

Us and the Bottleman

Edith Ballinger Price

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Author: Edith Ballinger Price

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US and THE BOTTLE MAN

BY

EDITH BALLINGER PRICE

Author of "SILVER SHOAL LIGHT,"
"BLUE MAGIC," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Greg rigged himself up as an Excavator
We hoped the Bottle Man would like the letter
"Hang on, Chris!" Jerry said. "I can get it"
"Ye be Three Poore Mariners"

CHAPTER I

It began with Jerry's finishing off all the olives that were left, "like a pig would do," as Greg said. His finishing the olives left us the bottle, of course, and there is only one natural thing to do with an empty olive-bottle when you're on a water picnic. That is, to write a message as though you were a shipwrecked mariner, and seal it up in the bottle and chuck it as far out as ever you can.

We'd all gone over to Wecanicut on the ferry,--Mother and Aunt Ailsa and Jerry and Greg and I,--and we were picnicking beside the big fallen-over slab that looks just like the entrance to a pirate cave. We had a fire, of course, and a lot of things to eat, including the olives, which were a fancy addition bought by Aunt Ailsa as we were running for the ferry.

When we asked her if she had any paper, she tore a perfectly nice leaf out of her sketch-book, and gave me her 3 B drawing-pencil to write with. It was very soft, and the paper was the roughish kind that comes in sketch-books, so that the writing was smeary and looked quite as if shipwrecked mariners had written it with charred twigs out of the fire. We'd done lots of messages when we were on other water picnics, but we'd never heard from any of them, although one reason for that was that we never put our address on them. We decided we would this time, because Jerry had just been reading about a fisherman in Newfoundland picking up a message that somebody had chucked from a yacht in the Gulf of Mexico months and months before.

I wrote the date at the top, near the raggedy place where the leaf was torn out of Aunt Ailsa's sketch-book, and then I put, "We be Three Poore Mariners," like the song in "Pan-Pipes."

Jerry and Greg kept telling me things to write, till the page was quite full and went something like this:

"We be Three Poore Mariners, cast away upon the lone and desolate shore of Wecanicut, an island in the Atlantic Ocean,

lat. and long. unknown. Our position is very perilous, as we have exhausted all our supplies, including large stores of olives, and are now forced to exist on beach-peas, barnacles, and--and--"

"Eiligugs' eggs," said Greg, dreamily.

Jerry pounced on him and said they only grew on the Irish coast, but I said: "All right! Beach-peas, barnacles, and eiligugs' eggs, of which only a small supply is to be had on this bleak and dismal coast. Our ship, the good ferry-boat _Wecanicut_, left us marooned, and there is no hope of our being picked up for the next two hours. Any person finding this message, please come to our assistance by dropping us a line," (I must honestly say that this was Jerry's, and much better than usual) "as the surf is too heavy for boats to land on this end of the island. Signed:--"

"Don't sign it 'Christine'," Jerry said. "Put 'Chris,' if we're to be real mariners."

So I put "Chris Holford, aet. 13," which I thought might look more dignified and scholarly than "aged," and Jerry wrote "Gerald M. Holford," and put "aet. 11" after it, but I'm sure he didn't know what it meant until I did it. Then we stuck the paper at Greg, and he stared at it ever so long and finally said:

"Ate eleven! He ate lots more than that; I saw him."

Jerry pounced again,--I was laughing too hard to,--and said:

"It's not olives, silly; it's an abbreviated French way of saying how old we are."

Then I had to pounce on _him_, and tell him it was Latin, as he might know by the diphthong. By that time Greg had written "Gregory Holford, Ate 8," across the bottom, very large, and Jerry said he might as well have put 88 and had done with it. We folded the paper up in the tinfoil that the chocolate came in and jammed it into the bottle and pounded the cork in tight with a stone. Greg was all for chucking it immediately, but Jerry said it would have a better chance if we dropped it right into the current from the ferry going home. So we cocked the bottle up on a rock and went back to the pirate-cave-entrance place to finish a game of smugglers.

Wecanicut is a nice place to smuggle and do other dark deeds in, and I don't believe we'll ever be too old to think it's fun. This time we cut the rest of the tinfoil into roundish pieces with Jerry's jackknife, and stowed them into a cranny in the cave. They shone rather faintly and looked exactly like double moidores, except that those are gold, I think. We also borrowed Aunt Ailsa's hatpin with the Persian coin on the end. By running the pin down into the sand all the way, you can make it look just like a goldpiece lying on the floor of the cave. She is a very obliging aunt and doesn't mind our doing this sort of thing,--in fact, she plays lots of the games, too, and she can groan more hollowly than any of us, when groans are needed.

This time we didn't ask her to, because she was reading a book by H.G. Wells to Mother, and anyway all our proceedings were supposed

to be going on in the most Stealthy and Silent Secrecy. The moidores and the Persian coin were all that was left of an enormous lot of things which the villainous band had buried,--golden chains, and uncut jewels, and pots of louis d'ors, and church chalices (Jerry says chasubles, but I think not). Greg and Jerry had dragged all these things up from the edge of the water in big empty armfuls, and we stamped the sand down over them. It really looked exactly as if the tinfoil moidores were a handful that was left over. Greg was just giving the final stamp, when Jerry crooked his hand over his ear and said:

"Hist, men! What was that?" They were having artillery practice down at the Fort, and just then a terrific volley went sputtering off.

"'Tis a broadside from the English vessel!" Jerry said. "We are pursued!"

We crept out from the cave and made off up the shore as fast as possible. Jerry went ahead and jumped up on a rock to reconnoiter. He did look quite piratical, with my black sailor tie bound tight over his head and two buttons of his shirt undone. Greg had his own necktie wrapped around his head, but several locks of hair had escaped from under it. He always manages to have something not quite right about his costumes. He has very nice hair--curly, and quite amberish colored--but it's not at all like a pirate's. I poked him from behind to make him hurry, for Jerry was pointing at a big schooner that was coming down the harbor. We all lay down flat behind the rock until she had gone slowly around the point. We could see the sun winking on something that might have been a cannon in her waist--that's the place where cannon always are--and of course the captain must have been keeping a sharp lookout landward with his spy-glass.

