The Adventure of Leonard Broadus

FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE

Supper was over; but the family, consisting of father, mother, and two children, were still gathered around the table, under the cluster of electric bulbs in the ceiling of the dark-panelled dining room of the commodious farmhouse.

The mail had been late in being delivered at noon, so that Mr. Broadus had not had the time, after dinner, to give his paper the brief survey which he usually bestowed upon it. Seeding was in full swing; and throughout the afternoon he had been busy in the fields, supervising the work of the men. He reached for it now. Adjusting his glasses, he unfolded the sheets and was soon screened from view behind them. Mrs. Broadus, a plump, good-looking, but delicate woman of forty, also remained sitting; in the rush of spring work, she did not see any too much of her husband; and she wanted to give him the chance to comment to her on the day's happenings. Besides, she had something on her mind.

But the children were visibly anxious to be off. Leonard, the older, a boy of thirteen, gave Mary, to his left, a wink; and Mary, only seven, winked at her mother; but Mrs. Broadus merely smiled tantalisingly.

These children had never been allowed to leave the table before their parents rose. It was irksome that the waited-for signal remained ungiven; it was still more irksome that, when a welcome interruption seemed to give the mother a hint, she, in rising, looked at them and, by that look, enjoined silence and immobility.

The interruption consisted in the ringing of the telephone which was in the kitchen, followed by the appearance of Alice, the maid, in the door, to nod at Mrs. Broadus, thereby indicating that the call was for her. As she left the room, a smile played over her lips. She had this in common with her husband that she took most things humorously, especially when the children were concerned.

When she returned, the singularly good-looking Leonard was sitting sideways on his chair, clearly disgruntled. Mary was more patient, though she, too, was anxious to get down to the barn where Stubbing,

the senior hired man, had told her a calf would probably have arrived by the time supper was over.

Mr. Broadus, tall and spare, was still invisible behind his paper.

Both children looked at their mother as if to urge her to give the desired signal; but her smile merely deepened in reply. The fact was that, unobserved by the children, she and her husband had, when she rose, exchanged a meaningful glance. Had the children known it, they would have worried about the meaning of that smile.

"Who was that?" Mr. Broadus asked from behind his paper.

"Margaret," Mrs. Broadus replied casually; "or somebody speaking for her. She wants us to drop in after the show."

"All right," Mr. Broadus said. Margaret was Mrs. Broadus's sister who lived in town.

It was Saturday; and it was the time-honoured custom with the Broaduses, at least in the growing season when time was always short, to go to town on Saturday nights and to attend to their weekly shopping. After that, they often took in a picture show before, around eleven o'clock, they returned to the farm. On Sundays, everybody was privileged to sleep in if he was so inclined. The milking was done by Stubbing and his wife; and no other work was permitted on the place.

Mrs. Broadus, having sat down again, now had her eye on her son. Leonard was tall for his age, keen, intelligent, musically gifted, and, above all, good-looking. Everybody liked him; but his mother was proud and perhaps inordinately fond of him; yet, where her children were concerned, she had a way with her so that they obeyed her slightest hints. Seeing her enigmatic smile, therefore, Leonard tried to smooth his brow. In spite of the warmer weather he was still in breeches and wore a smooth-fitting red sweater over his shirt, with a red bandanna handkerchief around his neck. His unruly, blond hair stuck out over his narrow, strongly-modelled forehead like a penthouse.

"Well, Leonard," Mrs. Broadus said at last, feeling her husband's foot under the table, and settling herself, "I want to have a word with you before you run out. Miss Mackay has been talking to me. She says you are letting her down."

Miss Mackay was the music teacher from town who, once or twice a week, made the rounds of the rural district in which the Broadus farm was situated.

"Shucks!" Leonard said, half angry, half laughing. "She's got examinations on the brain."

Mrs. Broadus laughed. "Good thing, too," she said evenly. "Since

you haven't. Examinations are only five weeks away."

"I'll make them," Leonard said confidently.

"You'll make them. But has it struck you that you have an unbroken record of honours to your credit, so far? And all Miss Mackay would commit herself to was, 'Oh, he'll pass.' "

"Well," Leonard said patiently, "I'll admit I haven't been playing that Allegro very well. I might have played it better if she'd been less crabbed. The way she talked to me this morning made me hot."

A slight crisping of the paper in Mr. Broadus's hand betrayed that he was listening. Mrs. Broadus laughed.

"The remedy," she said, "is more practice."

"Better be careful," the father said from behind his paper, "so you won't have to feel hot again."

"Oh," the boy said airily, letting the thing slip out of him, "but I'd rather feel hot than do still more practice."

At which both father and mother burst out laughing; and the paper sank to the table.

The boy, realising that he had given himself away, laughed a bit sheepishly and looked from father to mother.

"Listen, sonny," said the father, forcing a frown on his narrow face. "From what I've heard, I infer that you've got a rare gift there, as is only natural since you're your mother's son." Seeing his daughter fidgeting about on her chair, he did what his wife had hesitated to do. He dismissed her alone by raising a finger. "Run along, Mary," he said. "By this time the calf should be there."

And the little girl rose and ran.

Leonard who resented the fact that his father had limited this permission to his sister, resumed his frown. "Oh dad," he said pleadingly, "I've got the raft nearly on the water."

Which referred to a structure built with the cooperation of the father and recently marvellously improved. It was built of cedar logs, with a board floor on top and three superstructures which consisted of three boxes nailed to that floor: what he called a cabin at the stern; a 'bridge' in the centre; and the 'galley' in the bows; with a small Union Jack flying above the latter. This raft was pointed at stem and stern and, at the former, had an upright cutwater.

Since the creek which flowed through the central meadows of the farm was, in early spring, subject to sudden floods which overflowed its banks, transforming the meadows into a lake and the main channel

into a raging torrent, it had had to be built on land, within the orchard that separated the house-yard from those meadows, far enough from the water to be out of danger of being carried away.

A day or two ago Mr. Broadus had said to the boy, "First day we can spare a team of horses, I'll have Stubbing pull it down to the cattle ford." But Leonard, unable to wait, had used the whole of his Saturday, after the music lesson, to work it down to the steep bank, by means of rolling logs and pole levers. There it was lying now; and with another half hour's work it could be dumped on the water.

The creek was called Patterson Creek, for it rose in the south-west corner of the land formerly owned by Ralph Patterson and recently bought by his son George. The Patterson farm lay almost in the exact centre between the Broadus farm and the town of Rivers, straight north, the county seat of the County of Suffolk. Ultimately, roughly twenty miles south, the creek found its way into Lake Erie.

The father nodded, "So that's what's itching you," he said with a humorous appreciation of his son's urgency. "Well, tomorrow is Sunday. If you get it down altogether, you may invite me for a ride. But before I let you go, sonny, *I* want to say a word to you as well. As I said, I've been told by those who ought to know – and it's not Miss Mackay who's spoken to me – that you've a gift there. A gift's a gift; which means it's been given to you without your doing anything to get it. It isn't earned or acquired by hard work. For that reason it puts an obligation upon you. It's got to be cultivated. The boy or girl who's received such a gift and doesn't cultivate it cheats himself, his teachers, his parents, his country, mankind by neglecting it. We're here to make the most of the gifts we've received. If we don't, we betray a trust."

The father had spoken with a rising emphasis; and the boy felt crushed. It was not often that the older man used his own gift of speaking in deadly earnest to such telling effect. The mother now looked as serious as he. Instinctively the child felt that he was in the presence of something which was great in his father though he was 'only a farmer' – something, above all, which his mother admired. He was ready to admit to himself that perhaps he was a bit happy-go-lucky and vowed he would make up for it.

He rose. "I'll go to the piano now, dad," he said.

Mr. Broadus flashed a glance at his wife from under his bushy brows. Then he smiled. "No," he said, taking his watch from his pocket, "it's quarter past seven. Your bed-time is nine, isn't it? I want you to practise for three quarters of an hour tonight. Practise, mind you, not merely play the tunes you like. You have your own watch.

You've an hour to spare, therefore. Is that enough for the raft?"

"Twenty minutes is enough, dad," Leonard said eagerly, every muscle in his slender body tautening, his face breaking into a bright smile.

"All right. That will give you again as long to paddle about and allow time for getting there and back." He nodded to the boy.

Like an arrow Leonard shot out of the room.

Father and mother looked at each other.

"Good stuff in that boy," said the father.

"Your stuff," she said.

"Yours, too. And therefore ours."

Her smile deepened. She rose and ruffled his hair. "I'll send Alice in to clear the table," she said. "The children will sleep in the parlor till we get home. Alice has to clean the silver; so they won't feel lonesome."

II

The parents were upstairs in their bedroom, dressing for the trip to town.

"I don't like this I read in the papers," Mr. Broadus said, "about the spread of lawlessness into the open country. It's bad enough to hear of bank robberies in the towns, of clerks being held up in the stores, of service men being shot down for the sake of the money in their tills. But here I read of four farmhouses broken into; and always there is a robbery in the nearest town at the same time. Coming closer, too."

"Where, Stephen?"

"The last one was in Haldimand County, Jarvis way."

"Hm . . ." said his wife with a worried frown.

Her husband stepped to one of the windows which looked out over the orchard and over the meadows beyond which were traversed from east to west by the creek. Behind the meadows, dense woods barred the view to the fields. Somewhere, probably in the margin of the orchard, an invisible cow lowed through the calm evening haze; for everywhere moisture was condensing out of the air. Beautiful though it was in the fresh spring green, the scene had something remote and almost otherworldly about it, in this last light of the westering sun which lay just above the horizon, red and heatless.

A fleck of colour emerging from behind a willow-clump on the

bank of the river caught the father's eye. He stepped back to look at his watch which he had placed on his wife's dressing table.

"There's Leonard coming back now," he said, fastening his braces.

Mrs. Broadus, who was smoothing the curls of her still brown hair around her fingers, already fully dressed, dropped a glance to that watch. "Ten past eight," she muttered. "There's Alice fetching the children's bedding," she added, listening to a footfall in the upstairs hall of the quiet house.

It was a large, well-built house of brick erected in the days of Ontario's prosperity, its upper floor being wide, rambling, and full of niches, cupboards, and shadows, in contrast to the open, sunny unity of the lower floor where five of the half dozen rooms connected with each other through open archways; only the kitchen with its appendages – which included the maid's bedroom – was separated from the dining-room by a swing-door commonly closed.

As the parents came down, via the dark, oaken stairway, Alice, the maid, was making up the children's beds in the large parlor adjoining the dining-room, on two chesterfields half facing each other at an angle in the far end. From the drawing-room beyond came the sound of the piano.

They stopped in the dining-room to listen.

"He plays that well this time," said the father. "I like that Allegro. Mozart, isn't it?"

"Mozart, yes," said the mother, frowning as she nodded the time. "There!" she exclaimed. "He doesn't get those half notes right. He knows it, too. Again. I must show him." And she left her husband and went straight through the parlor into the spacious drawing-room. "Alice," she said in passing, "Don't forget to put the silver away when you've cleaned it."

"I won't," said the thin, bespectacled maid pertly.

Inside the door to the drawing-room, little Mary jumped from a chair and clasped her mother's hips as she accompanied her to the ancient grand piano, a bequest from Mr. Broadus's mother.

"Look, Leonard," the mother said, pointing to the notes on the page.

"I know, mother," he said. "I know I'm not getting that right. I know just how it should go. My fingers don't seem to obey me. I'll get it before bed-time, though."

"In half an hour?" she asked.

"In ten minutes."

"Well," she said, bending down to kiss him good night. "Too bad we've to go now. I'd like to hear you do it."

"Hear it tomorrow morning," he said and rose to go to the dining-room where he sang out, "Good night, dad."

"Kiss?" dad asked.

"Sure," the boy cried almost condescendingly as his father bent down.

The mother was snuggling her face against that of the little girl. "Good night, darling."

"Well," said the father with mock severity, "bed for you, Mary. For you, Leonard, in half an hour. I'll ask Alice for a report on you tomorrow morning. So long."

And father and mother went out through the kitchen.

A few minutes later the car passed the parlor windows; and both the children waved to their parents as they shot quickly out of sight, on their way to town.

III

But Mr. Broadus did not, next morning, ask Alice to report on the children's punctuality in going to bed.

Leonard's adventure had begun.

When, around midnight, Mr. and Mrs. Broadus came home from town, the first thing that struck them, on turning into the gate of the front yard, was that, with the exception of parlor and drawing-room, the whole house was blazing with light. Surely, Alice did not need all that illumination? Besides, she should be in bed by this time. Her usual Saturday instructions were to remain in the dining-room till the children were asleep and then to retire. It was true, she had had the silver to polish; but that could not have taken more than an hour.

Yet, the parents were not disquieted to the point where Mrs. Broadus broke her custom of remaining in the car while it was being driven into the garage and of helping her husband to take their purchases to the house; whereupon he returned to the garage to lock it.

But, on this particular evening, they had barely alighted in the shed, Mr. Broadus opening the storage trunk at the rear of the car, when the fact of the illumination suddenly connected itself, in the mother's mind, with that other fact that, when, after the show, they had gone to

her sister's, they had been told that no member of that household had rung them up over the telephone. So far, they had considered that call as a practical joke played upon them by some person unknown.

Mrs. Broadus spoke briefly to her husband and ran to the back steps of the house which led up to a wide stoop on which, in turn, the kitchen door opened. That door had a glass panel covered, on the inside, by a scrim curtain. In daytime, nobody could look in; at night, nobody could look out without first extinguishing the kitchen lights.

A cry from her brought her husband to her side at a run. The parcels remained behind; the door of the car-shed, unlocked.

A glance showed that, inside, facing the door, sat Alice, in a strangely rigid attitude, her head bent back, her mouth open, as if she were yelling without emitting a sound.

Mrs. Broadus had waited for her husband because her knees shook and threatened to give under her. He, however, at once pushed the door open.

And there sat Alice, securely tied to the chair by a quarter-inch rope passed four times around her body and legs. A piece of kindling an inch wide had been inserted between her teeth and was held by a dirty, red handkerchief knotted behind her head and also around the rope, so that she was prevented from raising that head forward. Her eyes, protruding, looked at the ceiling.

Mrs. Broadus, recovering the use of her legs, gave her one single look and ran on, through the swing-door, into the dining-room and, beyond, into the parlor. In passing, she saw from the corners of her eyes that the drawers of the buffet and the china cabinet had been rifled. In the parlor, there was, from the open slide-doors, quite enough light to see by. A glance at the chesterfield where Mary had lain showed that she was not there; the blankets had been flung back; the other chesterfield was completely covered from head to foot with a smooth counterpane which showed no human form beneath.

Mrs. Broadus stopped, her heart standing still; she opened her mouth to utter a cry; but no sound came.

Then, under the counterpane, something seemed to stir, if ever so slightly. That returned to her the power to move. Spasmodically she bent forward and snatched the covers off; and there, white as sheets, lay her two children, eyes wide open, staring in terror.

She threw herself on them; the tears came at last; and she hugged and kissed them as if she would smother them. They flung their arms around her, crying, "Mother, oh mother!"

Behind her, Mr. Broadus entered; behind him, Alice whom he had

released. Mrs. Broadus was still unable to speak; but she gave her husband a glance which sent a lump into his throat. He began to hum and to haw.

The little girl was hiding her face in her mother's bosom and clinging tightly to her. Leonard was the first to recover his speech.

"It's you!" he cried. "We thought it was those fellows coming back. I know one of them," he added excitedly, struggling to get to his feet past the knees of his mother who had sunk down on the edge of the bed.

Mr. Broadus stared at the boy, "You know one of them? Who is it?"

"Oh, well," Leonard said, realising that he was in the lime-light, "I don't mean to say I know who he is. But I'd seen him before. He came to the back door about a week ago to bum a dinner. I saw him sitting in the kitchen, turning his eyes every-which way while he ate. It struck me then that he was taking a good look about; he never moved his head, though."

"Well," Mr. Broadus said, "you talk of 'them'; so there were several. Alice probably had the best look at them?"

"No, I hadn't," said the girl. "They was masked."

"Yes," Leonard cried; "and the fellow I saw lost his mask at the very moment when another fellow turned the light on again; they had turned it off. That's how I recognised him."

"Well, now," Mr. Broadus said huskily, stepping up to his wife and patting her shoulder, for she was convulsively crying. "Let's sit down around the table and get this straight. But first I'll phone the provincial police at Rivers. By the time they'll get here, we'll know about things. Come now." And he took his wife's arm to support and to quiet her.

A minute later they were sitting around the dining table as for a meal, except that Mary was huddled on her mother's knees, and her chair was taken, on Mr. Broadus's invitation, by Alice. The latter looked strange and unfamiliar, for the rough gag had reddened the corners of her mouth by its friction, like those of a clown in a circus who enlarges his mouth by paint for the sake of a grotesque appearance.

"Let's start at the beginning," Mr. Broadus said, controlling his own excitement. "You had the first inkling of what was up, Alice?"

"No, I hadn't," Alice said for the second time. "I was still here in the dining-room when Master Leonard spoke to me, saying there was somebody at the back door."

"Yes," Leonard cried, eager to get back into the lime-light. "I had already heard them talking in the yard, under the parlor windows; and a moment later I heard someone trying the back door. And then there was a crash, as if somebody had missed a step and fallen.

"At that moment Mary who woke up, got out of her bed and dived into mine. It was then that I spoke to Alice. Alice was sitting at this table and looking through a magazine; there it is. I was wondering whether she'd gone deaf that she hadn't heard. I was sitting up, and Mary was frantically pulling at the covers to hide under them. I heard a key turning in the lock of the kitchen door; and at the same moment Alice got up and went through the swing door. You remember, that key of the kitchen door had disappeared. No doubt that fellow had taken it when he was bumming the meal. We never thought of that, of course, when dad got another key. We should have changed the lock. Then there was a scuffle; but not a voice." Leonard who was in his pyjamas, of course, airily waved a hand for the girl to proceed.

"Well-l-l," Alice said as if in self-defence, "there were three of them, all masked. But at first I saw only two; and I was on the point of turning back into the dining-room, scared, when, from behind the swing-door, a huge fellow leapt on me, putting one hand over my mouth and gripping me, with the other, around the waist. We fell; that was the scuffle Master Leonard heard, I suppose. The next moment the other two grabbed me, put me on the chair, and tied me so I couldn't move. The third fellow never took his hand off my mouth, not even when we fell because I struggled. When I was on the chair, he threatened me with a revolver and then forced his thumb between my teeth; I bit it; and he mumbled an oath. But they had me all right; and they stuck that piece of wood between my teeth and tied it back, with a loop of handkerchief around each end. I struggled, of course, but I couldn't move and I couldn't cry out. I came near choking; I had all I could do to keep my breath."

IV

"And then they burst through into the dining-room," Leonard went on excitedly. "They weren't even careful any longer about making no noise; they must have been thinking we were all in town together. I had been sitting up and listening; but by this time I had a pretty good idea of what was going on. So I dropped back, the moment I saw the kitchen door moving, and pulled the covers up to my chin. They may have thought, of course, that Mary and I were upstairs in bed; but they never even looked for us, as far as I could make out. My only trouble was that I had to keep Mary from yelling. I kept patting her cheek and her mouth under the covers, to show her that she must keep absolutely quiet."

"I knew that much myself," the little girl said defiantly, raising her head from her mother's bosom.

"Of course you did," said Mrs. Broadus.

"Well, she didn't show it," Leonard protested. "She kept squirming against me."

"The chesterfield is narrow," the father threw in. "Go on."

"The three fellows moved about like monkeys; the speed with which they moved was tremendous."

"Just one moment," interrupted Mr. Broadus. "What time may that have been?"

"Eleven o'clock," Leonard replied promptly. "They had been in the dining-room for no more than a minute when the hall clock struck; and, lying perfectly still, of course, I counted the strokes. I could see them plainly; and I expected any moment to see them coming into the parlor. But they didn't. They opened the buffet drawers, took the silver out, and threw it on the table. Then they went to the china cabinet and, finding it locked, they fumbled about for half a minute and then broke the glass in the door. They put grandma's tea and coffee service on the table with the rest. The big fellow, the one who'd been here before, though I hadn't recognised him yet, said, 'Stow that', and went out into the hall. I suppose he went to your den, dad. Meanwhile the other two, both small chaps, compared with the leader, were putting the silver away in a bag they had brought. Before they were done, I heard the other fellow running up the stairs. He went cautiously enough; it sounded as if he were on stockinged feet. But you know how the middle two steps creak when you put your weight on them. I heard it distinctly.

"Suddenly the two other fellows stopped in their work, looked at each other, mumbled something, and then stood listening. One of them suddenly reached for the switch and turned the light off. Outside, Ralph had started to bark furiously. He must have been down at the barn when they came; or in the meadow with the cattle. From that moment on they used flash-lights in here. The dog began to circle the house, tearing through the shrubs and barking now and then. Once he sat down and howled. It sounded dismal. Then something was knocked over upstairs, perhaps a chair. Again the two men whispered to each other; and suddenly, the flash-lights playing, they made for the hall and followed the big fellow who was their leader. I thought to myself that perhaps they mistrusted him and wanted to see what he was doing. He might find better loot than the silver and never tell them.

"I heard them rush up the stairs; they didn't mind the noise they were making, though the carpet muffled their steps. They went into your bedroom and remained there for several minutes.

"Then all three came down again; and this time they remained in the den for a long while. There was a noise as of straining and lifting. What they were doing I don't know, of course. I didn't care to follow them." The boy gave an excited laugh.

"I should say not," said the father.

"I lay still as still," the boy said, his laugh taking on a furtive note. "I suppose they had knives . . ."

"Or guns."

"Yes, or guns. Though I didn't see any. They opened the front door and carried out whatever they had been lifting. It must have been mighty heavy, for they groaned, and their feet scraped over the floor. I thought it must be the safe."

"Quite likely," Mr. Broadus said. "We'll see when the police arrives. How about the dog?"

"Oh yes, they must have got him. All I heard was a single yelp.

"And then they came back. This part of the house was pitch-dark, of course; and the first fellow who came back into the dining-room stumbled over the bag with the silver and swore. It was at that moment that one of the two others turned the light on again; and now I saw that it was the big fellow who had stumbled over the bag. He was still picking himself up; and so, just for a second, I saw his villainous face; for the mask had slipped down to his chest. I'd recognise him anywhere. He has a huge square chin and goggle eyes, and a stubble of red beard and a short but thick moustache which grows in every direction, from his lip. But the hair on his head was almost grey; his hat, too, had fallen off. As I said, it was no more than a moment before he replaced mask and hat; but that moment had been sufficient for me to recognise him. Besides, he now moved over towards the door into the hall where I couldn't see him; and he didn't once come back into the centre of the room. He's a powerful fellow, though. The other two were trying to lift the bag into which they had dumped all sorts of things from upstairs, or from the den; I never saw what they were. All I know is that they must have been heavy. He growled at the others and reached over, with one hand, picked it up, and swung it over his back. I didn't actually see him while he was doing that; but I saw the hand first and then the bag which was going up in a crazy zig-zag line. The other two fellows were in plain sight now; and one of them opened the kitchen door, just a little crack, and peered through, probably to see whether Alice was still on her chair.

"And then there came the noise of a car outside. I heard the leader give a hissed command, 'Vamose!', and they dived into the hall. It must have been Stubbing coming home in the rattle-snake Ford. He never stopped, of course, but went straight on to the tenant house. I heard him changing gears as he came to the slope there. Seeing all the lights in the house, he probably thought you had got home before him. After that, the robbers didn't come back here."

"How long may the whole thing have taken?"

"Fifteen minutes, perhaps twenty; no more. I never stirred, of course. I didn't dare to; I couldn't be sure that they weren't somewhere about still. And then you came home. When I heard you on the back steps, I covered us up the way mother found us; though I thought I had recognised our car. I wasn't taking any chances."

"Well," said the father, "we'd better remain in this room now till the police arrives. Leave things undisturbed; they might pick up clues. They should be here any minute now . . . What sort of masks did they wear?"

"Just rags with holes cut out for eyes and tied behind their heads with string. You couldn't see a thing of their faces while they were in place. They were of some heavy cloth; it struck me how the lower corners dangled clumsily about their cheeks and chins."

"Weren't you tremendously afraid?" the mother asked.

"Sure . . . Oh, well, not so very much; the only thing I was afraid of was that they might come through the parlor; they'd have found us then."

"Naturally," said the father with a smile. "What else was there to be afraid of?"

The boy smiled in answer. He was sitting on one of his legs which he had drawn up on his chair and half stood on the other foot, elbows resting on the table. "They might have done something serious to Alice. Or you might have got home before they were gone. There might have been shooting."

"True," said the father. "No doubt they had guns. Such fellows always have." And, a noise as of grinding brakes coming from the outside, he rose. "There's the police," he said.

V

There were three men, two in civilian clothes, one in uniform. None of them knocked; they just came in, their jaws set. One, after a brief glance into the kitchen, went out again and ran around the house to

the front door.

Mr. Broadus stood in the swing door when Captain Vance entered from the rear, followed by Sergeant Quinn; both saluted, giving their names and ratings.

"Well," Mr. Broadus said, "this is where they entered. They overpowered Alice, the maid, and tied and gagged her on that chair."

"You were not at home?" the captain said. "How do you know what happened?"

"As I said, the maid was at home; we found her here, gagged and tied. And there were two children, a boy and a little girl. Leonard saw a good deal of what they were doing; he even saw the face of one of the men; they were masked when they came. Perhaps we had better go into the dining-room. You'll understand better when you see the lay-out of the house."

But the captain did not move. "Is that rope yours?" he asked, for it was still where it had fallen when Mr. Broadus had released Alice.

"Yes," Mr. Broadus replied, wonderingly. "They must have got it from the barn; it's a new trip-rope for the hay-car which I bought only a short time ago. I recognise it by that red strand twisted into it."

The captain nodded, giving Sergeant Quinn a sign with his hand to proceed with the examination of the kitchen for any identification marks and clues. Then he followed the father into the dining-room where he was briefly introduced. From that moment on Leonard never took his eyes off his face.

Nobody stirred while Mr. Broadus explained where the children had been. "We usually let them go to sleep down here when we go out at night," he said. "The maid is within call."

"I understand," said the captain from the parlor door where he glanced briefly about. "I see they rifled the buffet and the silver cabinet. Did they go anywhere else?"

"According to the child, they went upstairs and to my den."

"In that case let's look the house over before we go into details."

There was a moment's delay because Mary refused to let go of her mother; and Mrs. Broadus, naturally, did not wish to be left behind.

The captain cautioned the children not to touch anything where the robbers might have been. "Fingermarks," he said with a smile at the boy. He was a fine-looking man; provincial policemen usually are; their physique is a prime factor in deciding whether they are fit for employment in that force.

"So you saw the robbers?" he asked casually of the boy.

"I did. I saw all three; but I saw the face of only one."

"Well," said the captain, smiling at the child's keenness, "you should be able to give us a pretty good description then."

"I am, sir."

"But we'll leave that for later. I don't suppose you could go to sleep just yet?"

"I'd rather not try."

The grown-ups laughed. The captain's ready understanding of boy nature placed him at once on a footing of familiarity with father and mother.

They crossed the hall and went to the den.

"As I supposed from what Leonard told us," said Mr. Broadus, "they took the safe."

"What sort of safe?"

"A small thing; you can see its height and width by the dark patch in the wall paper there. It was perhaps eighteen inches deep."

The captain turned sharply on Leonard. "You are sure there were only three men? You said you saw 'all three', you know."

"Three is all I saw."

"Now listen. Three men could not have carried that safe for any distance or length of time. No others outside? No others at the doors?"

"I don't know. I didn't follow them about."

The captain nodded. "Know anything about cars?"

The boy grinned. "A little." He made clear, by the way he said it, that this was an understatement. He was twisting about, trying to rub his body against the inside of his pyjamas; for, in spite of his excitement he began to feel the chill of the night.

