you to eat with us. Got a darkey for a cook, and he makes a fine chowder—and apple pie! My eye!"

"Home made apple pie? Say not so!" croaked Red Phillips. "You make my mouth water like a hydrant."

"You can stuff yourself," assured Yansey. "What say?"

"Is this just a polite invitation, or is it a dare?" asked Kingdon.

"Dare you to come!" laughed Yansey, hopping down into the *Spoondrift*.

"We never take a dare," responded Kingdon.

"Never!" was the chorus from the other Walcott Hall lads.

"But you don't know what you are getting that darkey cook in for," Cloudman warned. "We haven't had a square meal since we left Boston."

The wind was shifting and unsteady as they sailed across the broad cove. "Hope it comes into the right quarter for us to get back easy on," Kingdon observed.

"Think we're in for a spell of weather?" Red asked Yansey, who was Blackport born and seemed to be weather wise.

"Shouldn't wonder. Though we don't often have anything out of the no'theast this time of year. Just the same, there's been bad wrecks along the coast in June. They keep the life-savers on the job through this month nowadays."

None of the visitors thought of the weather, however, when once they were ashore at the boathouse. It seemed to be a club including all ages and the owners of all manner of craft. But the youngsters had it to themselves just now, as it was too early in the season for their fathers to get away save on Saturdays.

The visitors looked over several of the better-sailing craft while dinner was preparing. Kingdon took up the eight-oared shell question with Yansey, and learned that in August there was always a race with two other boat clubs, and that the Blackport eight considered themselves to be a little the best oarsmen anywhere along the Maine coast.

"To be real modest," Yansey grinned, "there's nothing to it for the other eights. We've got the race cinched already."

"Modesty adorns you," Kingdon told him. "I can see that. Also, why you chose that name for your catboat, too."

"Right! There's nothing to it!" proclaimed the optimistic Yansey. "We've got a new shell, and we keep her greased. Wait till you see us out practicing some

day. I'm stroke."

"What did you do with your old shell?" Kingdon asked, reflectively.

"It's for sale over yonder at the boat builder's. Good boat, too, though battered some. Come and see our new one."

Kingdon went, and said nothing more about the thought that had become fixed in his mind regarding the eight-oared shell race.

The Walcott Hall boys had a good time at the boat club; but they were delayed in getting away, and when the *Spoondrift* ran down toward the Channel it was plain the wind had come around into the north and was blowing strongly. The sea outside was streaked with foam over the caps of the jumping waves.

"Guess your old wind's changed, all right," grumbled Peewee.

"We won't have to beat up against it *all* the way back to the island," Rex responded with cheerfulness. "Keep up hope, infant. All is not lost."

"I don't want to lose everything," said Cloudman as the cat began to pitch in the choppy sea. "That apple pie was too good to waste."

"Stop that talk!" groaned Peewee, his hand upon his stomach.

Cloudman really suffered from seasickness before they got out into open sea. There the waves were less choppy, and the *Spoondrift* rode them like a seafowl. It was easier on all hands.

But the wind increased in strength, and to beat up into the sound—which was all a-streak with foam and very blusterous to look upon—was really more of an undertaking than Kingdon cared to tackle.

"We can do it all right. She's safe enough," Rex said to Midkiff. "But it will make rough going, Jawn—awful rough. These lubbers will be set on their ears."

"Never mind them. They'll feel better after it's all over."

"Unfeeling words, old boy. That's a narrow breach into our little cove where the camp is. Believe I'll go t'other side of the island."

"To the seaward side?"

"Right. The island will break the wind. I noticed one good anchorage, at least, over there. We can make it easily with the wind like this."

"You're the doctor," said Midkiff. "I suppose you know what you are about once in a blue moon."

"Your confidence in me almost brings the tears to my eyes. Shake a reef out of that sail, Jawn. We're going to run down wind for a long lap."

With this change in the sailing of the *Spoondrift*, Applejack and Peewee felt greatly relieved. With the wind practically astern, the catboat was less acrobatic in her motions. But when the high eastern point of the island began to draw in on their port quarter, the other fellows wanted to know where they were bound.

"What're you aiming to do, King?" asked Red Phillips. "Sail us clear over to Spain? You're heading that way."

"Get out your Spanish phrase book, and learn to speak the language with a pleasant accent," advised Kingdon, "if you think we're likely to reach that coast. Forewarned is forearmed."

"What do you mean, 'four-armed'?" grinned Red. "Think I am an *anthropoidean quadrumanous* animal? Isn't that a good one? I learned it by heart after Old Yad suggested I might be one on occasion."

"I'd have had him arrested," Cloudman said, weakly. "Didn't know Yad could talk so mean to a fellow."

It was growing late when the catboat swung into the smoother patch of ocean south of the island. On their left, the surf roared far up the rocks and narrow beaches, and the swell, forerunning a storm, was quite apparent. The boat sailed on more even keel.

Kingdon pointed her for the sheltered gulf that indented the island coastline, which he had noticed when they battled with the squall the day they had reached Storm Island.

"We'll have to stay aboard all night, I suppose?" Cloudman groaned. "Oh, boy! *Terra firma* for mine as soon as possible!"

"We might as well stay on the boat," Midkiff said. "No knowing what those other fellows have done to our camp."

"Cheerful, aren't you, Jawn?" chuckled Kingdon.

At that moment Peewee Hicks seemed suddenly to have a brainstorm. He had crept forward and was standing, hanging to a stay, looking off at the tumbling sea east of the island. Now he began to dance and yell.

"Come down out of that!" ordered Red Phillips. "What are you—going crazy? That's no place to be fox-trotting."

"Look there! See 'em! There's going to be a mess now."

"What do you mean?" questioned Red, climbing gingerly upon the deck to get a glimpse of what Peewee evidently saw.

The bulging sail shut out Rex Kingdon's vision. He called to know the cause of the disturbance. Red Phillips turned a perfectly pallid countenance to the stern, shouting:

"Canoes! Blown off shore, I guess. Two fellows in each, Rex. What will we do about it?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THE HAPPY FAMILY."

"It's that Horrors kid and his chums," Cloudman cried. "They're in for it, I reckon!"

"They're *out* for it, you mean," Midkiff said.

"What can we do?" wailed the dancing Peewee. "They're trying to paddle back to the island."

"Right into the eye of the wind," said Phillips, who now had a good view of the two canoes.

"They'll be drowned!" declared little Hicks.

"Easy there, Midget," Kingdon requested. "Don't weep yet. Steady, you fellows. I'm going to wear ship. Give me the course, Red."

"You're sure not going to run down to them, Kingdon?" questioned Cloudman.

It looked dangerous to him. Even Midkiff said:

"Better look before you leap, Rex."

"Pshaw! As our Blackport friend says, 'There's nothing to it!' We can reach 'em all right—without shipping a capful of water."

"Yes," Midkiff muttered. "But can we get back to the island again?"

Kingdon did not answer that question. He knew he had a sound craft under him. A catboat of merely the *Spoondrift's* length has run many a mile out to sea and lived through an offshore gale; but it wasn't a chance he fancied, and Kingdon fully felt the responsibility of taking the risk. Nevertheless, he could not think of letting those other fellows drown.

Drown they might unless they received immediate aid. Under the lift of the boom, Rex caught a glimpse of the two canoes. One fellow in each was paddling madly while his companion was bailing out the water shipped from the curling top of every wave.

It was a bad outlook for Horace Pence and his friends. Undoubtedly they had been fishing off the eastern point of Storm Island when the wind shifted. If that was so, then for nearly two hours the boys had been battling to get back to safety.

"Careless goats," Kingdon said to Midkiff, who stood beside him. "They ought never to have brought such dinky craft out here. Canoes are all right in the sound when it's quiet; but to try to manage a canoe out here, with the surf running the way it does on this south shore of Storm Island, is craziness."

"Guess they know all that now," grunted Midkiff.

"True for you, Jawn. Stand by to give them a hand. Save the canoes if you can. I've got to run her in between the two, and you and Red will each have to handle one of the cockleshells."

"Cockleshells. Now you've said a bushel, Rex," Midkiff rejoined. "Those fellows ought to be at home sailing chips on a puddle."

"They're putting up a plucky fight, just the same," Kingdon said, peering ahead. "Take your place. Speak to Red. Stand by the sheet to lower!" he bellowed.

"Aye, aye, skipper!" Phillips shouted back.

"Come aft here, Peewee, and help Cloudman pull 'em over the side. Keep your wits about you, Applejack."

"Oh, thank ye!" grunted the boy from the West. "I didn't spill them back there in that choppy channel."

Carried on by her own momentum, the *Spoondrift* shot in between the two canoes. The struggling boys paddling at the moment—Pence in one canoe and Pudge MacComber in the other—might have ceased their work, seeing the catboat so near, had not Kingdon shouted:

"Keep it up, you fellows! Stick to the paddle. We've got to snake those other fellows inboard first."

Cloudman and Peewee each seized their man, while Red and Midkiff, lying precariously themselves on the decked over portion of the catboat, got a grip on the gunwales of the canoes.

Ben Comas and Kirby were hauled into the cockpit; but each canoe shipped so much water it began to sink.

Pudge was frankly crying; but he tried to balance his boat and use the paddle on the starboard side. Pence's countenance wore its usual sneering smile. His black eyes flashed and his glance did not quail in the least.

"Awfully decent of you, Kingdon," he shouted. "Try to save the canoes, if you can."

"Scramble aboard!" commanded the skipper of the *Spoondrift*. "Never mind the canoes."

But Midkiff and Phillips did their part nobly. They hung onto the sinking craft until Horace Pence and Harry Kirby could aid in dragging both upon the deck of the catboat.

"Lash 'em there," commanded Kingdon. "Give us more sail. We've got to make headway against this breeze."

He had brought the *Spoondrift* into the eye of the wind and, when a reef was shaken out, the sail got the breeze on such a slant that she staggered and rolled like a drunken man.

"Oh, Rex!" squealed the frightened Peewee. "You'll have us turned turtle!"

"Don't worry, infant," responded Kingdon. "You couldn't tip this old girl over. She's as safe as a house."

The plunging of the catboat made them all hang on for dear life. Pudge had stopped crying, and he showed a courage far superior to that of his cousin. Deathly pale, Ben Comas was accusing Horace of having dragged them all into this perilous adventure.

That Pence had elements of the right stuff in him was proved by what he said in return: "You keep that to yourself, Comas, or I'll chuck you over the side. Thank Kingdon and his friends—as I do. We'd all been by-low in a few moments if it weren't for them."

"Huh!" grunted Ben. "What chance have we now?"

"If we are to drown we'll go down with these fellows who have done their best to save us," Pence put in curtly. "Don't forget that. Let's be decent—or, as decent as we can be—if we really have got to drown."

Kingdon smiled at the black-browed fellow.

"You're improving, Horrors," he said. "But we're not going to be swamped. We'll pull through all right."

"You'll never get us safely around to the other side of the island with the wind this way," Kirby shouted.

"Am not going to try," retorted Kingdon, shrugging his shoulders. "But we'll be all right—in time."

"Yes we will!" sneered Ben Comas.

"Drop that, or I'll punch you!" threatened Horace Pence, edging over toward the coward.

"Nice crowd, aren't they?" said Red Phillips, happening to be near Kingdon. "They must get along fine together in that camp up there. Regular happy family, such as you see in the sideshows—what?"

Kingdon laughed and shook the damp hair out of his eyes, for the spray had wet them all pretty thoroughly. Their oilskins had saved the Walcott Hall boys; but the canoeists were saturated above their waists.

"I'd feel better if I co-could get dry," chattered Pudge.

"So say we all of us, Fatty," Cloudman told him. "But no use trying to light the oilstove below. Might set the cabin afire."

"Don't take any favors from 'em, Pudge," ordered Ben in his nastiest way.

"Why don't you get out and walk," demanded Peewee hotly, "if you don't want to accept any favors? You're a fine chap—I don't think."

"Close up, infant," commanded Kingdon, hearing this. "Try to be hospitable."

"Hospitable!" muttered Hicks. "They've been so nice to us—stealing that permit and trying to get us put off the island—"

Horace Pence actually grinned at this. "You must have put it all over Enos Quibb," he said in his drawling way. "How did you do it? Gratitude for saving him from a watery grave, no doubt?"

"If he showed gratitude, it's more than somebody else," snapped Midkiff, boiling over.

"You're the fellow they call Grouch, aren't you?" Horace asked, still smiling.

"Name seems to fit."

Kingdon interfered before the slow Midkiff could get back at his tormentor.

"Let them rave, Midkiff," the skipper said. "They got the best of us the other day. We have to admit it. But the affair isn't over yet."

"We got the permit just the same," laughed Horace openly.

"We'd ought to take it away from them," put in Red Phillips, inclined to feel as Midkiff did.

"Remember they are our guests," drawled Kingdon. "Hands off. We must put them ashore in safety. After that—"

If the truth were told at that moment, Rex would gladly have gone to a clinch with the sneering Pence. There was something about the crass ingratitude of the cheeky fellow that made it hard for Kingdon to restrain himself. Pence and his crew were unbeaten cubs.

But Rex gave his first, and very earnest attention to the sailing of the *Spoon-drift*. She staggered along for an hour, making very heavy weather, and very short legs in her tacking, but finally, the eastern head of Storm Island began to break the wind.

"We're pulling out of it," Red shrieked in Kingdon's ear, for the roar of the nearby surf was now almost deafening.

"By the way," Rex asked of Kirby, "where's your Indian friend?"

"He didn't come out with us."

"Oh! I fancied he might have been drowned. That would have been a sad calamity. I think he has it in for me."

"Maybe he has," Ben said, overhearing this conversation. "But he doesn't dislike you any more than the rest of us do."

"Aw, Ben!" said Pudge MacComber, "I'm sure *I'm* grateful to Mr. Kingdon and his friends. He may not believe it—"

"Oh, I do," Rex interrupted, sweetly. "But don't lay it on too thick. I begin to feel slight symptoms of *mal de mere*. A little of the kind of gratitude you fellows feel goes a long way with me."

CHAPTER XIX.

MORE OF MR. QUIBB.

"Lower away!" shouted Rex, as he put the nose of the *Spoondrift* into the passage

between the two charging files of breakers. In a moment, it seemed, the catboat drifted on the heaving but quiet bosom of the small cove.

Rex Kingdon dealt in melodrama; no doubt of that. He liked to do things to startle his comrades. But they were not always chance things done on the spur of the moment. More often he shrewdly molded circumstances to lead up to his most startling successes. He had had both his friends and "The Happy Family," as Red had named their guests, speculating during these last few minutes. It had looked as though the old *Spoondrift* could not possibly be brought into this haven in safety.

"By George!" Horace Pence unwillingly said. "You're some pilot, you are!"

"Me!" Rex returned lightly. "If I'd sailed with Columbus, we'd landed at New York, not at a little picayune island down in the West Indies."

"Well, we'll be getting our canoes over and going ashore, I guess," Horace said in rather an embarrassed tone for him.

"So long," returned Kingdon carelessly. "Come up and give me another look at that fast ball of yours to-morrow."