"Eh, mon," said Jerry, when the schooner had passed, "but yon was a verra close thing!"

That's one of the worst things about Jerry,--the way he mixes up language. We'd been reading "Kidnapped," and I suppose he forgot he wasn't _Alan_.

"Silence, dog!" I said, to remind him of who we were. "Very like she's but hove to in the offing, and for aught you know she's maybe sending ashore the jolly-boat by now."

"Then let's go to the end of the point and have a look," Greg suggested.

He doesn't often make speeches, because Jerry is apt to pounce on him and tell him he's "too plain American," but I think it isn't fair, because he hasn't read as many books as Jerry and I. So I hurried up and said:

"Bravely spoke, my lad; so we will, my hearty!" And we crawled and clambered along till we came to the end of the point where it's all stones and seaweed and big surf sometimes. The surf was not very high this time,--just waves that went _whoosh_ and then pulled the pebbles back with a nice scrawpy sound. The schooner was half-way down to the Headland, not paying any attention to us.

"Ah ha!" Jerry said, "safe once more from an ignominious death. But, Chris, look at the Sea Monster! What's happened to it?"

The Sea Monster is a bare black rock-island off the end of Wecanicut. We called it that because it looks like one, and it hasn't any other name that we know of. We'd always wanted awfully to go out there and explore it, but the only time we ever asked old Captain Moss, who has boats for hire, he said, "Thunderin' bad landin'. Nothin' to see there but a clutter o' gulls' nests," and went on painting the _Jolly Nancy_, which is his nicest boat.

But the thing that Jerry was pointing out now was very queer indeed. It was just a little too far away to see clearly what had happened, but it seemed as if a piece of rock had fallen away on the side toward us, leaving a jaggedy opening as black as a hat and high enough for a person to stand upright in.

"The entrance to a subaground tunnel!" Greg shouted, leaping up and down in the edge of a wave.

He _will_ say "subaground," and it really is quite as sensible as some words.

"The entrance to a real pirate cave, you mean!" said Jerry. "Glory, Chris, I really shouldn't wonder if it were. Captain Kidd was up and down the coast here. What if they buried stuff in there and then propped a big chunk of rock up against the hole?"

"I wish we had a telescope," I said, "though I don't suppose we could see into the blackness with it. Mercy, I wish we _could_ get out there! It's more worth exploring than ever."

"Let's tell Mother and Aunt!" said Greg, and started running back down the beach, shouting something all the way.

Mother said, "Nonsense!" and, "Of course it's a natural cave in the rock. You probably only noticed it today."

But she and Aunt Ailsa shut up the H.G. Wells book and came to look. They did think, when they saw it, that it was something new. Aunt Ailsa thought it looked very exciting and mysterious, but she agreed with Mother that it was no sort of place to go to in a boat.

"Just look at the white foam flinging around those rocks," she said; "and there's practically no surf on today."

We had to admit that it wasn't a nice-looking place to land on from a rowboat, but we did wish that we were hardy adventuring men, bold of heart and undeterred by grown-ups. We knew, too, that Captain Moss would say, "Pshaw!" if we told him there might be treasure on the Sea Monster, and he certainly wouldn't risk the _Jolly Nancy_ on those rocks in her nice new green paint.

We were so much excited about the Sea Monster suddenly having a big black hole in it that we almost forgot to take the bottle when we went home. We did forget Aunt Ailsa's hatpin, and Greg had to run back for it, because he can run faster than any of the rest of us, and Captain Lewis held the ferry for him. Everybody leaned out from the rail and peered up the landing, because they thought it must be

a fire or the President or something. They all looked awfully disappointed when it was only Greg, with the black necktie still around his head and Aunt's hatpin held very far away from him so that it wouldn't hurt him if he fell down. He tumbled on board just as the nice brown Portuguese man who works the rattley chain thing at the landings was pushing the collapsible gate shut, and Greg gasped:

"I brought--the moidores--too!"

But Jerry collared him and pulled the necktie off his head. Jerry hates to have his relatives look silly in public, but I thought Greg looked very nice.

We chucked the bottle overboard from the upper deck, just when the We can cut was halfway over. The nice Portuguese man shouted up, "Hey! You drop something?" but we told him it was just an old bottle we didn't want, and not to mind. We watched it go bob-bobbing along beside an old barrel-head that was floating by, and we wondered how far it would go, and if it would leak and sink. The tide was exactly right to carry it outside, if all went well.

"Perhaps," said Greg, when we were halfway up Luke Street, going home, and had almost forgotten the bottle, "perhaps it will land on the Sea Monster, and the pirates will find it."

"Glory!" said Jerry, "perhaps it will."

CHAPTER II

Just in the middle of the rainiest week came the thing that made Aunt Ailsa so sad. She read it in the newspaper, in the casualty list. It was the last summer of the war, and there were great long casualty lists every day. This said that Somebody-or-other Westland was "wounded and missing." We didn't know why it made her so sad, because we'd never heard of such a person, but of course it was up to us to cheer her up as much as possible. Picnics being out of the question, it had to be indoor cheering, which is harder. Greg succeeded better than the rest of us, I think. He is still little enough to sit on people's laps (though his legs spill over, quantities). He sat on Aunt Ailsa's lap and told her long stories which she seemed to like much better than the H.G. Wells books. He also dragged her off to join in attic games, and she liked those, too, and laughed sometimes quite like herself.

Attic games aren't so bad, though summer's not the proper time for them, really. There is a long cornery sort of closet full of carpets that runs back under the eaves in our attic, and if you strew handfuls of beads and tin washers among the carpets and then dig for them in the dark with a hockey-stick and a pocket flash-light, it's not poor fun. Unfortunately, my head knocks against the highest part of the roof now, yet I still do think it's fun. But Aunt Ailsa is twenty-six and she likes it, so I suppose I needn't give up.

The day Aunt Ailsa really laughed was when Greg rigged himself up as

an Excavator. That is, he said he was an excavator, but I never saw anything before that looked at all like him. He had the round Indian basket from Mother's work-table on his head, and some automobile goggles, and yards and yards of green braid wound over his jumper, and Mother's carriage-boots, which came just below the tops of his socks. In his hand he had what I think was a rake-handle--it was much taller than he--and he had the queerest, glassy, goggling expression under the basket.