"About as much as you know about airplanes?"

"No. I've made airplanes. I've never made cars."

"Did they fly?" the captain asked casually.

"You bet," the boy answered.

"Well, listen, sonny. Was it a car or was it a truck in which the men came?"

"I don't know. I never heard them arrive. I was asleep. When I did

hear them, they were afoot in the yard."

"Did you hear them leave?"

"No."

"Must have stopped at some distance, then. All the more likely, in that case, that there were more than three." The captain went to the front door and spoke briefly to the man stationed there.

Meanwhile the mother spoke to her son. "Get your dressing gown, child."

He looked at her, grinning; and she understood that he was reluctant to go upstairs by himself.

"It's in the parlor," she said. "I saw it hanging over the back of the chesterfield. Run along. Alice is in the dining-room. You'll catch a cold."

"Don't do that," said the captain who was just returning from the front door. "We'll be needing you, sonny. We can't afford to have you laid up."

The boy ran.

When he returned, they went upstairs. In the parents' bedroom only Mrs. Broadus's dressing table and the top drawer of a chiffonier had been disturbed.

"As I thought," said the captain. "They were after jewellery. Can you tell offhandedly what they may have got? We'll get detailed descriptions later."

"A small diamond necklace and a few rings, most of them more or less worthless," said the mother. She was swinging to and fro, one hand around the little girl's shoulders; for the child was getting overpoweringly sleepy.

"And my spare cuff links and studs," Mr. Broadus added; "the cuff links gold; the studs just mother-of-pearl."

"And a half a dozen other trifles which you'll miss only by-and-by. When you do, give us a list. It may come in handy for identification. It's the trifles that count. Can you tell what was in the safe?"

Mr. Broadus laughed. "Not much. These are hard times for the farmer, and it's the end of the month. Less than a hundred dollars in cash, I should say. One cheque for one twenty. Some papers, a mortgage among them. Some title deeds. A bank book. A Queen Victoria Jubilee sovereign. And my wife's big pearl necklace, a family heirloom. Oh, yes, and about ten dollars' worth of stamps."

"To whom was the cheque made out?" asked the captain who was

taking notes.

"Myself. Drawn on the Bank of Montreal at Rivers, by Harry Snowdon. He's my tenant on another farm. It was the first half of his rent."

"By the way," said the captain, "you any relation to Mr. William Broadus, near Brittany-on-the-Lake?"

"He's my older brother."

"I happen to know him," said the captain. "Well, for half an hour's work it wasn't a bad haul. What did you estimate the value of the silver at?"

"I hardly know. The tea and coffee services are sterling; the flatware is plate. Eight hundred dollars?"

"As I said, not a bad haul. Let's go down and talk matters over. I'll tell Quinn to search den and bedroom if you don't mind. He's our fingerprint expert. That little girl," he added, "is falling asleep. Has she anything to tell us?"

"Nothing that Leonard can't tell as well."

"I'll put her to bed," said Mrs. Broadus, bending down to pick her up.

VI

"Now, young man," said the captain when they were once more sitting around the table in the dining-room, "let's have your story."

And Leonard repeated what he had told his parents, now and then interrupted by a pertinent question from the captain, especially regarding his description of the man whose face he had seen without a mask.

"Well," the captain said at last, "that, I suppose is all we can do tonight. I shall want to look the premises over in daylight. They must have left tracks somewhere. I won't deny that it will probably turn out so that our little friend Leonard is at the heart of the problem. He's actually seen the face of one of the men so as to recognise it. That's right, isn't it?"

"I'd recognise him anywhere."

"Good. Of course, we're dealing with an organised gang; and the men who did this job are not the only ones. This is their fifth job within three weeks."

"Sure they're the same men?" Mr. Broadus asked.

"No doubt about it. Same number every time, namely five; same

technique: they make sure that the people are away at a given time; same sort of house. Same method of carrying off safe."

"Just a moment. Five, you say. You insist on that? Leonard saw only three."

"Plus one to keep watch on the road; and one to stay with the car or the truck."

"I see."

"And they're city men."

"What makes you think so?"

"Assuming the identity of this gang with others, the way they've handled safes. Blow-pipe and dynamite. They have the equipment of experts. The city got too hot for them; and they took to the country. But the chances are they're directed from the city; and probably, between jobs, they return there. We'll round up all known gangsters in Toronto, Hamilton, and London; and if you'll let us have Leonard on loan . . ."

"I see," Mr. Broadus said. "Confront them. Let him look them over. I suppose we'd trust him to Captain Vance?" he asked, turning to his wife.

She smiled. "I suppose so."

"It'll probably be Tuesday," the captain said. "Perhaps Monday. I hope we can manage by Monday."

"Why?" asked the boy.

"The king will be in Toronto. You might get a chance to see him." And, turning back to the parents, he added. "I'd fetch him early in the morning and bring him back before night."

"That will be fine."

"I'll tell you why I asked this young man about his knowledge of cars. In the early part of tonight, or perhaps I should say of last night," he added, with a look at his watch, "two cars were stolen at Rivers; one a new Buick sedan, the other an old Chevrolet delivery truck. A third car was opened and tampered with; but apparently the thieves could not get it to start without the keys. But they removed the week's shopping. I have a suspicion that these car thefts were carried out by the gang. Well," and he rose, "I'll be back early in the morning. The two men I've with me are on night duty. I'll leave them here, one inside, the other outside. If needed, I'll bring two men out tomorrow. Though I don't think the robbers will return. They're far away by this time. Just to make Mrs. Broadus feel safe?"

"It would feel safer. Thanks."

And, saluting, the captain turned away to leave via the kitchen where he briefly conferred with the sergeant who was still there.

Mr. Broadus followed him to lock up. When he returned, he found his wife in tears. Leonard, in his dressing gown, was bending over her. "Now, Anna," the father said, "don't take it that way."

She struggled with her sobs. "I can't help myself," she said, wiping her eyes. "Don't mind me. I'll be all right in a moment."

It was the first time that Leonard had seen his mother lose hold of herself. Girls cried; and he despised them for it. That a grown woman could cry and abandon herself to her crying was a shock and a revelation to him. However, his father having returned, he felt he could do nothing but leave his parents alone. A vague impulse made him tiptoe into the drawing-room and sit down at the piano where, in the dark, he played the Allegro without a flaw.

VII

Leonard was up before six o'clock. He had had a good if short sleep. When he awoke, however, he could not have remained in bed.

To his surprise, he found his father already downstairs. "Come on," the latter said. "In all that excitement last night I clean forgot about our groceries; and I left the garage unlocked."

As, unexpectedly, they passed through the kitchen, they surprised Alice who was standing in the door of the narrow corridor which led to her room, stretching herself, yawning, and scowling. Her glasses, broken and patched with a strip of adhesive tape, made her look somewhat grotesque at all times; but at this moment she looked positively ferocious. Leonard burst out laughing at her; and she stamped her foot.

At the car-shed, they found everything as Mr. Broadus has left it; even the keys were still in the drop-door of the storage trunk behind the car. They loaded up and carried the parcels into the house, returning to lock the garage. Leonard was reluctant to leave his father. He wished to talk about the night's happenings; but at bottom, of course, there was nothing to say. More than once, preparatory to launching into speech, he took a deep breath and hitched up one shoulder. At last he brought a few words out.

"That police captain is a fine man, isn't he, dad?"

The father suppressed a smile. "In what way do you mean? Fine-looking?"

"Yes, isn't he? But I meant that he isn't afraid of anything; and he must know a lot, mustn't he?"

"He probably knows his job if that's what you mean."

"Yes-s-s," said the boy. But he was clearly dissatisfied with his father's entire lack of enthusiasm.

The father, knowing his son, intentionally refrained from pursuing the subject directly. "I see," he said, "you're wearing your boy-scout hat? Going in for that sort of thing?"

The boy laughed embarrassedly. "I wish I had a real pistol," he said.

This was a piece of diplomacy on his part; for he also wore a belt, and in it he carried a toy pistol. No doubt the father had already seen it; and by touching it now, the boy wished to ward off a sly remark.

At this moment, they having just closed the garage door, there came the hum of a car from the gate of the yard. It came to a stop a few feet behind them; and Captain Vance stepped out.

"The top of the morning to you," he said, patting the boy on his head. "Well, Mr. Broadus," he went on. "We have your safe; and we have the stolen Buick."

"You don't say so," said Mr. Broadus. "Quick work. Where did you find it?"

"In a field of the Patterson farm, of all places. As a matter of fact, there are two safes there. One was taken out of Post's Cash-and-Carry store this morning between two and three; and the fact that they are both in the same place now connects the two jobs. Those fellows don't allow any grass to grow under their feet. Town Constable Annesley passed the store at two and tried the door; it was locked. He tried it again at three; and it was open. He rang Mr. Post, using the telephone in the store; and together they verified that the safe was gone. It must have taken ten men at least to lift it. That confirms my theory of an extensively organised gang."

"It would seem to," Mr. Broadus said. "Clever scoundrels. That safe would hold a nice, tidy sum, too, on Saturday night."

"There were between eighteen and twenty thousand shoppers in town last night."

"And how were the safes discovered?"

"George Patterson, the young fellow who bought the farm from his father Ralph, heard the blasts about an hour before daylight; the first he mistook for a gunshot; but the second one shattered a window in the wood-shed behind his house. You know he lives in what used to be

the tenant house on the place; the big house along the highway still belongs to his father. So, as soon as daylight came, he went out to see; and there, in his oats-field, he came upon the two safes, both gutted. I believe, though, your papers are safe, all but the cheque. I'd like you to come with me as soon as I've looked your premises over. The Buick was found abandoned at the corner of the highways north of town. Apparently they made their get-away in the delivery truck; they thought it safer not to be conspicuous in a new car, I suppose. My theory is that they used the Buick for the trip down here. We'll soon know. The tires are a new type and unusually heavy. The car, by the way, belonged to Mr. Patterson senior who couldn't go home to Sleepy Hollow where he lives now."

"Had your breakfast?" Mr. Broadus asked.

"Had a cup of cocoa."

"Come to the house. Breakfast should be on the way. We'll look for the tracks afterwards."

A quarter of an hour later, father, son, and police captain sat down to a breakfast of coffee, toast, and bacon. Leonard was again much excited, though pleasurably this time. He felt as if he were sitting in the council of grown-ups.

"Do you mean to say, captain," he asked, "that they went to town from here to rob Post's store?"

The captain smiled. "Looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Gee!" cried the boy. "They're hustlers!"

The two men laughed.

"They are that," the captain said; then, turning to the father, he enquired, "I hope the shock didn't upset Mrs. Broadus too much?"

"Well . . ." said the father. "She didn't go to sleep till towards morning. She's sleeping now, I hope. And so is the little girl."

In another ten minutes the two men rose; and so did the boy, attaching himself to them as a matter of course; he felt part of the drama.

VIII

They entered the captain's car, and he turned it. The plan was to run along the east-west road till they came to some soft spot which would carry the imprint of a tire.

But they had barely reached the front of the house when one of the men who had remained behind stepped out and held up his hand. It

was Sergeant Quinn. When the car had stopped, he came to the window.

"I'm sorry," said the captain, "I can't relieve you just yet. We've phoned to Hamilton for reinforcements; as soon as they get to Rivers, I'll bring two new men out. Anything to report, Quinn?"

"I have, sir," said Quinn. "The party consisted of five men. Three went to the house; one kept watch on the road, and one remained by the car till they fetched him, no doubt to help carry the safe. The one on the road got bogged in a bit of swamp. Probably a car passed, and he tried to get out of the path of the headlights. From the way he churned it up, he must have been in to his hips."

"And the car they used?"

"They ran it into the bush north of the road, a couple of hundred yards east of the gate."

"That's my logging trail," said Mr. Broadus.

"Hop in," said the captain. "I'm going to look at the track. Hulme about?"

"Yes. He's keeping watch. We found a collie dog on the front stoop, with his throat cut."

"Oh!" cried the boy in distress.

"Nothing unusual going on now?"

"Not a thing."

They ran forward, through a gate, and thence east. Two minutes later they stopped by the side of the road, opposite the place where a trail led into the bush to the north. This was part of Mr. Broadus' woods which wound through his farm beyond the meadows.

In this early morning light it was very beautiful here. Every leaf pearled with dew, for the night had been chilly. That chill had not yet entirely disappeared, though the sun was striking into the chasm of the road.

They alighted and crossed over to the trail. There the soil was soft and clayey; and a fresh car-track showed the criss-cross pattern of new tires with great distinctness.

"As I thought," said the captain. "They had the Buick."

"What puzzles me," said Leonard, "is why they abandoned it."

"I can explain that. A new car. One sure to be insured against theft. Insurance companies are apt to follow every clue."

"That's right," Mr. Broadus agreed.

"That old delivery truck they used for Post's safe in town might not even have been missed for weeks had it not been for a curious coincidence. It came from a line-up of used cars at Dick's garage. It so happened that Shaver, the plumber, who had traded it in last week, had a hurry-call on account of a burst water pipe. Both his new service trucks were out. So he sent a man over to borrow the old one. It wasn't there. By this time all roads out of town and all highways throughout the province are being watched, of course. The truck still had Shaver's name and telephone number on the cab door."

"They may have painted that out," said the boy.

"They may," the captain agreed. "You're a smart one, aren't you?"

The boy laughed.

"Yet it's amazing what such fellows will overlook. Let's go on for a piece."

"There's a cross-trail further down," Mr. Broadus volunteered. "The turn to the left leads back to the farm, near the orchard."

"That's where they stopped," Quinn said.

They proceeded. Leonard and his father followed the example of the two policemen in walking along only in the margin of the trail, so as not to obliterate any tracks. At the crossing the track of the car came to an abrupt stop; just beyond the point where the car had been turned. Behind, the soft ground had been churned up for a distance of many feet. That was where they had to lift the safe into the trunk of the car.

Sergeant Quinn fell at once to measuring the boot-tracks once more, as if to demonstrate his reasonings; from above, dew was dripping down on the group.

"Look here, captain," said Quinn. "Only four carried the safe. This fellow here," pointing to one of the tracks by the roadside which was of marvellous precision, "was the one who remained by the road till they needed him for the lift."

"I see," said the captain; and, turning to Leonard, he asked, "How do you think the sergeant can tell that one from the rest?"

Leonard squatted down for a close look. "It's a small foot," he said. "Smaller than any of the others." And suddenly he jumped up and spoke excitedly. "He wears iron toe-plates under the tip."

"That's the boy," said the captain, laughing.

IX

"Well," the captain said at last, "let's go and identify your safe. It's a mere formality, of course. But you might want to take the papers home with you. Perhaps we'd better return to the house before we go?"

"By all means," said Mr. Broadus. "I'd like to see whether my wife has come down."

But she had not.

"How about these men?" asked the captain.

"Take them along."

"Well, . . . if Mrs. Broadus comes down in your absence, she might feel safer with them around."

"That's right. Better wait till you relieve them. I'll tell Alice to see to their breakfast. And I'll take my own car, to save you having to come back here."

In a few minutes the two cars were on their way to the Patterson farm, Leonard riding in the police car. Though the distance was only two miles in a straight line, they had to travel four by the road to reach it. They entered it from behind, without going through to the north-south highway which led into town.

As they turned their last corner, they saw, on the crest of a low hill planted to oats, a group of men outlined against the sky. One of them was a town constable who had spent his morning here, watching over what remained of the safes; the others were Messrs. Ralph and George Patterson, recognisable from their extraordinary height.

They stopped at a gate to the field, alighted, and strode up the hill along a dead furrow.

"Hello," they greeted the group without going up to them; for the safes were lying in the shallow valley to their west.

That was all that was needed. Mr. Broadus recognised his safe at a glance; it lay on its back, open, but practically undamaged; he readily found his papers which were as the robbers had left them. The money and the valuables, of course, were gone. The other safe, from Post's Cash-and-Carry store, had been ripped open by the two charges of dynamite which Mr. George Patterson had heard when they exploded.

Again the captain turned to Mr. Broadus. "That's all we can do. There's no need to trouble you any further. Could you send for the safe tomorrow? Or today if you want to; but it's Sunday. It's the boy we shall need. I'll let you know when we want him. They are rounding

up every last man who might fall under suspicion."

"All right," Mr. Broadus said. "Good morning."

"Good morning. Good morning, Leonard."

Father and son returned to the road. "Well," said Mr. Broadus, "that was not the way in which we usually spend Sunday morning." The usual way was in reading and lounging about.

"Oh," Leonard said brightly. "It's early yet."

Mr. Broadus laughed.

X

There was no change in the situation when they got back to the farm. Mrs. Broadus was still asleep, and so the father went to tell the policemen to take what rest they could and to hold themselves ready against the time when their relief would arrive.

Leonard was left to himself, feeling empty and unemployed. On every ordinary Sunday he would have gone on his ordinary errands; he might have gone bird-nesting, for he was a bit of a naturalist; he might have gone rafting; he might have gone down to the tenant house, at the east end of the orchard; he might even have condescended to play with his little sister, at Cowboys and Indians. In the latter game both were invariably cowboys; and once, when their mother had asked who the Indians were, Leonard had airily replied, "Oh the Indians! They are imaginary."

Today he felt an actor in a drama; it was his part, for the moment, to wait patiently for his cue. Ahead lay a weary time. But he felt positive that his hour would strike: then he would hunt those robbers down and cover himself with glory.

His father had no doubt retired to his den; and so, for the moment, especially after the excitement of the night, matters were unconscionably commonplace and dreary.

Almost instinctively he strolled down to the tenant house. But he had hardly issued from the orchard which was still patchily white with blossoms when he caught sight, across the half-acre clearing of the hired man's garden lot, of the opening of the trail which led to the crossing where the Buick car had stopped during the night.

The tenant's twelve-year-old boy hailed him as he strode across, for he had to pass within fifty feet of the small, white-painted cottage. He stopped. But the sight of the trail had implanted in him a sense of aloofness from every-day affairs. As for taking the boy along, he reflected that it might be important not to obliterate any tracks on that trail.

So he waved a preoccupied hand. "Sorry, Jim. No time to spare just now." And he strode on.

Jim, being a year his junior, was shy and fell back at once.

Within a minute or so Leonard was in the woods where the air was still laden with moisture, the soil soft and damp, the leaves, now stirred by a slight breeze, still dripping. These were open woods, with most of the underbrush removed. They were carefully thinned, too, so as to give young growth a chance to mature. Leonard who, being his father's son, was versed in wood-lore tried to imagine himself approaching the spot he was bound for as a stranger – in fact, as a detective; and to deduce the night's happenings from what he saw, as if, so far, he knew nothing of them. In this he felt a little as if he were putting his own age back. He had outgrown the taste for crude mystery. In Stevenson's work, for instance, he had passed from *Treasure Island*, though it still seemed a 'proud yarn' to him, to *Travels with a Donkey* and *In the South Seas*; for his father had Stevenson's complete works. On the other hand, this was not fiction; it was reality; and that made all the difference in the world, did it not? It might well be that the capture of a dangerous gang of criminals hinged on him; which gave him a sense, not only of importance, but of responsibility.

But in pursuing this new game of detection, he remained fully conscious of the effect the woods always had on him; he noticed that the leaves on the late-comers among the trees, the oaks, the coffee-trees, and the sassafras, were sprouting; and that the buds on the flowering dogwood were on the point of opening up.

As earlier in the morning he stepped along in the very margin of the trail, often turning sideways in order to get past a tree without stepping on any of the footprints. It was by this trail that the men had reached the car from the house; though the man from the road, the one whom he had already begun to call to himself by the name of 'Toe-Plates', had not yet been with them. In fact, coming to a spot where the footprints were deep and sharp in softer clay, he spent several minutes in careful comparisons till he arrived at the conclusion, as had Sergeant Quinn, that indeed this part of the trail had been travelled by only four men.

He went on again and came to the crossing and re-examined it. He found one thing which seemed new. Wherever the foot with the toe-plates had stepped, there was one corner of that plate-mark which showed a peculiarity: as if a tiny rod had been planted near the right corner of the crescent-shaped imprint. In some of the footprints it was more distinct than in others; but it was present in most. He was puzzled. But at last the explanation came to him. Toe-plates had to be

fastened to the sole of the boot with tacks or nails; one of these was missing; the hole provided for it was empty; and wherever the foot had descended into the soft, plastic clay in a perfectly perpendicular direction, the clay had penetrated that hole and formed that rod when the foot was withdrawn.

To make sure of his fact, which might and might not prove to be of great importance, he carefully examined those prints where the foot had been moved sideways as it stood on the ground, so that it had formed a sort of smear. In none of these did he find the mark.

Had Sergeant Quinn and Captain Vance observed this detail?

Of course, they had. When such experts examined a trail, it was most unlikely that he, a mere boy, should come on anything new.

This was a discouraging thought; and suddenly, as if to spite himself, he jumped clear over the cross-trail and carelessly burst through the woods beyond. The ground sloped down there; and shortly he came to the sharp bank of the creek which crossed these woods before it entered the meadows to the west. He would go to his raft.

XI

It was late at night, after supper when the telephone bell rang. Since Alice was not at home – her boy-friend had come to take her for a walk along the road – Mr. Broadus went to answer the ring.

When he returned, his face was grave. "It was Captain Vance," he said. "He reports that at all three cities they think they have done what can be done. There is a reward out for information leading to the arrest of any member of the gang. He would like Leonard to go with him in the morning."

Mrs. Broadus bent a questioning look on her son, a look which, in spite of her smile, betrayed worry. "I almost wish you would go along, Stephen."

"And leave you alone?"

She shrugged a despondent shoulder.

The boy was still up. They were sitting in the parlor; for, as usual of late, the night was chilly; and there was a fire in the fireplace. He wondered. Surely, there was not the slightest occasion for worry? But between grown-up people there existed things from which boys were excluded. He knew that his parents had had a long talk in the afternoon – his mother had not come down till near dinner time. Since he had always had what he needed or wished for – since he had even been able to give out of his superfluity to others, Jim Stubbing,

for instance, he could not imagine that the loss incidental to the robbery meant a serious blow to them. Yet, what else could there be to worry about? He looked at his father; and only now, having seen the despondency in his mother's shrug, did he seem to feel something strange, some sort of tenseness, in his father, too. What in the world could it mean?

They rose soon after. The little girl had been in bed for over an hour; Alice had just returned from her walk and promptly retired to her own room. Leonard lingered while his father locked up.

Then Mr. Broadus spoke briefly. "Get into bed, my boy," he said. "See that you have a good sleep. You'll have a trying day tomorrow."

Leonard at once slipped upstairs – when it came to going to bed, he was apt to prevaricate – and went to kiss his mother good-night. When his father followed him, he stood at the railing of the stairway, in his pyjamas. "Good night, sir."

"Good night, Leonard."

And five minutes later he was sound asleep.

It seemed as if barely five minutes had elapsed when his father, already fully dressed for his work in the fields, woke him, saying, "The captain has started from town. Better hurry up and get dressed, so that you have your breakfast before he arrives."

"What'll I wear?" asked the boy, swinging his feet alertly to the floor.

"Whatever you'd wear at home, I suppose. I can't see any need for dressing up."

"Surely not. Mother awake?"

"Mother was getting up when I left her."

Like an arrow the boy shot out through the door, leaving his father unceremoniously, and ran to the parents' room. "Mother," he cried from the door, "dad says I'm to wear my every-day clothes."

The mother laughed. "How like dad, isn't it? . . . No, my boy. You wear your new grey corduroy breeches, your good black shoes, a clear blue shirt, your maroon sweater, and whatever you want to around your neck and on your head."

Without answering the boy veered back into the hall, grinning at his father who was slowly going down the stairs on tiptoe; he had caught his father listening to his wife's directions!

In another five minutes he sat down to his breakfast, alone. Outside, a dense fog was veiling the woods. Shortly, his sister joined

him, still in her nightwear.

"Why are you so smart?" she asked.

"I am going away."

"Where?"

"Toronto."

"What for?"

"To see the king."

"Nonsense."

"Fact. He's in Toronto today, isn't he?"

She looked doubtfully at him. "Just to look at him, you mean?"

"Oh no," he said. "I'm going to have a talk with him about those European affairs. He's asked for my advice." Then, looking at the little girl who, to him, was a literal-minded non-entity, he felt sorry to have teased her. "I may not even see him, at that," he added.

Mrs. Broadus entered, more serious than usual; but she forced herself to seem cheerful. Going into the kitchen, she returned with a platter of crisply fried bacon.

"Oah!" cried the boy, "I don't want bacon, mother."

"You eat a full breakfast, Leonard," she said sternly, "or I won't let you go."

But he managed to evade the bacon after all; for before he got around to it, a car drove up by the side of the house, and he ran out.

There were two officers in it; but only one alighted, and that was Captain Vance. The other, in an identical uniform, was a veritable man-mountain; and it was probably on account of his bulk that he did not leave the back seat of the car. Captain Vance introduced the boy to him through the open door. "This is Leonard whom I was telling you about, Culver . . . And that" – to the boy – "is Captain Culver."

Leonard ran around to the other side and got in beside his new acquaintance, for Captain Vance motioned him into the back seat. Just as Mrs. Broadus stepped out from the kitchen door, Captain Vance turned the car in the yard behind the house.

Captain Vance stopped once more at the steps where Mr. Broadus had now joined his wife.

"Don't worry," he said. "We'll take the best of care of the boy. I'll ring you up some time around noon."

Leonard was leaning out of the window, to throw his arms about his mother's neck. "I'll be awfully good, mom," he whispered into her ear. "I'll be a goody-goody."

It had the desired effect; for Mrs. Broadus, laughing, kissed him briefly, gave him a push, said, "Go on with you!" and turned away.

Everybody laughed; and a moment later the car shot forward into the fog.

XII

Leonard could not take his eyes off his neighbour who was twice the circumference of Captain Vance, himself no light-weight. But he proved a most pleasant companion who chatted incessantly, asking Leonard all sorts of questions about his life, both at home and in school. Apparently, too, he knew the county in a geographical sense as well as in the sense of its fauna and flora; and though Leonard had had his father's coaching, he learned a few new points about some of the rarer birds.

The fog thinned after a while; but the sky remained overcast; there was no sun. Yet the car, going east, sped along at a great rate.

"Where are we going first?" Leonard asked.

"London," Captain Vance replied.

"And then?"

"Hamilton next; and lastly Toronto. At least that is the program, subject to change when we get to London."

"That little girl at the window," Captain Culver asked; "she's your sister, is she?"

"Yes. I'm glad I'm not she."

"Why?"

"It's no fun being a girl."

The huge man laughed.

"Besides, she sees things at night. And she's afraid."

"You are never afraid, of course?"

"No," Leonard said decidedly. "Though I don't believe in taking chances."

"You like to know what you're doing, eh?"

"Sure. But when I know it, I do it."

"That's the spirit," said the captain. "That's what *we*'ve got to do."

"I shouldn't mind being on the force."

"You wouldn't? I don't think, though, it's exactly what your parents would like for you."

"Why not?"

"Boys like you have better things open to them."

"Like being a pilot, or a captain at sea?"

"For instance," the captain agreed readily enough. "Or a professor at the university, or a pianist."

"I shouldn't like that."

"Not?"

"No. Not enough action."

Both officers laughed.

Meanwhile, expertly driven, the car was speeding along. Captain Vance seemed to know every bump in the road as well as every turn. In half an hour they passed through Tillsonburg where they turned north, cutting across to Ingersoll and the main highway. Thence, it took them another three quarters of an hour to make the city limits of London.

Leonard fell silent. While they had been going through the open country, he had felt at home. This realm of paved streets and crowded traffic was alien to him. On and on they went; and though it took them no more than fifteen minutes to reach their destination, which was the central police station, so brief a span of time seemed longer to him than the whole previous drive.