"Perhaps," said the black-eyed fellow, non-committally.

The four went ashore. The Walcott Hall boys saw Joe Bootleg meet them at the edge of the water with a lantern. He had evidently been aware of their peril, and from the headland had watched the *Spoondrift* making her anchorage.

"Good riddance to bad rubbish," muttered Red Phillips.

"All but the fat chap," Peewee observed. "He isn't such a bad sort."

"Most onery crowd of coyotes I ever saw," Cloudman acclaimed with force.

"Forget it!" advised Rex, with more tartness than he usually displayed. "Not worth talking about."

"Those chaps from the other camp have really gotten under his hide at last," Peewee whispered to Red.

They spent the night in some comfort. The summer wind-storm blew itself out before midnight, and in the morning they were able to sail around to the little cove below their camp. Nothing had been disturbed there. They found the tent-fly laced down as they had left it.

Kingdon insisted on taking his two pitchers to the top of the island for practice in the afternoon. Neither Horace Pence nor any of his chums appeared. The Walcott Hall boys caught only distant glimpses of the other campers-out during the day.

The morning following Kingdon was too busy with Midkiff, tinkering with the engine of the *Spoondrift*, to bother about the rival campers. The other Walcott Hall boys went fishing off the rocks in the still water, and caught a mess of cunners that made a nice change from the usual cod, or flounders.

"Never knew there were so many kinds of fish," Cloudman admitted. "Al-

ways thought, till I came East, that fish was just *fish*. All tasted the same. But even those squirmy eels taste better than Texas venison."

"What's Texas venison?" questioned Phillips.

"Jackrabbits," Applejack replied, grinning.

"Fellers in N'York, they tell me, pay a dollar a pair for them. They kill 'em in big drives in Texas, and use flivvers instead of ponies to run 'em. Then they cold storage the jacks and push 'em up to the Eastern market. All they are worth in Texas is a bad word; and a dollar a pair in the effete East. Some dish, jackrabbit stew—if a feller has good teeth."

Pudge MacComber came over to the Walcott Hall camp about dark, to borrow a hatchet. He seemed rather embarrassed about asking for it, his cousin's insistence evidently having been all that brought him.

"We've mislaid ours somewhere," he confessed. "We've got to cut some more firewood and a few tent pegs. The wind, the other day, pretty near blew our tents away."

"You're welcome to the hatchet," Kingdon said. "Thought you had a fellow with you who knew all about camping—and was cookee, too?"

"That Injun," Cloudman put in.

"He's a good deal of a frost," admitted Pudge. "He's lazy. Won't work any more than he can help. And his cooking!" The fat youth sighed, shaking his head mournfully. "I know I'm going to reduce all right if we stay on Storm Island. I do all the work and haven't had a square meal once since we landed."

"You're looking bad. I noticed that when you came along," Red Phillips said with commiseration. "You tottered. I bet you've lost half a pound."

"Oh, you can laugh—"

"No laughing matter," said the lean Cloudman, "to lose flesh. I lost some once, and it made me lopsided. Got thrown from my pony and scraped off some thigh meat against a rock, on one leg. Walked with a list to starboard, as you mariners would say, for a couple of weeks."

"I wouldn't care to lose flesh that way," Pudge said. "When I'm not fat I don't feel so well. I begin to get weak and all run down—"

"So that you don't cast a shadow, I s'pose?" suggested Peewee.

"Oh, I guess I always cast more of a shadow than you do, little feller," Pudge told him, to the amusement of the others.

"But if you get thin, I suppose you are afraid of losing your right proportions," Kingdon chimed in gravely. "You know, a fellow hates to lose his shape."

"According to what kind of a shape he's got," muttered Peewee.

"Why, the rules for perfect pulchritude are easily remembered," the curly-haired youth said with serious mien. "You know, 'Twice around the thumb, once around the wrist; twice around the wrist, once around the neck; twice around

the neck, once around the waist'—"

"And in this fellow's case twice around the waist, once around the 'big top' at a circus, I s'pose?" put in Red. "Just about."

"Oh," said Pudge, mildly, "you fellows can poke fun if you like. I don't mind. I'm used to it anyway. I'd rather be fat than uncomfortable. Besides, after what you fellers did for us the other day—"

"Now don't get maudlin," begged Kingdon quickly. "The least said the soonest mended. We had to save you from a watery grave! We're not proud of it."

This rather closed Pudge up, and he mournfully went away. Midkiff said with scorn:

"They must be having a nice time over at that camp! They don't open their tent-flies before nine o'clock. Sleep away the best of the day. Then they lay around and squabble most of the time, I s'pose."

"Don't let their behavior worry you, Grouch," Red advised. "You haven't got to play father confessor to that bunch."

"I'd like to give 'em penance, all right," growled Midkiff. "What they need is a rattling good shaking up. Being half an ace from drowning the other afternoon wasn't enough."

It looked, the next forenoon, as though the "shaking up" was about to come to the first party of campers on Storm Island. Kingdon and his mates had got the engine of the catboat into running order, and were just about to try her out, when the sound of another motor approaching brought them all up standing. Motor crafts, thus far, had not been very plentiful in the sound.

"See who's coming to be in our midst again," invited Peewee. "It's the jolly constable."

"Now we're in for it!" predicted Midkiff, looking solemnly at Rex.

The latter seemed the least disturbed of any of them. Indeed, he smiled quietly and went about preparing for the trial of the catboat.

"Is he coming here?" queried Cloudman after a minute.

"Not first, I guess," said Red, who was likewise pretty solemn. "But he'll be here all right. He's going over to take another squint at that permit, I s'pose. If you had only let us get that paper away from those fellows, Rex—"

"Never mind the ifs and ands, Red," said Rex. "Let's go over there and see what happens."

"He's got something in reserve," declared Peewee.

"I believe he has," muttered Red.

Kingdon went about his business, without further word. In a minute or two their own engine was going, and soon the *Spoondrift* moved easily out of the cove. By that time Enos Quibb's motorboat was almost at the landing where the

two canoes lay.

The Walcott Hall boys could see that the fellows at the other camp had been rounded up by the excitable Pudge. They were all at the landing when Enos Quibb shut off his engine and stepped forward to make fast a line. Joe Bootleg remained in the background; but even he, it seemed, was more than usually interested.

The boys aboard the catboat could not hear what first was said by the constable, but they heard Horace Pence laugh his sneering, musical laugh, and reply: "You're going to have some job proving that, aren't you, Mr. Quibb? We have the permit—"

"Then, by gum," the excited constable shouted, "you stole it! That's what you did. You ain't got no right to it."

"You'd better try to prove that, Enos," Horace said, still laughing.

"I'm a-goin' to," cried Quibb. "I'm a-goin' to take you fellers—all of ye—over to Squire Lowder's, an' let him decide this business. No school of tomcods like yeou, is goin' to fool Enos Quibb right along. No, sir!"

CHAPTER XX. KINGDON'S SURPRISING MOVE.

The catboat's engine was suddenly shut off, and then there was no sound from the water to break the silence that had fallen on the group ashore. Before anybody aboard the *Spoondrift* could speak, Kingdon gestured for silence.

"All right," muttered Red. "I'm willing to get it from here."

Down from the bank above the mooring place came the voice of Horace Pence, cool as ever. Kingdon, who had begun to consider the fellow's bad qualities as uppermost, again felt a thrill of admiration for him.

"Now, Quibb, you know very well you can't do that," Horace was saying soothingly, but with restrained laughter in his voice. "Why bother to try and frighten us?"

"I'll show you—"

"You'll show us nothing but warrants for our arrest," retorted Pence. "You know that's the best you can do—summons us to court. If you think we have been trespassing here, that's your limit. You can't scare us a little bit."

"Oh, I can't, hey?" blustered Enos.

"No. Remember we have shown you the permit from the Manatee Lumber

Company.”

”I know all about that,” said Enos, his lean jaws seeming to bite off the tart words. ”But ’tain’t yours. You stole it—or somethin’. I know you ain’t that Kingdon feller, now. That’s flat.”

”You know a lot,” said Pence. But, before speaking, he had hesitated just an instant. His black eyes had glanced downward and marked the catboat under the bank, and the listening party in her. For that instant, indeed, his gaze fell on Rex Kingdon’s face. The latter had smiled suddenly.

”You know a lot,” repeated Horace Pence.

”I got you foul, young feller,” said Enos, evidently happy to say so. His pale eyes gleamed; his freckled face was roseate; he showed all the venom of the shallow mind and vindictive nature. ”You pack up—all five of ye—an’ git off Storm Island. I’m giving you a chance, when I might have got warrants and pulled ye.”

”Say not so!” begged Pence. ”You wouldn’t really arrest us, Mr. Quibb?”

”Wouldn’t I?” returned the constable. ”I wish I’d gone to Squire Lowder fust-off and got the warrants. No use doing sech fellers a decent turn. I dunno but I could get ye for false pretenses, takin’ another feller’s name the way you did.”

”I didn’t take the name!” cooed Pence. ”You gave it to me.”

”You showed me that permit, and acted like it was yourn.”

”And isn’t it?” chuckled the black-eyed fellow.

”Not by a long chalk!” cried Enos. ”I know who Rex Kingdon is now.” He turned and pointed to the catboat. ”There he is—that curly-haired chap that thinks himself almost as funny as you be. I l’arned who he was t’other day when he was over to Blackport gettin’ fixin’s for that engine. I heard Val Spear—he’s treasurer of the Manatee Company—call him Rex Kingdon right on the street. You ain’t him, an’ you ain’t got no right to that permit.”

For the instant Horace Pence seemed to have no reply ready, although he was quite at ease. His friends were flustered and terrified.

”There! What did I tell you?” the Walcott Hall boys heard Ben Comas say.

”Nice mess you’ve got us into,” whined Pudge.

”The game’s up,” said Kirby, rather stolidly.

Kingdon made a sign to his friends, and they gathered close about him in the stern of the catboat, which was drifting in nearer to the shore.

”Fellows, I’m about to play the trump,” he said, his eyes laughing but his lips grave. ”Are you with me?”

”What do you mean, Rex?” demanded Midkiff suspiciously.

But Phillips said promptly: ”We’re always with you, Blue-Eyes. Go to it.”

”It’s some foolishness,” began Midkiff again. But Peewee whispered:

”Put on the muffler, Grouch, and let him have his way. King’s always good

fun, no matter what he does.”

”What’s on your mind, Rex?” asked Cloudman, his curiosity also aroused.

”Yes, what are you going to do, pitch in and help Enos clean up the bunch?” asked Red, hopefulness in his tone. ”That would have my approval.”

”I’ll give you another guess,” laughed Rex. ”I’ve a plan that beats thrashing that crowd, much as they deserve it.”

”Unfold it to us,” urged Midkiff, still in doubt, ”if it’s anything sensible.”

”Bide a wee,” restrained Rex. ”You’ve got to back me up. No balking.”

”Confound it!” exclaimed Cloudman, ”you haven’t told us your scheme.”

”No time to discuss it,” said Kingdon. ”You’ve got to take my plan on trust.”

”Now I know it’s something foolish,” declared John Midkiff.

The nose of the catboat rubbed against the beach, and Rex was the first one ashore. ”Follow your resourceful leader,” he called, laughing over his shoulder at the gloomy face of Midkiff. ”Bring a line ashore, Jawn, and moor the old girl. We don’t want to lose her, now that we’ve just got the engine to working like a chawm.”

Cool as ever, he led the way up the bank. For the last few moments the Walcott Hall boys had given no attention to what was being said or done on the island, but now they saw that Enos had stepped back a pace, and had his little black billy in his hand. He was threatening:

”You fellers pull up them stakes and begin packin’ your stuff, or I’ll crack a few heads. I know what I’m doin’. Squire Lowder’ll stand back of me.”

Kingdon came up to the constable, with a good natured smile, and laid a soothing hand upon his shoulder.

”Why all the disturbance, Mr. Squibb?” he asked. ”Don’t get overheated on this sweet and pleasant day——”

”And this bunch of fellows is a sweet and pleasant crowd, I s’pose, Mr. Kingdon?” snapped Enos. ”And my name’s Quibb, not Squibb, if you please.”

”Sure, Mr. Fibb. My mistake,” said Rex. ”What’s doing?”

”You know well enough,” said the angry Enos. ”You helped fool me, too——”

”Never!” groaned Kingdon. ”You know, Mr. Constable, you are a man who can’t be fooled by a parcel of boys. You said so.”

”Aw—well. I wasn’t *sure*. This chap had that permit from the Manatee Company.”

”Of course,” said Kingdon easily. ”It didn’t matter who showed you the paper—as long as we had it and you saw it?”

Midkiff uttered a grunt that was almost an ejaculation of pain. ”I knew it!” he growled.

Mr. Quibb was not the most startled by Kingdon’s query, however; Horace Pence almost leaped forward to stare into the smiling visage of the leader of the

Walcott Hall boys.

"What d'ye mean?" snarled the constable. "That these fellers—"

"Certainly, Quibb," Kingdon replied, quite seriously despite his good-humored look. "You know, it says nothing in the permit about the number of my party. Those other fellows are my friends; at least, I call them so. See the love-light in their eyes when they look at me?"

Unable to fathom the bantering lad, Quibb looked a good deal like a fish out of its element, his mouth open and eyes staring.

"Come hither, Mr. Constable," Rex said, drawing the man beyond earshot of the others. "Let me bare my heart to you."

"You can't bluff me!"

"Oh, I wouldn't think of trying it! This is no bluff. I'm going to spill the truth, and nothing but the truth, into your copious ear. Those fellows did not belong to my party—originally."

"There!" exclaimed the constable, swelling again. "That's what I knowed. They stole that permit."

"At least, they *have* it," agreed Kingdon. "But that is not the point. The permit is issued to 'Rex Kingdon and friends,' but it doesn't say how many friends. And so, Mr. Cribb—"

"Quibb!" ejaculated the constable.

"Oh, pardon me!" pleaded Rex. "I'm dreadfully forgetful of names, but I always remember faces—like yours. Now, I want you to be a good fellow. You'd be almost lovable, really, if you would let your natural kindness of heart have full play. Say or do nothing to sour the milk of human kindness that lies—"

"What do you want me to do?" broke in the constable, nettled yet impressed by Kingdon's airy manner.

"Remember that black-eyed chap jumped into the drink to snatch you from a watery grave the other day. Be grateful. Let us alone to fight our own jolly battles. I claim them as my friends now, and therefore you really have no right to drive them away. What do you say—"

"I say you're the sassiest set of boys I ever see. But it's a fact you got me out of a pickle," acknowledged the freckled-face constable, putting away his billy.

"All's well that ends well," quoth Kingdon briskly. "If anybody asks you, you can tell 'em we've got two camps over here for reasons of our own. It's nobody's business as long as you are satisfied."

"Sure not. I know I'm right now," said the constable, nodding his head. "I heard Val Spear speak to you as though he knowed you well."