He never will learn to fix proper clothes. He might have seen what he should have done by looking at Jerry, who had an old felt hat with a bit of candle-end (not lit) stuck in the ribbon, and a bandana tied askew around his neck. But Aunt Ailsa laughed and laughed, which was what we wanted her to do, so neither of us remonstrated with Greg that time.

Father plays the 'cello,--that is, he does when he has time,--and he found time to play it with Aunt, who does piano. I think she really liked that better than the attic games, and we did, too, in a way. The living-room of our house is quite low-ceilinged, and part of it is under the roof, so that you can hear the rain on it. The boys lay on the floor, and Mother and I sat on the couch, and we listened to the rain on the roof and the sound--something like rain--of the piano, and Father's 'cello booming along with it. They played a thing called "Air Religieux" that I think none of us will ever hear again without thinking of the humming on the roof and the candles all around the room and one big one on the piano beside Aunt Ailsa, making her hair all shiny. Her hair is amberish, too, like Greg's, but her eyes are a very golden kind of brown, while his are dark blue.

We thought she'd forgotten about being sad, but one night when I couldn't sleep because it was so hot I heard her crying, and Mother talking the way she does to us when something makes us unhappy. I felt rather frightened, somehow, and wretched, and I covered up my ears because I didn't think Aunt would want me to hear them talking there.

The next day the sun really came out and stayed out. All of us came out, too, and explored the garden. The grass had grown till it stood up like hay, and there were such tall green weeds in the flowerbeds that Mother couldn't believe they'd grown during the rain and thought they were some phlox she'd overlooked. The phlox itself was staggering with flowers, and all the lupin leaves held round water-drops in the hollows of their five-fingered hands. Greg said that they were fairy wash-basins. He also found a drowned field-mouse and a sparrow. He was frightfully sorry about it, and carried them around wrapped up in a warm flannel till Mother begged him to give them a military funeral. Jerry soaked all the labels off a cigar-box, and then burned a most beautiful inscription on the lid with his pyrography outfit. Part of the inscription was a poem by Greg, which went like this:

"O little sparrow,
Perhaps to-morrow
You will fly in a blue house.
And perhaps you will run
In the sun,
Little field-mouse."

Jerry didn't see what Greg meant by a "blue house," but I did, and I think it was rather nice. I copied the poem secretly, before the cigar-box was buried at the end of the rose-bed. I think Greg really cried, but he had so much black mosquito netting hanging over the brim of his best hat that I couldn't be sure.

Fourth of July came and went--the very patriotic one, when everybody saved their fireworks-money to buy W.S.S. with. We bought W.S.S. and made very grand fireworks out of joss-sticks. Joss-sticks have wonderful possibilities that most people don't know about. The three of us went down to the foot of the garden after dark and did an exhibition for the others. By whisking the joss-sticks around by their floppy handles you can make all sorts of fiery circles. I made two little ones for eyes, and Greg did a nose in the middle, and Jerry twirled a curvy one underneath for a mouth that could be either smiling or ferocious. A little way off you can't see the people who do it at all, and it looks just like a great fiery face with a changing, wobbly expression.

Then Greg did a fire dance with two sparklers. He dances rather well,--not real one-steps and waltzes, but weird things he makes up himself. This one lasted as long as the sparklers burned, and it was quite gorgeous. After that we had a candle-light procession around the garden, and the grown people said that the candles looked very mysterious bobbing in and out between the trees. We felt more like high priests than patriots, but it was very festive and wonderful, and when we ended by having cakes and lime-juice on the porch at half-past nine, everybody agreed that it had been a real celebration and quite different.

In spite of being up so late the night before, Greg was the first one down to breakfast next morning. Our postman always brings the mail just before the end of breakfast, and we can hear him click the gate as he comes in. This morning Jerry and Greg dashed for the mail together, and Greg squeezed through where Jerry thought he couldn't and got there first. When they came back, Jerry was saying:

"Let me have it, won't you; it'll take you all day!" and dodging his arm over Greg's shoulder.

"Messrs. Christopher, Gerald, and Gregory Holford; 17 Luke Street," Greg read slowly. Then he tripped over the threshold and floundered on to me, flourishing the big envelope and shouting:

"It's funny paper, and it's funny writing, and I _know_ it's from The Bottle!"

"My stars!" said Jerry, with a final snatch.

But I had the envelope, and I looked at it very carefully.

"Boys," I said, "I truly believe that it is."

CHAPTER III

The envelope was a square, thinnish one, addressed in very small, black handwriting.

"It must be from The Bottle," Jerry said; "otherwise they wouldn't have thought you were a boy and put Christopher."

I had been thinking just the same thing while I was trying to open the envelope. It was one of the very tightly stuck kind that scrumples up when you try to rip it with your finger, and we had to slit it with a fruit-knife before we could get at the letter. There were sheets of thin paper all covered with writing, and when Jerry and Greg saw that, they both fell upon it so that none of us could read it at all. I persuaded them that the quickest thing to do would be to let me read it aloud, and as we'd finished breakfast anyway, we each took our last piece of toast in our hands and went out and sat on the bottom step of the porch. I read:

Fellow Adventurers and Mariners in Distress:

By this time there may be naught left of you but a whitening huddle of bones, surf bleached on the end of Wecanicut,--for I know well what meager fare are eiligugs' eggs and barnacles. However, I take the chance of finding at least one of you alive, and address you fraternally as a companion in distress.

I am myself stranded on a cheerless island where, against my will, I am kept captive--for how long a time I cannot guess. I was brought here at night, only forty-eight hours ago, and landed from a vessel which almost immediately departed whence it had come, into the darkness. My captors left me to go with the vessel, the chief of them threatening to return every week to torment me unless I obeyed his slightest command. I stand in great fear of this man, who is tall and bearded, for he brings with him instruments of torture and bottles containing, without doubt, poison.