Then he found himself alighting, and the first intimation of his own importance came to him when he saw a dozen cameras pointing. He felt annoyed that the photographers did not give him the time to pose for them but promptly clicked their shutters.

But Captain Vance stepped in. "Now, gentlemen," he said, "we don't want a picture of this young man to appear in the papers just yet. It might interfere with our plans. I must ask you to give me your word of honour not to use your snap-shots till we give you permission to release them. If you refuse, I must ask you to step inside and leave your cameras behind."

The photographers grinned at each other and the boy; but they gave the desired assurance. "All right, captain," they said almost in chorus.

Then Leonard found himself inside the building where he was asked to sit down in a bare, empty room which held nothing but three or four battered chairs. The air was depressing, stale, and almost foul; but he was left there for no more than a few minutes.

Captain Culver came for him; and the boy admired the easy way in which he carried his bulk.

"Well, Leonard," he said, "we're ready for you. Captain Vance has a score of men lined up for you; there's only one among them who might possibly answer your description. Simply walk along the line and look at them. If that fellow is he – it doesn't seem likely to me – stop and give Captain Vance a sign."

"All right, sir," said Leonard who had already jumped up.

He was led through a long, dismal corridor which somehow had the air of being underground and into a wide, low-ceilinged room which, though all its lines were straight, brought the word 'vault' to his mind. All those wretched-looking men who were waiting for him looked up as he entered, some openly, some in a furtive way. At the far end of the room stood Captain Vance; and four constables stood behind them.

He walked rapidly forward, quite unselfconscious; and, without stopping or even hesitating, joined Captain Vance. Captain Culver had remained behind at the door through which they had come.

Then, strangely, he felt himself being rushed back to the car; he could not see the necessity for all this hurry; but before he had had time to ask a question, they were back in their seats and threading their way through the traffic of the city. For a while they followed side streets; but at last they had to turn into the main thoroughfare.

There they began to tear through the traffic at what seemed to Leonard breakneck speed, never even stopping when a stop-light went against them. Leonard said a word about it to his neighbour.

"The car is known to the traffic policemen," his neighbour said. "They know it may be a question of life or death."

Then Captain Vance spoke over his shoulder. "Mind you," he said, "this proves nothing whatever. We are dealing with a widely ramified gang which probably has its members in every centre. We've a slender clue; it points to a single man who may or may not be the leader of the rest. The danger is that one of his accomplices, here or elsewhere, gives him warning before we can reach him . . . By the way," he added, "before we get to Hamilton, you had better remove that hat of yours and your bandanna; they may have been signalised by the time. The police can't hold these men at London; there's nothing

against them except that they are known as members of criminal gangs who have served time before. They are probably free by now. We want to give them as little to recognise you by as we can."

"All right," said Leonard.

When they reached the open highway, their speed became breathtaking.

But Captain Culver asked the boy smilingly, "Ever been on a motorcycle?"

"No," Leonard said. "We are doing eighty-five. Do you go faster than that on a motorbike?"

"A hundred often. I've gone a hundred and twenty to overtake a car. We'll have two of those handy little machines with us for the trip back from Toronto."

"What for?"

"Just for an escort."

Leonard hated to ask too many questions. 'An escort?' he repeated to himself. Were not these two men escort enough? Why should a police car need further protection? It was disquieting, to say the least. He was to learn one thing that day: that even the police is not immune from attack by desperate men.

XIII

They were into and out of Hamilton in an hour and a half; and then they swung into the new, so-called 'Middle Highway' with its four wide lanes separated by a boulevard. Here, Captain Vance struck a pace which kept them almost incessantly on the inside of the eastbound traffic. Cars were streaming into Toronto in an all but unbroken line, on account of the visit of the king and queen; beyond the boulevard, hardly any were travelling west. Few of those going east were going at less than fifty miles an hour; but a large number of highway policemen on motorcycles prevented them from going much faster. The police car, signalised as such to the motor-men by a constant use of the horn – one long blast, two short ones – streaked past all that traffic as if it were standing still.

When they reached the city limits where the dual highway narrowed to single width, the captain sounded his horn at intervals of fifteen seconds, for he overhauled everything. Fortunately, here, too, there was no out-bound trafic.

Leonard sat, watching fascinatedly, holding his breath. If the car had been driven by anyone less expert than Captain Vance, they would have crashed a score of times. More than once they avoided a collision

by inches; but Captain Vance kept a cool head as well as a sharp lookout. He did take chances; but invariably, before taking them, he weighed them with a level eye.

Then, entering the city proper, he had willy-nilly to slow down, for the streets were now lined with crowds of pedestrians who even overflowed into the driveway, all hurrying to such places as Their Majesties were to pass. Thicker and thicker grew the crowds; and the boy who, so far, had thought of the royal visit in a remote way – as something that interested him, it was true, but that did not concern him in any but an impersonal way – began to be caught up in the general excitement. He began dimly to realise that this visit of the royal couple meant more to his country than he thought; more, no doubt, to the king and the queen than a mere sight-seeing trip; more to himself than a chance to see royalty passing by. He felt as if he had been dropped into an alien atmosphere where he had to relearn to breathe but where, once he had learned it, he drew in, with each breath, a wider consciousness and a deeper purpose.

What he had said to his sister about seeing the king he had said in entire indifference, quite apart from his jests. Now he knew that it would mean a serious loss to him, to be regretted for years and years perhaps for life, if he failed to see the man who was the bond between many countries and who had come to Canada, not as a person, not as a mere individual, but as a representative of Empire, of ancient institutions, and of a future perhaps one day to be fought for.

"Gee!" he said excitedly, turning around, from the window, to his companion, "I wish I could see the king!"

"You are going to see him," said Captain Culver.

"Am I?" he asked; yet his tone did not betray any particular eagerness; it was dreamy rather. He was too profoundly stirred by what it would mean to him, to show how hopelessly he would be disappointed if it failed to come about. When the full sense of the promise just made by the captain came home to him, he felt as if something had suddenly put him at peace with the world.

Yes, it was a necessity for him to see the king; it was something that could not be denied him; it was the necessity of consecration, of dedication of his whole future life. If he saw the king, he thought irrelevantly, he would never, he could never shirk his piano practice again; he who has seen the king does not do such a thing.

He only half heard the man by his side who was explaining. "You see," Captain Culver was saying, "you are doing us and the whole of the provincial police a signal service. You may be the means of saving many people from loss and even from death by helping us to locate

this gang. In return, we have arranged for you to see the king face to face."

"But if I fail?" asked the boy.

"There is no failure," said the man-mountain with a curious light in his eyes. "You have already done us this service that, if we don't find our man here, we know that he is still south of the London-Hamilton line. Everywhere the roads are being watched; and they cannot get through, not with that truck of theirs; and if they change it, they must get a car somewhere, provided they are still trying to get away. They must buy one or steal one. In either case they will leave a new trail. They must get gas. But every service station has a description of the man. They can't get through the net any longer; but they may have got through it during the first few hours. At three in the morning of Sunday they were still at Rivers; by four the alarm was general over the province. If after that they got through, they must have been invisible. If we fail to locate the man here in Toronto where a hundred lightning raids were made yesterday, the conclusion at which we have already arrived becomes almost a certainty."

"And what's that conclusion?" Leonard asked.

"As I said; that the man we are looking for, the only one we can identify, by confronting him with you – unless indeed they are such bunglers at the game as to offer something for sale that is recognisable – that that man, I say, is still in your district. If he is, we'll get him sooner or later."

"I see," said the boy. "I didn't know how important I am," he added with an embarrassed laugh.

"I thought so. Knowing, then, that we'd be in the city today, and even near the City Hall, we've made arrangements with the city police for you to have a place at the window reserved for the chief. From there you can salute the king."

"Gee," said the boy, "I'm to be that close, am I?"

"You wouldn't like us to offer you pay for your time, would you?"

"No . . . But if we get the fellow, how about that reward?"

"That's yours," said the captain promptly.

"Not that I want the money," said the boy. "I shouldn't know what to do with it. But I heard dad say that the burglary cost him round a thousand dollars."

XIV

The inspection at the central police station took much longer than

either at London or Hamilton; though, in many ways, it was very similar; and similar also was its result in that it was unsuccessful.

When they left the police station, they had lunch; and the two captains parted company after having made an appointment to meet at a given street-corner and a given hour. In taking temporary leave, Captain Vance mentioned to Leonard that he was going to telephone to his parents, so as to allay any possible nervousness his mother might feel. With that, he handed his charge over to Captain Culver.

They had hardly issued into the crowded streets when Leonard became aware of the advantage he had over others in being escorted by the huge captain who seemed to be known to every policeman, provincial or mounted.

The open space in front of the City Hall was packed with humanity excited with anticipation. The royal pair were expected at any moment. But at a word Captain Culver was permitted to pass anywhere. Leonard could not decide whether it was merely the uniform he was wearing or whether he was personally known to those he saluted so briefly when he spoke to them. The fact was that everybody stepped back to make room for them.

The cenotaph, the royal pavilion, the brilliant uniforms and dresses, the flags, the flowers – everything dazzled him; and he felt invaded by that excitement that surged through the crowds.

They stopped near a man with the air of authority, though his uniform was no more striking than that of Captain Culver. For the first time the latter saluted the older man with an air of deference before exchanging with him a few brief words which Leonard did not understand, so great was the noise. But the stranger bent down and spoke to him, Leonard, who felt strangely small in this crowd.

"The captain will take you inside," he said. "There, to that window. From there you'll be able to see all there is to see. The king will stand here in front of the cenotaph while the mayor gives his address of welcome . . . What's that? . . . Oh, we're glad to give you a good place, my boy; you're one of us for the day." And he turned away, raising an arm to a point where his decision was needed.

As they went on, Captain Culver took the boy's hand; and they passed right through the centre between the surging crowds.

They had not yet reached the open doors of the main entrance to the City Hall when, from a distance, like the approach of a huge wave, a sound broke upon their ears which electrified even the huge captain. "Come on," he said, tightening his grip on Leonard's hand, and hurried forward.

All about, the crowds were straining and surging.

Coming closer, the wave seemed to tower above them and then to thunder down on their heads: the king had arrived in the square.

Leonard and his escort were almost running through crowded corridors, colliding with people, stopping suddenly to let others pass, hurrying on again through any opening that offered.

Then they entered a sort of low hall with many windows all but one of which were crowded with people, those behind standing on tiptoe, and some on chairs, to look over the heads and shoulders of those in front. The single window unoccupied was guarded and, a moment later, filled with police officers stepping sharply to attention. It was there Captain Culver steered the boy whom he held by one up-raised hand in front of him. They reached it at the very moment when a tremendous cheer burst forth outside which threatened to deafen all those in the room; for, by some accident of the acoustics of the place, that room acted like a sounding board.

Leonard did not feel frightened exactly; he felt awed and infinitely small and unimportant, as he might have felt in the sight of some convulsion in nature. It was only when, at a word from his escort, a lane opened in front, and he found himself lifted right into the window, with his feet dangling out, that he became aware that those about him were cheering as well. He, too, joined in, at the very moment when Their Majesties came forward from their car, to walk into the space kept open for them, saluting the cenotaph as they did so.

The ceremony which he witnessed, the greeting of the royal couple by the mayor of the city, and all that followed, he observed with what was almost an absent-minded detachment; he was thinking of his parents to whom he must report the smallest detail.

But meanwhile, his eyes glued to the face of the king, something was happening to him. When, an hour or more ago, they had been driving through the crowded streets where the flags were waving and the thousands of people were either waiting or hurrying along, he had been overwhelmed with the sense of Empire, of masses unconquerable in their aggregate, for whom the king did not exist as a human being like themselves; but as something above them; as a symbol of smoke-blackened banners and grim battle-fronts in which they or theirs had been fighting and dying, determined to hold on in the face of no matter what odds, dedicated to a cause rather than to a person. Of course, he could not have expressed or explained his feelings; but that was what they had been. It all suddenly vanished; it became simplified into what was almost a worship of a smiling face, of two smiling faces,

for at last he became aware of the queen as well; into a personal love which, though he sat still and absorbed, without cheering now, without stirring or even waving of hands, would, at a sign from that king, have precipitated him at his feet, ready to surrender his life for him. To cheer would have been profaning that feeling which was love.

There came a moment when Their Majesties, no doubt carried away by the brunt of the reception, disregarding all rules of precedent, walked boldly forward into the crowd, smiling, extending their hands, visibly touched to the point where they themselves felt this to be one of the supreme moments of their lives: in the heart of these people, body-guards, guards of honour had become needless.

Leonard still sat motionless; but down his cheeks the tears were coursing.

And then the royal couple stepped back. It so happened that Her Majesty's eyes swept upward over the façade of the building and its windows, coming to rest on the boy from whose eyes waves of love seemed to flow. She put her hand on His Majesty's sleeve and, very slightly, nodded in the direction of the child. Whereupon the king smiled straight at the boy and nodded; and the queen raised a gloved hand and waved to him.

He felt so choked with emotion that he could do nothing but give a brief nod to the two crowned heads who, next, glanced at each other as if they fully understood what was going on in the boy.

XV

It was five o'clock when a red car set them down at the corner of Queen and John Streets. Another, plain car stood drawn up at the curb of John Street, headed south.

From its window, Captain Vance was waving his hand at them. It was not, Leonard noticed, the car in which they had come in the morning; and somehow that seemed only natural. In the interval, he had lived through so much that most likely that other car must have been worn out meanwhile.

Within a few minutes they were under way. To Leonard, in his strange state of mind – which was still an absent-mindedly observant one – it seemed incomprehensible that they should have to make so many turns and detours. They were constantly slowing down to take a corner, and then shooting forward again at the top of their speed. The streets were deserted.

At last he asked a question.

"Why," said Captain Culver, "we are covering our tracks, that is all. We are dodging possible pursuers."

"Who should be pursuing us?"

"My dear boy," said the captain, "you are now known by sight to hundreds of people. Most of them had been arrested for the sole purpose of being looked over by you. You may be sure *they* looked *you* over. Suppose there were some among them who were connected with the gang. They are putting two and two together; in their own field they are clever enough. They have long since guessed that at least one of their men was seen at one of the jobs. The leader knows who it was; and that it was during the robbery at your father's; for that is where his mask slipped from his face. Wouldn't it be a great thing for them if, before you could do your worst, they got you?"

"I see," said Leonard wistfully; and for the first time he understood why, at the last moment, his parents had hesitated about letting him go. At the same time, realising that he himself was in danger, he felt overcome with the feeling that he was bent on performing the king's work; and that thought kept him from experiencing anything resembling fear.

At last they emerged on the great crescent that led out of the city to the highway. At one point of this crescent two motorcyclists were standing by the curb, straddling their machines, engines running. As they passed them, Captain Vance raised a hand from the wheel; and instantly the boy heard the bellow of their exhausts behind the car. Looking back out of the rear light, he saw them following at a distance of perhaps two hundred feet.

Then the car took the turn to the right, on to the highway which was here still single; and it they followed for some time at the almost leisurely gait of sixty miles per hour. Nothing happened. The highway widened out, and the boulevard separated the two one-way halves. Still nothing happened till they had passed under the bridge carrying the cross-road from Brampton to Port Credit overhead.

And suddenly things began to happen fast.

By mere chance Leonard was looking back through the window when a car travelling faster than their own cut in between them and the motorcyclists. This manoeuvre was followed by a sudden congestion behind. Two, three cars swerved into the inner lane. A warning signal – one long blast followed by two short ones – caused Captain Culver to look back, too; and apparently he instantly understood the situation, which Leonard did not. He spoke crisply to Captain Vance, his words coming so rapidly and excitedly that the boy did not catch their meaning.

Ahead, the highway was perfectly clear; not a car was in sight.

Captain Culver got ready for action by drawing his automatic from

its holster. Simultaneously he spoke sharply to the boy by his side: "Keep away from the window. It's you they're after."

Since Leonard obeyed at once, he could no longer find out what was going on. The last he had seen was that all but one of the cars were slowing down and that there were now three abreast, covering both passing and traffic lanes; and his quick mind helped him to interpret that move at least. If these were cars driven by members of the gang, it must be their purpose to hold back the motorcyclists; for, spread out as they were, they were barring the full width of the highway.

The next moment came Captain Vance's voice, quiet but urgent.

"Do you hear me, Leonard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Lie down on the floor of the car."

"Oh, but . . ."

"Do as I tell you. I am responsible for you to your parents . . . Culver."

"Vance?"

"We've got to get them."

Captain Culver laughed. "If we can."

"How many are there?"

"Six cars. Five are holding Gunn and Barker back. The other is trying to draw up alongside.

"I'll let them go by, on the wrong side. Watch out."

The police car was doing ninety miles an hour; slowly it swerved into the passing lane on the left, then slowed down perceptibly.

The next moment there was a volley of shots from the right; riddling the side of the police car; the bullets fell dead on the cushions and the floor, around the boy. He touched one; it was scorchingly hot.

"Any hit?" asked Captain Vance while he cautiously applied the brakes.

"Arm," Captain Culver answered. "Flesh-wound. Don't mind me."

"They're passing us," Captain Vance said tensely. "I'm slowing down. Get their tires."

Apparently baffled by the slowing of the police car and unprepared for such a manoeuvre, the bandit car shot by. Captain Culver, whose movements Leonard could see, leaned far out of his window, for the

moment in perfect safety, for the assailants, preoccupied with their own purpose, did not yet look back. In quick succession six shots rang out from the captain's barking automatic.

"Confound it!" cried Captain Culver. "I got both tires instead of one."

"They're slowing," said Captain Vance. "Watch out. Hit to kill if you can."

At this moment sharp signals came from behind.

"Gunn and Barker are coming up," Captain Culver sang out. "They've taken to the boulevard."

"Good for Barker!" Captain Vance said. "It's his move. I know him." Then, "Look at that! Look at that!"

"By jingo!" Captain Culver cried out.

At which Leonard could not restrain himself any longer; he jumped up to see.

The car in front, slowing sharply, had swung in front of the police car, forcing Captain Vance to use both brakes. Now, running on two flat rear tires, it prepared to take a turn to the left where, on the far side of the traffic lane, a narrow gravelled road joined the highway. It made the turn at great risk, running on its two outer wheels only; but it made it.

Captain Vance was still going too fast; and he was too unprepared to take such a right-angled turn; he was applying both brakes; yet, when he hit the curb of the boulevard, the car took something like a flying leap; and along a slant line it ran over the east-bound lanes, plowing down shrubs and young trees as it did so.

For a moment all looked like utter confusion; for the cars that had been following, holding back the cyclists, shot by with screaming horns and increasing speed. But the cyclists somehow made the turn, though they skidded badly, and now followed the disabled car which was still running as fast as it dared with two flat tires on loose gravel; they were perhaps a thousand feet behind it but rapidly catching up. For the merest fraction of a second Leonard had been able to look crosswise through the bandit car; it held three men: the driver and two others, both in the back seat.

And then the three occupants of the police car which had come to a stop at the extreme left of the highway, a few hundred feet beyond the side-road, witnessed an appalling thing.

Out of a field-lane, a quarter of a mile from the crossing, the disabled car having just passed the place, and at the very moment

when the cyclists, now running abreast, at a speed of over a hundred miles, were approaching it, there shot a huge truck, backing out at right angles to the narrow road, barring it completely. Both cyclists hit into it at their terrific speed and were catapulted forward, over the body of the truck, their cycles demolished. From the cab of the truck jumped a man who ran for the disabled car which had slowed down to a mere crawl. With him on board, that car limped away in perfect safety, in plain sight of the two officers and the boy, till it disappeared in some woods which crossed the roads a mile further on.

"Well,' said Captain Vance, a profound disappointment betraying itself in his voice, "that settles it. Can you run and see, Culver?"

"May I come?" cried Leonard.

"Not on your life! You stay where you are."

With a speed surprising in one of his bulk, Captain Culver ran back to the crossing and there turned into the side-road. One of the cyclists, who had been thrown into the field to the east, was slowly, painfully getting to his feet; the other lay motionless in the middle of the road beyond the truck. A mile or so further on, the car had disappeared.

Within ten minutes Captain Culver was back. "Barker's dead," he said. "There's a mighty fine man lost. Gunn, it seems, got off with a broken arm, the left one. There may be broken ribs, of course; but he thinks he's merely badly shaken up. He refuses to leave his post. Rather fine of him, too."

"How about your arm?"

"A trifle. But it's bleeding into my clothes. I'll put a bandage on while we're going. You are going to change your route, I suppose?"

"I'll cut across to Number Five. We'll hit Erindale or Trafalgar. From there we can send help to Gunn; and we'll telephone to stop the others unless they leave the highway which they likely will." He had pointed in the direction of Hamilton.

It took twenty minutes to reach the village of Trafalgar where, by a lucky chance, Captain Culver got hurried surgical help from a doctor who happened to be in the drugstore whence Captain Vance was telephoning to Toronto and Hamilton.

In less than half an hour more, driving fast, they came to Brantford where they refuelled the car. While they were waiting, Captain Vance cautioned Leonard not to frighten his parents too much by a too graphic account of the shooting.

By eight o'clock the two officers delivered an excited but dead-tired boy to his parents, who, unfortunately, had already heard of the

battle of the cars over the radio and vowed that, no matter what happened, they would not let the boy go alone again to help the police.

XVI

But that decision was not to lie with them, nor with Leonard; the heavens themselves took a hand.

Perhaps it was only natural that the parents, having heard, through the boy, of the conclusion at which the police had arrived, namely that the presumable leader of this cunningly organised gang was lying low and still hiding in the district, vetoed even the boy's going back to school. Miss Mackay came on Saturday to teach him his music, of course, praising him, as Leonard said, at ninety miles an hour. But that was as far as, for the moment, his instruction went.

The rest of the time he spent largely on the raft, dreaming of deeds to be done for king and country, on land, on sea, or in the air – he serving at sea, of course, or in the air.

Just now the immediate task before him consisted in the capture of those robbers; though, in that, he had another motive. They heard over the radio that the rewards offered for that capture were of $500 for any proved member of the gang; and of $1,000 for the capture of the leader or any other additional two. The reward was to be for information even though the capture as such might be effected by the police. Leonard dreamed of stepping up to his father and saying, "Here is a cheque which will reimburse you for your loss which I could have prevented if I had been a man."

Much of his time, too, was taken by listening to radio reports of the progress of king and queen through the Dominion. On May 24 he heard the tremendous international ovation arranged for by the government of Manitoba. All four members of the family were sitting around the radio. Leonard was pale with emotion; and in the middle of the broadcast he rose and quietly slipped out into the hall. When his mother, fearing he was unwell, tried to follow him, he waved her away. Every muscle in his body was tense.

He had not cared to talk to anyone, not even to father or mother, of the experience he had gone through in Toronto – it had seemed too sacred.

It had a trifling, if curious consequence. The raft was his; there was no-one to dispute his right; and without that view of the smiling king and the waving queen he would have contemptuously declined to be burdened with female company, apart from his mother. As it was, he more than once invited his sister to go with him, to her immense delight. Not that she cared for the rides on the raft; but she

appreciated being taken notice of. His parents had had one ride each, of course; first his father; then his mother, in spite of her ineradicable fear of the water which it took all her courage to conceal for the sake of her boy.

Every day, too, he spent hours at the piano, getting daily new pleasure out of what had often seemed an irksome task.

Thus a whole week went by; and a little over.

On Saturday, the parents forewent their usual weekly trip to town; they went on the following Monday instead, in broad daylight, having arranged for police protection of building, premises, and inmates during their absence. For the moment, field-work had come more or less to a standstill, apart from routine operations which Stubbing could look after alone.

More than once, during that week from May 23 to May 29, Captain Vance dropped in; the police were fine-combing the whole district, for it was known that in many places presumably unemployed men had erected temporary shelters in the bush which, south of the Broadus farm, became more and more continuous till, in a valley running roughly parallel to the shore of Lake Erie, approximately ten miles north of it, there was another dense settlement. Captain Vance was in charge of this search which, however, remained without the slightest result.

"Too bad," said the boy one day to the captain when he had met him in the front yard. "I'd dearly love to catch those pirates."

"Well," said the captain, his hand as usual on the boy's shoulder, for he had become fond of him, "our trip last Monday has had at least one beneficial effect. For weeks before, there had been a double or triple robbery every two or three days. We tried to forestall them; but we never seemed to be able to guess right. There hasn't been a single one since – which again proves that they were all due to one organised gang."

"They are warned," said the boy.

"And waiting till we relax; which, however, we aren't going to do. They are all shut up in this county, at least the leaders are; for one of them knows he was recognised. No doubt he knows by this time who it was who saw him when he dropped that mask. That's why I always keep a couple of men patrolling the woods around here, within sight and earshot of the house, day and night. You needn't tell your dad that, or at least your mother. I tell you because you're one of us."

The boy smiled brightly up at the man.

And then, on that Monday, while Mr. and Mrs. Broadus were in

town, about five o'clock in the afternoon, the famous rain started.

It began with a sudden, vicious thunderstorm which Leonard watched from the kitchen stoop. The air had been breathless for an hour – the sort of atmosphere which he had already learned to look upon as the forerunner of one of the major aerial outbursts of nature. The beginning and middle of May had been unusually cool and even cold; but during the week just past there had come three sweltering days, such as ordinarily are expected only in late July or early August. Every now and then, that Monday, there had been little bursts of wind; and on open stretches of the fields little dust eddies had swept along from west to east, with the sky remaining unclouded. Yet it had been only in the afternoon that the calm which invariably had re-established itself took on an unnatural, threatening, brooding quality. Leonard caught himself wishing that his parents would come home. Not that *he* was afraid. He rather enjoyed thunderstorms; but his mother was nervous about them, especially when she was on the road. More than ever, since his view of the king, was his mother the centre of his life, the embodiment, to him, of all that was good, true, and beautiful. It was largely on her account that he wished he could hand his father that cheque.

When, in his purely physical disquietude, he stepped out on the back stoop of the house, he saw that already half the sky was hidden by clouds presenting the appearance of a solid, steel-blue wall which slowly rose from the north-west towards the zenith. These clouds still looked deceptively calm; they were menacing by the inexorable slowness with which they pushed up, obscuring the sky, and proclaiming, by he knew not what, their potential energy, so far dormant. At last they reached the middle of the sky and hid the sun. With that moment it grew fearfully dark.

Then a wind broke loose, of a hissing violence that threatened to lay flat trees, buildings, hydro and telephone poles, and even fenceposts. A second or so later, the rain began to pour down with the effect of a cloudburst. Thunder and lightning, usually heralding such an outbreak, were minor factors, vicious though they were. What was frightening was the force of the wind which hissed and bellowed and crackled and snarled, as if all the evil forces of the universe were let loose in an infernal dance of destruction that swept down from the upper realms of the air.

The creepers that covered the west side of the house strained at their finger-like roots and their tendrils and then floated loose upon the wind like banners; the trees stood humped as if they were turning their backs to the blast; at moments they looked as if they were running; in the meadow, the cows stood aligned in slanting succession, their heads

lowered under their great chests, their feet braced forward, their flanks streaming with the rain.

This outburst lasted for perhaps a quarter of an hour; but it left behind a trail of destruction. Every board in the buildings that was loose had been flung aloft; many a tree no longer in its prime had been laid low; and on the barn, north of the tenant house, the roof was bristling with its shingles raised like the hair on the back of a dog that is frightened. In the orchard, the trees were split in the crotch, their blossoms stripped.

Nor did the sky clear up. The rain simply settled down to a steady drizzle which was not to cease all night, nor next day; instead, it was broken by periodic downpours from low-hanging clouds, so violent that it seemed they must empty the firmament of its waters.

It was shortly after the initial cloudburst had settled down into the drizzle that the parents came home. Contrary to his custom, Mr. Broadus drove up to the front of the house, to set his wife down; for usually she stayed with him till he had gone to the garage.