"Thank you so much!" cried Rex, seizing Enos by the hand and almost wringing his arm off with enthusiasm. "I knew you were naturally a broad-minded and generous man. Must you hurry away so soon? I hate to see you

go, but—good day, good day.”

The two parties of boys stood waiting and silent until the man had got aboard his motorboat and started it chugging away from Storm Island.

CHAPTER XXI.

REVENGE.

”What’s the game?” finally asked Horace Pence, when he was sure the constable was out of hearing.

”Game? No game at all, I assure you,” Kingdon answered gravely. ”Don’t lend yourself to suspicion, as many do, old chap. By the way, hand over that permit now, Horrors. It’s served its purpose in your hands, I am sure.”

Pence produced the paper without a moment’s indecision. But he said:

”I’d rather you didn’t think I swiped it out of your jacket pocket, Kingdon. I fancy it must have slipped out when you threw off your jacket that day to play ball. Joe Bootleg found it in the grass, afterward, and brought it to me.”

Kingdon looked straight into the black eyes of Horace as he accepted the permit in its envelope. ”I believe you,” he said simply, putting it into his pocket.

Suddenly the coarse voice of Ben Comas broke in:

”All very fine, but I take it we go, just the same, Horrors. ’Twould have been better if we had got off the island before all this foolishness happened.”

Kingdon laughed at him cheerfully. ”Not at all necessary. I don’t see why you should leave, now that things are so comfortable and pleasant all around.”

”What’s that?” demanded Pence, plainly startled.

”The island’s a cramped place, I know,” Kingdon responded, with a careless wave of his hand. ”But it’s been more than a little fun rowing with you fellows. It puts quite a tang into the taste of it all. Hate to see you chaps move out when there’s no necessity for it.”

”Listen to that!” ejaculated Red Phillips from the rear.

”So you like a row?” Pence asked Kingdon, having recovered his self-possession.

”It’s better than monotony, though there might be other ways of passing the time.” Saying which, Rex turned his back on Pence and his party and started for the waterside. ”Come on, fellows,” he suggested to his comrades, ”let’s run across to that fishweir over yonder. I see they’re going to haul the trap.”

The five Walcott Hall boys silently boarded the catboat, while Pence and his comrades watched them, equally silent. When the *Spoondrift* was well away from the mooring place of the two canoes, Harry Kirby said:

"What have you got to say about that, Horrors? I don't understand that Kingdon at all, do you?"

Pence did not reply at once. Ben's harsh voice broke in:

"You fellows make me tired! He's got some scheme to come back at us, of course. Why shouldn't he? We ought to get out of here."

"Where'll we go?" complained Pudge MacComber, apprehending work before him.

"Don't ask me." Harry Kirby groaned. "Wish we'd never come."

"We wouldn't if it hadn't been for this crazy Horrors."

"All you can do is growl," flared Kirby, who was Pence's strongest admirer.

"Give that Kingdon and his crew half a show, and they'll get us into hot water of some kind," Ben fumed.

"Listen," commanded the black-eyed chap, whose influence over his mates was by no means dissipated. "I want to know why we should get out of here at all?"

"But, Horrors," Ben said, "you know they'll do something mean to us."

"You're judging them by what you'd do yourself."

"Didn't they take our canoes in the first place?"

"But they didn't keep them," said Horrors. "That Kingdon is as square a chap as I ever saw."

"What's that?" exclaimed Kirby. "Have you fallen in love with him?"

"Well, I can't say I hate him just because he is ready to fight, as long as he fights fair."

"I could lick him, easy," boasted Kirby.

"A lot you could! Ask Joe, here, whether Rex Kingdon's got a hard fist."

The Indian lad's countenance denoted his feelings on this point. Although he did not speak, his expression was a threat that none of the others quite understood.

"Look here," insisted Pence argumentatively, "let's settle this. Why should we leave Storm Island?"

"For one reason," said Kirby, "because Kingdon can get us put off any time he feels like it."

"Will he feel like it?"

"Why won't he?" asked Ben Comas.

"He says," returned Pence, "that he likes to have us here to row with, and why shouldn't we accommodate him? He hasn't got so much the better of us. We've had just as much fun out of it as he and his crowd have."

"Quibb will be coming around again," prophesied Kirby.

"Don't you believe it. Kingdon has settled that. He'll keep away from Storm Island. We'll take Rex Kingdon at his word. He says he likes to fuss with us. Let's give him all the sport in that line he wants."

Joe Bootleg's gloomy face caught the attention of the black-eyed lad. "You going to stay here, Mr. Pence?" the Indian asked.

"That's my intention, Chief."

"Them fellers stay?" demanded Joe, pointing off at the catboat.

"Sure."

The Indian turned and started into the woods. He carried the camp hatchet that had been borrowed from the Walcott Hall boys.

"Where you going, Joe?" asked Ben, as Horace gave the fellow no further attention.

"Chop more firewood," grunted Joe Bootleg.

But he clutched the hatchet handle with a grimness that might have startled the others had they seen his face. The fire of revengeful determination burned hotly in Joe Bootleg's heart.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BOULDER ON THE HILLSIDE.

The *Spoondrift* and her crew came back from the fishweir with several varieties of edible fish that the pondmen had given the boys. They had a feast that night at the camp, and even Cloudman admitted that, for once, it was a "square meal."

Midkiff, unlike the others, could not easily forgive Rex and the others for letting Horace Pence and his friends off so easy.

"You're piling up trouble for yourself and us," he told Kingdon. "Fellows like those over at that camp would cut your tugs and let the horse run away any time you weren't looking—and think 'twas fun."

"We'll be looking," laughed Kingdon.

"Yes, we will! That Indian, for instance, could be planning something against us right now, and we wouldn't know it, would we? He's a wicked-looking chap, and he hasn't forgotten how you mauled him around that night in the dark."

"Nor have I forgotten how he mauled me," said Rex, with some feeling. "My dainty little foot is tender yet. But maybe my upper deck is loaded with a grand

scheme to get even." He finished with a soft laugh.

"Yes it is!" scoffed the gloomy one, with scorn. "I know about the kind of plans you have in your mind."

Midkiff really admired Kingdon's whole-hearted and friendly way of settling the matter of the permit and the remaining on the island of the other campers. Nobody but Rex, it seemed to him, could have done just that—and done it so well. Furthermore, he had not lingered around to receive any expressions of gratitude, or to make the chaps with Pence feel uncomfortable. He had taken his own friends away at once, leaving the surprised and shame-faced crowd to recover from the jolt his action had given them.

Midkiff was sure he couldn't have done such a thing himself. Indeed, he wouldn't have done it under any circumstances. Heaping coals of fire on the heads of his enemies was not John's way of settling any dispute. He could fight, or he could argue; but it was not in him to be a generous—indeed a prodigally generous—enemy. Besides, he did not believe that it would improve Pence and his friends. He considered them beneath contempt and incapable of holding a generous sentiment for an instant.

Kingdon suddenly laughed at him again. "I'm glad I haven't your suspicious nature, Jawn," he drawled, shrugging his well-built shoulders.

They went up to the open field in the middle of the island the next forenoon, and before long Pence and his three white companions strolled into view. If Ben, Pudge and Kirby felt any embarrassment, and showed it, not so Horace Pence. He was his usual careless and cheerful self.

Kingdon left it to Pence to make advances, and presently Horace wanted to try his arm. Kingdon caught for him, never uttering a word of encouragement or criticism all the time the black-eyed chap was working, although Pence was using all the speed at his command.

"I say," called Horace at last, "what d'you think of them?"

"You don't want to know what I think, do you?" Kingdon asked quietly.

"I wouldn't ask if I didn't," returned the heated Pence.

"I think you're likely to throw your arm out of joint, if you keep on," was Kingdon's frank response. "I'd take care if I were you. You don't put the ball over; you let it fly anywhere, as long as you put steam behind it."

Pence was unable to hide his chagrin. He flung the ball as far as he could across the field, and sullenly started back for his camp. But he slipped on his sweater as he went. He had remembered Kingdon's advice of the week before.

"He got what he asked for, and didn't like it," Peewee snickered.

"Shows his bringing up!" muttered Cloudman.

"Regular Chesterfield for manners!" chuckled Red Phillips.

Midkiff, too disgusted to speak at all, looked his contempt.

They forgot that it took training of the right kind for a young fellow to get into the habit of controlling his temper. Kingdon might have been intentionally aggravating, for he went off whistling in the other direction, and alone. One could seldom tell whether Rex was perturbed or not. At least, on this particular occasion he showed no apparent feeling for Horace Pence.

None of the others followed Rex at the moment, and he slipped into the woods alone while his mates were picking up the bats and recovering other articles. He did not care to be questioned just then. Nevertheless he was smiling. He was wise enough to appreciate how Horace Pence felt.

Going whistling down the aisles of the wood, but bearing off the usual route to their camp, Kingdon suddenly came upon something that stopped him.

"Hul-lo!" he murmured, startled if not surprised. "Who's been chopping down trees?"

The spot was almost directly above their camp. The steep hillside fell away to the small plateau on which the Walcott Hall boys had set up their tent. Below that was the cove, with its pebbly, narrow, crescent beach, and the catboat courtesying to the swell of the water. Kingdon could get a glimpse of her stick through the trees.

Here, just before him, a goodly sapling had been cut off near the ground. That, in itself, was an infringement of the rules laid down by the Manatee Company. Rex had been warned against cutting wood of this kind for any purpose whatsoever on Storm Island.

"Now, who did this?" muttered the lad again. "Surely none of our fellows."

His quick eye saw something in the grass, and he hastened to pick it up. A hatchet, with one side of the blade rusted.

"Our extra hatchet! The one that MacComber fellow borrowed. I'm sure he didn't return it!"

He went on a little way and saw where the sapling, all of four inches through at its butt, lay half hidden in the rank weeds and grass. It seemed that the stick had been cut wantonly, after which the marauder had tried to hide it.

"I'm sure none of our fellows would have done such a thing. Here's the hatchet," Kingdon told himself.

He went on a little farther, and came to the opening above the camp. The forest trees seemed to withdraw on either side and leave a small, wedge-shaped pasture on the hillside, with the thin edge of the wedge up-hill. Down the slope, not two hundred yards away, was the tent.

Kingdon's gaze swept the opening in the forest, studying every detail of the narrow landscape. Suspicion had been bred in his mind. It was more, an intuition that all was not right.

He walked slowly down the hill, observing several outthrust rocks and one

rounded boulder directly in his path. Apparently a dog had tried to dig a woodchuck out from under the upper edge of that boulder.

Kingdon passed on. Then he turned, startled, and went back to the gray rock. The thought had flashed through his mind that there were no dogs on Storm Island!

At least, he had neither seen nor heard a dog since his party had arrived. A dog had not dug under that boulder, nor would a groundhog have left so much loose soil at the mouth of his burrow.

Kingdon stopped and studied the situation. There was a small rock lying just above the boulder and about two feet from its uphill edge. This smaller stone had recently been placed there.

He walked back to the felled sapling at the edge of the wood. Its butt, freshly cut from the stump, should be white. Instead it was crusted with earth.

Rex returned down the hill again, and stood for a minute by the great gray boulder, testing one hand upon it, thinking. His gaze scrutinized minutely every foot of the slope below him. Presently, his face frowning and thoughtful, he sought the path by which he and his mates usually descended the hillside, and arrived at the camp before the others.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A THREATENING SKY.

Rex had brought the camp hatchet and placed it where everybody could see it. None of his fellow-campers spoke of its return. They were all hungry, and they hurried through dinner, took a nap, and then made for the sound while the tide was up.

There was a good diving place just east of their cove, and within a few rods of the spot where the other fellows moored their canoes. When the Walcott Hall boys arrived at the bathing place the four white youths from the other camp were already in the water. Joe Bootleg seemed to have a constitutional objection to water for bathing purposes.

With a driftwood plank they had found, Midkiff and Phillips rigged a diving-board. The rocks which weighted its shoreward end sometimes slipped off and "dumped" the diver ingloriously into the deep hole under the bank, but that merely added to the sport.

Peewee hailed Pudge MacComber, with whom he had struck up something of a doubtful friendship, and soon four of the other fellows were at the spot where the Walcott Hall boys bathed.

Pence, a fine swimmer, dove like a shark and stayed under water longer than anybody in the crowd, save Kingdon himself. The two raced informally from the diving hole to the canoes and back again, and it seemed that Pence had a wee bit the better of it.

"You do that Australian crawl fine," Kingdon told the black-eyed chap frankly.

"That's one thing I do all winter. There's a corking pool in our town gym., and I don't often miss a day."

"Swimming and rowing are as good all round training stuff as a fellow can do," Kingdon said. "Gives you wind and what Downs, our coach, calls stamina. You handle a paddle like a veteran, Pence. How are you with the oar?"

"So-so," Horace replied languidly. "Had good crews at Belding where I went for a year. I made Number Two eight."

"Belding?" ejaculated Kingdon. "Did you go to Belding?"

"I went and then I came away again," laughed Pence with that unpleasant curl of his lip. "Didn't stay long."

"Why not?"

"I rather think my absence was requested because of something regarding a calf being led into chapel and tied in the pulpit. Had a kind of a weak-voiced chaplain and the calf helped him out in bellowing."

"Boys will be boys," Kingdon said sadly, "and calves will be calves. Sometimes it's hard for the faculty to tell 'em apart."

Pence's eyes twinkled with appreciation. "At least, they didn't make the mistake of rustivating the calf instead of me."

"After that?" quizzed Rex.

"After what?"

"Belding wasn't your last school? Where do you go now?"

"I've finished school. Nothing to it," yawned Pence.

"That reminds me," Kingdon said quickly. "Those fellows sailing the *Nothing To It* claim to be the fastest crew in these parts in eight-oared shell."

"*Nothing To It?*" echoed Pence.

Rex told him about the Blackport Boat Club fellows and their boasting. "I'd dearly love to get hold of that old boat of theirs, train a bit, and see how bad they could trim us in a race."

"But you five fellows can't handle an eight-oared shell," the black-eyed youth said.

"No. But we five, with your four, could. Even Pudge would do as ballast.

Have to work in Hicks as cox."

Pence stared and laughed shortly. "You're a queer fellow," he said. "Anybody'd think we were bosom friends of yours."

"Bosom enemies," responded Kingdon. "What's the odds, enemies or friends? We might work up a good crew and have a little fun with that *Nothing To It* crowd."

"You must have sport on the brain, Kingdon," drawled Horace.

"Sure. Clean sport. There's nothing like it. I can have a fine time with the worst enemy I've got, if he only plays the game—*any* game—fair."

"Suppose you've got plenty of deadly enemies?" was the other's rejoinder.

"Got one, I fancy, right in your crowd," Kingdon said, with rather a meaning inflection to his voice.

Horace stared at him. "Oh, I wouldn't worry about Ben Comas."

"I don't. It's your Indian chum, Joe Bootleg."

"Joe? Tut, tut! He's as tame as—"

"As a tarantula," finished Kingdon, laughing again.

"I'll have an eye on him," said Pence, rather sneeringly smiling once more.

"But you don't expect a fellow like him to play any game fair?"