Can you imagine my joy when, tottering down the beach this morning, supporting my frame upon two sticks, I beheld your bottle cast up on the sands? Now, thought I, I can unburden myself to these three unfortunate men, obviously in even greater distress than my own, and we can, perhaps, ease each other's monotonous maroonity. Scholars, too, I perceive you to be,--witness the Latin following your signatures. Ah well, Grata superveniet quae non sperabitur hora, as the poet so truly says, and I cannot express to you how eager, how happy I am, in the thought of communicating with some one other than the natives of this desolate isle. These inhabitants, though friendly on the whole, are uncouth and barbaric. They spend their entire time fishing from boats which they build themselves, or squatting beside their huts mending their fishing implements.

The good soul with whom I am lodging is calling me to my scanty repast. In the rude language of the place she tells me that there is "Krabss al ad an dunny." How can I live long, I ask, on such fare?

Hopefully, your

CASTAWAY COMRADE.

P.S. My address--mail reaches me from time to time, by aforesaid vessel--is P.O. Box 14, Blue Harbor, Me. ME stands for Mid Equator, but the abbreviation is sufficient. Blue Harbor is my own literal translation of the native Bluar Boor. Box 14 refers to the native system of delivering messages. P.O. has, I think, something to do with the P. & O. steamers, which, however, do not very often touch here.

"I _told_ you it would go around the world!" Greg said, when I had finished, and Jerry and I were staring at each other.

"_Well!_" Jerry said at last. "_What_ luck!"

"I should rather say so," I said; "suppose a fisherman had found it, or no one at all."

"Bless his old heart," said Jerry, taking the letter.

I wanted to know why "old."

"He must be ancient if he has to totter along on two sticks," Jerry said. "Besides, he has a stately, professorish sort of style. Do you suppose he really does want us to write to him?"

"Of course he does," Greg said; "he tells us to often enough. Think of being alone out there with savages, and that bearded chief coming with poison bottles and all."

"Shut up, Greg," said Jerry; "you don't understand. There's more in this than meets the eye, Chris. I didn't get on to this crab salad business when you read it."

Neither had I; in fact, I hadn't got on to it until Jerry said it in proper English.

"He's a good sort, poor old dear," I said. "Why do you suppose they keep him out there?"

"He's there of his own free will, right enough," Jerry said.

But I didn't think so.

We were still confabbing over the letter, and explaining bits to Greg, who was hopelessly mystified, when Mother came out to transplant some columbine that had wandered into the lawn. We did a quick secret consultation and then decided to let her in on the Castaway. So we bolted after her and took away the trowel and showed her the letter. She read it through twice, and then said:

"Oh, Ailsa must hear this, and Father!" But what we wanted to know was whether or not we might write to the Castaway, because we didn't quite want to without letting her know about it. She laughed some more and said, "yes, we might," and that he was "a dear," which was what we thought.

We decided that we would write immediately, so Jerry dashed off to Father's study and got two sheets of nice thin paper with "17 Luke Street" at the top in humpy green letters, and I borrowed Aunt Ailsa's fountain-pen, which turned out to be empty. I might have known it, for they always are empty when you need them most. Jerry, like a goose, filled it over the clean paper we were going to use for the letter, and it slobbered blue ink all over the top sheet. But the under one wasn't hurt, and we thought one page full would be all we could write, anyway. We took the things out to the porch table, and Greg held down the corner of the paper so it wouldn't flap while I wrote. Jerry sat on the arm of my chair and thought so excitedly that it jiggled me.

But minutes went on, and the fountain pen began to ooze from being too full, and none of us could think of a single thing to say.

"If we just write to him ourselves,—in our own form, I mean," Jerry said, "it'll be stupid. And I don't feel maroonish here on the porch. We'll have to wait till we go to Wecanicut again, and write from there."

I felt somehow the way Jerry did, so we put away the things again and went out under the hemlock tree to talk about the Castaway. Greg didn't come, and we supposed he'd gone to feed a tame toad he had that year, or something. The toad lived under the syringa bush beside the gate, and Greg insisted that it came out when he whistled for it, but it never would perform when we went on purpose to watch it, so I don't know whether it did or not.

Under the hemlock is one of the best places in the garden for councils and such. The branches quite touch the grass, and when you creep under them you are in a dark, golden sort of tent, crackley and sweet-smelling. You can slither pine-needles through your fingers as you discuss, too, and it helps you to think. We thought for quite a long time, and then I got out the letter and spread it down in one of the wavy patches of sunlight, and we read it again.

"Did you really think anybody'd find it?" Jerry asked suddenly, and I told him I hadn't thought so.

"Neither did I," he said; "let alone such a jolly old soul. Why, he'd be better than Aunt on a picnic."

"I do wonder why he has to stay there," I said.

"Perhaps he's a fugitive from justice," Jerry suggested; "or perhaps he's a prisoner and the bearded person comes out with Spanish Inquisition things to make him confess his horrible crime."

"He sounds like a person who'd done a horrible crime, doesn't he!" I said in scorn.

"Well, then," said Jerry, who really has the most inspired ideas for plots, "perhaps he's an innocent old man whose wicked nephews want to frighten him into changing his will, leaving an enormous fortune to them. And they're keeping him on the island till he'll do it."

"Well, whatever it is," I said, "I don't think he's awfully happy

somehow, and it's nice of him to write such a gorgeous thing."

So we both decided that whether he was staying on the island of his own free will, or in bondage, in any case it must be frightfully dull for him and that our letter ought to be interesting and cheerful.

Just then the hemlock branches thrashed apart and Greg crawled under with pine-needles in his hair. He sat back on his heels and blinked at us, because he'd just come out of the sunlight.

"I thought _some_body ought to write to the Bottle Man," he said, "so I did."

"Well, I never!" Jerry said.

Greg fished up a bent piece of paper from inside his jumper and handed it to me.

"You can see it," he said, "but not Jerry."

"As if I'd want to!" Jerry said; but he did, fearfully.

Greg is the most unexpected person I ever knew. He's always doing things like that, when everyone else has given up.