As she alighted, Leonard having run around the house through the rain, he was struck by her air of weariness and by his father's solicitude in helping her to get out of her seat. He said nothing; but that picture of her was to remain with him through the several days of separation that were to follow. It was pathetic to watch her response as the little girl came running out from the door to fling her arms around her mother.

Leonard promptly took her place in the car to help his father bring in the provisions and to close the garage.

It was when, thence, they re-entered the house that the first-fruits of the storm were revealed. For Mr. Broadus, tall, stooping, worried, had barely deposited the last of the parcels in the kitchen when he reached for the receiver of the telephone and rang central. There was no answer to that ring.

"I thought so," he said as if speaking to himself. And then he turned to the boy. "The line is down. Switch the lights on . . . I thought so," he repeated. We're cut off . . . Our bridge," he added, nodding to the north-west where Patterson Creek crossed the road, "looked a good deal as if it would go if this lasts."

Leonard was appalled; he had never thought of the possibility of what he considered civilisation being suspended by a natural catastrophe.

XVII

He was still more appalled when, next morning, having dressed in a hurry, he went to the north window in the upstairs hall to look out. Never before had he seen the creek so high, not even in the first days of thawing weather in spring. It overflowed its banks every year, covering the meadows to both sides, often dammed back by an ice-jam at the bridge to the west where the road to town crossed the narrow strip of woodland. There he had watched the swirling floods forcing their way under the concrete span, carrying up-ended ice-floes and the wreckage of the woods to the east. Later in the year, it would rise and fall with every heavy rain; but it stayed within its banks. Never before had it, in late spring or summer, invaded the orchard, for instance, as it did now.

Suddenly he thought of his raft. Only the day before, in his parents' absence, had he rummaged about in kitchen and pantry for things with which to provision the 'galley'; only the day before had he searched in barn and implement shed for a stout wire, a number-nine wire, to serve as a mooring cable. Stubbing, the hired man, had, at his request, driven a pole into the bank to which to fasten. But, unable to find such a wire long enough, he had provisionally tied the craft with a length of what he called Eaton-string – the sort of hemp cord with which that mail-order house tied large parcels for shipping. It was good, stout string; but would it withstand the raging pull of that central current?

Like an arrow he shot downstairs. Nobody saw him. The parents were only just getting up; he was usually the first to rise; Mary was still asleep; Alice happened to be in the cellar to fetch cream and butter for breakfast; and Stubbing was in the barn, milking.

He ran through the orchard where everything was dripping though, for the moment, there was a lull in the rain; and soon he came to the edge of the water where the lake formed by the flood lapped the higher ground among the trees.

The raft was there; he saw it plainly; the Eaton-string held; but it was tossing in the water ridged by its speed.

For a second he stood irresolute; and then he made up his mind. The water covering the meadow was more or less stagnant; and at the deepest it could not be much over two feet deep; the line of the bank was clearly marked by the streak of foam forming where the torrent bordered on that stagnant flood.

Leaning against a cherry tree – for he could not sit down anywhere in the mud – he stripped shoes and stockings off – the latter he still

wore knee-high; and, looking about for some dry spot to deposit them and finding none, he tucked them under his arm and waded out into the water. It chilled him, for it was anything but warm; but by the time he returned, breakfast would be ready, so the chill did not matter. He felt poignantly that he must save his raft by pulling it up among the trees of the orchard.

While thus wading out to the centre of the lake, he thought humorously of the sort of provisions he had put away in the 'galley': there were half a dozen coffee tins filled with raisins, nuts, cookies, biscuits. Alice had scolded him when she had discovered the theft. These tins stood in the forward box which he had securely nailed to the floor. Only yesterday, too, he had provided the craft with a sort of paddle: a piece of board four inches wide fastened to a broom-handle, in addition to the poling stick of white ash which his father had given him when they had made the raft. He wondered whether the raft had been swamped at any time, so that these instruments of navigation might have been lost.

He had not yet covered half the distance when he saw that both paddle and pole were safe. But, seeing the violence with which the raft, every now and then, jerked the mooring-string taut, he began to fear that it might go adrift before he could reach it; the water was still rising, so it seemed. He started to go faster and faster, till his movement was almost a run, so that the water splashed up from his shins into his rolled-up breeches. But at last he had to slow down again; for he was now near the natural bank of the creek which fell away sharply; and the water came now up to mid-thigh.

It was this hurry of his which brought about what, for the moment, seemed a disaster, though, ultimately, it was the very thing which brought about the fulfilment of his boldest dreams.

When he stood on the edge of the creek-bank, he should have groped about with his toes for the mooring pole and then for the cord, to lift it with his foot. Instead, he took a flying leap on to the boarded deck of the craft.

Now the raft had been lying for three parts in smooth water over the meadow; and only one part had been exposed to the push of the central current; for, in the first place, the mooring pole stood a foot or so from the edge; in the second, the furious pace of the water beyond had exerted a powerful pressure on that part exposed to it and thereby slanted it inland. Barely a quarter of the raft had been actually in the current. The pull on the cord, therefore, had been comparatively slight.

Under the impact of his leap, however, the craft swung crazily out into mid-current, gaining slightly against it, even, so that the cord

slackened. But as soon as the momentum thus gained was exhausted, the ridged current took swift charge. The cord, snapping under the full and suddenly-applied force of that current and the increased weight of the raft, the boy nearly losing his balance in the jerk, with the consequent reversal of direction, released the craft which promptly went careering down the stream, to the west where the meadow and, therefore, the lake narrowed, between high banks, for the passage, first through the fringe of woods, then through the arch of the low bridge that vaulted it.

Leonard was dumbfounded. For a moment panic seized him; and he cast an imploring glance back at the house the upper story of which was in plain view above the orchard. There, at the open window of his parents' bedroom, he saw his father wildly waving his arms and ineffectually shouting something which, of course, he could not hear. Just then the rain began again to descend in a downpour; the sight of the house was veiled; and all sounds were drowned in the swish of the rain-drops on the leaves of the trees. It was many hours later that he interpreted his father's wild gesture to himself: he had meant him to jump for it, at the imminent risk of falling on the slippery bank and taking a ducking.

When he recovered his presence of mind, he thought of the poling stick; and, with a leap, he picked it up where it lay alongside the deck. But he could reach neither bank nor bottom of the creek; the bank was too far away, the water too deep. When he realised his predicament, the panic returned for a moment; and he stood helpless. It was during this brief interval that he was swept through the fringe of forest and on. He never saw sign of the bridge; and when reflection returned, he concluded that he must have passed over instead of below it; unless, indeed, he had been too stunned to observe it. But no, he thought, that could not be; even with the creek at its normal height he had always had to lie flat to avoid being caught by the span. The truth was that, overnight, it had collapsed, its abutments having been undermined by the torrent.

When he looked about again with a clear eye and a full appreciation of the danger he was in, he found himself already in unfamiliar territory. He was helpless; for the speed with which he was being carried along prevented him from doing anything whatever: it must have been twenty miles an hour. At that rate he would reach the lake in forty or fifty minutes now, unless the creek turned back upon itself in wide loops – a thing of which he knew nothing.

On and on he was swept; and then, conscious of the rain which was once more pouring down with great violence, he thought of such precautions as he could take. So long as he stayed on the raft there was no immediate danger except that of catching a frightful cold which

would worry his mother more than him. He must provide for a change of clothes. He squatted down in front of the galley and arranged the tins in it so that they formed a false bottom. On it he deposited, first his shoes and stockings which, after his leap, he had pushed in at haphazard; yet, finding that they remained reasonably dry, he slipped his watch into one of the shoes. Then, removing his coat, he took off sweater and shirt and finally his underwear; all these, still dry, he placed on top of the shoes. Incidentally, while thus engaged, he took a handful of raisins and another of biscuits from the tins and began to munch them, very slowly; for he had heard that, the more slowly one eats, the greater the benefit derived from nourishment. He had had no breakfast; and heaven only knew when he would have one. Breeches and coat he put on again; and, after having stood stripped for a moment, he marvelled how warm they felt though they were damp enough. By this time he knew that the air was not so calm as it seemed; he was simply travelling with the wind which, above him, tossed the tops of such trees as stood along the banks.

Then he sat down on top of the galley and tried to reason some way out, but with no success. He tried to use his paddle as a rudder; but it proved useless for he had too little steerage way over the water. So he paddled for a while furiously and then tried again. Once or twice he did touch the bank which was getting steeper and higher all the time; but every time the motion of the raft, the last moment, became a whirling motion; for the faster current in the centre caught the stern of his craft and wheeled it about. A jump he could not risk without danger of slipping back into the current, and that without the support of the raft; for the bank was too steep and too slippery with the rain.

He sat down again and tried to assemble in his mind every fact known to him about the geography of the district. He knew that the creek emptied into Lake Erie; he had been there with his parents and Mary, for a picnic and a swim. Normally, it was there perhaps sixty feet wide. Some twenty miles or so either east or west of the mouth – he did not know which – lay his uncle's place, a great peach farm, near the hamlet of Brittany-on-the-Lake. He must wait, so it seemed, till he got to that lake. Surely, there, in standing water, his paddle would take effect; and he knew that, on the cliff behind the beach, there were farms in plenty where he could find people to help him in getting back home.

He had just reached this comforting conclusion when the raft, on its wild career, began to cross the last valley which stretched away to east and west, parallel to the shore of the lake. That valley he knew; his father had motored through it; and it, too, was dotted with farms.

His hope rose; and he braced himself for another desperate effort;

for he also knew that, beyond, the creek cut through a wild region of sand-dunes which, years ago, he had slid down, on the occasion of one of their picnics; he could even date that picnic by the fact that Mary had been a mere baby.

But his hope was soon shattered; for what had been mere trickles of streams joining Patterson Creek and emptying into it from east and west were now raging torrents carrying wreckage. He caught sight of a gasoline standard crazily bumping its way down from the east.

He was being swept on, straight towards a sand-dune three hundred feet high, and it looked as if he must pass right through that hill. But, surprisingly, at the very foot of the dune which rose at an angle of forty-five degrees, the creek, in a smother of foam undermining its flank, turned clean about, so that the right side of the raft was sucked under water as if it must capsize. He was going north for a piece; but not for long. A second dizzy turn took him south again; and then, with a pecular sense almost of exhilaration, he saw before him, beyond wide sand-flats extending to both sides, the immense expanse of the lake.

XVIII

He began to paddle furiously in order to get out of the current which pushed far into the lake, here mirror-smooth. Had he but known it, he could have jumped; for the creek had deposited its sediment here till there were no more than three feet of water. But the water was muddy, and he saw no bottom. The poling stick, too, would have been sufficient to arrest his career; but he used the short paddle instead. Meanwhile his mind worked as fast as his body. The lake being smooth, the effect of the current which was carrying him was plainly visible on both sides: there was the muddy water of the creek; and there was the greyish-green, clear water of the lake; and the two were separated by a sharp line. But straight ahead, the water was dark-blue, stippled with white.

There was only one explanation for that: a strong wind was blowing off-shore, from the north; and so far he was in the lee of the high cliff. The rain had ceased for the time being; and he read the signs of the weather. Most likely it was going to clear; but the sky would be swept of its grey and low-hanging clouds by nothing less than a roaring 'nor-wester' – a thought which made him shiver in anticipation. He became conscious that he was faint with hunger; and the paddle, good enough so long as it was used only for an occasional stroke within the normally narrow creek at home, proved fearfully heavy to handle here; and, as far as he could see, it was useless for purposes of propulsion in the lake.

Farther and farther out did the still persisting current sweep him, though its speed was now much reduced. He had visions of landing on the far side of the lake, in the state of New York, or perhaps Ohio. He did make progress towards the quiet water, but all too slowly; and he knew he was reaching the limit of his endurance. So he rested a moment, gathering himself together for a final effort and then going at it with every ounce of his strength. In vain.

At the very moment when he thought he was winning out – he was no more than three yards from smooth water, in spite of the fact that the current was spreading in the shape of a fan, the wind caught him broadside on. Instead of sweeping along above him as it had done before, it pounced down, chilling him as if it had passed over snow. For a desperate moment he was now tempted to leap for it and to try to swim to the shore. But by this time the shore was a quarter of a mile behind; and even if he stripped, he was afraid he could not make it. Again he never thought of the fact that, most likely, he could have waded for at least half that distance.

A more convincing argument, however, than mere distance showed him that he had better not attempt such a way of escape; and that argument took the form of a shower of spray. He was lying broadside to the wind, and now there were waves. He must concentrate his efforts on keeping the raft at right angles to the run of the waves; for that spray was ice-cold; the sun had not yet had time to warm up the water; if he had tried to swim, his limbs would have become numb.

For many weary hours now, the wind did what, so far, the current had done; it carried him south, towards the middle of the open lake, here sixty miles wide as he knew from his geography lessons.

Yet he did not give up hope. His weather-lore told him that, after such a storm, the wind would turn sooner or later. He was caught in a cyclone. The more furiously the wind blew in one direction, the more furiously would it blow in the other; and then the paddle might prove useful.

The question was how long it would take the wind to turn. It was now the early afternoon; and hunger and exhaustion were doing their work. By using his paddle, he could, of course, have retarded his southward career; but at the very time when, in a furious blow, he would need every ounce of his strength, he would find himself at the end of it.

Reluctantly he made up his mind to the necessity of spending the night on the water – unless, indeed, a fishing tug or some other boat picked him up before night came. But, though happily he did not know it, fishing tugs and other craft had run for shelter. A new

cyclone was on its way with gale force; and the warning had gone out from every lake-port.

Leonard came to the conclusion that the best he could do was to get some food and some rest while he could.

On the whole, the lake was so far quiet enough to let the raft rise and fall with the waves; so long as he sat still, the worst that came aboard was spray. In the open lake the waves would be higher, of course; there, green water might wash his deck. Then he would need all the endurance and the seamanship he possessed.

He took out some of his tins and ate two handfuls of biscuits and one of raisins; and, feeling still hungry and cold, he added to that three cookies and a handful of nuts which he put into the side-pockets of his coat, to munch while he was resting. Incidentally he looked at his watch which he took from the shoe in which he had deposited it. It was five o'clock; and, like Robinson Crusoe, he thought of the necessity of keeping track of the time. Yes, it was still Tuesday; and by counting back to his great day at Toronto he fixed even the date: May 30.

Then he lay down on his back, carefully balancing the raft by his position in its exact centre. But he found that the 'bridge' prevented him from stretching out his legs; and so, regretfully, he wrenched it loose and cast it overboard.

Flat on his back, he had a chance to estimate the height of the waves. He was disappointed at finding that they seemed to be less than three feet high. From the pitching of the raft while he was standing on it, he had estimated them at twice that height.

But it was not long before conscious thought ceased; the last he saw with his mind was his mother getting out of the car after having been to town; and then he was sound asleep.

Just how long he had slept he had no means of knowing when he awoke. He had dreamed of his sight of the king and queen; and it was the emotion that released in him by the king's smile and the queen's hand-wave which woke him. For a moment he lay motionless; it was pitch-dark; and he thought he was in his bed. It took him perhaps half a minute to become aware that what he was looking at while he lay still was the clear open sky. When he did, he sat up with a start. All about, nothing was visible except the mysterious dimness of the night, lighted by a nearly full moon and myriads of preternaturally bright stars. Something resembling his previous panic came over him once more; the line, "Water, water every where," floated through his mind; and then, remembering at last what had happened, he laughed. But to his parents, he thought, this was hardly a laughing matter.

His next impulse was to start paddling; for physically he felt wonderfully refreshed.

But where was the land? Not a sign of it could be seen; not even a friendly shore-light. Fishing tugs were guided by lighthouses. He scanned the horizon all about; only in the direct line south, determined by an upward glance at the pole-star, was there a wink now and then, but at irregular intervals. Was that the United States shore? Or some promontory of the Canadian shore, jutting far out into the lake?

It was neither. At last it struck him that it had warmed up considerably. His clothes were dry; there was no wind; the raft lay motionless. The air was sultry, almost breathless, just as it had been yesterday – or was it the day before? – when he had stood on the back stoop of the house, watching the approach of the storm. This made him look south once more. It was a long while before the light came; but when it did, he became convinced that the winking radiance was nothing else but sheet-lightning.

Once more he scanned the sky. Low down, in one direction, not a star was visible: that must be west. From things his father had explained to him he knew that there was such a thing as the weather 'going into a rut' – certain phenomena repeating themselves: a drought breeding drought because over large areas the air had gone stagnant; a cyclone dragging another cyclone in its wake, because the conditions which had produced the first persisted till a second was produced. Yes, he concluded, there was another storm coming.

He must be prepared. He must eat, to store strength against a possible ordeal. He must force himself to have more sleep while he could. Paddling about blindly was useless, might be worse than useless. He was as apt to paddle away from land as to paddle towards it.

Fifteen minutes later, having taken the edge off his hunger, he lay down again. And he did sleep, if, so it seemed, not for long. He was awakened, this time, by the fierce tossing of the raft; and a rain of spray had drenched him. There must be a wind; but it did not seem strong enough to account for the violence of his motion. This was puzzling till he bethought himself of the fact that, of course, he was again running before the wind – a fact confirmed by the swirling and foaming of the water on his lee. He tried to stand up but found it a feat impossible to accomplish, so wildly did the raft roll and pitch.

He sat down again in a hurry; but he had hardly done so when he felt penetrated with the sense of a coming disaster which made him look up; and there, for a hundredth of a second, he saw something dimly gleaming straight overhead. Instinctively he gripped the sides of

the deck; and less than a tenth of a second later he was overwhelmed by a huge comber thundering down on his head and depressing the raft till he sat in swirling water. To make his confusion complete, the wide, soft brim of his hat was flattened down over his eyes so he could not see. He had not even known that he was still wearing it. He came within an ace of letting go of the raft which seemed to float crazily away from under him. Many things were swept away: the little flag in front which had still been bravely waving when he had seen it last; the contents of the box below him, the 'galley'; and many other things, no doubt. He found himself spluttering and coughing, for the smother of water had caught him unawares on an intake of the breath.

He had barely recovered to the point where he could breathe normally again and where he felt that the raft was once more floating on top of the water, when the process was repeated; and for five or ten minutes it kept on being repeated periodically at intervals of perhaps half a minute each.

By this time he was thoroughly frightened. His estimate of the height of the combers – hugely exaggerated – was of fifteen feet. How long, he asked himself, would he be able to hold on against such odds? For he had no doubt that tons upon tons of water had hurled themselves upon him.

Yet, had he but known it, the breaking of the waves in a smother of hissing foam should have reassured him; for it proved that he was in shallow water. By this time the rain began to whip down again; the sky was completely hidden by clouds. He thought of his watch and groped for it; but there was nothing left in the 'galley'; everything had been swept away.

Then the waves ceased to break; though every successive one still gave his raft a sudden, swinging forward motion.

That caused him to interpret the experience he was going through. Waves of such height, he said to himself, could not arise on a weather shore. They had the sweep of the wind and water over the whole width or length of the lake behind them. According as the wind came from north or south, he was near American or Canadian land.

He would sound with his poling stick which was sixteen feet long.

He groped about and found it. How much of a miracle that was he did not grasp till he missed the paddle which had been carried away. To use the pole, he rose on his knees; but he had hardly done so when another comber came from behind his back, first tilting the raft into its concave front and then completely overturning it. Frantically he tried not to let go of the pole and at the same time to hold on to the galley with his free hand.

Fortunately he did not succeed, and the raft did not come down on him from above. He had been caught without a firm hold. When the comber broke, it swept him clear; and he had to let go of the pole at the same time, for it knocked against something with terrific force. Thus unencumbered, he went head over heels, shooting three, four somersaults in quick succession, to come down with a terrific jar on his shoulder-blades, his legs above him: he was in less than three feet of water.

But already the next comber seized hold of him, the suck of the water at its base pulling his feet from under him; and he found himself rolling along, in a series of back somersaults, over a sandy bottom with here and there a stone embedded in it. The water itself was laden with sand and rasped over his skin. Again he came down with a bump; but this time, with the effort of desperation, he got to his feet and started to run, only to find himself, the next moment, in comparatively smooth water beyond his depth. He struck boldly out, swimming; for he understood now that he was very near land. He was chilled to his bones; but his excitement kept him from giving in. He knew he must be bleeding in a dozen places; but he held resolutely to the direction of the run of the water. In this interval of comparative quiet he became conscious of the fact that thunder and lightning were playing over the lake at his back.

He never knew, of course, how often this was repeated among the intricate sand-banks of the shore; nor how far he went in that way; nor how long it took him.

All he knew was that, unexpectedly, he was standing on a smooth, rippled beach, beyond the reach of the wildest breakers. A few steps further on he stumbled on to a huge boulder and crouched down in its lee, feeling enormously relieved at being out of the lash of the wind and the rain, not caring even that he had lost everything but his breeches and his thin coat which clung to his ribs like a wet rag.

XIX

Fortunately, it was not far from daylight. He had dozed again, disquietly, for he was battered and bruised; and the boulder against which he was leaning was of granite, with too many rough points projecting to afford any comfort.

He was on a wide shingle beach, with only a narrow strip of sand at the water's edge. In front of him, to the north, if north it was, rose the cliff, forbidding and steep, showing alternate layers of coarse gravel and sticky clay. Wherever there was clay, there was some plant-growth; the strata of gravel were bare. From the crest of the cliff the domes of large trees were overhanging a sheer downward drop; at its

foot there grew only scraggly willows, some of them half buried in the debris that had fallen from the face of the cliff in the course of many, many years till they had formed a talus.

Under the scudding rain which came in waves from the lake, driven by a high wind, the landscape looked dismal and desolate; but at least it was a landscape, not a seascape; and it was the scenery with which he was familiar from more than one summer-afternoon excursion in the car when it had looked romantic and beautiful.

It was one thing to come here for a picnic; it was quite another to have been cast away he knew not where. How comforting it would be if he knew the car to be waiting up there for the trip home.

Of Patterson Creek he saw no sign.

He would have to climb that cliff, he supposed; if for no other purpose than to find food and information. The task seemed formidable. Wiping the rain out of the mop of light hair which was as though plastered to his skull, saturated with sand, he wondered impartially whether he would be able to walk; for he felt sore in every limb. He thought of his father and mother and even of Mary; and he had to hold back his tears; he was so desolate and home-sick. He even thought of the two Captains of police with something resembling affection.

And then a wave of disquietude sent him staggering to his feet. He was desperately hungry; and there were now no biscuits or raisins to fall back upon.

His body ached in every muscle; every part of it seemed to have its peculiar and separate pain as he moved, first his arms, then his legs.

He stood perfectly still and pondered. No, he could not hope to get to the top of the cliff at this point; it was two hundred feet high; and as far as his eye could range, the upper thirty or forty feet were overhanging. He must try to walk along the beach; but whether east or west he did not know. He did not even know for certain which was east or west. Did it matter? The chief problem was to get in touch with people, no matter with whom; they would help him to get in touch with home, no matter where he was.

He began to hobble along to the right, or what seemed to be east. The shingles hurt his bare feet; the rain chilled his flesh. While he had been sitting with his knees drawn up, there had, as it were, been bays of his body where flesh touched and warmed flesh and where the rain could not penetrate. Thus, for a brief moment, the discomfort of the latter part of the night seemed, compared with this present state, positive comfort. He was tempted to look for another such boulder to shelter him.

Then came the thought of duty. It was his duty to keep moving. Not to move was treason: treason to his parents who were longing for him; treason to the police who relied on him to identify a robber; treason, therefore, to king and country.

He struggled on, to find, happily, after the first ten or fifteen minutes, that his sufferings decreased; that his legs limbered up; that his back, on which he had come down with such fearful force, ceased to be so painfully stiff. All which was a comfort. Further, the very exertion which his progress involved warmed him up; in spite of the fact that his rain-washed skin felt as cold as ice to the touch.

On and on he went. There seemed to be no end to that forbidding cliff; not a trail came down anywhere; there was no cattle-track, even; no sign of a fishermen's village – nothing but wreckage wrought by the wind and the water. Even on the beach there was such wreckage in the form of drift-wood. If he had had matches, he could have lighted a huge bonfire to warm up at, such as they had lighted on the occasions when night had fallen on by-gone picnics.

How did his mother feel about it all? That mother whose bosom, only a few short years ago, had seemed a home in itself – till he had begun to run wild: as if, in the growing consciousness of his developing powers, he had deliberately repulsed that mother's love which interfered with his fierce desire for adult independence. All she knew of him now was that he had gone down the creek. If ever he was destined to get home again, he would make up to her for past neglect. He wished he were sitting at the piano in the drawing-room at home this minute, practising harder and harder pieces till he surprised every hearer and delighted her who had said that she would feel tremendously proud of him if one day he got a scholarship from the conservatory.

On and on he went. He had no way of finding out how long he had thus been struggling forward; but it seemed like many hours. The desolation of the scene remained unrelieved. From the lake the rain kept sweeping in, pelting his body and closing the horizon at no great distance from the shore. Grey against grey the waves were rolling in and breaking. Yet it felt to him as if it were warming up.

And then, like a gift from Heaven, came the sight of a wide, steep valley, v-shaped, opening to his left, but filled with a raging torrent resembling the one which had swept him out on the lake, except that here the water seemed to tumble over itself, in its hurry to reach the level of the beach. This was not Patterson Creek. The whole gully through which it tore was filled with large trees in young foliage which nodded down over the swollen leaping waters. There were oaks and maples, poplars and occasional evergreens, white pines and cedars, all

of them bending their branches inland, under the pressure of the wind, all of them with their trunks bathed by the tearing, swirling, mud-laden flood. Patterson Creek had led out through sand-dunes.

He almost ran as he began the ascent on the near bank, splashing knee-deep through the water which tore at his legs. For safety he clung as closely to the hillside as he could, making his way from tree to tree. He did not mean to be carried out again, without a raft this time to cling to.

It took him half an hour to make the head of the gully; but then, on the far side of the water, here about fifty feet wide, within an enormous clump of broad-leaved trees, lay a farmstead, a large, comfortable-looking place built on high ground and looking all the more sheltered for its proximity to all this destruction. A score of Holstein cows were gazing at him from across the torrent, surprise and bovine curiosity showing in their motionless stare. Whenever he moved, they slowly turned their great heads after him as with one accord.

He raised a shout; but the roar of the wind and water drowned his voice. Yet he repeated it, winding one leg about the bole of a tree and using both hands as a megaphone. The mere sight of a house seemed a blessing and a promise.

Then he waded out as far as he possibly could, till the tearing flood swirled around his hips; and, holding on for dear life to a birch, he repeated his shouts, still ineffectually. By this time he had made out, on his side of the red-brick house, a large veranda on which opened several doors. The cows, as he had seen at a glance, had been milked; their udders were slack; no doubt they had been turned out for the day. But in case of need, if he waited long enough, till evening milking-time, somebody would no doubt come for them; and it might be as well to save his voice against that time. Already he was getting hoarse.

One more attempt, though! Three times in succession he raised his voice to the top of his bent: "House ahoy! House ahoy! House ahoy-oy-oy!" The last shout broke in his throat.

In vain? Not this time. He could have carolled in jubilation.

Tail-wagging, from a mat in the veranda, rose a long-haired black spaniel and, shaking the rain-dust out of his pelt and lazily stretching his hind-legs, came slowly down to the edge of the water.

There, catching sight of the boy who, in his eagerness, had come almost to the centre of the stream where, hanging with his hands to the lowest branch of a maple, he was immersed nearly to his arm-pits, the dog wagged, not his tail but his hind-quarters, with such vigour that

more than once it seemed as if he must fall over on his side. Gingerly he placed one foot in the water and withdrew it, shaking his head, but laughing all over his good-natured face and bending his hind-legs till he touched the ground behind him with his belly as he gave a summoning bark.

"Come on, doggie, come on! Come, doggie!" Leonard called, laughing aloud at the animal's antics.