"Not so's you'd notice it," Kingdon cheerfully returned. "But you other fellows, now—take for instance yourself, Horrors."

The other straightened up on the rock where they were sitting in the sun, at a distance from the other fellows, and looked with hard eyes at Rex. "What do you mean?" he questioned. "I don't just get you."

"Consider your pitching," Kingdon said coolly. "It's crude."

"Crude?"

"Very."

"Say, I've got some reputation as a pitcher around home."

Rex repressed a laugh. "Others before you have been Walter Johnsons around home, but have lost their reputations as soon as they got away anywhere."

"What's the matter with my pitching, anyhow?"

"I've told you that you lack control, but you need experience and training in other things. Speed is a great thing, I'll admit, when a pitcher mixes it with brains."

"Perhaps I've got as many brains as your friends Midkiff and Cloudman," flared Horace. "I suppose you think them Mathewsons?"

"They're steady and dependable, at least."

"Plugging horses!" snapped Pence. "No real stuff."

"I've seen fellows who didn't succeed though everybody thought they had the 'real stuff,' and I've seen 'plugging horses' who climbed steadily and surely to the top. Brilliancy is sometimes nothing but a flash in the pan."

"Is that so?" demanded the heated Horace. "I don't suppose I'd make any showing at all on the diamond of that fancy prep. school of yours?"

"Oh, you're baseball material; no doubt of that," answered Kingdon carelessly. "I figure Stanley Downs would place you about on the Number Three scrub."

"*In-deed?*" exploded Horace.

"Yes. We're weak in our pitching staff, too. I could use a southpaw like you, even if you came in as a freshman, with the school nine this fall."

Kingdon said it in such a matter-of-fact way that the other stared at him for a full minute before demanding: "What's this you're driving at? What's the big idea?"

"I might use a fellow like you on the pitching staff of the Walcott Hall nine, if he was amenable to discipline and I could work with him this summer."

"You go fish!" jeered Pence, rising suddenly to cast himself into the sea and swam away.

"Now, let that idea rattle about in that dome of yours, Horrors," chuckled Rex, also rising. "We'll see what comes of it."

That evening, while supper was cooking, Rex strolled up the hill overlooking the camp. He glanced at the boulder, and again found the stick that had been cut and hidden at the edge of the wood. Apparently no one had been there since he made his previous examination.

The next day the Walcott Hall boys saw Joe Bootleg and Harry Kirby paddle away from the island in one of the canoes, and knew the pair were going for provisions. When Kingdon and his chums went up to the ball field, the former was not surprised to see Horace Pence there, alone.

Pence lay languidly in the shade, chewing a grassblade, and watched the workout of Midkiff and Cloudman, without comment. On this occasion Kingdon was intentionally sharp with both his moundsmen. He criticized them so severely that Midkiff became a boiling volcano of wrath, and Applejack was as wild as a tiger. But neither of them answered back.

Further than being catcher, Rex was captain of the Walcott Hall nine. Off the field he was even more easy and democratic than most fellows, but in practice or in a game he was the leader, and would brook no rebellion against his authority.

When Cloudman had come in and joined the sullen Midkiff in the shade, Rex whipped around to look at Horace Pence. "Want to get out there and see if you can find the pan to-day?" he asked. "I can give you a little time before sending those babies of mine out to practice base throwing."

"If you talk to me the way you have been ballyraggin' those chaps, I'll maybe punch your head," drawled Horace.

"That would be careless of you. You might make me cry. You might wake

up," Kingdon shot at him with surprising fierceness, "and find yourself in the hospital!"

Horace laughed. Then he drawled, as he walked out toward the pitcher's box: "My goodness! You're some bully, aren't you? Where's your umpire?"

"Want one?"

"I'm going to show you I can cut the platter."

"I don't see any of your crew here."

"Call one of yours. I can stand him. That sunny-tempered chap you call Midkiff is my choice. He just loves me, I know. If he says it's a fair ball I shall know I've earned it."

"Jawn, as a favor to me, please," begged Rex, adjusting his mitt.

He knew Midkiff was doubtless stewing in the red-pepper of his own temper. Therefore he was suddenly mild as milk in begging John's assistance; so mild, indeed, that John was forced to repress a smile as he reluctantly came forward.

With Pence working, however, Rex continued mild and encouraging, almost complimentary at times; for he was honestly desirous of developing this southpaw with the phenomenal speed. To Kingdon's mind, here was a fellow who, having speed, could be taught control; a fellow who, if he wished, could contain himself and be, on the surface at least, as cold as a glacier.

When Horace Pence considered it best to check his temper, he could do so. Kingdon had perceived that. The question was, did he care enough about baseball and about excelling in the game to hold a tight rein on that flaring rage that the lift of his upper lip indicated?

With Midkiff and Cloudman, both tempestuous natures, there was an advantage. Each was inspired by the thought that he was working for his Walcott Hall; and the biggest and most sweetening thing in a school-boy's life is his loyalty to his school. In a miniature way, it is the feeling which every citizen should hold for his country; it is that not easily explained virtue called patriotism.

Somewhere else it has been pointed out that Rex Kingdon was so successful in molding his comrades, even those who did not much admire him, to his will because he possessed an ability to read character. It was really the foundation of his success in sports.

He had read Horace Pence like an open book from the start. He saw just the sort of hot-as-fire, cold-as-ice kind of a youth Horace was. Reckless, bold, dishonorable, yet clean in his habits because he abhorred viciousness. Pence was secretly proud of his influence over others, but too proud in another way to put forth much effort to hold that influence. Never, for one moment, did he think of exercising his power for the good of others.

For all such faults, Rex believed that discipline of the right sort would turn

Horace into a real pitcher and a real man as well. Everything depended upon leading him into the proper path through an appeal of some sort that, while opening his eyes to what was wrong, would rouse his ambition to do right.

Rex kept all this to himself. On this present occasion, despite all that had led up to Horace Pence's work-out, with Midkiff as umpire, the session went through, as Peewee said, "without a skid." Even Midkiff, had he admitted it, would have been forced to acknowledge that the dark-eyed fellow showed distinct signs of improvement.

"How does the arm feel?" asked Kingdon, when they had finished.

"Just getting warmed up—as though I hadn't used it at all."

"Therefore now's the time for you to come in from practice. It's all right under conditions that demand it, to put everything you've got on the ball and work till the old wing just about drops off. But overwork in practice is as foolish and harmful as too little work. Some fellows, who might be pitchers, kill their arms before they ever get into any real games."

Pence did not scoff at this. There was nothing offensive or "preachy" in the way Rex spoke. His manner was as sincere and friendly as if Horace had been one of his chosen chums.

That afternoon the mainland grew hazy, clouds began to gather, and a threatening sky presaged heavy weather.

"Seems to me those canoeing fellows have bad luck," Red Phillips said, as the Walcott Hall boys lazed around the campsite waiting for a contrary fire to burn up briskly so supper could be made. "Look at it now."

"Hasn't that Injun and Kirby got back?" questioned Peewee.

"If they have, I don't see the second canoe over there," Red yawned.

"If they haven't started from Blackport by this time somebody'll tell them not to," Midkiff said.

"They had a leg-o'-mutton sail," said Kingdon. "They could skim over with this breeze. It won't rain yet awhile, and the wind's only puffy."

"I'd rather be on *terra firma* just the same than out in a canoe on this sound," Red declared.

Without feeling any disturbance about the absent Indian and Kirby, Kingdon climbed to a point above the camp where he could see far away along the sound shore of the island to the westward. In fact, he stood upon the great gray boulder which had already attracted his attention.

Was that a small sail away to the west? He had no glass, and could not be sure. If it was, the craft was so close under the island that it almost immediately was wiped from the range of his vision. It might have been nothing but a flash of surf. If it were a boat, it had been beached in safety by its crew, who feared the threatening aspect of sea and sky more than they did the sign-boards of the

Manatee Lumber Company.

Rex was climbing down from the eminence when he fancied he felt the boulder move under him. His efforts to descend seemed to contribute a rocking motion to the granite.

"A rocking stone?" muttered Kingdon, leaping down. "If it is so easily tipped off its balance—"

He tried a dozen times, and from as many angles, to rock the boulder. It weighed several tons and of course he might as well have taken hold of the corner of Old Hall and tried to topple it over.

Finally he went back to the tent, for the other fellows were calling him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LUCKY MOVE.

The wind began droning like a monster pipe-organ through the wood. The thunder of the surf sent its solemn cadence to their ears from the seaward side of Storm Island. Night was shutting down threateningly and pregnant with the possibility of coming disaster.

They were comfortable enough under the break of the hill. If worse came to worse, they could clip aboard the *Spoondrift* and take shelter in her cabin. She was not likely to pitch much here in the cove, with the wind in its present quarter.

Red took Peewee in his arms, despite that infant's strenuous objections, and sang to him:

"Rock-a-bye, baby, on the tree top!
When the wind blows the cradle will rock."

"I'll bounce a rock off your top story—that's the sort of a rock I'll give you!" threatened Hicks. "What do you think you're doing, nursing a first-form kid?"

The evening promised to be tempestuous, both in the tent and out. The atmospheric pressure has something to do with the brittleness of human temper at such times. Midkiff and Cloudman got into a wrangle that Kingdon had to settle with some abruptness, and Hicks had a chip on his shoulder most of the time. After a while, getting tired of it, Rex called sharply:

"Stop the fussing. I have something serious to say. This tent isn't right.

I haven't been satisfied with its position since it was raised. It isn't properly sheltered from the wind, and we're going to have some wind to-night, my husky lads. Come on, let's move it before it gets any darker."

"Move it!"

"It should be at least twenty yards over here to the east," insisted Rex. "No time like the present. Give a hand." He began to pull up stakes.

"You're crazy, Rex," Midkiff said.

"Let the tent alone!" cried Cloudman.

"Ain't to-morrow another day?" queried Peewee shrilly, almost in tears. "I don't want to work any more to-night."

"This tent is going to be moved to-night," asserted the leader of the party.

"You're foolish, Rex," Midkiff again said.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Peewee. "I don't see—"

"You don't have to," Kingdon said with sharpness. "Come, now! Think I'm going to do this all alone? Want to get it set up again before the rain comes."

"I won't do it!" Phillips protested. "It's foolishness. You're using the steel fist without any reason."

Midkiff yielded. "Rex is within his rights. He's captain. If he says it's moving day, why move we must. But to-morrow we'll see about this."

"You'll have to show us why and what-for to-morrow, then," said Cloudman morosely. "I can obey orders as well as the next one. But these are tyrannical. I didn't know what I was letting myself in for. This will need a lot of explaining to satisfy *me*."

It was a grouchy bunch that tackled the job. Before starting for the summer camp Rex had been unanimously chosen captain, and they had agreed to obey every order given by him. This, of course, was quite necessary aboard the *Spoondrift*. Discipline had become somewhat lax ashore, but Kingdon still had the right to command, if he wished to enforce it.

It was necessary to get out the lanterns before they were through, and ere the job was finished it had begun to rain.

Some of their "dunnage" got damp, and when Hicks got into his nightshirt the bottom of it was sopping wet. He almost frothed at the mouth beneath the chaffing of the others.

The rainfall began and continued without the roll of thunder or the flash of lightning. It was a tempest, nevertheless. Harder and harder the rain drummed on the canvas roof. The torrential downpour would have drowned conversation had the boys attempted it.

Their five cots were arranged just as they had been before, but somehow they did not now seem so comfortable. Peewee growled about his nightshirt, and Cloudman snickered. In the dark the little fellow tried to smash his tormentor

with his own hard, hay-stuffed pillow. When he got hold of it again the pillow was wet.

"The water's leaking in under the tent, King!" snarled Peewee. "You got us in a nice mess!"

"In the morning you shall take a pick and shovel, honey, and dig a nice trench all around."

"I'll see you hanged first!" bawled the rebel.

"Go to sleep and forget it," advised Red.

They all got to sleep finally. But it was not yet morning when they were awakened again by Peewee, who seemed to be having a nightmare.

"That blamed infant!" Midkiff was saying with shocking emphasis. "I never did see such a pestiferous insect."

Hicks was squealing: "Stop it! Stop! 'Tain't time to get up. That's only the first bell. Slop any more of that water on me, and I won't leave you enough to wash your face in!"

"Somebody please hit him on the head with the hatchet," urged Phillips.

"Ouch!" bawled the now thoroughly awakened Peewee. "I'm all afloat."

"What d'ye mean—afloat?" demanded Kingdon, sitting up.

"Water's dripping ri-right into my ear," wailed Hicks.

"Ahoy! She's sprung a leak! Man the lifeboats!" came from Red Phillips. "All hands to the pumps."

Then they heard something which at first they thought was the rain increasing. It seemed to be rushing down the hill upon them in a regular flood. Then, with a rumble and roar that seemed to rock the earth itself, an avalanche fell upon the plateau.

Kingdon sprang up, seized the lantern that was burning low, turned up the wick, and got outside as quickly as possible. Midkiff was at his heels. In bare feet, they slopped through the two-inch flood that ran all around the tent. The rain was pouring steadily down. Through the darkness and the downpour they saw, just about where the tent had formerly stood, a bulky object around which the rain smoked.

"Mercy, Rex! What is it?" Midkiff gasped.

"The boulder," Kingdon said in a muffled, almost choky voice.

"Boulder?"

"It overhung the camp. I—I was afraid of it. That's why I had the tent shifted."

"Good boy!" Midkiff patted his shoulder. "Your hunch saved us."

Both recovered themselves as the others rushed out of the tent. No boy cares to reveal, even to his closest friend, the deeper feelings of his nature, and Rex and Midkiff said nothing more about appreciating the wisdom that had saved

them all from disaster.

"Look at that rock!" gasped little Hicks, staring and shivering. "Rex, you kept us from being smashed by making us move."

"It—it was lucky, Rex, that you made us do that," admitted Cloudman.

"You're a wonder!" Red exploded. "If we'd been there we'd been driven three feet under ground. They'd never had to bother to bury us."

Midkiff pointed to the east. "It's almost daybreak. No more sleep."

"I should say not!" Cloudman agreed.

"The rain washed the rock free and sent it down the hill," decided Phillips. "I can understand that, all right. But why did it fall just now? Of course, there's nothing fishy about it, Rex?"

"I couldn't say. A fish might have done it, but he'd had a stiff climb up to where that rock was."

"After that I'm sorry that *you* moved! There's nobody would have done such a thing, anyway."

"Even that scaley Injun wasn't on the island," Applejack added.

"I don't believe our beloved Horace, or any of his bunch, would have strolled out in such a rain," Red went on carelessly.

"Hush!" chided Kingdon. "Evil to him who evil thinks."

"It's knocked all the think out of me," said Cloudman, grinning in a sickly way.

All five felt a seriousness that they feared to display. Boys are prone to consider any show of deeper feeling unmanly.

They started to dress, and found that the most of their garments were more or less wet. As for putting on shoes and socks, that was foolish. The driest place they could find was the cabin of the catboat, and as it was almost high water they easily got aboard. When the oilstove was lighted, Cloudman started to fry soft clams and bacon for breakfast.