I spread his paper out on top of the other letter, and he sprawled down beside me, all ready to explain with his finger. What with his dreadfully bad writing and the sunlight moving off the paper all the time as the branches swayed, it took me ever so long to read the thing. This is what it was:

Dear Bottle Man:

To-day we got your leter wich surprised us very much. Although I kept hopeing and hopeing some body would find the bottle. We are not so distresed now because we were picked up and now have toast and other things beter than barnicles. I mesured from here to the equater on the big map and it is an aufully far way for the bottle to go. Only I thought it would. I am sorry you are so imprisined on the iland and please dont let the cheif with the beard poisen you because we would like to hear from you agan. If there is tresure on that iland I should think you could look for it and it would be exiting. But prehaps there is none. We hope there is some on Wecanicut. But it is hard to know sirtainly. Chris and Jerry are going to do a leter. But I thought I would first. I hope the saviges will be frendly allways.

Your respectfull comrade,

GREGORY HOLFORD.

P.S. None of us are Bones yet.

"Will it do?" Greg asked anxiously, when I folded it up. His eyes grow very dark when he's anxious, and they were perfectly inky now.

You never would have guessed that they were really blue.

"It'll do splendidly," I said, for I did think the Castaway man would like Greg's letter tremendously.

"Better let me see it, my lad," said Jerry, rolling over among the pine-cones and sitting up.

Greg got his precious letter with a snatch and a squeak, and scurried off with it. I pitched Jerry back on to the pine-needles, because I knew he'd never let the thing go if he saw it.

"Oh, _let_ him send it," I said. "It's perfectly all right, and it will do the Bottle Man heaps of good."

But Jerry growled about "beastly scrawls" and wasn't pleased with me until supper-time.

Somehow we all began calling our island person the "Bottle Man" after Greg did, for it seemed as good a name as any for him, seeing that we didn't know his real one. We read the letter from him after supper to Aunt Ailsa, and she laughed and liked it, and so did Father. We also asked Father what the Latin meant, and he made a funny face and said he'd forgotten such things, but then he looked at it again and told us it meant something like this:

"The happy hour shall come, all the more appreciated because it comes unexpectedly."

So we went to bed thinking about our poor old Bottle Man consoling himself out there on his island with Latin quotations.

CHAPTER IV

We all went to Wecanicut next day, which was a glorious one, and when the food had disappeared we three walked up the point and wrote to the Bottle Man from there. We'd decided that the paper with "17 Luke Street" on it was much too grand for "poore mariners" anyway, so we'd just brought brownish paper that comes in a block. We told the Bottle Man how wonderful we thought it was that he had found our message, and how his letter had cheered our lonely watching for a sail. Also, how we had been picked up and were returned now to Wecanicut of our own will, seeking rich treasure. We described the "Sea Monster" very carefully, and wrote about the black cave-entrance-looking place that had happened, where no boat would dare to venture. Jerry's description of it was quite wild. He dictated it to me above the shrieking of a lot of gulls which were flying over us all the time. It went like this:

"The Sea Monster was quite terrific enough looking before, like the slimy black head of something huge coming out of the water. Now it looks as if it had opened a cavernous maw" (I'm sure he nabbed that from some book) "as black as ink, ready to swallow any unfortunate mariner which came near. Below the base of this fearsome hole roars the cruel surf, ready to engulf a boat which

would never be seen more if it was once caught in this deadly eddy."

I thought "deadly eddy" sounded like Illiteration, or something you shouldn't do, in the Rhetoric Books, but Jerry was much excited over his description. He sat on top of a rock, pointing out at the Sea Monster like a prophet. He has quite black hair which blows around wildly, and he looked very strange sitting up there raving about the cavern. The letter was very long by the time we'd put in everything, and we hoped the Bottle Man would like it. Just before we signed it, I said:

"Do you think we'd better tell him I'm really Christine and not Christopher?"

"_No_," Jerry said; "put Chris, the way you did before. He's writing now as man to man. He might be disgusted if he knew it was just a mere female."

"Oh, _thank_ you," I said; but I did put "Chris," on account of our all being fellow castaways.

When we'd finished the letter we walked a long way down the other shore toward the Fort. The wind was blowing right, and we could hear bits of what the band was playing and now and then peppery sounds from the rifle practice. It's not a very big fort, but it squats on the other side of Wecanicut, watching the bay, and real cannon stick out at loopholes in the wall. The ferry really only goes to Wecanicut on account of the Fort, because there's nothing else there but a few farm houses and some ugly summer cottages near the ferry-slip. The point from which you see the Monster is not near the Fort or the houses at all, and is much the wildest part of Wecanicut. When you're standing on the very end you might think you really were on a deserted island, because you can look straight out to sea.

We cut back cross-country through the bay-bushes and the dry, tickly grass to our usual part of Wecanicut, where the grown-ups were just beginning to collect the baskets and things and to look at their watches. We posted the letter on the way home, and Greg jiggled the flap of the letter-box twice to make sure that it wasn't stuck.

It was that week that Jerry sprained his ankle jumping off the porch-roof and had to sit in the big wicker chair with his foot on a pillow for days. He hated it, but he didn't make any fuss at all, which was decent of him considering that the weather was the best we'd had all summer. We played chess, which he likes because he can always beat me, and also "Pounce," which pulls your eyes out after a little while and burns holes in your brain. It's that frightful card game where you try to get rid of thirteen cards before any one else, and snatch at aces in the middle, on top of everybody. Jerry is horribly clever at it and shouts "Pounce!" first almost every time. Greg always has at least twelve of his thirteen cards left and explains to you very carefully how he had it all planned very far ahead and would have won if Jerry hadn't said "Pounce" so soon.

Also, Father let Jerry play the 'cello, and he made heavenly hideous sounds which he said were exactly like what the Sea Monster's voice would be if it had one. Just when we were all rather despairing, because Dr. Topham said that Jerry mustn't walk for two days more,

the very thing happened which we'd been hoping for. Greg came up all the porch steps at once with one bounce, brandishing a square envelope and shouting:

"The Bottle Man!"

It was addressed to all of us, but I turned it over to Jerry to do the honors with, on account of his being a poor invalid and Abused by Fate. He had the envelope open in two shakes, with the complicated knife he always carries, and pulled out any amount of paper. He stared at the top page for a minute, and then said:

"Here, Greg, this is for you. You can be pawing over it while we're reading the proper one."