Whereupon the dog, on the far side of the stream, raised his head and gave a sharp, humorous bark, in token that he had heard the boy's voice. Then, when the boy called again, more and more urgently, he sat down on his haunches, raised his head, gathered his hanging lips into a flute, and gave a long-drawn-out note sung in coloratura, up and down the scale of canine music, up and down, Leonard laughing the while. When he stood up again, he wagged his hind-quarters with such energy, coming forward the while, and retreating again, that it looked as if fore and hind-quarters must part company.

But after a minute or so of this the dog's barks and whinings had a new effect. On the veranda of the house appeared a woman in a light-coloured summer house-dress, calling to the dog.

But the dog, though he turned his head and wagged still more strenuously, did not budge; he merely fidgeted on his feet. And then he barked again and lay down in the mud with a suddenly serious expression in his face, turning from one side to the other, as if torn between two attractions.

And suddenly, the boy shouting meanwhile at the top of his voice, "Hello, hello there!" and waving one hand while hanging on by the other, the eyes of the woman widened: they had seen.

The woman waved to him in encouragement and then ran back into the house. In a moment she came out again, with a large man's raincoat thrown over head and shoulders. Thus accoutred, she ran behind the house, in a direction parallel to the stream; and as Leonard followed her with his eyes, he discovered, hidden by trees, the towering frame of a red-painted barn.

"Saved!" an inner voice sang out in him. "Saved!"

The woman came back, still running; behind her, in bedraggled overalls, came a man of medium height and very wide shoulders.

Again Leonard sang out joyously. "Hello!"

The man said something he could not understand, but he pointed upstream; and then there was a moment's exchange of words between man and woman. When it ceased, the man shouted at the top of his

voice, "Hang on for half an hour, and I'll get you."

"Hang on till doomsday," the boy shouted back, laughing; and man and woman joined in his laugh.

The man returned to the barn, whence, shortly, he came back on horseback, holding the halter-rope in one hand. Again he pointed upstream, as much as to say that he must reach a ford before he could cross the water; then, urging his horse by a vigorous kick of his heels into a lumbering gallop, he disappeared.

Leonard made his way carefully back into shallower water and, still going from tree to tree, started to work his way upstream.

Yet it was fully half an hour before he saw the horse coming; the great beast was nervous and snorted with wide nostrils as it carefully picked its way between the trees.

A moment later the rider bent down to reach the boy a hand by which he swung him up on the horse's back behind him.

Almost before he was seated there, Leonard asked, "Where are we, in Canada or the United States?"

"You're in Ontario," replied the man with a broad laugh. "But wait till we get to the house. We can talk afterwards."

As they turned to cross the water for the last time, the horse's mane blew out sideways, scattering drops; its skin, coal-black, glistened with wetness; on the far bank, the dog was frantically chasing up and down, barking. Gingerly, and yielding only to the rider's urging, the horse stepped forward, hesitating when it felt the pull of the current. Halfway across, it stopped dead, fidgeting on its feet. The water reached to its flank; and it was leaning against it. Then, the rider still urging and shouting and flickering his halter-rope on the glistening neck, the huge animal gathered himself for a spring; and the next moment, having leapt and being almost immersed, it was afloat, though for a second only before it hooked its forefeet into the upward slope on the far side. Within ten seconds it bestrode the solid sward east of the torrent.

XX

To his surprise, when he entered the house, Mrs. Anderson greeted him with these words, "You must be Leonard Broadus whom we hear so much about over the radio."

He had never thought of the radio; and so he stopped dead in the door and asked, "What does it say?"

"So far," Mrs. Anderson continued, turning back to the stove

where she was preparing breakfast for the unexpected guest, "it merely gave the story of your being carried away by the raft on Patterson Creek. They've organised a posse to search for you along the banks, of course. We'll hear more about you in twenty minutes, I suppose, when the morning news broadcast comes on. When did you have your last meal, Leonard?" All which was said with the humorous indulgence of a woman of fifty-five who had longed for a child all her life without getting her wish.

"What day is this?" he asked.

"Wednesday."

"On Monday night, then. But I had some biscuits and raisins when I was in the middle of the lake, or near the American shore, I suppose. I had provisioned the raft for the fun of it."

Mr. Anderson had just entered the kitchen, having tied his horse outside for the moment in order not to miss the story.

So he joined in the laugh which Leonard's words occasioned.

"That's where you went, eh?" he asked. "To the state of New York? And where's the raft?"

"I don't know. I was thrown off, a few hours ago when a fifteen-foot comber broke over my head."

Again they laughed.

Then Mr. Anderson said, "Come to think of it, the boy may not be so far out, at that. I've been in a fishing tug when the waves broke over the bridge."

"May have been as much as twenty feet," the boy said slyly.

Mrs. Anderson, who was putting the frying pan on the fire to fry some bacon, turned sharply about and asked, "Do they grow five feet higher every time you tell the story?"

"Well," Leonard said, laughing, "the more I think about it, the higher they seem to have been. They did toss me about, I tell you."

"Come along, sonny," said Mr. Anderson. "My clothes won't fit you; but at least they are dry."

When Leonard returned to the kitchen, he was clad in an odd outfit of adult garments, folded back at his wrists and ankles; but Mr. Anderson was right: they were at least dry; and he felt singularly warm and comfortable.

He sat down to a hearty breakfast, giving, under the fire of questions directed upon him, a brief outline of the story.

"Have you a phone?" he asked after a while.

"Yes, but it's useless," Mrs. Anderson said. "The wires are down; and so are the hydro wires. But I'll say this. It's nice of you to think of your parents. Unfortunately, there is no way of communicating with them. The roads are out of commission with wash-outs; the bridges are down. We're completely isolated here. It will be weeks before they get the wires repaired; and probably months before a car can go once more."

"Is that so?" the boy asked wistfully, taking a sip of hot cocoa. "I'm worried about mother."

"Dad doesn't count for so much?" Mr. Anderson asked.

"No," said the boy in entire seriousness. "Mother hasn't been well for years."

"You're right, then, to worry about her," Mr. Anderson agreed readily. "Well, we'll talk to Mr. Broadus about what can be done. Bill Broadus. He's your uncle, isn't he?"

"My uncle, yes. Are we anywhere near him?"

"He's my nearest neighbour. Two miles east. 'The Squire' as we call him in this district."

"Any apples and peaches left on his place, do you think?"

Again his hosts laughed; they were given to laughter.

"How like a boy!" Mrs. Anderson said.

"Not this time of year," her husband answered the question. "But I'll get you an apple by way of dessert. I've got a case of B.C. apples in the cellar."

"B.C. apples?" the boy cried in vast astonishment. "Do they keep that long?"

For a second his hosts were puzzled; then they burst into a roar of laughter.

"British Columbia," Mrs. Anderson said at last, "not Before Christ."

"Of course!" Leonard said as if kicking himself with annoyance.

"I've a brother out there, in B.C. who sends me a case now and then."

"He must have known you were coming," Mr. Anderson added. "The whole universe turns around a boy by name of Leonard Broadus."

"I don't know what you mean," Leonard said in a matter-of-fact

tone while continuing to apply himself to the task of appeasing his hunger.

Again both grown-ups laughed.

"Great fun to be a boy," said the husband.

"Great fun to have a boy," Mrs. Anderson amended.

And Mr. Anderson gravely nodded assent.

A minute or so later Mrs. Anderson went to the radio which stood in the adjoining room, the parlor, and turned the buttons. The news broadcast was just being announced.

"Good thing," Mr. Anderson said, "we've a battery set; or we'd be cut off from the news as well."

And for the next few minutes all three listened to the ether.

"Leonard Broadus," the broadcast began, "the boy of Suffolk County we were telling you about last night, is still missing. Both banks of Patterson Creek have been thoroughly searched by posses from adjoining farms and towns, often at great risk to life and limbs of the searchers. Towards evening there were close to a hundred men out; and a few of them have not been heard from yet. So far, not a sign has been found either of the boy or the raft on which he was embarked. It is now feared he was swept out into the lake. Captains Vance and Culver, of the provincial police, have arranged for an aeroplane to fly down from London, Ontario, this morning; and in spite of the unfavourable weather a thorough search will be made of the beaches adjoining the mouth of the creek to east and west, as well as of the lake to the south. Since, throughout the district, telephone wires are down, anyone able to give information by wireless or any other means is urged to communicate with the provincial police at Rivers or elsewhere; or with any of the wireless stations which will be glad to relay any message. The father of the boy is moving heaven and earth to find track of the child who, by the way, had been used on an important mission by the police, in connection with the identification of members of the gang of robbers that has been infesting Suffolk and neighbouring counties.

"The king and queen . . ."

"Well," said Mrs. Anderson, turning a button, "we are not interested in Their Majesties just now. We must somehow get into touch with the parents of this boy."

Leonard had listened tensely. When his father was mentioned he had all he could do to suppress his tears. A few seconds passed in silence, for both Mr. and Mrs. Anderson respected his preoccupation. But suddenly the child, with almost his old vivacity, said, "Gee! Don't

I wish I were at the mouth of Patterson Creek! How far is it?

"Twenty-odd miles. Why?"

"If I could get there, I might get a ride in an aeroplane."

And once more the grown-ups laughed.

"Well," Mr. Anderson said at last, "in default of an aeroplane I'll go and put a saddle on Beaut. I don't know whether I can get through. I may have to go many miles around. But I'll make the attempt."

"Can I come along?" the boy asked.

"Better not," Mrs. Anderson said after she and her husband had consulted by means of a glance. "I want you to get into bed; and then I'll give you a good rubbing-down. You're full of scratches and bruises. If my husband gets through, your uncle will no doubt come back with him, somehow; and he may want to take you over to his place. Meanwhile you had better stay with me."

The boy gave in readily enough; in the first place, he felt only now how dead-tired he was; and in the second place, he had taken a liking to this motherly woman.

XXI

It was not till he was lying down in the comfortable bed of the spare room of the house that, for a brief second, Leonard realised just how sorely he was in need of this rest. He had donned a suit of Mr. Anderson's pyjamas; and Mrs. Anderson was on the point of turning him over, a bottle of liniment in her hand; and that was the last he knew that was happening before he was lost to the world.

More than once, while he was in this state, and she was ministering to his needs, Mrs. Anderson laughed to herself in a sort of vicarious happiness.

Meanwhile, outside, the rain continued to pour down, washing the air, the leaves of the trees, and the roofs of the buildings. This was the third day since the downpour had started . . .

Mrs. Anderson was still alone with the boy sleeping upstairs when the evening news broadcast told her that the search for Leonard Broadus – or, as became increasingly probable, for his body – still continued unabated. The flight of the plane over the beaches and part of the lake, it was true, had remained without result. Yet the search was not yet abandoned.

The broadcast had gone on with a description of the unprecedented damage done by the storm. Railway and radial connections were interrupted over an area more than a hundred miles square. Whole

towns, Rivers among them, were isolated. In the cities of Hamilton, Brantford, and London there was a milk famine, due to the inability of the trucks collecting the milk to penetrate into the rural districts, along roads which, for the moment, were largely non-existent. The southern edge of the area affected was particularly hard hit because there the roads were largely superimposed on swamp bottoms; and wherever the graded surface was gone, they had reverted to swamp.

Mr. Anderson, who had set out at nine o'clock in the morning, in his attempt to reach Mr. Broadus's place, had not yet returned at six in the evening. The distance being only a little over two miles, this fact gave his wife a measure of the isolation effected. Incidentally, the broadcast mentioned the destruction, by the flood, of such major bridges as that of Tillsonburg where Big Otter Creek had broken the connection between two main highways.

Restlessly, and now worriedly, Mrs. Anderson returned to the spare room where Leonard still lay asleep though he turned and twisted a good deal, muttering in his sleep to himself.

At last, about half past six, there was a commotion in the yard behind the house; and, flinging a raincoat over her shoulders, Mrs. Anderson ran out to the barn. Her husband was there, wet through to the skin, his grey moustache dripping. His horse stood by the stable door, knock-kneed and dejectedly hanging her head. Even the saddle was soaked.

In the stable door stood a tall, distinguished-looking man of sixty or so, clad in a tightly-buttoned black 'slicker', a south-wester on his head. This was Mr. Broadus, uncle to the boy.

He greeted her with an exaggerated formality which she condoned; his ways were well known; it was not for nothing that people called him 'the Squire'. He was a wealthy man who, in 1929, in the nick of time, had disposed of his three hundred acres of peach-orchard to a limited company, realising a peak price and retaining the office of manager at a munificent salary. His wife and his two grown-up daughters were in Europe just now.

"Well," he said, "where is the scamp? I've got the car on the beach."

"Took five hours to get it down the cliff, by means of ropes," Mr. Anderson said with unconcealed disgust. "That was an idea of Gentleman Matthews."

"Gentleman Matthews" was the nickname which the countryside gave to Mr. Broadus's chauffeur and man-servant.

"When did you get there?" Mrs. Anderson asked.

"Twelve thirty."

"Three and a half hours for two miles!"

"Yes. And steadily getting worse. I had to make a huge detour. I'll admit, I should have gone by the beach. I never thought of it. You can't get a horse down there, of course. But I might have walked. I came back over the cliff. It's better there than along the roads."

"Well," Mrs. Anderson at last answered the tall man's question, "the boy is still asleep. Wouldn't it be best now to leave him here for the night?"

"What did we go to all the trouble for?" Mr. Broadus asked sarcastically.

"To get word to his parents."

"That's out of the question. It will be many days before we can get word anywhere."

"Couldn't a boat get through from Brittany to Port Burwell or Port Dover?"

"With the lake running as it is? Who'd venture out?"

"Isn't there some private broadcasting station at Brittany?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well-l-l," Mr. Anderson said.

"No," Mr. Broadus said, "better get the boy ready so we get home before dark. It's no fun driving on the rough beach."

Mrs. Anderson frankly hated to part with the boy, especially to this gruff and stiff man whose family had acquired an English accent. *She* was Canadian, not English; and she had no desire to be anything else. But, of course, she could not deny that it was within Mr. Broadus's rights to decide what was to be done. Reluctantly she returned to the house.

Meanwhile Mr. Broadus declined Mr. Anderson's invitation to enter while he was waiting. "Thanks, Anderson," he said; "I can't enter a house with these dripping clothes. I'm all right where I am."

"Well," Mr. Anderson said, feeling the slight which the well-to-do man was putting into his words, "I'll have to ask you to step aside to let the mare in. She's done her share."

"By all means," said Mr. Broadus, retreating into the interior of the stable. On his place, no horses were kept for work any longer; all operations had been mechanised; though a couple of saddle-mounts were kept by a groom.

Mrs. Anderson found the boy awake but worried; he, too, had heard the commotion in the yard where the dog had barked.

"Your uncle is here," she said. "Come. I've dried your breeches and your coat. Too bad I haven't a shirt and pair of shoes that might fit you."

"Doesn't matter," Leonard said, trying to swing his feet to the floor. "Gee, but I'm stiff!"

However, having waited for Mrs. Anderson to leave the room, he managed to strip and to don his breeches and coat, both freshly pressed, as he noticed with a smile.

A few minutes later he came downstairs where Mrs. Anderson had a cup of hot cocoa ready for him. The dog was whining at the door.

Then, Mrs. Anderson draping the raincoat over her head in such a way as to protect the boy, whose hand she took, as well, they went out together to the barn. Leonard was limping.

"There you are, eh?" Mr. Broadus said, nodding to the boy. "Well, we had better get down to the car. Come on."

Leonard felt as if a bucket of cold water had been poured over him. To the Andersons he had been a bit of a hero; to his uncle, he felt, he was more nearly a criminal and altogether a nuisance. Once more it took all his self-command not to burst into tears as he bent down to pat the dog who was jumping to reach his face in order to lick it with his friendly tongue. Then, having gained control over himself, he turned to his hosts and held out his hands.

"Thanks awfully," he said with a wry smile. "You're bricks, both of you. If ever the roads dry up and I get home, I hope I'll see you again."

Impulsively, Mrs. Anderson took his head between her hands and bent down to kiss him on both cheeks. "Good by," she said. "Good by, Leonard."

And her husband repeated her words as he shook hands.

The dog, dripping with wetness, whined about the boy's feet, playfully biting his ankles. Then, seeing the child following his uncle, he gave a woeful bark.

XXII

Once they had got down to the beach, via a steep, winding, and slippery footpath narrowly crowded by trees, it took only half an hour of bumping along over the rough shingle beach strewn with rocks to get to a point straight below Mr. Broadus's great house. Here matter

were simplified by a series of connecting flights of stairs built sideways against the acclivity of the bastion-like cliff.

The car, of course, Mr. Broadus abandoned on the beach.

Supper was waiting in the great house where an elderly lady, the housekeeper, received them without being introduced to the child.

Everything was strange and unfamiliar to him; he was not used to any kind of formality; and everything was on what seemed to him to be a grand scale.

"Better come to the dining room as you are," his uncle said in the lofty hall. "I'll send Matthews down to the village tomorrow morning to see whether we can get you some clothes. It's less than a mile to go by the beach. Till then, we'll excuse your bare feet. You lost your shoes with the raft, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," Leonard said, using the 'sir' in a way very different from the way in which he often used it to his father. "They were in the galley."

"The galley?" Mr. Broadus repeated, looking at him; and for the first time the boy seemed to catch a slight note of humour which made him look shyly up.

"Yes," he said. "That's what I called a box in the bows where I kept my provisions."

"I see. You even had provisions on board? Well, sit down over there. Do you take broth?"

The boy looked at what was being offered to him over his shoulder. The broth was in a tiny cup, and something was floating on top of it; but it smelt delicious. He took it; but he watched his uncle to see how one drank it.

Supper – fortunately he did not call it that; in this household one had 'lunch' at noon and 'dinner' at night – was served by two maids, one of them young and pretty, the other resembling a bulldog as to face; but both dressed in freshly-laundered uniforms; and both quick and efficient at their work, not the least like Alice.

Nothing else was said while uncle and nephew ate their way through an excellent meal consisting of four courses, soup, fish, roast, and dessert.

Then, dinner over, the uncle rose. "I suppose you are ready for bed?" he asked. "Mrs. Pyett will take you up to your room."

Mrs. Pyett, the housekeeper, did. It was a large, fine room, larger and finer than his own room at home, although he had always been

proud of that; and it was lighted just now by two enormous and prettily shaded coal-oil lamps. The furniture was new and fragile, it seemed; bed-spread and curtains were frilly.

Leonard remembered his aunt only dimly as a big, imposing woman whom he had seen but once; she had carried what she called a Lorgnette at the time – glasses with a long handle, such as he had never seen before or since. His grown-up cousins he had never met; they were always away, at finishing schools or visiting with friends in the great cities across the border.

"This is Miss Clara's room," Mrs. Pyett mumbled. Opening some drawers, she shook out a pair of pink-silk pyjamas abundantly trimmed with lace. "I thought," she added, "since we've no boy's things in the house, you might get along with these for the night. They were Miss Clara's when she was about your age."

Leonard gave them one scornful glance and waited for Mrs. Pyett to go. She took the hint of his rigid immobility. But at the door she turned once more. "Just go to bed," she said. "Never mind about the lamps. I'll be back and blow them out."

When the door closed on her, Leonard stood for a moment. 'Girl's things!' he thought. The silky covers of the bed had been turned back; and he touched the mattress and the sheets. "Well," he said to himself, "it's better than the raft to sleep on, I suppose, but not half as much fun." And, resolutely, he stripped, climbed up successively on two chairs to blow the lamps, and slipped between the sheets, naked.

He went to sleep instantly; and it gave him as well as others a measure of the degree of his exhaustion that again he slept through till ten o'clock next morning.

When he awoke, the pretty maid was in the room; no doubt it was her presence which had awakened him. On the night table at the head of the bed stood a tray with a cup of cocoa and exactly three biscuits. Over the maid's arm hung a new suit of clothes, not large enough for him, as he saw at a glance; there was also a new shirt, and in one hand the girl carried a pair of shoes.

"There you are," said the maid, smiling at him. "That's all the breakfast Mrs. Pyett served out for you; it's all Miss Clara ever takes when she's at home. But it's ten o'clock; and lunch is at one. Will you be able to hold out till then?"

"Sure," said Leonard, looking at her, his eyes full of mischief. It was a new experience to him to be waited on in bed, unless he was sick, of course. But he felt that this girl liked him; and that was a

comfort. Instinctively he knew that, in this house, he was in need of an ally.

"And here are some clothes Mr. Broadus sends you. Mr. Matthews has fetched them up from the village. Don't be too particular about them; there isn't much you can get at Brittany-on-the-Lake." The last words she brought out in a male bass which made Leonard laugh.

"Who's Mr. Matthews?" he asked, remaining up to his chin under the covers.

"He's the chauffeur, gardener, and general roustabout," said the girl. "But he's a gentleman, if you please. Though the mistress calls him the man-servant."

"Sounds as if you didn't like your mistress much."

"Naughty!" she said, laughing. "But to tell you a dark secret, I don't."

"Why do you stay here, then?"

"Good wages. That's why. I'm saving up to get married."

"Get married!" the boy cried contemptuously.

"Well," she said judiciously, "if such as I didn't get married, where'd such as you come from?"

The boy looked at her, wondering. Then he laughed. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Agnes."

"Well, I like you, Agnes."

The girl laughed. "Most boys like me," she said pertly.

"And now," he said, "I want you to leave the room. Leave the tray here, of course."

"Better drink your cocoa before it gets cold; then I'll take the tray along."

"I'll tell you. I am stark naked under these covers."

The girl laughed and laughed. "Didn't put on these pretty things, did you?" she asked, discovering the pyjamas on a chair and holding them up with two fingers. "I'm sorry they are too small for me. I'd gladly borrow them."

"Those!" Leonard said with the greatest contempt. "I should say not . . . Eh, wait a moment," he added when Agnes prepared to leave the room. "Listen. I want you to rustle some two, three, four big slices of bread, with plenty of butter on them, and have them handy for me downstairs when I sneak out."

"How are you going to sneak out? Mrs. Pyett is laying for you."

"Oh," he said airily, "I'm expert at that. Is it still raining?"

"Not a bit of it. It's bright sunshine." And she went to the windows to draw the curtains aside. "But they say it'll be a week before they can get word to your parents."

"How far is it to Rivers?"

"Twenty-odd miles."

"Then I'll get there long before that."

"You can't."

"Who says so? I shall. And now scoot. And have that bread and butter handy in the hall. Put it on the little table with the knick-knacks at the foot of the stairs."

"Good luck," she said with a saucy curtsey. "I'll tell you. There's a huge Chinese vase on that table. I'll wrap your sandwiches up and put them in that. You just reach in as you pass."

"I get you," he said and waved to her with a naked arm as she passed out through the door.

XXIII

It was glorious weather; the whole world seemed renewed.

Leonard could hardly believe that, as a consequence of three days of rain, he was a prisoner on his uncle's place.

He felt wonderfully refreshed. There remained a trace of stiffness; and, as he moved, there were here and there little shooting pains; but he paid no attention. He felt like roaming the woods, like watching the birds, like . . . rafting.

And he laughed joyously, forgetting for the moment his worry about his parents. It was hard, when the leaves were young, when the sun was shining, when everything glistened with dewy freshness, to keep one's mind on the darker side of life. He even forgot about the ill fit of the clothes he wore which were tight, and the knickers too short, and merely rejoiced at the fact that the shoes did not hurt his toes though they were much too broad in the foot.

He fairly jumped about as, munching the sandwiches, with plum jam between the well-buttered slices of bread, he made his way through the grounds north of the house. In his body, he felt, there were four hundred or four thousand muscles aching to move and exert themselves; and soon he entered the orchard where the rain had beaten off many blossoms and strewn the ground with millions of pink-white

petals. It was true that, every now and then, he thought of the fact that lunch was at one and that he must not fail to be back by that time. But his instinct of exploration carried him farther and farther away from the house and its grounds. Here, on the grassy floor of the orchard, the soil was firm if not dry. Birds flitted everywhere; and the spring sunshine warmed his blood so that he could fairly feel it coursing through his veins.

He did not know how far and how long he had gone through the sun-dappled shade of this enormous orchard with its regularly-spaced peach trees, when he suddenly came to its northern margin where, without division of any kind, it merged into open forest; and there, in that margin, he suddenly and unexpectedly came face to face with another boy.

The sight stopped him.

For several seconds the boys eyed each other much as two dogs will do when they meet on the road and can't make up their minds whether to be friends or foes. Metaphorically speaking, Leonard was the first to wag his tail by way of opening.

"What might *your* name be?" he asked.

"Tom," came the prompt answer. "And you're Leonard Broadus, I suppose?"

"How do you know?"

"Radio," the strange boy said. He was barefooted; and frayed breeches were hanging loosely about his calves; his ragged shirt was open at the neck; he was chewing a twig of slippery elm. Leonard carefully took these signs in and augured favourably from them. The boy was not ill-looking, though he had a button-nose in a freckled face. His limbs looked clean; he was wiry of build. He might presumably do on a raft.

"Tom who?" Leonard asked.

"Tom Matthews."

Now Leonard had not yet seen Mr. Matthews who was chauffeur, gardener, and what not, besides being a gentlemen. 'Oh,' he said to himself, 'the roustabout's kid!' "And where do you live?"

"That way," Tom said, pointing rather vaguely. "In a former tenant house."

"I didn't know Mr. Matthews was married."

"He ain't. Mother's dead."

That reminded Leonard of his own mother; and he repeated to

himself that he must not be late for lunch. "I'm sorry," he said politely.

"Don't mention," Tom said. "I've never saw her. My dad says I'm a savage."

"Does he bach it with you?"

"Naw," said the boy. "We gets our grub at the house. We eats with Miss Pyett."

"Mrs.," Leonard corrected.

"What's the diff?" Tom said. "We calls her 'Miss'. She likes it. She's a widder. She's sweet on my dad. She wants him to marry her. He'd do it, too, I guess. Only there's me."

"I see," Leonard said, though he did not see at all.

"Say," Tom said abruptly, "ever seen a hobo camp?"

"Don't think I have," Leonard replied. "What's a hobo?"

"One of them there unemployed that walks the road. There's one within a coupla of miles from here."

"A hobo, you mean?"

"Naw. Whole camp of them."

"Let's go there this afternoon," said Leonard.

"Why not now? I'm going there now."

Leonard pondered. He must be back at the house by one; or he'd miss lunch; he might even fall into his uncle's bad graces.

Tom, seeing him hesitate, held out further inducements. Perhaps he was unwilling to part with a newly-found companion. Being excused, on account of the state of the road, from going to school had this disadvantage that it left one lonely. "Say," he went on, "there's a funny guy there. Came with a car, a little delivery truck, about a week ago, or a little longer. When you say 'Buick' to him, he gets raging mad."

"That so? What about?"

"Dunno. When I first seen his outfit, I said, 'Where'd'che get that Buick?' He nearly killed me. He jumped up an' made for me, murder in's eyes. But he ain't as fast as me. I've tried him more'n oncet since. I sneaks up to him, keeping three yards away, an' I says, 'Buick', I says; an' he sees red. It's lots of fun."

"What sort of chap is he?"

"He's a big un. Big an' broad. He's got a red stubble all over's chin,

an' a vicious gleam in's eyes. He's got money, too. He's allays craving for drink; but for one reason or 'nother he can't get it. I've heard him talk to some guys in the camp; an' he's allays askin' one or 'nother to go to town to get him that drink. Now, of course, they can't."

"Why not?"

"Cause of the state of the road. Can't get to town except by the beach."

"Funny," Leonard said.

"Ain't it? Wouldn't'che like to see him?"

"I sure would."

"Well, less go."

"What time is it? I lost my watch with the raft."

Tom squinted at the sun. "It ain't much more'n nine o'clock."

"Nonsense," Leonard said. "It was ten when I woke up."

"What'd I say? Not much more'n nine o'clock. Suppose it's half past ten. That ain't *much* more'n nine o'clock, is it, now?"

Leonard laughed. "You say it's only two miles?"