"Talk about paradise!" sighed Red, stretching and crowding Peewee into a space about as wide as a knife-edge. "This is it."

"It distinctly is *not* it," denied Hicks. "A sardine in a can feels lonesome, 'side of *me*. Move over, and let a fellow breathe."

Kingdon had not come aboard to stop. Getting into his oilskins, he climbed the hill above the camp alone. He was in a pretty serious mood. The boulder had sheared the sod off the hillside for its entire course. The water was running in a brown flood down the path of the avalanche.

Where the boulder had been set was a hole all of two feet deep, and full of water. The drainage from above, pouring down the hill, seemed to have excavated the earth from all around the station of the boulder. It might be that the huge rock was merely washed out of its bed by the rain and started in its plunge

down the hill.

Kingdon looked farther up the hill. Through the still falling drizzle he mounted the slope a few yards and found the sapling that he had before noted. It had been brought out of the woods and apparently had been put to criminal use. The smaller stone, still in position as a fulcrum, pointed to one answer to the problem. The leverage of that green stick might easily have started the boulder to rolling. The rain had merely helped cover the fact.

In Rex Kingdon's mind a thought took form: "An enemy hath done this!"

CHAPTER XXV. THE EIGHT-OARED SHELL.

The sun broke gloriously through the clouds, and it became a lovely morning. The Walcott Hall boys began finally to feel more cheerful. They spread out their belongings to dry in the sun, and Peewee actually took spade and pick and went to work on the shallow trench and drains that should surround every tent, no matter how good the natural drainage is.

While he was sweating and grunting over his work, he looked off on the water, and promptly called:

"See the ca-noe! Do you see the ca-noe? What is the ca-noe doing?"

"That Indian and Kirby are just getting back from Blackport," said Phillips, after glancing in the same direction.

"They must have started mighty early," Midkiff said. "They've had to beat up the sound against a stiff breeze."

Kingdon said nothing, but he watched the two in the canoe make a landing. The light craft was heavily laden. He was quite sure it had made no quick passage from Blackport Channel; and at sunrise the weather had not cleared.

With an idea in his head that he did not mention to the others, Kingdon wandered away by himself for a tramp along shore, strolling westerly. His chums had expressed their wonderment regarding the rolling of the boulder, all through breakfast and afterward; but they suspected nothing. They were quite satisfied that it had been set in motion by the heavy rain.

Storm Island was several miles long, and it was no inconsiderable walk to the western point of it. As he came within half a mile or so of the high clay bank under which he believed he had seen the small boat take shelter the previous

afternoon, he looked sharply as he went along for signs of a landing on the beach.

He found the place for which he was searching. The canoe had been lifted out and carried into a narrow, sandy and well-drained gully. It had been overturned, and its cargo sheltered beneath it. The marks of two human beings who had crouched under the overturned boat were likewise plainly visible.

Presently he went back to his friends, and found that the boys from the other camp, with the exception of the Indian, had come to see what the boulder and debris on the plateau meant. They had spied the heap soon after the canoe arrived. Horace, of course, was reserved in his observations, as usual. Ben Comas was silent. Pudge was openly congratulatory that nobody was hurt. Kirby did the most talking.

"Wonder our fellows here didn't hear it," he remarked.

"It ought to have been heard in Blackport," Kingdon said grimly.

"You chaps must have slept like the dead, over there at the camp," said Kirby. "I'm sure I should have heard it if I'd been there."

"Perhaps I did hear it," drawled Pence, "but thought it was only Pudge snoring."

Kingdon continued cheerful and talkative while the visitors remained. He did not appear to, but he made friendly advances to Kirby.

"You had a bad night, didn't you?" he questioned. "I guess I saw you and Bootleg making the Clay Head just before the storm burst."

"Wha-at?" cried Kirby. "We didn't either! We stayed at Blackport all night."

"Where'd you stay?" Kingdon asked curiously, with raised eyebrows.

"On—on the wharf. A feller let us sleep on some bags in a fish-shed. If you saw anybody land here last evening, it wasn't us."

He was so voluble and eager to deny it that he attracted Horace's attention. "What's the matter with you, Harry?" the black-eyed fellow drawled. "Having a fit? I heard you say you slept in the fish-house, which is believable; for both you and Joe Bootleg seem to carry a rather fishy odor about you this morning. It wouldn't have been a crime if you *had* reached the Clay Head last night, and were afraid to sail the rest of the way up here." He laughed his unflattering laugh.

Kingdon wondered. He had left the rusted hatchet he had found in the woods stuck in a rotting log in plain view. Pudge came across it.

"My goodness!" said the fat boy, growing red in the face. "I feared that had been lost. Do you know, Hicks, I don't remember bringing that hatchet back after I borrowed it. We found ours the next day."

"Don't ask *me*," Peewee said carelessly. "I don't know a thing about it."

"I found it," Kingdon put in quietly, watching Pudge now.

"Did you?" asked the plump lad. "Where?"

"Where it was lost," returned the other laughing. "Don't need to worry

about it. But you fellows don't want to cut green wood on the island. If one of the Manatee wardens should come over here and find out that you had—"

"Why, I never!" declared Pudge.

Again Horace intervened. "What's all the row?" he queried, strolling up to the group at the log.

"I found a good sized stick cut, up there in the woods," Kingdon told him. "This hatchet that Pudge borrowed of us lay beside the raw stump. That'll never do, you know—cutting well grown saplings is a crime in the eyes of the lumber company."

"You never said a word about it before, King," Hicks observed. "Thought we all understood there was to be no green wood cut."

"We do," Horace said, his eyes narrowing.

"I never did it!" Pudge exclaimed again.

"I'll ask Joe. He's the only one that's likely to have used the hatchet," Horace said grimly. "You know how these Indians look at things, Kingdon. To such fellows a rule is only made to break."

"I wonder," thought Kingdon, "if that isn't pretty nearly the attitude of everybody else?"

To tell the truth, he was puzzled. Joe Bootleg, Kirby, Pudge, even Horace Pence himself, was under suspicion in Rex's mind. As for Ben Comas, sour as the chap appeared, somehow Kingdon did not consider him in any way connected with the affairs of the sapling-lever or the boulder that had rolled down the hill.

It was much too wet that day to get in any baseball practice, but the following afternoon the two parties of campers met on the field. Pence and his followers seemed rather more friendly than before. The two parties of boys mingled and spent an hour in a lively scrub game. Kingdon learned on this occasion that Horace was something of a batter.

"Over the fence and out, boy," the backstop said, grinning at Pence cheerfully. "Some wallop that. We've a real field at the Hall, and that fly would have gone pretty near to the lake. Old Jerry Lane never did better when he got a real clout at the sphere, eh, Red?"

"Lane couldn't do as well," Phillips agreed, with honesty, though still rather niggardly of praise regarding any of Horace Pence's achievements.

"Lane was our 'baby grand,'" laughed Kingdon. "He was some large person. Only trouble with Jerry was, his wits were in his feet and his feet were awfully slow. He ran bases like cold molasses. I bet Pudge could beat him. Made a fair football center, though."

"You fellows at Walcott Hall go in for almost every kind of sport there is, I guess," observed Horace, almost as though he were interested.

"From tiddleywinks to button-button," Kingdon chuckled. "You should see

our gym. There's few prep. schools can beat it, and some of the colleges have to lift their bonnets to Walcott Hall. Old Til loves clean sport himself, and some of the teachers aren't bad at tennis, golf, tatting, embroidery—even football. We've got a prof. of math, who is a regular shark at baseball. Used to coach for some southern college, I believe. Cloud can tell you. Cloud's known Yadkin since he was in pinafores. Cloud, I mean."

"Look here," drawled Horace Pence, his black eyes twinkling, "don't you ever study at that school of yours?"

"Study!" exploded Phillips. "Man, they drive you like a dynamo at that institute of erudition."

"But the dynamo's hooked up to plenty of fun, too," Kingdon hastened to say, favoring the clumsy Red with a frown. "Of course, we have to keep up in the lessons, without too many conditions."

"Textbooks make me sick," yawned Horace. "I could almost like the sport end of it at Belding; but having to get lessons, and face the sour visage of an unappreciative faculty—not for me!"

"Why waste your time with that fellow, King?" complained Red, as they walked down to the camp together. "He's neither fish, fowl, nor good red herring. Thinks he's too old for school, whereas he doesn't know any more than little Peewee."

Suddenly they both saw something in the cove below that brought a cry of surprise to their lips. Along beside the *Spoondrift* another craft was just drifting in, its snowy sail ruffled on the deck.

"Pirates!" shouted Red to the boys behind them.

"That's the *Nothing To It*," Kingdon added, striking into a trot.

The five Walcott Hall youths came scampering down to the shore just as Yansey and his friends carried a line aboard the *Spoondrift*. The Blackport boys hailed the campers vociferously.

"Where's the rest of your band, Kingdon?" Yansey asked, after the greetings were over. "I see you've got two camps. We didn't know which one to anchor off of, but this was nearest."

"The other fellows—Pence and his crowd—like that location best," Rex returned easily. "We eat in two squads, anyway. By and by we'll all go over there. I want you to know Horace."

"Another of your Walcott Hall crowd?"

"Er—not yet," Kingdon admitted with a quiet smile.

The skipper of the *Nothing To It* agreed. "We haven't got to hurry. There's a moon to-night, and we'll sail home by light of her. We're allowed to stay out late since we've put on long pants."

Midkiff cooked a chowder. Cloudman fried fish and made biscuit. The

Walcott Hall boys made great inroads on their choicest canned goods store, to balance the spread the Blackport Boat Club boys had previously given them.

Kingdon found time to sound Yansey regarding the discarded eight-oared shell at the boat-builder's.

"No, he hasn't sold it for us yet. Not much chance of that till next spring when the rowing season opens."

"Give you ten dollars for the use of it this summer," Kingdon offered.

"What for?"

"Well, we don't want to eat it."

"You haven't the men to fill it."

"Yes, I have. Fancy I can lick 'em into shape so as to give you Blackporters a practice race. I've offered ten dollars,—"

"Ten nothing!" cried the skipper of the *Nothing To It*. "If you really think you can get up a crew—"

"Wait till you see us cutting circles round you," laughed Kingdon.

"I'll never live long enough to see that," said Yansey. "You can have the old skiff."

"For ten dollars?"

"For ten kicks! We won't take your money. You look like a square chap to me, Kingdon. You're welcome to the use of our old boat. Perhaps you *might* beat some of the other crews in August."

"We're going to break our backs to beat you Blackport fellows, I warn you," said Rex seriously.

"I admire your nerve!" chuckled Yansey. "But don't expect me to furnish liniment for your broken backs."

CHAPTER XXVI.

PENCE DEFENDS KIRBY.

They went over to the other camp immediately after supper. It was still twilight, and the other campers saw them coming in good season. But the only one of Horace Pence's comrades that got away was Joe Bootleg. He did not linger to meet the fellows from Blackport.

"These are the chaps we can get that shell from, Horace," Kingdon explained, after the brief introductions. "Fact is, they sort of dare us to get into

it and show 'em how much we don't know about rowing."

"Perhaps we can surprise them by showing what we do know about it," laughed Pence.

"No wonder you don't wear hats over here on Storm Island," said Yansey. "None made big enough for your heads."

"Can that fat chap row?" demanded another of the Blackport boys.

"Course I can," spoke up Pudge resentfully. "I'm not so heavy as I look." If there was one form of exercise the fat youth did not shy at it was rowing.

"It's lucky you're not as heavy as you look to be below the ears," drawled Yansey. "You'll make ballast, all right. Five and three are eight, and there's little nubbin for cox. Didn't see him at first."

"I suppose not," sneered Hicks, who nearly always took offense when his physical proportions came into question. "There's a whole lot of things you Blackporters have never seen."

"I suppose we'll have our eyes opened when you fellows get to rowing," laughed the skipper of the *Nothing To It*.

"Quite likely," Phillips chimed in. "Give us two weeks of good weather and we'll show you something in the line of rowing that'll make you blink."

He said this chaffingly, although he was enthused with the spirit of confidence. Even Midkiff showed interest. Cloudman was the only green hand. He had never given much thought to any sport but baseball.

Before they returned to the cove where the catboats lay, Kingdon said to Horace Pence: "Come on over with me in the *Spoondrift* to-morrow, and we'll get the shell."

"You mean to try it?"

"Try what?" asked Rex.

"To beat those fellows at their own game. All these long-shore chaps can row."

"It won't hurt us if they beat us," Kingdon returned. "It'll give us something to do for excitement, anyhow."

"I don't know that I can get our fellows to agree," Horace said slowly. It was the first speech Kingdon had ever heard him make that did not reek of self-confidence.

"You've got influence enough for that," Phillips told him. "Get 'em interested, and we'll keep 'em interested."

"I'll try," Pence promised.

Pence strolled over to the Walcott Hall camp in the morning, soon after breakfast, and signified his readiness to sail for Blackport.

When the *Spoondrift* was out of the cove and headed down the sound under her engine, the breeze being light, Phillips, the third member of the party, asked:

"All your fellows like the idea of rowing? How about Comas?"

"Didn't have any trouble with Ben, for a wonder," Pence answered with a lift of his lip. "Ben kind of likes himself in a boat, anyway. But Harry—"

"That's Kirby?" Kingdon put in carelessly, as Pence hesitated.

"He's always been a shark on boating," the black-eyed chap stated. "I fairly had to tease him to agree to this scheme. I don't know what's got into him. Didn't act like himself at all. Almost as sour as Joe Bootleg."

Pence said this more as a soliloquy than in open answer to Kingdon's question. As mentioned before, Horace was no great talker.

When they were moored in the basin off the boat-builder's yard before noon, Rex and Pence went ashore. The two looked over the Boat Club boys' abandoned shell, and Kingdon noted with glee that Horace betrayed interest in, as well as familiarity with, shell construction, which seemed to prove that he had not been foolishly boasting about his prowess as an oarsman. The boat was rubbed a good deal, and somewhat battered; but there was nothing serious the matter with her. When she was lifted into the water she didn't leak enough to keep her "sweet."

"She's an all-right shell," the master boat-builder said. "Only these rich young fellers over to the Boat Club wanted something fancier. Yes, Mr. Yansey was down here this morning, and said I was to let you have her if you showed up."

"By the way," the man pursued, "you're the party that's camping on Storm Island this summer? Well, you've got canoes over there, haven't you? Didn't two of you come over here t'other day?"

Pence was the one to answer in the affirmative this time, and Kingdon saw that his eyes narrowed and he showed sudden curiosity.

"What of it?" Horace interrogated.

"Nothing," returned the boat-builder, "only I saw that canoe run down to the channel just before the blow came up, and I was a little worried. They got to the island all safe?"

"Next morning?" Pence said quickly.

"I mean that night. They ran out through the channel about ha'f after five."

"They made the island all right," Kingdon coolly interposed, and without looking at Pence. "They landed at Clay Head, and spent the night there."