But I said, "Not so fast," and "Let's hear it all, one at a time."

So I took Greg's and read it aloud, because he takes such an everlasting time over handwriting and this writing was rather queer and hard to read. This is his letter:

Respected Comrade Gregory Holford:

I am writing to you separately because you wrote to me separately, and very much I liked your letter. I cannot tell you how much relieved I am to hear that toast has been substituted for barnacles in your diet. In the long run, toast is far better for a mariner, however hardy he may be.

It is indeed a long way from Wecanicut to the Equator,--but are you sure you measured to ME.--_Mid_ Equator? It is very different, you know. The bearded one is pleased with me and has not brought his poison bottles of late, but thank you for not wanting me to die just now. I do not know of any treasure in Bluar Boor, but I refer you to the enclosed letter which tells something of treasure elsewhere. I hope your search on Wecanicut, my dear sir, will be richly rewarded.

Please note that I refer to _natives_, not _savages_. There is a vast difference; more than you perhaps might suppose.

May I inscribe myself your most humble servant,

THE BOTTLE MAN.

P.S. I'm so glad your Bones are still where they belong.

Greg was counting elaborately on his fingers, and said:

"I believe he answered _everything_ in my letter, but please let me have it, because there are some things I need to work out myself."

"Now for the business," Jerry said. "This must be the whole sad story of his life,--there's pages of it. Coil yourself up comfortably, Chris, and I'll fire away."

So I coiled up beside Greg on the Gloucester hammock, and Jerry

began to read.

CHAPTER V

From my desolate island refuge I salute the Intrepid Trio!
Good sirs, what you tell me of the "Sea Monster" makes my
flesh creep and my hair stir with terror. A murderous bad
place I should call it, and not one to trifle with. Yet it
might well be, as you think, that the sudden-appearing cavern
is the mouth of a pirate cave fairly bursting with treasure,
and only now exposed to the eyes of such daring adventurers
as yourselves by a trick of the elements. Strange things
there be above and below the waters of the world--which
serves to remind me of a tale you might not scorn to hear.
You may take it or leave it, as you will, but at least the
penning of it will pass some of my hours of banishment in a
pleasant fashion.

In the year of grace 18-- (I shudder to think how long ago)
I was a bold youth of perhaps the age of the valiant
Christopher.

Here Jerry paused to give a muffled hoot at me. I chucked a hammock
cushion at him, and he went on:

My father's house stood on a rambling street in an old
waterside town, and from the windows of my room I could see
the topmasts of sailing ships thrusting upward above gray
roofs. Small marvel that my head should be filled with the
ways of the sea and the wonder of it, or that I should spend
long hours dreaming over books that told of adventures
thereon. It was over such a book that I was poring one
summer's evening as I sat in the library bow-window. The
breeze from the harbor came in and stirred the curtains
beside my head, and brought with it the last westering ripple
of sunlight and a smell of climbing roses. The book had
dropped from my hand and I was well-nigh drowsing, when I
saw, as plain as day, the queerest figure possible clicking
open our garden gate. He looked to be some sort of South
American half-breed,--swart face under rough black hair, and
striped blanket gathered over dirty white trousers. Now I had
seen many a strange man disembark from ships, but, never such
a one as this, and when I saw that he was coming straight
toward my window, I was half tempted to make an escape.

He leaned on the sill of the open casement with his dark face
just below mine and began to pour out, in halting English, a
tale which at first I had some trouble in understanding. The
most that I made of it was that he, and he alone, knew the
whereabouts of a city buried ages since under the sea and
filled with treasure of an unbelievable description. But you
may imagine that even the hint of such a thing was enough to
set me all athrill, and I was not greatly surprised at myself

when I found that I was following the queer, slinking figure down our bare little New England street.

He led me to a ship, an old brigantine heavy with age and barnacles and hung about with the sorriest gray rags of canvas that ever did duty for sails. No wonder that nine days out we lost our fore tops'l. But stay; I fear I go too fast! For you must know that I went aboard that brigantine, and once aboard I could not go ashore again, partly because the strange, ill-assorted crew detained me at every turn, and partly because the longing was so strong upon me to see the things I had read of so often. And that night found me still upon the vessel, nosing down to the harbor light, with the lamps of my father's house winking less and less brightly on the dim shore astern.

Well, sirs, it would weary you to tell much of that voyage, and besides, many's the time you yourselves must have weathered the Horn. For it was 'round Cape Stiff we went--no Panama Canal in those days--and I served a bitter apprenticeship on ice-coated yards, clutching numbly at battering sails frozen stiff as iron. It was Peru we were bound for,--Peru where the submarine city lay beneath uncounted fathoms waiting for us. The captain and I were the

only ones Acuma, the half-breed, had taken into his confidence; all the others sailed on a blind errand, trusting to the skipper, who was a shrewd man and severe. And the brigantine wallowed around the Cape and toiled on and on up the coast, and every day Acuma grew more restless; every day he cast about the water with eyes that seemed to pierce to the very bottom of the Pacific.

One day of blue sky and little breeze, when we were pushing the brigantine with all sails set, Acuma flung himself at a bound to the quarterdeck, and a moment later the skipper shouted quick orders that the crew could not understand for the life of them. For to heave the ship to, just when we all had been whistling for enough breeze to give her something more than steerage way, seemed nothing short of insane. Acuma climbed to the maintop and looked at the coast of Peru with a telescope, and the captain took bearings with his instruments.

It was Acuma and I who went over the side in diving suits, for no others save the captain knew what we sought, as I have said. Down I went and down, with the weight of water crushing ever more strongly against me, till I stood upon the sea's floor. That in itself was quite wonderful enough--the green whiteness of the sand and the strange, multi-colored forest of weed and coral through which my searchlight bored a single, luminous pathway. But right ahead, looming and wavering, seen for an instant, lost again when a deep vibration stirred and swayed the water, shone the faintly golden shape of a great portal. Acuma I had lost sight of, but I had no need to ask him what lay before me. The wild pounding of my heart told me that I stood at the gateway of the city that had been covered a thousand thousand years ago by the unheeding sea. Leaning at an angle against the tide, I

struggled forward till the great gate towered above me, its arch half lost in the green, swimming shadow of the water. But as I flashed my light up across its pillars, it answered with the shifting sparkle of gems crusted thick upon it.