"Not much more'n that."

"All right," Leonard said, "Let's go then. But I must be back before one."

XXIV

Of course, he wasn't.

In the first place, the distance, being, according to Tom, 'not much more'n two miles', was three and a half; in the second, they travelled at the rate of a mile an hour; in the third, they spent considerable time, say an hour and a half, in spying upon the camp from all quarters of the compass before Leonard made the attempt at rousing the 'guy' to his spectacular fury; in the fourth, when he had done so, important things happened.

Take the second point first. Tom Matthews knew the woods. There were all sorts of bird-nests: nests of robins, blackbirds, mourning doves – great platforms these, never seen by Leonard before – and, only about a mile out of their way, there was a heronry where huge birds wheeled wildly about on concave wings when they sighted the boys. There were cushions of moss and whole flats of clubmosses of curious shapes. There were bushes of flowering dogwood, the glory of south-Ontarian woods; there were saplings of sassafras, to be chewed

as well as admired. In a swampy water-hole tadpoles flitted about, with a spotted salamander and a brood of young newts. There were squirrels, both red and black, and a ferocious woodchuck. And there was an elusive search for a deer which Tom claimed to have seen only the day before the rains started. Above all, Leonard, with three huge and double plum-jam sandwiches in the course of easy digestion, never once heard the clock of his stomach strike.

As for the camp, it consisted of a long-abandoned, half-decayed house in a small clearing which was rapidly reverting to forest. All about this clearing, its inmates – there must have been thirty of them, were squatting about or walking about on various errands. Some were washing their ragged linen in old, leaky wash-tubs rescued from some junk pile; some were drying their bedding: worn mattresses, blankets, and quilts draped in the gratēful sun over shrubs and the lower branches of trees; some were cooking their dinners in tin-cans over improvised fires; some were playing poker on a board reaching across their knees. Alongside of the house proper, there were several smaller shelters erected with the help of half-rotted planks and boards from a barn which had long since collapsed and now formed a mere heap of debris.

It was a revelation to Leonard who had so far only heard at second or third hand of the make-shift life which a not inconsiderable fraction of the population was leading. These were fellow human beings supporting themselves with offal and in a furtive way, hidden from the traveller rolling along in a sumptuous car over costly highways laid out to display the fine old Ontario landscape to the best advantage. In future he would not again have the heart to look down with contempt on the 'bums' of the road. Their very endeavour to keep themselves and their clothes clean proved that they were of the same flesh as himself.

More than an hour went by in this furtive examination of the camp, from the woods surrounding it, before they even saw the 'guy'. When they did, he was sitting apart from the rest of the men, on a block of wood, near the south edge of the clearing, almost directly in the opening of an old logging trail. They were on the opposite side of the camp; and even when they had spied him, past the house, he was sitting bent over, so that they could not distinguish his face. In one hand he held the broken half of a car-spring; with the other he was groping about at the rim of a car-wheel with the deflated tire on it. Apparently he was preparing to take the tire off the rim for repair.

"That's him," Tom whispered. "Come on. Less go around till we gets to that trail."

They did; and they did it with all the precautions of Indians stalking

a camp of pale-faces; for both were familiar, the one from reading, the other from hear-say, with the tales of Fenimore Cooper. Leonard went so far as to stand rigidly still and alert, in the attitude of arrested motion, when by mischance he stepped on a dry twig. The ground was high here; the soil, gravelly; so that the half day of sunshine and playful breezes had made such twigs brittle enough to crackle under the steps of the boys.

There was one distraction. While taking a wide detour around the camp, a sudden vista opened to the north; and at the same moment there was the sound of childrens' voices.

Tom laughed gleefully, but without emitting a sound. "That there," he said, pointing, "is my school."

Leonard stopped. "Why aren't you there, then?"

"The road's washed out."

"Why don't you go the way we came?"

"Cause I don't want to."

"Doesn't anyone know about this trail?"

"Leastways my dad don't," Tom said slyly. "He thinks by the road is the only way."

Leonard grinned. "Don't you like school?"

"I hates it."

This incident was to prove important to Leonard shortly.

They went on again; and soon, a matter of five hundred feet from the clearing, they came upon the one-time logging trail.

"There he is," said Tom, pointing along it. "See him? You go and say 'Buick' to him."

"I don't know," Leonard said; and, falling readily into his companion's manner of speech, he added, "I don't know as I wants to."

"I'll tell you," Tom said, not without a trace of scorn in his voice. "You's afraid. That's what you is."

Leonard grunted contemptuously; but the bare truth of it was that Tom was right. "Are they all chums of his?" he asked, referring by a nod to the other men in the camp.

"Naw," Tom drawled. "I believes he's all alone. But if you's afraid I'll go and show you."

This decided Leonard. "No," he said. "Stay where you are. I am

going."

"He's an ugly devil," Tom warned as if to hold him back now. He knew he had Leonard where he wanted him.

"I don't care."

And Leonard advanced boldly along the trail, taking note, however, from the corners of his eyes, of every advantage the surroundings might offer to one bent on flight.

Slowly he approached the man who was still sitting there, bent over, on his block of wood, his face averted, for he was speaking to an extraordinarily small man between him and the tumble-down house which, from this side, resembled some animal resting sideways on its haunches.

Leonard judged he was close enough and stopped about three or four yards from the man's broad back. He took an instant to subdue the pounding of his heart; but when he spoke, he did so in a voice loud enough to be heard by Tom.

"Buick!" he said.

The effect was electric; and before the boy had had time to realise just what that effect had consisted in, he was running for dear life.

The man had jumped up with tense muscles, grabbed the tire, still on its rim, swung it up above his head, and hurled it with tremendous force through the air, aiming for the fleeing boy. It barely missed him and then, for a hundred feet or so, rolled past him before it fell flat on its side.

Not before Leonard had run for several hundred feet, sprinting along as fast as he could, did he become ominously aware of the fact that his companion Tom Matthews had disappeared. It was strange that it should affect him as it did. Was it not natural enough that one boy who had got another boy into mischief should run for it as the other did?

But, thinking at last that he was out of danger – for instinctively he knew that the 'guy' was not pursuing him – he stopped and turned; and there, at the end of the trail, still stood the ferocious stranger, large as life, putting the bent knuckle of his middle finger in his mouth to emit a fierce, whistling sound, audible, in the quiet woods, for half a mile. At once, in the clearing, half a dozen men ran to his bidding.

At that very moment Leonard felt himself seized from behind and borne to the ground.

It was half a minute before, struggling fiercely, he recognised his assailant as Tom Matthews; not till he began to yell for all he was

worth to the huge fellow at the end of the lane. Tom himself had fallen with his victim and was holding him down.

"Hi, Bottom," he cried. "Come on. Quick. I've got him. It's the Broadus kid."

The hulking figure, disregarding his helpers who had come running from all sides, was slow to get into motion. But when he came stalking along, he looked menacing, his huge chin out-thrust.

"What Broadus kid?" he asked, almost roaring.

"Him what saw you, when you lost your mask. The kid of the raft, don't'che know?"

The man was coming on, somewhat more swiftly now, though he still made the impression that he did not know what all the commotion was about.

Leonard fully realised the danger he was in; but his head remained cool. He lay absolutely motionless now; he was planning his next move; and while he did so, his eye, for just one brief moment, focused itself on the ground before him, where, almost touching his nose, he saw, in soft clay, a footprint with an iron toe-plate at its tip and a little rod of clay sticking up in one corner. That sight gave him all the strength and the cunning he needed.

To deceive the boy who was still lying on top of him, he relaxed all his muscles; and his ruse succeeded, for Tom also relaxed, preparatory to the effort of rising; and then, with one powerful twist of his body into which he threw the strength of every fibre, he brought himself uppermost. In another moment he sat astraddle on the back of his treacherous opponent, twisting his arms into a knot behind his back.

Watching the huge man approach, he allowed Tom to rise, in fact, forced him to rise, by tightening his grip on his wrists and half lifting him, giving his arms at the same time an additional twist to show him that he was helpless.

He coolly appraised the fact that the man was not very fast on his feet; that his arms hung low like those of an ape; that he had, apparently, neither knife nor gun.

But, as he faced him this time, at a distance of perhaps five or six yards, his helpers still following him, bent over, trying to peer past him, he recognised the man at last, recognised that pitiless, ugly face with the red stubble of beard and the goggle eyes which he had seen in the dining-room of his father's house. The words which Tom had yelled out to the man had gone past his ears, so much had he been preoccupied with his sudden predicament; but now they came back to him, with the force of so vast a surprise that a word escaped him

which, a moment later, he would gladly have recalled. That word was, "You!"

Again the effect was electric. A roar escaped the huge, twisted mouth with the flabbily-hanging lips; and his wide, heavy body broke into swift action. From the clearing behind, another figure came running, no doubt still in answer to the whistling; and this figure carried a gun.

But Leonard had had the time to prepare himself for his next move. Taking a still tighter grip on Tom Matthews' wrists, he braced himself; and at the very moment when the big man hurled himself forward, the boy pushed his prisoner between the monster's legs so that he stumbled forward.

At the same moment, having let go of Tom's wrists, he veered around and once more ran for dear life. A second later he heard the whine of a bullet pass his ears; then the impact of that bullet in the trunk of a tree; then the report of the rifle from behind.

With a jump he struck sideways between the trees, leaving the trail; and in fifteen seconds he felt safe from pursuit except by a systematic search of the woods.

XXV

He never stopped, not even when he reached the orchard where he was on his uncle's land; not before, like a whirlwind, he had burst into the house, slamming the heavy oak door behind him and bracing himself against it from the inside, quite out of breath.

The noise of the slamming door brought two people into the hall that stretched before him: his uncle from the library, and Mrs. Pyett from the back quarters of the house. Both looked at him, half indignant, half scared.

"What in the world has happened now?" Mr. Broadus asked. "Have you seen ghosts?"

Leonard hesitated for just a second. Neither of these two people, he felt, took him seriously; neither understood anything about him. They thought him a harum-scarum sort of scamp who, by mishap half chargeable to him, got himself carried out into the lake on a raft; who habitually missed his meals; and whose main purpose in life was to upset grown-up people in their habits in order to worry them.

Then he said defiantly, "Yes, I have. I've seen the ghosts of the robbers; unless they are the live ones. The leader and at least some of his men. But even they're only part of the gang, of course. Your precious Mr. Matthews and his brat are two others." This was said more or less at random; but there was a shrewd intuition behind it.

The uncle stared. "Now, now, my boy!" he said. "You don't know what you're saying."

At mention of the name of Mr. Matthews, Mrs. Pyett had given a cry of dismay.

"I know only too well what I'm saying," Leonard replied. "I tell you the leader of that robber gang is in the camp. I'm the only one who knows him for what he is, apart from his own men. I tell you it's he; and your Mr. Matthews is an accomplice of his."

Removing his glasses, the uncle smiled with the air of strained patience. "Come into the library, child," he said soothingly. "What camp are you talking about?"

"I won't leave this door till it's locked," said the boy. "They were after me. They're after my life. They shot at me. They've tried to shoot me before."

"We'll lock the door," said Mr. Broadus. "We'll do better. We'll ask Mrs. Pyett to remain in the hall and to give the alarm at the slightest sign of anything wrong. I'll even take a rifle along. There," he added, having taken a formidable-looking big-game rifle from a cabinet in the hall. "And now come to the library, will you? You can tell me all about it."

The boy obeyed readily enough.

In the library he gave a brief but lucid account of all that pertained to the immediate aspect of the case: of the shooting on the Toronto-Hamilton highway of which even his parents knew only a few details so far; of the camp and how he had been lured there; of his sight of the man Bottom whom he had recognised beyond the possibility of a mistake; of the boy Tom and his treacherous attack; of the way in which he, Leonard, had foiled it; and of his precipitate flight when the old man, as he called him, would have killed him in cold blood in order to do away with the one person on earth who knew him for what he was.

The uncle listened; but he did so with the air of one who believes only half. "Now, my dear child," he said when the boy finished, "granted that everything you tell me is strictly true as far as it goes. Yet your interpretations are almost certainly wrong. I absolutely refuse to believe that Matthews is in anyway involved. The boy, of course, knew of the camp, as such boys will. He's always roaming about in the woods. He isn't Matthews' child, by the way. He's adopted or something; I've never thought it worth my while to enquire into the matter. If that camp had been near your father's place, you would have known about it. No doubt some of the men employed on this place know about it. Others roam the woods; you do; or you

wouldn't be here this moment; you even go rafting. That boy – Tom as you tell me he's called – was naturally anxious to show a new acquaintance that camp. You've attained a momentary notoriety. Boys are apt to show off. No doubt you bragged a bit about your adventure on the lake . . ."

"No, I didn't."

"Well, be that as it may. He wanted to display some sort of superiority. So he persuaded you to come with him. I don't believe for a moment that there was any plan underlying his action . . ."

"Uncle," Leonard interrupted again, speaking this time with an air of authority, "He was waiting for me there, in the margin of the wood. How could he have known of my being here, except through Matthews? By the way, has Matthews a radio?"

"He has. I happen to know because my own depends on current from hydro; and I happened to forget to wind my watch yesterday; so we got the time-signal from him. He has a battery set."

"Good," Leonard said, "that confirms it. He knew all about me from the broadcasts. Besides, when that boy fell upon me as I was running away from that fellow Bottom, he had moved from the point at which I had left him; he had picked a better place from which to jump down upon me, with all the advantage which his higher position gave him, by the side of the trail. He knew the man's name. He called me 'him of the raft'. He even mentioned that I was the one who had seen him with his mask off. They know all about me. They knew all about me when they pursued that police car out of Toronto last week. They weren't after the police; they were after me."

"How could they know you had seen one of them?"

"I don't know," said the boy in his eagerness to get on with his reasoning; and then he corrected himself. "Yes, I do know. Captain Culver explained it all to me. But I see it for the first time clearly now. I had been at London, at the lock-up, to look over all their suspects. I had been at Hamilton and Toronto. Among the men lined up for my inspection there must have been one or more that belonged to the gang. They communicated with others in Toronto; and most likely with this man Bottom here."

"How?"

"I can't tell that. By telephone or by wireless."

The uncle laughed. "Surely, the police have by this time enquired everywhere whether there have been long-distance calls. And to talk of wireless in a camp of unemployed sounds simply funny."

"They're not all unemployed," Leonard cried. "Though most of them probably are. Some of them I know to be members of the gang. They have a car there, a stolen car."

"Granted. But to give instructions to people in Toronto, he must have had a broadcasting station as well, a transmitting set, I don't know what you'd call it; I've never been interested in the mechanics of the thing; and it still doesn't explain how they knew you."

"Because the gang-leader knew he had been seen without a mask only once; when that mask fell off in our house. As for the transmitting set, they may have one after all. Portable ones are made, that I know for a fact. Admiral Byrd had one at Advance Base in the Antarctic; he had to work it by hand; and he did. Uncle," the boy said with sudden decision, "can you and will you get together a posse of men large enough to surround that camp and to put every man there under arrest? If you do, I'll make bold to find that transmitting set."

For fully two minutes the uncle stared at the boy, thinking, "No," he said at last. "I can't. The only people within ready reach are the villagers at Brittany; at best I could get together half a dozen men that would do."

"That's not enough," the boy said; but he said it with a desperate determination. "I must get into touch with the police, then. At once."

The uncle smiled. "What's the hurry?" he asked. "Since we're all cut off and can't get out? They, too, are cut off and can't get out, don't you see?"

"But the moment *we* can get out, *they* can; and they'll act fast; faster, I'm afraid, than we shall. They'll beat us to it."

"At any rate, the hurry isn't immediate, my boy. They won't, and we won't be able to get out within several days."

The boy made a motion as if *his* patience were being exhausted. But he checked himself and thought for a moment. Then he said, "Uncle, how far is the school-house from here?"

"Four miles by the road."

"How far from Brittany?"

"A bit over three miles."

"All right. Would you have thought it possible to go those four miles from here?"

"I should not."

"Well, the camp is half a mile from the school; and I passed the school within less than that. I distinctly heard some of the children

playing and shouting in the yard. It must have been during the afternoon recess."

"They were Herring's children, no doubt. He lives within a quarter of a mile of the school; and it's his wife who boards the teacher."

"But that isn't the point," said the boy, arguing carefully. "The point is that *I* was there; and I came from here, four miles by the road as you said yourself. Only I didn't try to follow the road."

Mr. Broadus was impressed. This was indeed a new aspect of the matter.

The boy pressed his advantage home. "And if that is so, as it is, then, who can tell what a person familiar with the woods, like this boy Tom, can't do to get anywhere he wants to go, especially if he is liable to swing from the gallows unless he does."

"The gallows!" said the uncle. "We don't hang people any longer for robberies."

"They have killed people. They tried to kill me."

"Even at that it would be a dangerous undertaking. Don't forget that there are the swamps."

"Dangerous or not. These men know that, the moment I get out, their game is up. They will think that you'd do what you can to help get me out."

"What I can," said the uncle. "Which is precisely nothing."

"You say there are the swamps. There are. But swamps are filled with trees and shrubs, though they may not stand as close as in dry woods. There isn't a swamp in Suffolk County which, given time, I wouldn't undertake to cross."

"There isn't?"

"No," said the boy firmly. "It might take me hours to make a mile, in places. But if it had to be done, I'd do it. And there are woods everywhere; if you follow the woods you're on dry ground, except for short stretches; for the woods are left only where the soil is too sandy or gravelly to be tilled. As for the swamps, you may have to go round about; you may have to cross streams and get wet. But the streams are rapidly running out, now the rain has stopped. No matter how roundabout the way through the woods may be, it will take you wherever you want to go. It's a matter of patience. Uncle, you must help me to get to town . . ."

Mr. Broadus looked pensive. "Explain this to me, my boy," he said. "If those people you talk of, the people in the hobo camp, are

the robbers, why did they rob my brother's place and not mine?"

"I've thought of that, uncle. Just because their camp is here."

"What do you mean?"

"It was before the rains. Distance didn't matter. What mattered was that they should keep some place, somewhere, from which they could direct operations. If you had been robbed, the woods all about would have been minutely searched; their hiding place would have been found at once."

"Not badly reasoned," the uncle admitted, smiling.

"But now," the boy went on, "now they've been discovered and you are cut off . . ."

The uncle's eyes widened. "Now, you think, I'm in line for their next exploit?"

"As likely as not."

Mr. Broadus rose and took a few turns through the room. Then, as if finally making up his mind, he stopped. "I'll set a watch," he said. "We'll keep all our lamps burning. We'll put the house in a state of defence. I've plenty of firearms, though only women to handle them. Even Matthews has probably gone home by this time. But the moon will be shining. I believe it is full tonight. Yes, it is. It's the first of June. I'll do what I can, my boy. But I have to think matters over. There might be a possibility to get through to Port Dover, now the lake's quiet. But we can't do anything before tomorrow morning. It's nearly six now. Nobody would start out, rowing, when there is danger of getting into the dark. We'll have dinner in an hour."

The boy frowned. But instinctively he understood that he had wrested his last word from his uncle. Well, whatever had to be done must be done at once. His mind was made up.

XXVI

In the boy's room stood a small alarm clock, a pretty little thing. He wrote a note to say that it was he who had taken it. Then, waiting till it was two o'clock at night, he climbed out of a window, using a sheet which, by one corner, he had tied to the rail of his bed by way of a rope, and let himself down to the ground.

Port Dover was too far away; to get help from there would take days. He felt convinced that he could reach Rivers more quickly.

The moon shone brightly indeed; as his uncle had said, it was full; and soon he was on his way through the woods, not stopping this time

for bird's nest or moss bank. He passed within sight and sound of the snoring camp which he had reached walking fast; and till he had left the school behind, he kept up his speed. He was determined to make the twenty-odd miles to town before noon.

But there were difficulties. He did not know the exact direction in which he should go; for he had no map. Had he known it, he could not have held it; for he had no compass. Apart from the moon and the stars there was nothing to guide him except the moss on the trees which grows on their north side. The moon was moving; and the stars he could often not see for the trees. Yet he felt certain that, roughly, he could hold to the north.

More than once he came out upon plowed fields which were a mire of knee-deep mud torn by deep gullies; he circled them. Even though the moon helped much, it was not like daylight; he had known that, of course, and it was why he had not started in the early night. More than once, too, he came upon streams; but once only did he, in a deep, wooded valley closed to the sky by hemlocks, have to wade hip-deep through an icy black-water brook. Two or three times he struck roads and used them, though they ran east-west; but he used them only to get past plowed ground and then took to the woods again. Every now and then he looked at his clock which was dangling by a string on his back. There was only one thing he was grateful to his uncle for: the pair of stout shoes he had on his feet.

For hour after hour he pressed on. His plan was to make the town first and to rouse the police, unless, indeed, he should come upon telephone or transmitting set before he reached it, and only then to go home to father and mother, his duty done. For his task had long before this taken on the colour of duty.

Last night, in anticipation of having to go hungry till noon or longer, he had eaten a tremendous dinner; and he felt buoyant and strong. He felt as though nothing could defeat his purpose.

Then daylight came, and that helped.

And at last, shortly after six o'clock, he stood on a wooded height looking down into a broad valley running roughly east-west – a valley filled with farms and checker-board fields. Too bad he had to cross it for it meant that he would have to climb the hills on the other side. But he made the descent without wasting time. This valley he knew.

There was a road running along its bottom; but now that road looked like the dry and tumbled bed of a river. On Tuesday last – this was Friday – when he had been descending Patterson Creek on his raft, he had seen this valley. A tumbling, swirling, muddy flood had

poured from it into the larger water-course; and that explained the destruction. He remembered a gas-standard he had seen being carried along.

Having reached the bottom, he followed the road for a while, going east, in order to find an easy ascent of the heights to the north; and he passed two or three farms.

Suddenly he heard himself hailed. "Hello, there!"

He turned. A small fellow with an extraordinary long upper lip jumped across a ditch into what was left of the road.

Leonard stopped. "Hello," he said.

"And who might you be?"

"Name's Broadus," said the boy. "Any telephone up in this valley?"

The man laughed. "Telephone? Naw. What chou want a telephone for?"

"To get in touch with the police at Rivers."

"No," the stranger repeated. "All the wires are down."

"You working here?" Leonard asked.

"I? Yeah. I'm working for a fellow by name of Vanderelst. Belgian. Good farmer."

"There doesn't happen to be someone with an amateur radio transmitting set around here, does there?"

"I believe there is," said the man after a brief pause.

"Where? What's his name?" The boy still spoke with the air of authority, like a grown-up.

"Well, now, I don't rightly know as I can tell you his name," said the man pensively. "He operates a service station about half a mile west."

"Half a mile? I've come farther than that along this road. I've seen no service station."

The man laughed. "Ye wouldn't," he said. "He's no sign out; and his gas-standard went with the flood. Did ye see a little house close to the road but high up, perched-like on a little knoll?"

"I believe I did," Leonard said, trying hard to remember. "If that's the place, I'll go there. I'm in a hurry."

XXVII

Leonard knocked at the door of an unpainted shack-like hovel.

A woman built like an overgrown baby, enormously fat, answered the knock.

"This the service station?" he asked.

"Used to be."

"The man in?"

"My man's sleeping; if it's him you mean."

"Could you wake him?"

The woman looked him up and down. "I don't know as I care to," she said.

To Leonard's surprise she spoke in a friendly enough voice; and to his still greater surprise, she proved, on closer inspection, by no means ill-looking; she was fat and loose; but her face had a baby-like prettiness which was quite attractive. He thought he could enlist the help of such a woman.

"Listen here," he said. "This is urgent. I understand your husband . . ."

"He ain't my husband," she interrupted comfortably. "He's my man."

Leonard stared, uncomprehending. His father had recently used the expression 'a distinction without a difference'; this seemed to be it.

"I'm his housekeeper, like," she elucidated with a smile.

"All right," said the boy, dismissing the problem. "I understand he's a radio operator."

The woman laughed. "He's that. That's why he's asleep. He's been tinkering all night, trying to join up an old gasoline engine with a little dynamo, since the hydro is gone. He's a big kid."

"For heaven's sake," Leonard cried, "wake him up as fast as you can."

He spoke with such urgency that, instinctively, the woman turned to obey. In less than two minutes a huge man in shirt and trousers, built like an overgrown, half-empty flour-bag, came to the door.

"What chou want?" he asked gruffly, still frowning and blinking with sleep.

Leonard explained in as few words as possible why he must get into touch with the police at Rivers or anywhere else.

"What's the hurry?"

Again Leonard explained, on his guard not to say too much, for fear of betraying himself to an accomplice of the robbers.

"By . . . jinks!" said the man with tremendous emphasis; and he broke into activity as if every part of his body were working separately, and all of them at cross purposes. "You're that kid . . ." he said. "They were here, searching for you. Come on in. Sit down."

The air in the low, bare, dilapidated room, at once dining, living, bed-room, and kitchen, was stifling. But the man had already disappeared into a sort of shed beyond. At a sign from the woman Leonard sat down on a home-made bench behind a plank table. She herself sat down opposite him, simpering.

Behind, in the shed, a gasoline engine was being started with a bellow of exhausts. Then, as the engine settled down to more civilised behaviour, there ensued a silence till the man's voice became audible.

"RXRY calling anyone anywhere. Police wanted."

And those words he repeated to satiety for many minutes, varied only by an occasional, "Hello, hello, hello!"

Then, suddenly, there was a loud crash, produced by the kick of a foot against the door.

"He wants you ," said the woman, rising.

Leonard quickly entered the shed which was filled with an odd assembly of machines and engines.

"You want Rivers, do you? I can't get it. I've got London. Some private person who picked me up by mere chance. I don't know who he is. He's pretty faint."

"Can he ring the police?" Leonard asked.

"Hello, hello, hello! . . . Can you get the police? . . . All right . . . Let them call RXRY, 1635 . . . Got that? . . . R-X-R-Y, 1-6-3-5 . . . Got it? Good . . . Many thanks to you, sir. Case of life and death." He turned to the boy. "Now it means waiting. But you'll be able to hear. The police commandeers some powerful station . . . There they are. By jinks, they're quick. Here, take the mike. Hear them? Just a minute . . . We'll get them clearer. There, now, speak to them."

"Hello. This is Leonard Broadus speaking . . . I'm at a service station . . . I know where the gang is . . . Hello . . . The Haldimand-Suffolk gang . . . Yes, Leonard Broadus, the boy of the raft . . . Can you get in touch with Captains Culver or Vance of the provincial police? At Rivers, yes. There's hurry, of course. I was at my uncle's. I got away; so they can. Let them call . . . What was it? . . . R-X-R-Y,

1-6-3-5. All right. I'll stay right here."

The huge man reached across him for what resembled a telegraph key. "I'm signing off," he said. "Now it means waiting again."

They waited for half an hour. Then the man shouted, "Ruth!"

The woman looked in at the door.

"Cup of coffee," the man said laconically.

Before it came, the telegraph key began to rattle, spelling out a station in the Morse code. While listening, the man turned the knob of the small receiving set. "It's Hamilton, this time," he whispered. "They're making connections over the telephone, it seems."

While the receiving set spluttered and coughed, he took the microphone from Leonard's hand. "Hello!" he said. Then, an answer coming very faintly. "Hello, hello, hello. You hear me? Yes, Leonard's right here."

The voice from the other end suddenly took on an enormous volume; then, as the big man twirled the buttons, it grew faint but gained in distinctiveness what it lost in volume. "Hello, hello, hello . . . That you, Leonard? Culver speaking. Where are you?"

Leonard looked helplessly at the huge, flabby man who took the microphone from him again and gave lot, concession, and township. Then he handed the microphone back to the boy who, at once, began a brief account of his escape from the lake, the loss of the raft, his landing, his being taken to his uncle's, and his discovery of the gang.

"Now listen, Leonard," said Captain Culver. "Here's Vance, too, just coming in. Don't leave your place. We've got to consult, to decide on some course of action. I'll call again in five minutes."