Horace was a good actor. He controlled his surprise and postponed his questions. Kingdon spied a light cedar boat with nice lines, and before he got through he had made a bargain with the boat-builder to hire that craft as well.

"We've got to have something to try them out in singly," he explained to Pence. "Canoes are no good for that. Besides, we fellows have felt the need of a tender to the *Spoondrift* ever since we reached the island."

When they got under way again the shell was balanced and lashed across the deck of the catboat, while the rowboat bobbed behind, in tow. Red was forward, lying half asleep on the deck, when Horace said in a low tone to Kingdon:

"You knew all the time that Joe and Kirby stayed at Clay Head that night?"

Kingdon nodded. "Thought I saw them making a landing just before sunset. Next morning I went over there and found the place where they spent the night. They must have had a nice dry time of it in that howling rainstorm."

"I did not know it," Pence said simply. "I believed what Harry said about their sleeping in the fish shed."

Kingdon made no rejoinder. After looking at him with apprehensive gaze for a minute, the black-eyed fellow asked: "What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing worth publishing in the newspapers."

"You've got it in your head that they had something to do with shooting that rock down on you fellows?"

"How does it look to you? Somebody had something to do with it, that's sure. They tried to do it before the rain. I found the lever, and saw an attempt had been made to pry loose the bowlder. That's why when I thought I saw those two landing at Clay Head just before nightfall, I had the fellows move the tent."

"Rest of your crowd wise to it, too?" Pence asked.

"Guess not. They think I had a hunch. Call me a wizard." Kingdon chuckled. "I'm not spilling anything to them about it—yet."

"Why not?" Horace's eyes were flashing.

"Because I am not sure who did it—who cut the sapling, dug the hole under the bowlder, and set the other stone there for a fulcrum," Kingdon told him calmly.

"But you believe it was Joe and Kirby?"

"One of them—or both."

"Not both."

"You ought to know about that better than I," Kingdon returned significantly.

"I can't be sure about that Indian," Horace admitted.

"Who ever can be sure about one of those fellows? I have a faint suspicion he's got it in for me. I punched him hard that first night."

"But why should Harry take up with him?" Pence's tone was savage.

"You should know, if Kirby is so thick with the aborigine. Look as though they might be brothers in the same boat, belong to the same lodge, as it were. Kirby may be heap big Injun, too," Kingdon laughed lightly.

"Oh, he's an Indian all right," gloomily agreed Horace Pence, "but not Joe Bootleg's kind. I never knew Harry to do a really mean thing. He's too white a fellow, I believe, to lend himself to a job like that."

Kingdon had it on his tongue to suggest that he did not think Pence the

best judge of what was "white" in a chap's character, but he refrained.

"It seems to me," he stated, "that whoever tried to roll the boulder the first time couldn't make it. One chap wasn't heavy enough on the end of the lever; but two—"

"I won't believe it!" cried Horace suddenly. "I've known Harry Kirby since he was a little shaver."

"Keep your opinion of him, then, till you find out you're wrong," advised Kingdon. "The truth is bound to come to the surface. You can't keep a cork under water. Murder will out, and that came near being murder if the rock was actually started by human means. Now, let's talk about the weather. Do you think it's going to rain or snow?"

His seriousness tossed aside, Rex was his usual sunny, light-hearted self. But Horace remained grim and thoughtful throughout the return trip.

CHAPTER XXVII. VISITORS.

Unless one or the other of the two camping parties on Storm Island sailed across to a weir for a mess of fish, they seldom saw a stranger to speak to. Fishermen and others kept away from the island because of the well-known rules of the Manatee Lumber Company against trespassing.

Had the two camping parties not become friendly to a degree, neither would have had so enjoyable an outing. Rex Kingdon, with his never-failing insight and clever ideas, had brought about a situation better than an "armed neutrality." The boys of the two camps met on grounds of common interest at two points, baseball and rowing.

Each forenoon they spent an hour or two practicing on the ball field. Under Kingdon's coaching they began to work together quite smoothly, although they lacked a complete nine to play against. But Yansey had threatened to bring over a nine of Blackport boys who could show them some "real baseball," and the Storm Island lads were hoping he would not forget about it.

Towards evening of each day, as it grew cooler, they began practicing in the eight-oared shell. Meantime Kingdon and Pence were getting the fellows singly into the cedar boat to test their individual rowing.

Not a word had been said about who should be "captain." Pence had once

rowed stroke in a freshman eight at Belding. Frequently the chap in that place is captain of the crew, but not always.

"You've got a fat chance to be captain," scoffed Harry Kirby, one evening when he and his three friends were by themselves. Joe Bootleg did not count, for he kept strictly away from the white boys unless he was told to do something by Ben, to whom he looked for his wages. "A fat chance," repeated Kirby in the most irritating tone he could command. "Kingdon kid hogs everything. He doesn't give anybody else a bite."

"Talking about biting, you can growl, can't you?" said Horace, placidly.

"Oh," returned the other, "I don't care about myself. I don't care where I row—or if I row at all. I'm only doing it, anyway, to keep peace in the family."

"Peace is sometimes hard to come by, isn't it?" murmured Pence, with his cap over his eyes and an air of exaggerated carelessness that was bound to irritate a fellow as much worked up as Kirby was just then.

"You can make believe you don't care——"

"Certainly I care! I've gone into this for one thing—just one thing," Pence declared with sudden sharpness.

"I'd like to know what it is. We'll bust up in a row with those fellows. I come near licking that redheaded guy to-day."

"You'd have a nice time doing it, Kirby," put in Ben Comas, delighted to see his two comrades on the verge of a scrap. "Phillips could eat you up. I saw him boxing with Kingdon the other morning, and, take it from me, he has a punch. King had hard work to keep away from it."

"King!" snarled Kirby, like an angry dog. "You've got the disease, too, Comas!"

"What disease is that?" asked the lazy one, startled.

"Calling that curly-haired pet King. He's a fine king! If it wasn't for his name, he wouldn't be leading that bunch. He's got 'em under his thumb, and now he's starting in on you fellows."

"Hear him rave," grunted Pudge MacComber, widely agrin. "Never did hear Harry take on so."

"The whole thing will end up in a fight," insisted Kirby, subsiding.

"That'll be nice," chuckled Pudge.

"You won't be in it, if you see it coming," drawled Pence. "We may be sure it suits Kingdon. He says he loves to fuss with us."

"I'd like to give him all he's looking for," mumbled Kirby.

"Don't try it, old chap," advised Pence. "I've had the gloves on with Rex Kingdon myself. Phillips may have a punch, but Kingdon has a whole flock of them hidden in his sleeves."

Kirby fell silent, feeling that they were all against him. Nevertheless, he

stopped quarreling about Kingdon—for the time being, at least.

To the casual observer it would have seemed that Horace Pence worked with Kingdon in perfect harmony as they began to whip the crew into shape.

"Horrors knows a thing or two about rowing," Rex said to his friends, "and there's no reason he shouldn't put it into practice."

"He'll do something to queer the whole business," predicted Midkiff. "He's too erratic."

"Erratic fiddlesticks!" returned his roommate in Old Hall. "He's got grit and some foresight. I notice that his judgment in anything but pitching is fine."

Red laughed. "Don't let him hear you say that. He'd be dead sore. But he's improving at pitching, even, Rex."

"Seems to be improving in general, if you'll pardon me for saying so," Kingdon said. "He's doing his bit. It isn't for Walcott Hall exactly. So, if we come a cropper over this rowing business, why shed tears?"

Red Phillips' sturdy back and his rowing ability made him the choice of both Kingdon and Pence for bow oar. Number Two fell to Ben Comas. The latter stirred himself sufficiently to be valuable as an oarsman because he chanced to be very fond of the sport. Pudge MacComber fell heir to Number Three, because it seemed that he balanced the boat better in that place, Midkiff's bulk occupying the next seat, Number Four.

Cloudman splashed a good deal in the beginning, and the fellows behind him kicked about it; nevertheless they made him Number Five. "Unless you want to give him your seat, Midget," Kingdon chuckled, "and try to row against Kirby, here, at Six."

"If I couldn't do better than Applejack, I'd eat my oar," Peewee maintained with his usual modesty.

"Just fancy yourself on a wild bronc, little one," Phillips told the perky coxswain, "and think of what kind of a show you'd make beside Applejack's performance. He's at home on a bronc."

"And Peewee would be at home in a peanut shell," chuckled Cloudman.

"If I wasn't more at home in this shell than you seem to be, Applejack," scoffed Hicks, "I'd write a letter of introduction for myself before I tried to climb aboard."

Cloudman really intended to learn to row. He was a determined fellow—nor could he be deterred by trifles from any point he wished to gain. He splashed less as time passed, and as Number Four, began to pull a strong oar. He possessed good muscle, did that Western boy!

Kirby was the best of all Pence's band; Rex had seen that from the start. Short of Horace himself he pulled the strongest oar. They tried him in almost all the positions in the shell and he made good wherever he was placed. Kingdon

saw, however, that Kirby seemed much more silent and sullen than he at first had been. He came to the ball-field and to rowing practice with a somber face; Horace was talkative as compared with Harry.

At other times Kingdon often saw the latter wandering about alone, or lying by himself under the trees and taking no part in the general activities or conversation of his comrades. He seemed to have nothing to do with Joe Bootleg. Indeed, the Indian was treated like a servant by the other members of Pence's crowd. Joe kept strictly to himself, too. He did not even come down to the waterside to watch the rowing practice.

For a full week Kingdon and Pence were busy getting the boys properly disposed of in the shell. Then it seemed to come about naturally that Kingdon was put in as Number Seven and Pence took Number Eight oar.

"Set the pace, Horrors," said Rex. "You've got to stroke us. Let's see if we can't work up speed enough to make those Blackport fellows hustle a little, at least."

"Think I'm the best candidate for crew captain?" Pence asked almost in a whisper. "Really mean it?"

"I'd take it myself in a minute if I didn't think you know more about the game than I do," answered Kingdon frankly. "For the good of the crew, old boy!"

Horace Pence stared at him for several seconds. "I'm willing to try it because you say so, Kingdon," he muttered presently in a queer voice.

"Nuff said. Now we'll do our prettiest to work up a little surprise for our Blackport friends."

Following Kingdon's advice, they declined to show off in the shell when the *Nothing To It* was loafing about in the sound, and did most of their rowing toward evening; for at that time it was less likely that any of the Blackport crowd would be in sight.

When Yansey brought over his nine of ball players one Saturday afternoon, however, the Storm Island boys were more than ready to play them.

"Give your eyes a treat," urged Peewee to Kingdon and Pence, before the game. "Those huskies they've brought from the sawmill and the shipyard ought to be in the big league. Methinks they've played as far south as Providence. Look at that feller warming up over there. He ought to be pitching for McGraw."

"Get a foot warmer," chuckled Rex. "Don't let the size of 'em scare you, my child. We will protect you."

"How kind of you!" murmured Hicks. "I hope Middy bounces a fast one off his dome, just the same. He acts like he owned the earth and was just whitewashing the fence around it."

"Let's take care he doesn't whitewash us," said Kingdon.

The visitors won the toss and chose the field. The Storm Island boys did get

whitewashed the first inning, while the Blackport players began to hit Midkiff rather freely. Nevertheless, they pushed only one man around to the scoring station, although it was more by good luck than good management that the island nine held them down so well.

Kirby started grumbling when the islanders were back under the trees for the first half of the second inning. "I thought you Walcott Hallers could play ball," he said. "What kind of a pitcher is that Midkiff, Kingdon? I call him a frost."

Midkiff was batting at that moment, but Kirby had not tried to keep his voice down, and John's face seemed to indicate that he had heard. The situation was tense at the start of the game, and there was danger that trouble would be hatched in the ranks of the home nine. If Kirby's critical attitude was going to become general, Rex knew the Blackport nine would not have much trouble in winning.

CHAPTER XXVIII. HORACE PROVES HIMSELF.

Midkiff swung at the first pitched ball, and popped a little fly into the hands of the third baseman. That surprised individual muffed it, which enabled Midkiff to reach first. The Blackport fellows laughed. Kirby sneered at the batter's luck: "He's carrying a rabbit's foot. Swings like a garden gate, and shuts his eyes. I've seen his sort before."

Rex felt like punching the fellow, but he wanted to play the game, and so he ignored Kirby, urging Cloudman to hammer Midkiff along.

Cloudman struck out. In the meantime, however, Midkiff stole second very neatly.

Pence was the next one to bat. He cast one of his sneering smiles at his chum, and got into position. Before going out he had whispered a word or two in Kingdon's ear, and the backstop had nodded.

"Kirby next," Rex reminded the grouchy one mildly.

Horace swung at the first ball, and missed. The visitors had brought an umpire, and he grinned as he called the strike.

"Oh, Horrors!" groaned Kirby, picking himself up to look for a bat he liked.

A moment later Horace surprised nearly everybody by laying down a pretty bunt, and beating the throw to first. At the same time, having caught a signal

from Rex, Midkiff scampered safely to third. This was like real baseball, and the Blackporters did not laugh.

"Now, Mr. Kirby," said Rex, "you have a lovely opportunity to show us that your middle name is Home Run. Rise to the occasion, and we'll have a nice little lead."

Kirby glanced at Midkiff and scowled. Then his gaze sought Horace. He knew very well the black-eyed chap's style of base-running. Already Horace was bothering the big pitcher for the visiting nine by taking a lead toward second. To "play the game," it devolved on Kirby to give Pence a chance to steal. Instead of that, however, he swung at the first ball pitched to him, and hit it hard and fair.

"A bird!" yelled Peewee from the coaching line.

"Some crack, but poor baseball," muttered Rex.

Kirby couldn't make the plate, but he reached third, and the Storm Island nine was one run to the good.

Now Kirby would have been reprimanded by most coaches for failing to give the runner on first a chance to try a steal, but Kingdon remained silent.

Hicks chattered like a monkey, telling Kirby he was a wonder or else the pitcher was easy.

Either Kirby's long slam or the joshing of Peewee disturbed the big pitcher from Blackport, for he walked Phillips. Then Comas rapped out a scratch hit, scoring Kirby. Phillips raced onward to third, and made it by sliding.

Kingdon went to bat, and waited while two strikes were called on him. On the second one Comas went to second. Rex had demonstrated to Kirby by example what the batter should do with runners on first and third. Then he smashed the next ball that came over, hitting for three sacks.

Phillips and Comas cantered in, and the Storm Islanders were four tallies in the lead.

The streak ended there, however, for Hicks and the next men fanned.

"Nice little bunt, Pence," said Rex to Horace as the nines changed positions. "It cut the ice, Midkiff was waiting for it."

"Oh, I know a little something about real base ball," returned Pence somewhat loftily.

"But Kirby wants to be the whole team," laughed Kingdon.

In the next inning, Midkiff held the visitors down to two hits, neither of which counted. Neither side had scored again when the fifth inning came round.

At that point, however, Kingdon saw that Midkiff was beginning to show weariness. This was true also of the Blackport pitcher, and the captains of both teams decided to make a change. Yansey himself went in for his club.