I walked then, breathless, into a street paved with rough silver ingots, each one surely weighing a quintal, between tremulous shapes of buildings which pointed lustrous towers upward through fathoms of green water. It was many minutes before I dared enter one of those great silent halls. Dragging my heavy leaden-soled boots, I pushed through a shapely silver doorway, and a fish darted past me as I entered. Who could imagine the wonder of that vast room! The mosaic that covered the walls and ceilings was of gold and jewels, not porphyry and serpentine, such as delight the wondering visitor to Venice, but precious stones--rubies, sapphires, emeralds, amethysts as richly purple as grape clusters, topaz as clear and mellow as honey.

Behind a traceried grillwork lay heaped a mound of treasures such as no human eye will ever see again. I lifted a little tree fashioned all of gold,--each leaf wrought of the metal--and strung with jewelled fruits on which ruby-eyed golden birds fed. In despairing rapture I clutched after a neck ornament hung with pendulous pearls as large as plums. But as I reached for it, I felt that something was looking at me from the corner. Not Acuma; no human being was in sight. Peering out through the glass visor of my helmet, I saw fixed on me from low down beside the doorway two inky, moveless eyes as large as saucers. They were not human eyes, nor did they belong to any sea creature I had ever beheld or read of. They were round and fixed, pools of bottomless blackness, staring at me through two varas of clear, swaying water. I took an uncertain step backwards, and as I did so I felt something soft and heavy laid slowly and slimily upon my shoulder....

Ah me, here is an interruption! A native child approaches, bearing as an offering a Lol lpop (one of the native fruits). Just before he reaches me he falls face down, doubtless out of respect for my gray hairs, and, on arising, proffers me the Lol lpop, now coated with sand. In this state I am expected to eat it, and, being in great awe and fear of the inhabitants, I proceed to do so, which incapacitates me for further epistolatory effort.

So, till I recover from the effects of my enforced meal, believe me your devoted correspondent,

THE BOTTLE MAN.

"Well, of all mean tricks!" Jerry said.

"It's worse than a continued story," I said. "Bother the horrid native child! Do you suppose that's really why he stopped?"

"Probably not; he knew it was the excitingest place to stop. What did I tell you about his being ancient? Now he _says_ he has gray

hairs, so that proves it."

"I should think he might," I said, "after such experiences. What do you think it could have been that stared at him?"

"An octopus, most likely," Jerry said. "They have goggly black eyes; I've read it."

"But he said he'd never seen such eyes on any sea beast he knew of, and he's read as much as you have; that's sure."

"That treasure! Oh, my eye!" Jerry sighed. "Do you suppose he brought home hunks of it?"

"Just the same hunks that we dig up on Wecanicut, I suppose," I said.

"You mean you think he's making up the whole yarn?" Jerry asked. "Well, even if he is, it's a mighty good one, and it might have happened to him, at that."

Greg looked up suddenly from beside me, and said:

"_I_ think the thing what stared at him was a mer-person."

"My child," said Jerry, "I believe you're right."

CHAPTER VI

Next day Jerry was well enough to walk around with a cane, and when he'd broken Father's second-best malacca stick by vaulting over the box border with it, we decided that he was quite all right, and the summer went on again as usual. Of course we wrote to the Bottle Man at once, and told him, as respectfully as we could, just what we thought of him for letting the native child interrupt him in such an exciting part. We also begged him to write again as soon as possible, and to choose a place where the inhabitants weren't likely to come with offerings. We kept waiting and waiting, and no letter came, so we settled ourselves to Grim Resignation, as Jerry said. It was worse than waiting for the next number of a serial story, because you're pretty certain when that will come, but we had no idea how long it would be before the Bottle Man wrote to us.

Aunt Ailsa still needed cheering up a good deal, and that kept us busy. The cheering was great fun for us, because it consisted mostly of picnics and long, long walks,--the kind where you take a stick and a kit-bag and eat your lunch under a hedge, like a tinker. We also wrote a story which we used to put in instalments under her plate at breakfast every other day. We took turns writing the story, and Greg's instalments always made Aunt Ailsa the most cheered up of all. The story was much too long to put in here, and rather ridiculous, besides.

By this time it was almost September, and asters were beginning to bloom in the garden and the hollyhocks were almost gone. Wecanicut

was turning the dry, russetty color that it does late in the summer, and the harbor seemed bluer every day. Captain Moss took us out in the _Jolly Nancy_ one afternoon just for kindness--we didn't hire her at all. She is a sixteen-footer and quite fast, in spite of being rather broad in the beam. He let each of us steer her and told us a great many names of things on her, which I forgot immediately. Jerry always remembers things like that and can talk about reef-cringles and topping-lift as if he really knew what they were for. We went quite far out and saw the Sea Monster from a different side in the distance, and tacked down to the other end of Wecanicut under the Fort guns.

It was when we got in from the gorgeous sail, with Greg carrying the little basket all made of twisted-up rope Captain Moss had done for him, that we found a big, square envelope lying on the hall table. And, to our despair, supper was just ready and we couldn't read the letter till afterward. Supper was good, I must admit,--baked eggs, all crusty and buttery on top, and muffins, and cherry jam. We ate hugely, because of the _Jolly Nancy_ making us so hungry.

When we'd finished we went into Father's study, where he wasn't, and turned on the desk-light and got at the letter. I read it, while the boys crouched about expectantly. Here it is:

Dear Comrades:

I should have answered your frantic appeals for news of me long since, had I not been slavishly occupied in carrying out the demands of the Man of Torture from whom I am now completely released, praises be. I am even contemplating escape from Bluar Boor by stealth. But no doubt you have no desire for these modern details and are all agog to find out whether or not I met a wretched death at the bottom of the sea. I think you left me--or I left you--with a soft and hideous something resting upon my shoulder.