They seemed to be the longest five minutes Leonard had ever lived through.

Then the call came again, loud and spluttering as before, but slowly, as the huge man turned the buttons, toning down again to clearness and distinctness.

"Hear me, Leonard? . . . All right . . . We've sent a messenger down to your parents'. The telephone hasn't been repaired yet. You'd want them to know at once, wouldn't you? Now listen. We are putting through a requisition for a ranger's sea-plane; but in case that takes too long, we've decided not to wait for it. We're going down to Port Dover where they're chartering a big launch or a tug for us. We'll be coming around Long Point Island, of course. It's seven o'clock now. That way we can make your uncle's place around noon. Can you get back there by then? . . . Good. Yes . . . Yes . . . We'll be twenty-five

men all told, all armed, yes . . . All right, then. Get back to your uncle's as soon as you can. See you in four, five hours. Vance sends congratulations. He says he knows your uncle's place. Here he is, wanting to say a few words to you. So long, Leonard."

"Hello," Captain Vance's voice came through. "That you, Leonard? . . . Good boy, Leonard. Good work. So long."

XXVIII

Leonard, of course, felt inordinately proud and elated over the praise he had received. He turned to the big man. "My hat will be getting too small on me," he said with a laugh. "Can I get a bit of breakfast?"

"You bet."

"All right. I'm in a hurry."

"So am I. I'm going with you."

"Are you? Good. Any way to get down to the lake other than walking?"

"Afraid not."

They did not waste time. They swallowed a fried egg each, took their bread along, and munched it while climbing the hillside to the south. The service man and radio operator who, when asked for his name, said briefly. "Call me Percy," certainly knew the quickest way to get up to the level of the heights; and once they reached them, he knew how to avoid unnecessary descents. He strode out with huge steps, so that Leonard at times had difficulty in keeping up with him; but he never complained. Most of the time, however, Leonard was leading. They did not speak much; they pressed forward at the top of their speed.

In a little over three hours Leonard began to recognise where they were. He was a good woodsman.

Both he and his companion were wet through to the waist; one cannot pass through even open woods so early in the morning without getting wet; and these woods were far from open. The dew was hanging from every leaf; and though they avoided the one deep stream which Leonard had crossed in the night, there were plenty of others, shallower ones, and they splashed through.

A few minutes more brought them to the school which served the village as well as the countryside. They circled its yard; and then, as they crossed the road leading down to the village, Leonard enjoined the most absolute silence; but he could not deny himself the

satisfaction of pointing out the hobo camp to his companion.

In another three quarters of an hour they were in the orchard, well-known all over the county and even beyond; and then they sighted the house.

"Come on," Leonard said and broke into a run.

But Percy stopped him. "No," he said. "I'll stay here. You go ahead and speak to your uncle. If I'm wanted, just whistle."

"All right," said Leonard and went on.

It was not yet eleven o'clock; and everywhere, in the house, the windows were open. At one of them, the boy saw Agnes, the pretty maid. She stared down at him, wide-eyed, as he crossed the back lawn.

"You're a great one for coming and going, aren't you?" she asked.

He gave no answer.

A moment later, not to lose time, he entered the house via the kitchen where Mrs. Pyett was giving instructions to the cook who was round as a ball.

She, too, stared at him as if she saw a ghost. "Well, I declare!" she said.

"Where's my uncle," he asked.

"In the library, I suppose."

He went straight on without stopping in his stride.

In the dark, book-lined room, where his uncle was busy at his desk, his unexpected reappearance caused a third sensation.

"Where in the world do you come from?" the aging man asked.

"I've been in touch with the police at Rivers," the boy replied. "I knew I could get through; and I've proved it. The police will be here in an hour or so."

"How do you know?"

"I've been talking with them over the wireless."

"You don't say so! . . . Well, my boy, in one point at least you were right. Matthews is gone, with the boy. It seems I've been harbouring a snake in my bosom. And he took a goodly sum along, too. He broke this desk open, and a drawer in my bedroom. I'm just trying to find out how much he's taken. He got every penny I had in the house. What else, I don't know yet."

"The silver?"

"No," said the uncle. "We've verified all that. He didn't care to take anything that could be identified, I suppose. He hasn't been in any room, either, except here and in my bedroom."

"How did he get away?"

"That we don't know yet, either."

"The car?" asked the boy. "It was still on the beach, wasn't it?"

The uncle brought his fist down on the desk in front of him. "It was!"

"Well, since you could get here via the beach, from the Andersons', he could get that far, at any rate. He couldn't cross Patterson Creek, of course. But he may have gone the other way."

"Unless he's in the camp. We'll soon find out."

"Don't," said the boy.

"Why not?"

"Leave it to the police. They know how to go at it."

"The police are coming, you say. How?"

And Leonard briefly gave him the news he had.

"Well," said the uncle, "I'll get into some rough clothes; and we'll go down. Have you had your breakfast?"

"I've had an egg and some bread. But I can eat. By the way, I've got the wireless operator along. He's in the back yard."

"I'll give directions to Mrs. Pyett. Better fetch him in while I get ready."

A few minutes later Leonard and Percy sat down in the panelled dining-room to a second breakfast of cold ham and fowl, toast, and milk. Agnes was waiting on them, smiling mischievously at the boy whom she was teasing.

"I know, of course," she said, "how you got out. Everybody knows that since you left a white flag hanging out of your window. You should at least have drawn it back in instead of giving Gentleman Matthews the warning he needed."

"How could I?" Leonard asked, laughing.

"You might have gone back to bed."

"And never catch Matthews? . . . Funny thing, I never once saw him."

"You lost something there. He's more distinguished-looking than your uncle. Mrs. Pyett . . ."

But that lady appeared in the door just then, gave one look about, and went out again.

Agnes laughed. "I came near putting my foot in it that time!"

The next person to appear in the door was Mr. Broadus, in plus-fours and loose jacket, looking very smart in an English way. But he was stuttering with indignation.

"There, now," he said, "that confounded fellow got away in my best Palm-Beach suit; I don't mind the silk underwear he took. But the impudence of the fellow: he had the nerve to change in my room and to leave his dirty things bundled away in my closet!"

Leonard laughed. Then he politely introduced his companion. "This is Percy," he said. "This is my uncle."

The uncle stared for a moment as though he were still unenlightened. "Oh, oh, oh," he said at last. "I remember. You are the chap who helped this boy to get in touch."

"That's me," said the huge man heartily, though he was obviously embarrassed by his surroundings.

It had already struck Leonard that Percy, when at the microphone, seemed suddenly miraculously endowed with the ability to use the king's English correctly, which he promptly lost in the ordinary circumstances of life.

Soon they went out into what was appropriately called The Park, and down, by way of the wooden steps, to the beach. A first glance showed that the car was gone; a second, that it had gone east.

"I bet you, uncle," said the boy, "he was thinking already of his escape when he insisted on letting the car down to the beach that evening when you came for me to the Andersons'."

"Now I know more about him, I shouldn't put it beyond him," Mr. Broadus said grimly.

It was another glorious morning; the lake lay mirror-smooth; the leaves twinkled in the sunshine; and the air felt like a cool drink.

Leonard, of course, was sleuthing about; and soon he announced that at least two grown men had escaped in the car.

Meanwhile they were all three impatiently waiting for the arrival of the police; and, indeed, it was not long before they seemed to hear a distant "Chug-chug" sounding over to them through the calm air above the lake. Leonard at once trained his eyes on the far horizon to

the south-east; for it was thence that the boat must come.

And then he saw it; for it was rapidly getting larger; and within a few minutes he proclaimed it to be a fishing tug.

There followed ten minutes of tense uncertainty; for a fishing tug might pass them by, bound on its own business rather than theirs. But soon it swerved inshore; and in a few more minutes it ran aground on one of the outlying sand-banks, an eighth of a mile from land.

A boat was lowered; some ten, twelve figures swarmed overboard; a pair of oars flashed out; and within another five minutes all but two of the men it contained leapt ashore; the two remaining at the oars promptly pushed off again and once more made with long strokes for the tug.

Two men came running up the beach: Captains Vance and Culver.

There was much shaking of hands and slapping of shoulders; the tears stood in Leonard's eyes. Then Captain Vance said, "Do you remember the queen?"

"Do I?" said the boy.

"Well," the captain went on, "she recognised you by the pictures that have appeared in the papers. You must have struck her when she saw you in the window at Toronto. She's been enquiring; and she's given orders to keep her informed whether you were found or not. We had all given you up for drowned by this time, of course. But we sent the lady-in-waiting a wire at once, on getting in touch with you this morning. She came second after your parents."

"The queen!" said Leonard, awed.

XXIX

Twenty-five men had surrounded the camp. The two officers had insisted that neither Leonard nor his uncle should accompany them during the raid, though they enrolled Percy in the posse. There might be shooting, of course; and they were not going to let the boy or his uncle take any risk. The two stood near the south-east end of the logging trail, nervous, expectant, the uncle impatiently pacing up and down. For Leonard the suspense was next to unbearable. But during the whole of their wait not a shot was fired. The uncle kept looking at his watch.

"They are long about it," he said at last under his breath. "It's an hour since they left us."

But at that very moment Captain Culver came striding along the

trail from the clearing. A glance at his face showed Leonard that he brought bad news.

"Come on, my boy," he called, stopping as soon as he was within earshot. "We have every last man of the lot; but no person answering to your description is there."

"Have you searched the house?" asked the boy as he strode rapidly along by the side of the huge officer, with his uncle following behind.

"We have. There's nothing there. We found the delivery truck; and it's the one that was stolen in town; and we found twenty-nine men. I'm afraid they are all bona-fide squatters as we call them."

Leonard was profoundly disappointed.

The captured men were lined up in the clearing. Behind them, at ease, stood the posse, some in uniform, some in civilian clothes. Only two of them held their pistols in readiness. Captain Vance, notebook in hand, was questioning the men individually, walking along the line. A glance, indeed, showed Leonard that the man Bottom was not among them.

Suddenly an idea came to him. There were several small men in the line. "Hold them a minute," he said. "I want to make an experiment."

Everybody wondered what he was going to do.

He went to the rickety well by the side of the tumble-down house and, reaching for a pail which lay on its side, filled it with water. Then, taking the pail, he walked about over the clearing which, for a distance of fifty feet from the shack, was bare of plant-growth. Finding whatever he was looking for, he poured the water out on the ground. Then he stood for two, three minutes, watching it while it soaked away.

A minute later he ran up to Captain Vance who was just finishing his task. "Please," he said coaxingly, but much excited, "let those men walk across that wet patch, single file."

"Good!" the captain exclaimed, laughing aloud; for he had guessed at the boy's idea; and he promptly gave the necessary orders.

One by one the men were made to step across the damp patch of clay, the boy standing by, his eyes glued to the ground. Neither of the two officers came near; they wanted to leave the triumph, if triumph there was to be, to the child. The rest of the posse who did not know what his purpose was, slowly formed a lane.

Seven men had passed by the boy when he raised his hand. "Stop!" he cried.

The two captains, the uncle, and Percy came running.

"That," said the boy pointing to the eighth man who was still standing within the margin of the patch, "is the man with the iron toe-plates."

"Take him." Captain Vance snapped out this order to two policemen who promptly seized him by an arm each and snapped hand-cuffs on him.

Just before they had done so, the man snapped his fingers at himself as if in annoyance. Then he cast a quick, furtive glance about as if looking for some avenue of escape.

"Bring him over here," Captain Vance beckoned and led the way to an open stretch removed from the rest of the men; ending up with: "Search him."

A third man, in whom Leonard recognised Sergeant Quinn, went through his pockets. "He's one of the fellows from whom I took one of the revolvers," Quinn said.

What he now took from his pockets he placed on the ground. It consisted of the ordinary odds and ends which a man might be expected to carry about with him: a rag serving as a handkerchief, a handful of matches, a tobacco pouch, a book of cigarette papers, and a pocket knife. All which came from the pockets of his frayed trousers apart from which he wore only a vest and a shirt of grimy blue cotton. The sergeant inserted one finger each into the upper pockets of the vest; there was nothing in them. Then the fingers descended to the lower pockets. One was promptly withdrawn without result; the other fumbled for what was evidently some small object. When he withdrew it, he showed a small pen-knife on the palm of his hand.

"Dad's pen-knife," cried the boy and turned his back to the sergeant. "Want me to describe it?" he asked of Captain Vance.

Captain Vance smiled and nodded.

"Sterling silver shell," said the boy promptly; "two blades, one small, the other smaller; chain-loop at one end; dad's name in his handwriting engraved on one side. Correct?"

"Correct," said the sergeant behind him.

"That's five hundred dollars for you, sonny," said Captain Vance.

XXX

A few more men from the crowd at the camp were arrested on suspicion; all those, for instance, on whom fire-arms had been found; and those who were unable to give a satisfactory account of

themselves. In addition, there were three who had been seen exchanging glances and signals with Toe-Plates as Leonard called the man. The rest were temporarily allowed to go free, though a watch was set over the camp.

With this catch, the posse, apart from the watch, consisting of two armed men, returned to Mr. Broadus's grounds.

On the way, Captain Culver patted the boy on his shoulder. "That was a lucky chance shot," he said.

"It wasn't chance," Leonard said; and he explained how, when the boy Tom had thrown him on the trail, he had almost touched the imprint in a patch of clay of an unusually small boot with the plate on the right foot. "I recognised it at once," he said. "There was no mistaking it."

"Other people wear toe-plates," said Captain Culver.

"Yes. But this one was badly put on. One of the nail-holes had no nail in it. I had taken note of that, on that Sunday morning, at home."

"Good," said the captain, beaming down on Leonard. "That's one on Sergeant Quinn; I don't think he reported that."

At that moment all in the procession looked up into the sky; for the drone of an aeroplane, common enough here on the air-lane of the Chicago-Detroit-Buffalo mail route, drummed down on their ears. But this plane did not come from the west; it came from the north and was flying low.

"Quick!" said the two captains in unison. "Let's see her land."

The boy and the officers broke into a run, for they were still in the orchard. The boy, of course, being fleet of foot, led; and with quick decision he headed for the topmost flight of steps leading down to the beach.

Thence they saw the huge machine, two-motored, bank, swerve, and gracefully curve down to the water. Already the two men of the tug were bending to their oars to meet it.

"That," Captain Vance said, "means a flight for you, sonny."

The boy, hopping on one foot, cried, "I hope it does!"

"It's bound to," said Captain Vance. "We've got to locate the car."

The plane raised her nose and touched with her pontoons, splashing the water up to both sides in huge wings. The boy and the two men were already running down the steps.

Within two minutes after she had come to a stop, perched on the water like an enormous gull, the boat reached her; and the pilot, climbing out over her hood, dropped his anchor. Five minutes later he stood ashore.

He was a tall, lank man, looking extremely efficient, in spite of his pug nose.

At sight of the police officers in their uniforms he saluted smartly. "Canadian Airways," he said. "Reporting for duty. Name's Cameron, pilot."

"Very good," said Captain Culver. "In need of something to eat?"

"No, sir. Ready for work any time."

"Room for two extra men?" Captain Vance asked.

"Room for twelve, sir."

"All right. Just a moment."

And he took Captain Culver aside to consult with him.

Shortly, Captain Culver bade good-by to Leonard, though only for the afternoon. "See you at Dover," he said. "You'll be with your parents tonight. There's just one little bit of service waiting. I'd like to come along; but somebody must remain in command here."

"So long," Leonard said with a bright smile.

Captain Vance had turned to the pilot. "We shall have to locate a car along the beach. There were at least two men in it, and probably, a boy. Since there is ample room, I'll take an extra man, in addition to Sergeant Quinn. Including you and the boy, we'll be five. The point is we must fly low enough to see that car; and high enough to clear the cliff in case they abandon the car."

"When did they start, sir?"

"Some time during the night. That's all we know."

"Wouldn't they have reached Dover long ago? How far is it?"

"Not more than a hundred miles or so. But unless thay have managed to get the car on top of the cliff and there found an unbroken road, it can't have got away. Both are unlikely assumptions; and on this beach you don't travel at more than two or three miles."

"True," said the pilot. "Is it shingle beach all along?"

"Shingle and rock, with sand only here and there."

They waited. To the boy's impatience, it seemed an endless time before they saw a number of men coming down the steps.

"There's Quinn now," said Captain Vance.

And when the men had reached the beach, he picked one of them in addition to Quinn.

The boat was waiting. Within five minutes they reached the plane.

"Could I sit with you?" Leonard asked the pilot, nudging him as he stood up in the boat.

"Not with me. It's against regulations. But, if the captain permits you can sit in the co-pilot's cockpit."

The boy looked around at the captain who was laughing.

"I'm going to sit there myself," he said. "I'm the only one who's a pair of binoculars. He couldn't sit on my knees, could he?"

"I don't know, sir," the pilot replied. "I suppose he could. But you'd have to be responsible for him, captain."

"Can you sit still?" the captain asked.

Leonard disdained to answer; he scrambled in.

The pilot was taking his seat; the boat pulled clear; and the oarsmen retreated till the pilot gave them a sign with his hand.

The crawl of the huge machine changed to swifter and swifter motion as she taxied out of the bay.

Looking around, Leonard saw two figures ashore which were frantically waving; his uncle and Percy who, having helped him so much, should not, he vowed, by this parting pass finally out of his life.

He never noticed when the machine took off. As he turned forward again, he realised that a long-cherished dream had come true: he was flying.

XXXI

The plane rose and rose in a spiral till the altimeter, straight in front of Leonard who was looking over the pilot's shoulder, showed a height of six thousand feet. From this elevation, the countryside lay flattened below, like a map. They could see for a distance of fifty miles, over land and lake. Between the two, the curving, wooded shoreline with its many bays all bordered by a strip of beach and the cliff behind, stretched away endlessly. The beach was mostly of shingle, only here and there of sand, except on the great island of Long Point where there was nothing but sand. For a while this island

looked like a mere continuation of the shore; for, running east-west, it almost touched the mainland to the left. The shoreline proper, just beyond it, turned sharply north; and then north-east. It was the purpose of this initial ascent to enable both pilot and police to get a bird's-eye view of the whole territory before them; and the captain was ranging it with his powerful glasses.

Leonard, too, of course, was eagerly looking out; but for the moment he forgot that their flight had a definite purpose; he was enthralled by the mere sensation of flying.

Suddenly he turned his eyes straight north, but unobserved by the captain between whose knees he was half standing half crouching. Even with unaided eyes he made out the town of Rivers.

The captain trained his glasses in the same direction and shortly pointed. "There's your dad's place," he said into the boy's ears, for the roar of the exhausts to both sides made any other mode of conversation, except that of shouting at the top of one's voice, impossible. "I saw it plainly for just a moment; then I lost it behind the woods. If your parents knew where you are, they could recognise you with a good pair of glasses."

"I wish they did," the boy shouted back.

"That," the captain went on, pointing once more, "is Tillsonburg; there is Rivers. Straight ahead, but still below the horizon, is Port Dover where we are going. Look," he added, swinging his glasses around to the other side, "that is Long Point Island. Looks like a mere peninsula."

The boy looked; and a moment later he exclaimed excitedly, "Did you see the tug?"

"What tug?" the captain asked, removing his glasses which limited his field of vision.

"Can't see it any longer. There was a tug putting in on the beach of Long Point."

"Surely not," the captain said incredulously.

"I saw it plainly. That clump of willows is hiding it now."

The captain strained his eyesight but failed to discover it.

The plane was swinging out lakeward again and, banking sharply, turned shoreward, diving steeply till the altimeter showed no more than five hundred feet. At that height the pilot held her as he settled down to a patient flight in and out of the endless bays that constituted the shoreline. It became impossible now to indulge in the illusion of motionless soaring; for the distance tore past them below; and the

numerous headlands, sometimes rising to within a hundred feet of their level, seemed to be dipping up and down, up and down, rising out of the horizon in front and disappearing below and behind. Thoughout, the captain watched the outward shore of the great island, but without seeing anything of interest.

Then there came a moment when the captain had neither the time to talk to the boy nor to scan the horizon to the south, over the lake. His undivided attention was claimed by the beach below where he carefully examined every clump of willow, every angle in the cliff. They had slowed now to the minimum speed required to hold the machine in the air which was about sixty miles an hour. At any rate, it would still take them over an hour to reach Port Dover.

Discounting the many turns into and out of the bays, they were roughly describing a flat arc convex to the lake till, straight below them, they saw the west point of Long Point Island where it all but touched the mainland, the gap being spanned by a long, low bridge. From their left came a river, Big Creek, still swollen.

The shore of the mainland now made its sharp turn to the north; and at the very moment when they took that turn, far to their right, the lake-port of Dover came into view, not more than twenty-odd miles away in a straight line. The distance they had to fly, Leonard calculated, taking into account the many bays, would be twice as far.

The captain never took the binoculars from his eyes any longer; there he sat, behind Leonard, leaning over the side. Mile after mile they flew, mile after mile, without the slightest result.

To Leonard, the first twenty or thirty miles had been what a deep draught of cool, sparkling water would be to a man dying with thirst; he had simply drunk in the triumph of the sensation of flying. Now he began once more to feel that sense of responsibility for the success of their task which had animated him ever since, lying on the ground under the other boy, he had seen the footprint of Toe-Plates. He got down on his knees; and he, too, bent his head over the edge of the cockpit, straining his eyes.

Where was that car? The search for it must eclipse every other interest. Only when he saw the captain, close behind him, raising his glasses to the upper edge of the cliff did he realise again that the beach was not the only avenue of escape for the fugitives; if any road led down to its level, be it the merest cattle trail, it might well be that the criminals had struck inland. But, though there were plenty of gullies, widened by the recent rains into the beds of torrents, roads which a car could travel there were none. Those coming from the north, inland, all ended at the cliff above. Only sharp-hooved animals could have ascended or descended the gullies.

Suddenly he thought again of the tug which he had seen on the outside of Long Point. He turned; and there he saw it, now miles from shore, and headed to the south-west. He called the captain's attention to it; but Captain Vance, after a close scrutiny through his glasses, shook his head.

"No," he said into the boy's ear, "that's an ordinary fishing tug bound on business of its own. Most likely they are on the way to their nets."

The momentary distraction had this consequence that, when they looked shoreward again, the sight that met their eyes came with the shock of surprise. A wide valley had opened there; and just beyond the next headland lay two villages – or summer resorts as they seemed to be – so close together that, for a moment, they seemed to be one, though they lay in different bays. Captain Vance bent forward and touched the pilot on his shoulder, giving him a signal. The plane slowed down to a point where it rapidly lost height. They rounded a headland almost coasting and flew low over the cottages, all still boarded up. Behind them a road, which, from here, looked to be in excellent condition, swung boldly down right to the level of the beach. Here, if ever, was a chance for a car to turn inland.

By this time they were flying at what seemed a dangerously low elevation, so that it looked as if they could never rise again without touching the tops of the trees clustering close. Again the captain gave the pilot a signal; and suddenly the latter, opening his throttle wide, almost upended his plane and, banking, turned north, overland, climbing rapidly.

They went inland for about ten miles, till they had crossed the Guelph-Dover highway, Number 24, below; and meanwhile the captain kept anxiously scanning two gravelled roads which ran roughly north. Then, at a sign from him, the machine turned back to the lake.

Leonard who was intent on understanding all that was being done interpreted this manoeuvre as meaning that, if the fugitives had reached that highway, they were beyond immediate danger of detection from the plane; for there were numerous cars passing to and fro. In that case, therefore, it was a matter for the watchers on land.

Then, within ten more minutes, they saw below them the breakwaters and piers of the busy little harbour of Port Dover where the mouth of a river was crowded with fishing craft, all resembling each other with their covered-in bows and sterns.

As they were circling over the town, the pilot bellowed a question over his shoulder.

The captain shouted his answer back: "Land."

Again they swept out over the lake in a bold circle; then, turning, they dipped their pontoons and, slowing, taxied along till they were as close to the main pier as they dared to go.

"Stay where you are, Leonard," said Captain Vance. "I've got to make enquiries ashore and to consult with headquarters." He had already hailed a small boat to come alongside.

Timidly Leonard put his hand on the captain's arm, at the precise moment when the latter swung a leg overboard into the boat. The captain stopped.

"I've a hunch," Leonard said. "That tug at Long Point!"

The captain frowned pensively. "By George!" he said suddenly. "You may be right at that."

XXXII

Sergeant Quinn went ashore with the captain, using the boat which, in expectation of an honest penny to be earned, had come alongside. The pilot, the extra man in the cabin aft, and Leonard remained aboard.

Soon launches and pleasure craft, sailing and row boats, were circling the plane which sat perched like a bird on the water; and many curious eyes looked at the boy in the co-pilot's cockpit.

"Hi!" shouted a boy from one of the boats. "You Leonard Broadus?"

Leonard looked around, smiled, and nodded.

"Hip, hip!" intoned the boy; and scores of voices chimed in.

Leonard laughed. But he was worried and at last picked up courage to speak to the pilot.

"If those fellows that put off in the tug which I saw are those we are after, won't they get away before we can reach them?"

"We're travelling ten times as fast as they do," said the pilot; "we'll fetch up with them. By the way," he added, "I saw that tug just when you spoke. I watched where they were; on sighting the plane they turned inshore at once. I'm sure you are right; if they did not have those fellows aboard, why should they hide?"

"Yes," Leonard said. "That's what I thought. Of course, the captain never saw them till they were way out. I wish we'd gone after them at once."

"No hurry."

Leonard, encouraged by the fact that the pilot had not disdained to answer, began to ask all sorts of other questions about the instrument board and the management of so large a plane. There was ample time during the endless wait.

The clock in the tower of the town-hall showed half past three before the boat which had taken the two men ashore detached itself once more from the throat of the entrance to the harbour, between the two piers where the lake merged into the mouth of the river. Its progress, propelled as it was by a single pair of oars, was necessarily slow; and it was fully ten minutes before it pulled alongside.

"Well," said Captain Vance, smiling at the boy – everybody who saw him smiled, he looked so alert and wide-awake and handsome – "We've plenty to eat at any rate. I gave the sergeant a five-dollar bill, expecting to get four back by way of change; but he's spent the lot. I've warned every police station within a hundred miles; and they are passing on the word. One way or another we want to catch those fellows now we are at it. By the way," he added, turning to the pilot, "how much fuel have you?"

The pilot looked at his gauge. "Five hundred miles fast flight, sir," he replied; "three hundred slow."

"Plenty," said Captain Vance climbing into the cockpit where, first of all, he divided the food among them.

The sergeant re-entered the cabin behind.

They waited for the boat to pull clear and then turned.

"All right," said Captain Vance. "Now for that tug. Let's scan the outside beach of Long Point first."

"If we still get them, captain," Leonard asked, "and if the leader is among them, do I get that additional five hundred?"

"You surely do," said Captain Vance reassuringly. "Where should we be without you?"

The plane crawled forward till a sufficient lane had been cleared lakeward by the pleasure craft; then it began to taxi faster and faster, till, with a few splashing jumps, it finally took off.

Again it spiralled sharply upward till, almost startlingly, the shore of the state of New York hove into view like a long, low-lying cloud.

Almost immediately the captain, who was again sweeping the lakeward horizon with his binoculars, pointed to a black speck far beyond Long Point Island. He bent forward to speak to the pilot.

"As I said, the outward beach of Long Point first. If it's they, we shall find the car."

It was twenty miles across the bay to the lighthouse on the Point; and, while they were above open water, the machine made its very best speed, so that it seemed a mere leap before they were over the sandy wastes of the island. Then they swept low down, slowing sharply. Everything was dune or swamp down there; and out of the swamps and lagoons rose myriads of wading and swimming birds, startled by the roar of the twin engines and the huge shadow of the wings flitting over their haunts.