Yansey put more on the ball from the start than the deposed pitcher had possessed, beginning by striking out the home team in one, two, three order.

"Pence," Kingdon found time to say while the slaughter was proceeding, "do you think you can hold your own out there on the mound for five innings?"

"Give me a chance to try," requested the black-eyed chap.

"Will you work with me, and follow my signals?"

"If I cross you on signals, you can drop me."

"Good! No flashy stuff. Use all your speed only when you have to. A change of pace bothers most batters. I can send Applejack in, but—"

"Try me!" begged Horace, his eyes flashing.

"Be it so," Kingdon agreed with mock solemnity. "This day, then, shalt thou be tried."

He sent Horace off to one side to warm up with Kirby. The latter brightened at once.

"Is that yellow-haired chap going to put you where you belong?" Harry cried. "Well, there's hopes for him yet!"

"But how about me?" drawled Horace.

"Why, Horrors! You know you've got these would-be pitchers distanced. Just show 'em that fast one of yours, and those Blackport fellows will shut their eyes."

"Haven't a bit of confidence in me, old man, have you?" chuckled Pence. "But I'm under Kingdon's orders. Don't expect too much."

"Oh, bother him!" ejaculated Kirby. "Once you're in the box, you can do as you please."

But Horace had given his word to Rex, and he meant to keep it. For the first time in his life, he was willing to follow the lead of another man. A change was coming over him.

By this time Yansey had fanned the third man, and the Storm Island boys took the field. Horace got into position, and threw a few balls to Rex to get the range. Then he nodded that he was ready.

The big fellow who had first pitched for the visitors was up. He swung a stick almost as long as a wagon-tongue, and Kingdon signaled to keep the ball close. Pence used a shoot, and the big batsman caught the ball near his knuckles. The ball popped almost directly up into the air, but was a fair hit. Rex was under it when it returned toward mother earth, and the first man to face Horace had been far too easy.

"Wasn't that a shame!" chuckled the backstop, tossing the ball to Pence.

Such luck wasn't to continue. Though Horace started by putting a strike over for the next man, he followed with three balls, seeming unable to locate the plate.

The batsman grinned. "Oh, you squawpaw!" he called at Horace. "Just gimme one—only one, so I can lean up against it!"

Rex knew that Horace longed to send in one of his fast ones. He rubbed his palm in the dirt. A smoker came over. "Strike two!" barked the umpire, dodging involuntarily.

Kirby was delighted. Only for a moment, however. Horace followed with another swift one that made Kingdon stretch himself in order to stop it with one hand. The batter was sent to first.

"There it goes!" ejaculated Kirby wildly. "I knew how it would be. If Kingdon would give old Horrors his head, he'd win the game for us; but he puts him in a hole before turning him loose, and then it's too late."

But Pence was not blaming Kingdon. Seeming to read his mind, Rex had given him a chance to show what he could do with speed. The backstop was willing to be convinced that Horace's fast one was effective, if the pitcher could convince him. He had even admitted that it would be very effective when the time came that Pence could control it finely. Until that time, however, it could be used with safety only to dazzle batter and keep him in a state of uncertainty.

Having reached this conclusion, Horace gave close attention to Rex's signals for the remainder of the inning, and the visitors failed to score.

"That southpaw looks like a pitcher, Kingdon," said Yansey generously, as they changed positions. "But I thought for a moment he was going up in the air."

"My dear fellow," returned Rex, loudly enough for Pence to hear, "he couldn't be lifted off his feet with a derrick."

Horace grew better with each inning. The Storm Island nine could make only one run off Yansey, and the visitors crept up until the score was 5 to 4 in favor of Storm Island when the latter came to bat in the ninth. Yansey held them down to a goose-egg.

"Now go in and do likewise, Horrors," Kingdon urged. "Your control has improved steadily, and I'm going to let you try speed again. Want to?"

"I'd like to," answered Pence. "But if I get wild—"

"I'll stop you, leave it to me."

In spite of speed, the first batter hit the ball, but he merely popped a fly into Pudge MacComber's hands, and the fat youth held it. Up came Yansey, with a quizzical smile. He, at least, had been hitting Pence, and he still hoped to tie the score, at least.

The first ball that came his way made the skipper of the *Nothing To It* gasp. He stepped back, gripped his club tighter and—the umpire declared the second strike!

"Say!" called Yansey. "You want to look out or you'll tear your whole arm loose at the shoulder and pitch it right along with the ball."

Fully prepared, he was ready to swing at the next one, but he swung too late, nevertheless. "The pill was in my mitt before you started your bat, old man,"

laughed Rex.

"You've been letting him hold that speed back to dazzle us with at the finish," complained Yansey.

When the third batsman struck out likewise, the Storm Islanders shouted for Horace Pence. He had indeed demonstrated that he was a real pitcher, they claimed. Kingdon smiled to himself. He was quite as well satisfied as anybody.

CHAPTER XXIX. SOMETHING IN THE OFFING.

Of course, there were days when the Storm Islander crew could not get out the eight-oared shell. When the wind came out of the East the sound was almost sure to be pretty choppy; and, although Kingdon believed a little rough-water practice would not hurt the boys, a shell cannot be successfully handled in a sea that is too rough.

Further than that, Horace Pence was captain, and Kingdon never advised now unless invited to do so. The black-eyed chap, it was true, gave his full attention to the work when the shell was out, neglecting nothing that seemed vital to the training of the crew. He believed in them thoroughly, believed they were going to make a brilliant showing. Pence was really over-confident regarding their ability to beat the Blackport crew. Although Rex Kingdon often talked with supreme confidence, his thought was usually well-blended with caution. He was not at all sure in this instance that they had a winning crew.

Since that cheerful day when they had whipped the Blackport nine on the ball field, Pence and his friends believed they could beat Yansey and his comrades at any game. Yansey's own pet expression, "Nothing to it!" was forever on the lips of Ben, Pudge and Kirby when they spoke of the coming rowing contest.

"But you and I have been told, Jawn," Rex drawled, talking the situation over with the big fellow one day, "that rowing races aren't always won in the boat."

"Hey?" exclaimed Midkiff. "Who told us that bunk?"

"They're often won at the training table and in the gym.," chuckled Rex, who dearly loved to get a rise out of his Old Hall room-mate.

"Oh, scissors!" observed Midkiff.

"Those chaps aren't training, you know. Neither are we as we should, for

that matter. But they all dally with the cunning little coffin-nail, even Pudge. They eat everything and anything—and any-how. They lie around after eating like a boa constrictor assimilating a heifer; and then they take exercise too violently. Some of them puff, like the *Spoondrift's* exhaust, two minutes after they get to work."

"What did you expect when you handed the crew over to Horrors?" sniffed Midkiff.

"What I expected has nothing to do with what I want," Kingdon responded with some appearance of gloom. "Don't want it told all along this coast that a bunch of us Walcott Hall fellows joined a rowing crew that won't even have a look-in when we go up against these local chaps."

"What you going to do?"

"What would you suggest, Jawn? Come, Old Wise Head, give us a boost."

"Take hold of the crew yourself."

"And oust Horrors?"

"Can't be two captains in one boat."

"No," Kingdon said with seriousness. "Verily I itch for the chance to whip the crew up. I believe it can be bettered by shifting some of them about, too. But I fear, Jawn—I fear!"

"Fear what?" grunted his friend.

"Of losing all I've gained."

"What the dickens have you gained?"

"I've gained something with Horrors. Notice the figure he cuts on the mound now?"

"And is that the price he's paying for his job as captain of the crew?" demanded Midkiff scornfully.

"Whether he's voluntarily and knowingly paying such price," Kingdon rejoined evenly, "doesn't really matter, does it, Jawn? I've got him about where I want him in baseball. Got him interested. I'd hold him if I can, and the rest of you fellows must help me."

"What for?" snapped Midkiff.

"You know well enough," was the cool response. "We need him."

"At Walcott?"

"What a remarkable guesser you are!"

"You'll never get him! He's one of these swell-heads who think they know all there is to know, anyhow—and what's the use of proving themselves either right or wrong by going to school any more?" Midkiff spoke bitterly. He could not like a fellow of Horace Pence's caliber—or thought he could not.

"He was like that," agreed Rex.

"I don't see much change in him since the first day we struck this island.

Only he has to be half way decent now, because you let him and his crowd stop here. Now you'd sacrifice the rowing in an attempt to win him over for a pitcher for Walcott Hall. Nothing to it, Rex."

"There you go, Jawn," sighed Kingdon. "You've got the habit, too. Yansey's influence on this bunch is something awful. You're all talking just as he does."

"Quit fooling," grunted Midkiff. "What are we laying ourselves out on this rowing business for if nothing's to come of it?"

"Getting good practice, aren't we?" asked Rex. "Only I never did go into a game before without having a feeling of expectation."

"If you expect to win with Horrors as captain of the crew, you'll get specks in your eyes."

"Will I? Well, we'll see. You're so helpful, Jawn, when a chap has a hard nut to crack. Thanks."

"Oh!" cried Midkiff, throwing up both hands. "You always go your own gait anyway, Rex."

Which was true in this instance. Kingdon had to solve the problem himself, and he proceeded to go about it by sailing over to Blackport at the first opportunity and putting it into Yansey's mind to challenge the Storm Island crew for a trial match the first week in August.

Kingdon kept his own counsel about this, but the next day a motor boat halted long enough at the island for a note to be passed to Horace Pence, embodying the challenge and suggesting that the sound, in the quiet waters off the island, be the scene of the proposed match.

For once, Pence showed a measure of uncertainty. He went off by himself, evidently to study on the matter. It was almost supper time when he strolled back by the way of the Walcott Hall camp, and hailed Rex Kingdon.

"Say, Curly," he said to the backstop, "I've been fishing, and I got a bite."

"Who's bit you?" asked Kingdon lightly.

"Kirby. And he's always been such a household pet that it's surprised me, even if it didn't hurt me much," Pence explained with some gloom. "It's about that rolling stone that came near gathering up all you chaps as a new species of moss."

"Sayest thou so?" was Kingdon's interested comment. "Let's hear the worst."

"He does suspect, at least, how that avalanche started; but he refuses to give me his confidence."

"Yes?" encouraged Rex.

"Owned up to me last night that he and the Indian camped down there at Clay Head through all that rain."

"We knew that already."

"But Harry hadn't admitted it before. I put it to him straight if he and Joe left that canoe and came over here during the night."

"Well?"

"Swore he didn't leave the canoe," said Pence, anxiety betrayed in his voice. "Harry's more than ordinarily truthful—so I've always found him. Don't you suppose that the bowlder might have been washed out by the rain, after all?"

"The rain wouldn't have washed the lever out of the woods and down the hill into the field behind the place where the bowlder lay."

"Hardly!" agreed Pence, startled by this reasoning.

"Kirby says he didn't leave the canoe all night?"

"That's what he says," was the reply.

Kingdon added nothing to what he had already said until finally, with a sigh dismissing the puzzle for the time being, Pence offered him the letter he had received from the skipper of the *Nothing To It*. "What do you think of this?" Horace asked.

Kingdon read the challenge with as much apparent interest as though the matter was an utter surprise to him. It was plain that Pence was nervous—a nervousness not attributable to their former topic of conversation.

"The nerve of them!" said Kingdon. "They've been rowing together all season, and we're just beginning to get our crowd into shape."

"But we can't refuse," Pence hastened to say.

"No," Rex agreed.

"But—but—Kingdon! Suppose they lick us out of our boots?"

"What's the odds? It'll show the boys just about how bad—or good we are."

"It will discourage them if we're beaten," Pence said. "Haven't practiced enough to make sure of giving a good account of ourselves."

"Never know how good we are till we try a race with a real crew, and Yansey's got the best one along the coast—let him tell it."

"I know. He's an awful blowhard."

"But maybe he *has* got the best crew," chuckled Rex.

"Yet you say to accept it?"

"I say nothing. You're the skipper. You don't need anybody to decide for you. If you feel you do, put it to the vote of the crew."

"Oh! Our fellows will be eager for it," sighed Horace.

"Fancy our fellows won't mind a try-out, either," was Kingdon's cheerful rejoinder.

"Then I might as well say 'Yes,' but between now and then we've got to do *some* training."

"We're with you, Horrors," Rex assured him. "We'll win if we can." He felt in secret more serious doubt of winning than even Pence showed in his counte-

nance.

CHAPTER XXX. FACING DEFEAT.

The fellows in both of the camps on Storm Island were at once excited when Horace Pence announced the trial rowing match with the Blackport crew. All were eager but Joe Bootleg, and he did not count.

From the very hour that Kingdon and Midkiff first landed on the island in their bathing suits, the Indian had grown more sullen than was his usual condition. His vindictiveness daily increased against the Walcott Hall boy who had bested him in that fight in the night and the rain. Whenever he was close enough to Rex to make it count, he glared at the curly-headed chap with a malevolence that could not be misinterpreted. In the hatred of Rex he included all the Walcott Hall crowd.

The Indian's smoldering hate had convinced Kingdon after the avalanche that Joe had a hand in the starting of the boulder on its downward course. What puzzled Rex still, as he confessed to Horace Pence, was the part Harry Kirby had taken in the dastardly attempt upon the lives of the boys from Walcott Hall.

That the stupid and ignorant Indian had engineered the thing, Rex could easily believe. There are wicked and savage-natured characters among these latter day members of an expiring race, as there are bad men who have white faces. Joe Bootleg undoubtedly had no advantages of upbringing and instruction to make him better than Nature formed him.

In Harry Kirby's case it was different. Kingdon shrank from believing that Kirby had aided the Indian in bringing about the thing that might have been, had it not been for Kingdon's premonition of peril, a terrible catastrophe.

Had Kingdon secured evidence that pointed to Joe Bootleg alone in this serious affair, he would have been tempted to see Enos Quibb, the constable, and have the Indian removed from Storm Island. Failing in this attempt to injure Kingdon and his friends, the malevolent Indian might try some other means of "getting square."

Kirby's possible connection with the regrettable affair, and the surety that to attract the attention of the authorities would arouse the Manatee Lumber Company and cause questioning regarding the two camps established on Storm Island,

deterred Kingdon from taking this sane and sensible course.

He was always on the lookout for Joe Bootleg, and he continually warned his friends to be watchful of the Indian youth. Besides, Pence, having become suspicious, was keeping Joe well within view. The latter undoubtedly felt that he was watched and, his first attempt being so signally a failure, it was likely he would hesitate about making another. But his look was threatening, just the same, whenever his path and Rex Kingdon's crossed.

Being a healthy and hearty youth, with nothing particular on his conscience, Rex had usually slept as soundly as any of his chums. Now his rest was sometimes broken. He got up occasionally and went out of the tent for a look around in the night. When Midkiff or any of the others growled about being disturbed by this, Rex laughed it off.

The feeling persisted that peril threatened. When asleep it took hold upon his subconsciousness, and awoke him. He felt that the Indian might be prowling about. He knew that the fellow slept alone in the cook tent at the other camp, and could slip away without arousing Pence or his companions.