Then, "Hurrah!" cried the boy, pointing; for there, not more than a mile to their right, lay the car. 'Lay'; for it was obviously disabled and looked as if it had been stuck sideways into the loose sand. As they came close, they saw one wheel of it lying alongside; obviously the car had broken an axle. Just north of the spot stood three summer cottages, but there was no sign as yet of their being inhabited; at this time of year nobody lived on this island except the lighthouse keepers.

Again the captain touched the pilot on the shoulder, pointing, and shouted "All right!"

Again the roar of the engines became deafening as they swooped forward on the trail of the tug.

The chase was getting exciting now. Nobody in the flying boat doubted any longer that the tug held their quarry; yet, as they came nearer and nearer, the boat showed no sign of being disturbed by their pursuit. It was clearly heading for the American shore, somewhere near the city of Erie; and that was the only suspicious sign, for what business had a Port-Dover fishing tub in American waters? Of course, their direction might be a feint.

Then they were perpendicularly above the little craft; and as if to leave no doubt about its identity as the refuge of the criminals, a bullet came whistling up, tearing through one of the wings of the plane. But nobody except the helmsman was visible on board.

"Up!" shouted the captain; and, with the roar of the engines rising to a new pitch, the machine rose, going very fast.

The captain hugged the boy. "Now we've got them," he said, bending down. "And since we've got them, we don't want to take any chances. That shot was aimed at one of two things; either at you or at our gas-tanks. Since they got neither, it's a mere question of time now, though we shall need help." He turned to the pilot. "How about your wireless?"

"O.K., at your service, sir," the pilot shouted back over his

shoulder; and a moment later, handling the 'stick' with one hand, he bent down to the floor of his cockpit to reel out the antenna. Then, half turning, he handed the captain a fluttering sheet of paper which he had taken from his breast pocket. With his free hand he next reached behind him into their cockpit and opened two slide-doors in the partition, pointing.

"All right," the captain shouted and, bending down to the boy's ear, he said, "Keep your head low for a while, so I can reach those dials. I've got to get into touch with Erie, Dunkirk, Buffalo, and Detroit. On the Canadian side every lakeport is on the look-out already; I've seen to that. Half a dozen tugs are coming to our aid. They" – he was referring to the tug below, and Leonard understood – "haven't much of a range; they'll run out of gas before long. No use trying to fight them when all we've got to do is wait. But I want a gunboat for emergencies."

While the captain was calling the lakeports whose wave-lengths he found in the sheet which the pilot had handed back, and spoke to them in the Morse code, slowly ticking out his messages and jotting down the replies he received, the pilot rose once more to a considerable height and then settled down to a slow, almost coasting pace, circling the tug beyond the range of possible bullets. Slowly, therefore, they were now drifting west, the tug zigzagging as if it had a mind but could not make it up as to what to do.

At last Captain Vance settled back in his seat and drew the boy up on his knees. "Well," he said, "I've done what I could. It's a question of waiting now."

The boy nodded but gave a sign that he wished to ask a question; and the captain in turn bent down his ear. "Why does he fly slow?" he asked. "He said he could go farther flying fast."

"Farther," the captain replied. "But it isn't a question of miles any longer; it's a question of hours."

"I see," said the boy.

And a question of hours it remained for a long, long while, till the boy nodded with sleep. He did not wake till there was about to begin what ever after he called "The Battle of Lake Erie".

XXXIII

When Leonard awoke, he saw a strange scene. The sun was nearing the horizon in the west and gave a heatless, orange-coloured light. Below, the lake still lay mirror-smooth; but to the west it was crowded

with islands; and the tug pursued was now girt about with a whole flotilla of other tugs, recognisable as the pursuers only by the respectful distance which they kept from the central one. Among the islands to the south-west lay a long vane of black smoke, proceeding from a low, white, rakish-looking vessel which was threading a rapid course through the intricate channels. It all looked very strange and bewildering; but also beautiful. A last act was going to be enacted in a five-act play.

It was within less than an hour of sundown when suddenly there was a new development.

Leonard had just asked a dazed question and received the answer that they were in the western part of the lake, with a Canadian island just north of their present course and a group of smaller islands, American these, just south of it. It was obviously the aim of the fleeing tug to reach one of the latter before that low, white steamer, a gunboat, could prevent them.

What happened was that, on the short flagpole of the tug pursued a white rag broke in sign of surrender.

Instantly, the pursuing craft formed a rough circle about it.

"Either they're out of gas at last," said the captain into the boy's ear, yet as if speaking to himself alone; "or they see that escape is impossible."

He took a pad of paper and a pencil from a small compartment in the partition between the two cockpits, scribbled a few words, and handed them to the pilot over his shoulder. The pilot read, nodded, and put the slip of paper in his pocket. It was the order to land on the open lake.

Within a few minutes this manoeuvre was completed; the plane came to rest within the circle formed by the other tugs. That circle was slowly narrowing now.

Captain Vance reached for a megaphone which was lying at the boy's feet and commandeered a boat from the nearest tug to their right.

Sergeant Quinn came out on the foot-board; and for a moment Captain Vance conferred with him, speaking in a low voice.

Then, raising the megaphone once more, he spoke to the central tug, summoning whoever was in command there, to have a boat lowered and to embark its passengers in it, one by one, unarmed, and prepared to raise their hands when ordered to do so. The master of the tug was told to be ready to abandon ship and to hand it over to a crew which would be put on board.

The order with regard to the boat was carried out at once and in utter silence.

While they were waiting, the boy turned to the captain, speaking now in his ordinary tones. "What do you intend to do?"

"Handcuff them and put them on board of one of the tugs."

Meanwhile the flying boat was rising and dipping in the disturbed waves cast by the other craft. The boat from the outside tug, with two men at the oars, was drawing up alongside, between plane and quarry.

There came the moment when, on the near side of the tug, a hulking man swung his leg over the railing, to climb down into the boat waiting for him with one man at the oars.

"That's he," said the boy excitedly.

"Down now," said the captain.

Leonard ducked; but nothing happened.

While the yawl was slowly coming nearer, Sergeant Quinn and the extra man from the cabin entered the boat on their side, drawing their automatics. The yawl was rowed by a small, alert man who, as he approached, grinned at the captain and winked as if he were going to impart information; but if that had been his intention he failed to carry it out. From the boats surrounding the plane – for other tugs had lowered away – half a dozen weapons, shotguns, rifles, etc., were trained on the two occupants of the yawl. The hulking man was sitting in the stern sheets, sullen, frowning, but helpless. When ordered to do so, he promptly raised his hands over his head.

"That's the man," Leonard repeated, peering over the edge of the cockpit.

Sergeant Quinn gave a sign to his oarsmen; and a moment later the two boats lay alongside each other. He and his helper leapt across and secured their prisoner without meeting with the slightest resistance.

The sun was sinking; its lower limb was below the horizon.

The man Bottom was searched, manacled, and tied; and Sergeant Quinn stood up in the boat, awaiting orders.

Captain Vance scanned the prisoner curiously. He was a brutish sort of man, with a low forehead, and the hands of a navvy. Imperceptibly, the captain shook his head.

"Any Dover tug among these?" he asked of the oarsmen of the boat commandeered.

One of them pointed. "She had put into Port Stanley for repairs,

sir," he replied.

Captain Vance gave a sign to Sergeant Quinn to put his man aboard. "Leave your constable with him," he added; "and then return."

The pleasant little fellow who had rowed the prisoner across assisted in transferring him to the other boat which promptly gave way. Captain Vance told the little man to return to the tug.

Meanwhile the captain was speaking to Leonard. "You are no doubt right," he said, "that this is the man who performed the robbery at your father's place. But he isn't a leader."

"He was leading that gang," said the boy. "But how do you know?"

"Look at his face. He's a stupid brute. Fit to obey orders, not to give them."

"Then," said Leonard, "the real leader is still aboard. I believe it is Matthews."

The captain smiled. But he asked another question. "Can you explain this, my boy? Your whole theory – and ours, I'll admit – rests on the assumption that the real leader had a transmitting set at his disposal and could communicate any time with the rest of the gang. Apparently they commanded considerable resources. Why, then, did he run in that car instead of asking for a plane to help him escape when he saw that his game was up."

"Because," said the boy promptly, "his transmitting set was powered by hydro; and hydro was cut off."

"You have a head on your shoulders, haven't you?" asked the captain approvingly.

At that moment a hoarse cry rang out over the waters from the central tug which caused everybody in the flotilla to look that way. The oarsman from that tug had reached it and scrambled on board. The yawl lay alongside, in the last light of the evening which was now fast waning. The moon, of course, though risen in the east, did not yet give any light; it lay like a huge red pumpkin in the haze.

On board the tug, closely watched by Captain Vance through his binoculars, a tall man stood at the railing, revolver in hand, giving an order to the little oarsman who, to everyone's surprise, secured the yawl by its painter to the stern of the tug.

A minute or so later there came the chug-chug of the gasoline engine of the tug.

It took several seconds before the meaning of these sounds became

clear to anyone. When it did, there was a sudden burst of activity.

The whole situation on the lake was changed. When the tug had stopped her engine, it had retained enough momentum to continue slowly drifting west; and with it the encircling flotilla had drifted. Some of the boats forming the latter were in eminent danger of being grounded on one of the smaller islands to the south-west. They began to move out of the way; and that cleared the road for the central tug's last attempt to run for it. It made for an American refuge where the Canadian police would be helpless. No doubt that hoarse cry had proceeded from the master of the craft who had refused to go farther, even under threat. If the hunted tug succeeded in reaching land, even though it might have to be beached, there was no telling whether those on board might not escape again, under cover of darkness. For a few seconds there was something resembling utter confusion.

And then the beam of a searchlight played over the wings of the plane. "Here's help!" the captain cried, turning around to look at the gunboat which, lights ablaze, had at last emerged from the intricate channels between the islands and, with a burst of speed, was rapidly coming up.

Low, rakish, but confident, the little steamer drew up alongside. It was one of the craft kept on the lake in 'rum-running' times. Megaphone raised, an officer spoke to the plane.

"Hello, X 34," he said. "Can I be of assistance?"

"You can, sir. Thanks. Vance speaking, Ontario Provincial Police. That tug over there has at least one dangerous criminal on board. They are trying to beach under cover of darkness; they are making for Kelley Island. Can you stop them?"

"Stop them or sink them," said the officer; and he gave quick orders.

The search-light veered and picked out the fleeing craft, coming to rest on the tall man who had stood at the railing a few minutes ago. Leonard could see him plainly now. He was the exact build of his uncle; and he seemed to be very well dressed. He stood by the nimble little oarsman, pistol in hand, forcing him to steer straight for the shore.

"All right," came the voice from the gunboat. "I'm under your orders, sir."

"If you can't head them off, send a gunshot over her bows," Captain Vance cried through his megaphone.

It was pitch-dark now; but Leonard did not need to see; he could hear what happened.

The gunboat, obeying plainly-audible bell signals now put on a tremendous burst of speed and left the flying boat rolling and pitching behind. Then, with a blinding flash from its bows, followed by the commands which must have preceded it, the sound travelling more slowly than the light, it sent a gunshot over the bows of the fleeing craft. The search-light wheeled again; the tug lost speed; its wheelhouse was empty.

The gunboat rapidly lowered a boat, manned it with a dozen marines, and sent it flying across the intervening space.

The rest of the tugs were behind now, lying in a fan-shaped figure, all with lights ablaze. The plane taxied forward slowly. The gunboat slowly manoeuvred alongside the tug.

Once more the voice of the officer came through the megaphone.

"X 34," it said with great distinctness. "Better come aboard and take charge, Captain Vance. There's nobody here."

"May I come?" Leonard cried at once.

"All quiet?" Captain Vance asked. "I've a boy here who wants to come."

A laugh was the answer. Then, "All Quiet on the Western Front. I'm sending the pinnace for you."

The pinnace was already coming; and Captain Vance and Leonard jumped in; both were convinced that Matthews must still be on board; but in the presence of the marines they anticipated no danger. A few vigorous strokes of the oars brought them alongside.

When they stood on board, a glance, under the search light, solved the mystery.

In the forward hatch, bound and gagged, lay the captain of the craft; the nimble oarsman stood, sheepishly grinning, with his hand twisted into the collar of the boy Tom; at his feet, on the port side, lay two heaps of clothes: one the ordinary things of a working man; the other, Mr. Broadus's expensive Palm-Beach suit.

Leonard explained in a few brief words.

"Do you know Matthews?" Captain Vance asked.

"I've never seen him. But the man with the pistol by the side of the helmsman was he."

"How do you know?"

"People of the district call him Gentleman Matthews. He looked like his nickname."

The captain grinned. "Beau Brummel of Scotland Yard fame," he muttered.

The officer of the gunboat was already issuing orders to the marines in the pinnace which promptly gave way; the search-light was turned to play on the water ahead; and soon it came to rest on two straining heads.

There was nothing to do but to wait. Meanwhile the bound and gagged man in the hatch was released; and he promptly explained that the second man swimming for it had forced him that morning, at the point of a revolver, to put out for Long Point.

The boy Leonard went over to Tom.

"Why didn't you go with them?" he asked, grinning.

"Cause I can't swim."

"I see. Is he really your father?"

"No more my father than you're his son."

"But why, then . . ."

"Cause he'd promised me a hundred dollars if Bottom got you."

"I see," said Leonard, repeating his favourite phrase.

The pinnace was coming back. The marine at the tiller stood up. "The tall fellow, sir," he said, addressing the officer, "refuses to come aboard without his clothes."

"Nonsense," said the officer. "Hoist him up."

But at that Matthews himself rose in the stern sheets. "If you will pardon me, sir. I beg of you as a courtesy, as one gentleman from another. I am used to being appropriately garbed, in my walk of life . . ."

"One question," said Captain Vance. "If you answer it truthfully, I'll have Mr. Broadus's clothes handed to you. Are you the man known to Scotland Yard as Beau Brummel?"

"I have that honour, sir" replied Mr. Broadus's roustabout.

Everybody laughed.

XXXIV

There was nothing left to do. The new prisoners were transferred to the other Port Dover tug where Sergeant Quinn was to be responsible for them. Captain Vance sent word that he would be at Port-Dover before the tug could arrive there.

Then he turned to the officer commanding the gunboat and thanked him for his timely assistance.

"Not at all, sir," the officer replied. "Glad to have been of service. My orders were to place myself under your command."

Whereupon they shook hands and parted.

Captain Underhill, of the tug, was allowed to retain command after all; he decided to run for Rondeau Harbour to refuel.

Captain Vance and Leonard returned to the plane which was to take them home to Rivers at last.

"Is there a landing field?" the pilot asked.

"There is."

"Anyone ever landed there?"

"One man. Once," Captain Vance replied.

"Good enough," the pilot said. "Where anyone else can land, I can."

All about, the tugs were dispersing; the gunboat was steering for the international channel.

"Gee," Leonard said, "that was a long day."

"When did you get up?" the captain asked.

"I never went to bed. I started from my uncle's place at two o'clock in the morning."

"Poor kid!" said the captain. "And then tramped twenty miles. Is the thousand dollars worth it?"

"I get those, do I?"

"Surest thing you know. They're as good as in your pocket."

But the boy was at the end of his tether. Yet he still muttered, "But it isn't the money . . ."

"If it isn't the money, what is it?" the captain asked almost tenderly.

"The king," the boy sighed, "and dad . . . and mother . . ." And then he was sound asleep between the captain's legs.

Meanwhile the plane had taken to the air and was turning over the lake. Then the pilot shouted over his shoulder, "Hi, captain . . ."

"Yes?" the captain shouted back, leaning forward.

"Can't make it on my gas. I'm heading for London."

"All right."

That was all that was being said. But the pilot promptly unreeled the antenna; and the captain, after having spoken to the London flying field, to make sure that there would be gas available, made it his business to get in touch with Rivers, so that the child's parents could be notified of Leonard's approach.

The pilot at last lowered his undercarriage for landing on the field; and the plane had barely come to rest at London, when Captain Vance got out to transfer the sleeping boy to the cabin where he improvised a bed with the cushions of the seats. The boy never woke.

Nor did he wake when, half an hour later, the plane landed at Rivers. Mr. and Mrs. Broadus were at the landing field. They had come in a police car that had been sent for them; for their own car had not yet left the yard since the rains; the bridge was still down, and the creek was passable only by means of a few planks, for pedestrians.

The captain himself carried the boy to the back seat of the car; and when, after a twenty-minute run, they stopped at the gap of the creek, Mr. Broadus loaded him on his back as he might have loaded a bag of flour, so utterly inert was he.

Having crossed the creek by the planks and threaded their way through the fringe of woods, Mrs. Broadus handling the flashlight, they approached the house from the rear. Alice had already opened the kitchen door and was holding a coal-oil lamp over her head.

And then the boy suddenly began to fight. "Lemme go!" he cried. "Tom, you traitor!"

He would have fallen had not the father quickly turned to set him down on the steps.

"What's the matter?" the boy asked as he gradually woke up. "Where are you taking me?"

And then, completely awake at last, he saw his mother. With a shout he jumped at her; and, her tears streaming, she folded him in her arms.

As if to lighten the strain, he said, rubbing his face against her bosom, "But gosh, momps, I'm hungry."

The parents laughed; and that did ease the strain.

"My poor boy!" the mother cried. "What would you like to eat?"

"Pancakes and maple syrup," he said.

"You shall have them."

As they went in, the boy smiled roguishly at Alice. "Well," he

asked, "I suppose *you* are sorry to see me back?"

"Well," Alice said, "I must say, you're a nice one."

Leonard laughed. "What's the matter with me?" And, turning to his father, "Has the creek run out?"

"Pretty well."

"What day was it when I was swept out?"

"Tuesday morning."

"And this is?"

"Friday night. Or Saturday morning now."

"Gee," said the boy. "Is that all? Four days? Seems an eternity."

"It did to us," Mr. Broadus said, "till we had word this morning."

And, while the mother remained in the kitchen to help Alice prepare the pancakes, father and son went through into the dining room.

"Funny," Leonard said. "Everything looks the same."

He went into the parlor and looked at the chesterfields and shook his head; and thence into the drawing-room with the piano. When he saw the instrument, he touched a few notes, shook his head again, and turned away.

He was just re-entering the dining-room when a little figure came running in her nightgown to throw herself into an armchair by the door. Fresh from her sleep, even the dim light of the lamp blinded her. But when, blinking, she saw Leonard standing there, big and almost grown-up, she turned, snuggled into the cushion, and, between blinks, said almost ill-naturedly, "Hello!"

Leonard laughed, bent down, and hugged her as a grown-up hugs a child. "Hello, hello, hello!" he said.

She fought against his hugs; but he knew she was glad to receive it nevertheless.

XXXV

It was late in the afternoon on Saturday, June 3, before Leonard awoke. He quietly got up and dressed to go down, though he did not yet feel that he had caught up on sleep.

To his amazement, he found dining-room and parlor crowded with men.

On the dining table, the front pages of a number of daily papers lay spread out. At a glance he read some of the headlines.

MOST DANGEROUS GANG OF CRIMINALS IN HISTORY OF CRIME IN THIS COUNTRY CAPTURED THROUGH AGENCY OF 13-YEAR OLD BOY.

WALKS TWENTY MILES THROUGH WOODS TO NOTIFY POLICE.

KING AND QUEEN INTERESTED IN BOY HERO OF SENSATIONAL CAPTURE.

Then he guessed who these people were: they were reporters.

And for over an hour, the reporters sitting, pencils in hand, around the dining table which was drawn out to its full length, Leonard answered question after question, piecing together a very full and detailed account of his doings of the last four days.

It was nearly supper time before, to Mrs. Broadus's vast relief, the reporters left.

But they were hardly gone when Leonard said, "Gee, I wish I had my raft." Yet, even without the raft, he had a pretty full hour, running about, through the orchard and the meadows, and even the woods, to make sure that everything was as it had always been.

After supper, to his delight, Captains Vance and Culver came in.

The first thing they said, after having once more congratulated his parents on having the boy back safe and sound, was, "Well, you were right, Leonard. We found that transmitting set in the attic of your uncle's house."

Leonard laughed and laughed; and his father fully appreciated the humour of that disclosure.

"My brother," he said, "must feel most keenly responsible for it all. He was paying for the power they used to organise their crimes."

"That," Captain Vance said, "was exactly what he said when Culver found it."

And then he broached the subject that had chiefly brought them. Looking at the mother, he smiled. "And now, Mrs. Broadus," he said, "we want the loan of Leonard for one more trip."

She blanched.

"But this time," he went on, still smiling, "we are going to invite you and your husband to come along."

"To go where?" she asked.

"To Hamilton or to Niagara Falls, on June seven."

"You mean . . ."

"I do. Her Majesty has expressed the wish to shake hands with our little friend and to give him a little souvenir; and His Majesty has very kindly consented to hand him the reward which he has so amply deserved. It is for you to decide where we are to go. You will all be the guests of the provincial police."

XXXVI

The two police captains called for them at noon. Their car was gaily decorated with small flags and many flowers. It was Captain Culver who drove; and Leonard sat by his side in the front seat, with little Mary between them.

There was no hurry this time; and they had a leisurely trip through the southern parts of Niagara Peninsula. The nearer they came to their destination, the city of Niagara Falls, the slower became their progress, for here as on the Toronto highway on May 22, thousands of cars were crowding every available road, especially from Welland on.

When they reached the Falls, about 4 o'clock, the streets along the royal route were packed with crowds; every building was decorated with flags and bunting.

To Leonard, it was a repetition of the experience of May 22. He was part of a larger unit, a unit of Empire; and again, for the moment, the king and the queen became for him the symbols of that Empire, barely persons at all, but emblems of an historical pageant. Again that brought the sense of responsibility; but it did not weigh him down; it exalted him to a higher plane. He felt that, in no matter what field of human endeavour he might be working, he would be a leader. It was not enough, as it had been in the past, to be merely alive and to get out of life what he could. Life, as his father was wont to say, demanded as much from him as it promised to give. His country would be worth to him no more than he would be worth to it; and what he was willing to give it was his all, was himself. For, quite apart from the signal honour which was to be his, that of being received by his sovereign, he was once more pervaded with the feeling of consecration, of dedication to a task, even though he did not yet know what that task might be.

Again, as in Toronto, the car was privileged. Everywhere traffic policemen were turning others back; *they* were given one glance and allowed to proceed.

Thus they came down to the huge embankment that skirts the gorge of the river below its plunge. Here, too, the crowds were dense; and

for a moment it looked as if it must prove impossible for them to get through. And where were they going? Leonard did not know and did not care. He knew he would go wherever some higher purpose meant him to go. As they proceeded, at a mere crawl now, a lane opened up, and they were not balked of their purpose.

At last, quite near the head of the falls, the car was slowly, carefully manoeuvred into a parking space reserved for it.

It was late afternoon now; and the sun stood in the west; so that, when they alighted, they were faced by rainbows playing in the spray that rose from the thundering waters and slowly drifted over them, with the effect of a delightful coolness.

Captain Vance promptly produced, out of the trunk of the car, a folding chair for Mrs. Broadus. Leading them, he took it into one of the bastion-like pavilions overjutting the chasm. Space was reserved for them here, too; and they had ample room, facing the falls to their left and the jutting crags overlooking them to their right. From every available space – from the slopes below, the projections above, the branches of trees, Goat Island on the far side, and even from the banks of the river beyond that island, on the American side – tens of thousands of faces were peering down or up, excited, expectant.

And again that wave of sound came, towering above them. Nearer and nearer it came and then burst over them. Leonard was thinking of the combers in the lake which had broken over him and which had finally swept him off the raft.

This wave swept him off something, too; but it was not the raft; it was that common, self-centred composure with which most of us face life; with which, up to the time of his great adventure, he, too, had faced his life. He had always received, as was only natural; henceforth it would be his task to get ready to give.

Again, as in Toronto, he became quiet, withdrawn; he could not cheer when the others cheered; he could only stand there, one hand resting on the stone parapet, the other hanging loose by his side; and again the tears were running down his cheeks.

Their Majesties had stepped forward to view the chasm; and intuitively Leonard knew that in them, too, something had gone on: they had realised that in nature before which even they were mere humans; and that fact did not lower them; it raised them rather; for than the pride of humility there is none greater. They were one with the cheering crowds.

And then they stepped back.

Leonard stood motionless; he had to be led away.

There followed an hour or longer during which they had supper; bu the boy had no appetite; he merely nibbled at his food. At no tim thereafter would he have been able to give an account of where the had been.

Meanwhile Captain Vance was watching the time; and the momen came when he said, "We must go."

They were now escorted by two mounted policemen. Leonar noticed it all; but he paid no attention; he was walking as through a alien element.

They entered the lobby of a great hotel and were told to wait. The did so standing, with the exception of Mrs. Broadus for whom again chair was placed. All about them were crowds; and everybody els seemed to be in a hurry. They waited for perhaps half an hour.

Then they were summoned. A uniformed official came for them hurriedly; and they followed him to a door where another officia stood on guard. Between him and Captain Culver a few words were exchanged.

A door opened; and they were in the presence.

The king was talking to an elderly man; the queen stood smiling.

At once, as if by agreement, the entering group separated into three units. In one stood Leonard, with his father behind him; in the second, his mother, with Mary at her left; and the third consisted of the two officers who remained at the door, flanking it, and standing rigidly at attention.

The queen turned and approached the second group, her hand outstretched to Mrs. Broadus, but her eyes on Leonard.

"Yes," she said, "I recognise the boy: I have seen him twice before at Toronto and this afternoon at the Falls. He is such a striking figure. You must be very proud of him."

"I am proud of him," Mrs. Broadus said, smiling. "But he worries me."

The queen laughed. "Boys," she said, "I suppose are more trouble than girls. He is too enterprising for you, is he? But of such stuff heroes are made."

And she turned to the father in the other group and gave him her hand without words.

Leonard stood at attention, motionless, rigid, and very pale.

"I am glad to see you once more," the queen said with that simplicity which is her greatest charm.

And the child felt her hand on his shoulder from which an electric current seemed to run bracingly through his body.

Meanwhile the official who had brought them had stepped up to the group of which His Majesty formed part and handed him a slip of paper.

The king nodded and, with a glance at his interlocutor, turned away, smiling that smile of his.

"Yes," he said, "that is the boy. You were right." So far he had spoken to the queen. Now he addressed Leonard. "It is a great pleasure for me to be able to hand you this cheque, my boy. I am sure the money was richly earned. We are all proud of you." And he gave the child his hand.

A lady handed the queen a second paper.

"Here," the queen said, "is a photostatic duplicate of that cheque. We had it specially prepared for you. It is not worth any money, of course. But both the king and I have crossed it with our signatures, so it will be a reminder to you of this occasion."

The audience was over; a smile all around; and Mr. and Mrs. Broadus withdrew with the little girl.

But Leonard stood rigid till Captain Culver touched his shoulder; when he saluted and followed his escort into the hall.

As he passed through the crowded lobby and through the masses thronging the square in front of the hotel, he felt as if his very body had changed and consisted now of a different substance from mere flesh, bone, and sinew; as if he had gone through fire and come out tempered; and he knew, with the knowledge that comes from the heart, not the mind, that he would feel tempered throughout life whenever duty called . . .

Next day, after breakfast, ready to resume his life of smaller adventures, Leonard gave the original cheque to his father, saying, "Will that cover your loss, dad?"

The father had to think for a moment before he understood what the boy meant. Then he laughed. "But there is no loss to speak of. Practically everything, I am told, has been recovered in a warehouse at Jarvis; the loot is in the hands of the police."

The boy used his favourite phrase, "I see . . . But what shall I do with this money, then?"

"My dear boy," the father replied, "you could spend it, of course. It's yours. But if you want to put it to a use which will best serve king

and country, you will put it away. One day it may help to see you through college."

"All right, dad," Leonard said. "You take it then, and do as you think best. But I *should* like to have another raft."

"That raft we shall make," said the father with a glance at his wife.

Both of the parents smiled.