Sometimes Rex did a little prowling of his own on these midnight ventures. He roamed as far as the other camp on more than one occasion, and was always reassured by hearing the heavy breathing of the Indian lad within the tent.

"Getting just as nervous as an old maid in a haunted house," Rex told himself on one of these occasions. "If I was sleeping in a folding bed, I'd look under it after I let it down ev'ry night to see if there was a burglar underneath."

In the day time they were all so busy now, and there was so much fun and sport afoot, that Joe Bootleg and his intentions did not trouble anybody, least of all Kingdon. He thought the fellow had no chance to do anything desperate by daylight.

Rex did not allow his crowd to neglect practice on the diamond because of the added zest given to the rowing by Yansey's challenge; nor did Pence seek to dodge his usual work on the mound. He was no slacker. Once his hand and heart was given to a thing, he kept at it.

The eight-oared boat was out every pleasant day for two or three periods of practice. Ben and Pudge, of all the crew most sluggish by nature, worked as well as the others. Like Kirby, they proposed to back up Horace Pence and show the Walcott Hall chaps that there was loyalty elsewhere than in the ranks of the prep. school pupils.

Kingdon and Midkiff knew what was wrong with the rowing of the crew. Pence set a long, sweeping stroke that was easy for Rex, Midkiff and Phillips to maintain; but at times the shorter-armed Pudge, and even Kirby, clashed oars with the rower before or behind them. Often their spurts, timed by the caustic Hicks, with a watch strapped to his wrist, were spoiled by these fouls.

"Oh, get together! Get together!" the coxswain would implore. "Keep stroke! For the love of harmony, keep stroke!"

The little chap had a megaphone strapped to his face, and he could have been heard, when he was really excited, half across the sound to Manatee Head.

It was expected that Cloudman, who was the greenest of them all, would fail; but the cowboy had taken hold of the work grandly, and, being long-armed and lanky, the stroke Horace Pence set suited him very well.

The first week of August came on, bringing the day selected for the trial match between the Storm Island eight and the Blackport crew. It was a beautiful, calm, hazy day, and the conditions for the race could scarcely have been better.

The Storm Island campers expected to see the *Nothing To It* sail out to the island, with the shell in tow. Instead, before noon they saw a squadron of sail beating out of the channel in the light wind, followed by the steam-yacht of the Boat Club's commodore, with the boys' shell on deck.

"My aunt!" cried Little Hicks when it was realized that the entire flotilla was coming up the sound. "They're going to make a fine show of us."

"Slaughtering the innocents to make a Blackport holiday," murmured Rex. "Yansey is evidently confident that there's going to be 'Nothing to it!'"

CHAPTER XXXI. HORACE SHOWS THE RIGHT SPIRIT.

The Blackporters rowed the Storm Island crew a guessed two miles, and beat the latter so badly that the race was somewhat farcical in its last stages.

"We'd better have stood on the bank and watched them pull past us," complained Peewee. "We'd been saved a lot of hard work and worry."

Yansey and his crew had their beaten rivals over on the commodore's yacht to a great spread. It was really very jolly, and the winning crew was no more patronizing than they could help being. Yet when the squadron of the Blackport Boat Club got under way at seven o'clock, it left behind on Storm Island nine of the sorest youths that ever camped out on the Maine coast.

"You fellers couldn't even wheel a baby carriage," charged little Hicks. "And you said you could row!"

"You didn't have to row," flung back Ben Comas. "All you've had to do was shoot off your face."

"We tried hard enough," sighed Pudge.

"Can't blame you, Horrors," Kirby declared.

"I dunno as I want to learn to row," Cloudman remarked.

"If we'd had any sort of training!" Midkiff gloomily grumbled.

"Cheer up, fellows," was Kingdon's laughing adjurement. "The worst is yet to come."

"No it isn't!" exclaimed Horace Pence with angry decision.

"Yes it is," insisted Rex quietly. "We've agreed to enter those races three weeks from to-day. We'll have to meet the Blackport, North Pemberly and Howelson crews. We've agreed to. Don't want 'em to call us quitters, do we?"

"Of course we'll race," said Phillips, his jaw set doggedly.

"It isn't that at all," Pence went on, his black eyes flashing and his dark cheeks flushed. "It isn't that. We'll race, but we're going to do better than we did to-day!"

"I sure do like the sound of your talk just about now," Cloudman drawled. "Seems like you meant it. I'm with you."

"Same here!" cried several of the others.

"What's the use?" demanded Ben Comas. "We won't have a show."

"Of course we can't get the best of those fellows, for they're professionals," Pudge groaned.

"Do you really mean to try it again, Horrors?" murmured Kirby.

The black-eyed fellow had waited impatiently for them to subside. Now he stopped Kirby's further speech with a gesture, exclaiming: "That's enough! I don't want to be jollied. I know I'm the failure, not you fellows."

"My jinks!" squawked Hicks. "You pull the best oar in the boat—bar Kingdon."

"Thanks. You're the cox and you should be able to judge some. Don't matter how good an oar I pull. I can't make the rest of you pull your best, so—I'm a failure."

"As stroke?" grunted Red.

"Exactly," confessed Pence, and none of them—not even Kingdon—knew how it hurt him to make the admission. "I see now that you can't train all crews alike. I've been copying Belding methods."

"Good methods under conditions," murmured Kingdon.

"But they don't fit here," the other said shortly. "There's just as good rowing material in this crew as there was in the freshman eight I was on, and they could have rowed all around us without half trying. I'm a failure as stroke and coach. There's a screw loose somewhere. Just the same I believe we can do a lot better in the big race that is coming off this month."

"What makes you so sure?" growled Ben Comas.

"Because we can all pull a good oar, singly—even Pudge," Pence said. "Cloudman has improved wonderfully. But it needs something besides pulling to win a race. Just what it is, I don't know; but I bet Kingdon knows—or can find out."

"Oh, fudge!" muttered Ben. "Kingdon knows everything!"

"I reckon so," Pence said quickly, with uplifted lip, as he eyed the glum Comas. "Go off somewhere and growl it off alone, Bennie. What does it matter who's captain, if we can only win the race?"

"That's your idea, is it?" Kirby said.

"Look here, Horrors," Kingdon questioned uncertainly, "do you mean you want me—"

"You're the chap to boss the boat," cut in Pence. "You're the fellow to pull stroke."

There was a moment of breathless silence. To the surprise of the Walcott Hall boys, none of the others made either complaint or objection.

"If you say so——" began Rex slowly.

"I've said it," Pence rejoined.

"Anybody object?" questioned Kingdon.

After another period of silence, Phillips chuckled: "It seems to be unanimous. You're elected, King."

"Go to it, Rex," Pence said with heartiness.

"I shall coach this crew my own way, and to the best of my ability," said Rex earnestly. "I may not do a bit better than Horace, but I have a system I want to try. If you back me up——"

"Look there!" cried Hicks suddenly, pointing. "What's that fellow doing over on our boat?"

Kingdon took one look and started off on a fast run along the steep shore.

"It's Joe Bootleg," gasped Pudge. "He's coming ashore from the *Spoondrift*."

"He's running!" exclaimed Hicks. "He's been up to something."

All had started after Rex, but Harry Kirby was in the lead. "Hey, Kingdon!" he shouted. "Have a care! Look out! He's got it in for you!"

Joe Bootleg had already disappeared along the beach beyond the camp of the Walcott Hall boys.

As Kirby overtook Kingdon, the latter, still running, gave Harry a glance. "What's he been doing aboard that boat?"

"I don't know. Perhaps he fixed it to blow up your gasoline tank?"

"She'd have gone up by this," Kingdon returned as he splashed into the water and clambered over the rail of the moored catboat.

She seemed very easy to climb into, for her rail was as low as though she was heavily laden.

"The rascal!" shouted Rex when he was aboard. He had splashed into a foot of water in the cockpit, and the cabin was all afloat.

"What's he done? What's he done?" clamored the excited crowd from the shore.

"He's pulled the plug, or scuttled her," answered Rex savagely. "Come aboard, John. We'll have to find the hole and stop the leak in a hurry, or she'll rest her old keel on the bottom in short order. If she sinks we'll have a fine time getting her afloat again."

"If we can't help you, we'll go after that crazy chap," Pence shouted. "Come on, Kirby!"

They did not catch Joe Bootleg. The Indian had taken one of the canoes and hidden it farther along the shore of the island. This action had been overlooked by the campers because of the confusion attending the boat race. Joe was far out on the sound, and paddling for Manatee Head in the dusk, when the pursuers caught sight of him.

CHAPTER XXXII. IN FORM AT LAST.

Kingdon and Midkiff finally found the four holes bored in the bottom of the catboat by the Indian youth. They were able to caulk them well enough so that little more water could seep in.

In the morning Pence sent Kirby and Pudge to Blackport in the remaining canoe, and they brought back a pump, with which the *Spoondrift* was soon made free of water. In Blackport they learned where Joe Bootleg had abandoned the canoe he had stolen. The Indian had shipped for a summer cruise to the Banks, and he had left the canoe beached under Manatee Head, with a hole in her bottom. Later the canoe was recovered and repaired.

"Good riddance," Ben Comas said. "I didn't mind paying him his wages, but I'd rather do some of his work myself than have him around."

"You're not alone in that feeling, Bennie," drawled Horace, turning away to intercept Kingdon. "Well," he said to the Walcott Hall youth, "I guess I've got the right dope at last."

"About what?"

"That rolling stone that gathered no moss."

"Sayst thou so?" exclaimed Rex. "Prithee, go on, fair sir; tell me it."

"Kirby told me last night. He was a little afraid of the Indian. You couldn't blame him."

"A bad actor, sure," Rex agreed.

"Joe threatened him. The fellow carried a knife. It seems Joe stole away from the canoe that night just as soon as he thought Kirby was asleep; the night the rock fell, you know."

"Go on."

"But Harry wasn't asleep. He timed the fellow, and Joe was gone two hours. When he came back, Harry asked him if he'd been over here to our camp, and the Indian flew into a rage."

"I see."

"Told him if he said a word about it, or even about having been on the island that night, he'd fix him. Nice sort of a bird!"

"Kirby should have told us."

"So I said. But it's done now. There's one thing I haven't told you, Rex."

"What's that?"

"The Indian got back to the canoe long before midnight, and did not leave the spot again, Harry says, till morning. He is sure of this. Four or five hours elapsed, then, before the rock slid down on you fellows. How do you account for that?"

Kingdon slapped Pence on the shoulder. "Plain as a pikestaff! Bootleg tried to pry the rock loose, and failed. He meant to squash our tent flat. He cut the lever and dug the hole under the rock. Then he set the stone for a fulcrum. But he couldn't budge the boulder. Not even that night when he came over here from Clay Head."

"Then what—?"

"The rain did it. The rain, feeding into that hole, worked all around the boulder and, 'long toward morning, away she went."

"Lucky you had that hunch to move," said Horace.

"More than luck," Kingdon said gravely. But he made no further explanation.

That day there was no rowing practice, so Kingdon's idea was not divulged until the day following. The only change in the arrangement of the positions of the crew he made at first was to have Pence and Pudge MacComber shift places.

"Oh, cracky!" Kirby muttered to the black-eyed chap. "What a chance! Pudge for stroke!"

Kingdon had no idea of keeping Pudge there permanently. He wanted the fat boy, who was not so ponderously slow now, exercise having reduced his corpulency to a marked degree, where he could watch his stroke. After a time,

Kingdon sent him back to his former position and brought Pence forward to his own place at Number Seven, taking the stroke-oar himself.

"Now, fellows, I'll give you my idea," Kingdon said. "Length of stroke doesn't always make for power. The longer the stroke, the longer the recovery. For eight men to row successfully in unison, they should use a stroke that is well within the power of the one of the eight who naturally takes the shortest stroke."

"Pudge!" cried several.

"And that weakens the whole bunch," muttered Kirby, still in doubt.

"I get your point," said Horace Pence. "It's the idea of the chain being only as strong as its weakest link."

"Exactly. Gradually the weakest link must be strengthened."

"You're right," the black-eyed fellow said. "Pay attention, everybody. We've got a skipper who uses his head, and he's got a head to use!"

So they started rowing practice on a much different line for the three final weeks before the big race. Horace Pence's friends were not very enthusiastic at first, having been so badly beaten by the Blackport crew that hope had deserted them.

But something happened to revive their spirits and make them all feel good. They went over to Blackport on Saturday afternoon, and beat Yansey's nine 12 to 4. Cloudman pitched five innings, and did well. Then Horace pitched the last of the game, and Rex allowed him to display his speedy ball to his heart's content.

"There's nothing to it! There's nothing to it!" sang Peewee Hicks, as the *Spoondrift* sailed out through Blackport Channel that evening. "We're going to walk off with the shell race, just as we did with these chaps who thought they could play ball. There's nothing to it!"

"We're merely beginning to get into form at last, chums," said Rex, his words and his glance including them all.

Kirby whispered to Pence: "Never thought it would make me feel good to have him call me chum."

"It makes me feel proud," Horace whispered back.

It was a well contented party that landed on Storm Island that evening. The two crowds of young fellows were becoming more friendly than even Rex had foreseen. The next day Pence and his mates struck their tents and brought them over to the plateau above the cove where the catboat and shell lay. They combined forces to save work and get more time for practice.

Pudge, his cousin and Kirby, as well as Pence, began to enjoy themselves much better, now that they had an object before them and more work to do. There was less grumbling and scrapping among themselves, and a huge lot of fun with the Walcott Hall fellows.

Kingdon worked them hard, no doubt of that. He whipped them along at both rowing and baseball. During the last week of the former practice, however, he let up a little so that, when the great day came, the Storm Island eight went into the big race as fresh and cheerful as though they had every surety of winning.

To the amazement of their rivals, they did win. It could not be said that Rex Kingdon was the sole cause of their doing so. Every fellow in the boat felt that the fact was somewhat due to his own personal work. But Kingdon had trained them to pull together like a machine, and had developed a stroke that gave speed enough to enable them to beat the Blackport crew by a length.

The other two boats were a long way behind when Storm Island crossed the finishing line. Manatee Sound looked like a yacht-racing day at Newport, only on a smaller scale. Boats of all kinds and descriptions for miles up and down the coast, had come to see the regatta.

"Jawn," Rex Kingdon told Midkiff, as they rested after the race, "we'll never have better fun than we did to-day—not even at the old Hall." Which goes to show that even the self-confident Kingdon could be mistaken, as the reader will agree if he reads the subsequent volume of this series, entitled "Rex Kingdon and His Chums."

"We certainly pulled down the little old cup in this boat race," Midkiff chuckled happily. "That was a prize worth winning."

Rex rolled over and seized Midkiff's arm in a tight grip. His eyes were laughing, but his lips were serious as he said:

"We've gathered another prize, a bigger one, Jawn."

"Huh?" asked Midkiff, puzzled.

"Horace Pence is going to Walcott Hall with us next term. I've got his promise. I've written the Doctor about him. He'll enter with some conditions, of course, but he is going to help Walcott Hall win baseball games. He is the prize I was after."

THE END

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