Sirs, it was a Hand, a webbed hand, and turning, I looked straight down into another pair of flat dark eyes. They belonged to a creature not as tall as I, and certainly not human in shape. Arms and legs it had, of a sort, and scales, also, and finny spines, and a soft slimy body. Then, through the door which led to the silver street, I saw more of the creatures, and more,--a soft, hurrying crowd patting over the ingot blocks which paved the road, peering in at the door, beckoning with webby fingers.

My helmet smothered the cry I gave as I struggled against the horrible resistance of the water toward the door. Out in the street the mer-crowd surrounded me, fingered my arms, looking at me with unfathomable, disc-like eyes, black as ink. With dawning comprehension it came over me that these creatures inhabited the desolate, sea-filled city, lived in the mighty golden halls that once had echoed to the footsteps of Peruvian kings, fared about the rich streets where coral now grew instead of tree and flower.

The things were speechless, with no seeming means of communication, and I saw, too, that they could not leave the

sea-bottom, but walked upon it as we do upon earth, and could no more rise than we can leap into the air and swim upon it. I tried to push my difficult way through the clinging swarm, who seemed friendly enough in a weird, inhuman way, but I could not pass through. Dimly through the swinging water I could see others coming from every carved doorway down the silent street. I thought then of the weights attached to me, and I decided to cut them loose at once and rise from the ghostly place, of which I had seen quite enough to suit me. But I determined to take with me at least one thing from the vast mounds of treasure which held me breathless with utter bewilderment.

So I turned and with my long knife began prying from its doorway a ruby as large as my fist. Instantly, without warning, the creature nearest me raised its scaly hand in a flinging gesture, and I felt a hot and rushing pain just above my right elbow. I felt, too, a coldness of water spurting down my arm and clutched wildly at the sleeve of my diving-suit to seal the little hole which I saw in it. Holding it tightly with my left hand, I slashed with my right at the creatures who were now moving upon me menacingly, pressing me close. If they forced me back into the doorway, all hope would be gone. I cut desperately at the fastenings that secured the weights; felt myself rising; felt my legs pull out from the clinging, slimy arms; looked out down at them--a sea of bobbing smooth heads, of round, expressionless, black eyes; saw them waving their tentacle-like arms in fury; saw at last the dim, golden crest of the tallest tower below my feet; burst above the blessed sea-level and saw good blue waves slapping the bow of the brigantine drifting lazily down toward me.

I know nothing of the voyage home. I must have been poisoned by the missile, whatever it was, that the sea-creature flung at me. (I bear the scar to this day.) For I have no recollection of much more, until I sat in the library bow-window of my father's house, very tired and stiff and thoroughly thankful that the voyage was over. It was dark, and my mother sat sewing beside a shaded lamp and singing to herself. I fingered the book that lay beside me, on the window-seat, and said:

"Mother, did you keep the book just here all the time I was gone because you were sorry I went and wanted to remember me?"

She laughed, and said: "Yes, all the time while you were sailing to the Port of Stars. Come now to supper, my dear."

So I got up very stiffly, for I felt weak and dizzy still, and went with her. I said:

"I'm sorry, Mother, that after all I couldn't bring you any of the jewels."

Whereupon she laughed again and said something about "Cornelia" which I am too modest to repeat, but which, being scholars, you will know by heart, and said that she was glad

enough to have me back at all.

Sirs, you cannot think how beautiful our little dining-room looked to me, with the old brass-handled highboy in the corner and the pots of flowers on the sill--far more beautiful than the fretted golden towers and gem-girdled walls of the City under the Sea.

So take my advice, young sirs, the advice of a man many years older than you bold young blades: don't you ever go listening to a half-breed Peruvian that comes slinking to your window, no matter how enticing may be his tales of treasure.

Your most faithful

BOTTLE MAN.

"_Do_ you think he dreamed it?" Jerry said.

"Whatever it was, he must have been glad to get back," I said, switching off the light so that we could talk in the dark, which is more creepy and pleasant.

"But the treasure!" Jerry said. "Do you suppose there ever was such treasure in the world? That's something like! Imagine finding gold trees and birds eating jewels on the Sea Monster! By the way, do you know about 'Cornelia'?"

I said I thought she had something to do with sitting on a hill and her children turning to stone one after the other, but Jerry said that was Niobe and that it was she who turned to stone, not the children. He has a fearfully long memory. So we put on the light again and looked it up in "The Reader's Handbook," because we didn't want to bother the grown-ups, and we found, of course, that she was the Roman lady who pointed at her sons and said, "These are my jewels!" when somebody asked her where her gold and ornaments were. So naturally the Bottle Man didn't feel like repeating such a complimentary thing, being an un-stuck-up person, but we did think it was nice of his mother.

We put away the "Handbook" and made the room dark again and were arguing over all the exciting places in the Bottle Man's story, when Greg spoke up suddenly from the corner where we'd almost forgotten him.

"If _I_ found a thing like those mer-persons," he said drowsily, "I wouldn't let it bite me. I'd keep it in the bath-tub and teach it how to do things."

"Like your precious toad, I suppose," said Jerry. "Don't be idiotic."

So we all went to bed, and I, for one, dreamed about all kinds of glittering treasures and heaps of jewels each as big as your hat, and of our nice old Bottle Man, with his long white beard flowing in the wind.

* * * * *

And now comes the perfectly awful part.

CHAPTER VII

I must say at the beginning that it was all my fault. Jerry says that it was just as much his, but it wasn't, because I'm the oldest and I ought to have known better. To begin with, Father had to go to New York to give a talk at the American Architects' League, or something, and Mother decided to go with him. At the last minute Aunt Ailsa got a weekend invitation from somebody she hadn't seen for ages and went away, too, which left us alone with Katy and Lena. Katy has been with us next to forever and took care of Jerry and Greg when they were Infant Babes, so that Mother never imagined, of course, that anything could happen in two days. It wasn't Katy's fault either.

The first day was foggy, and the garden dripped, so we went down to call on Captain Moss, who lives near the ferry-landing. Besides having boats for hire, he sells such things as fishing-tackle and very strong-smelling rope, and sometimes salt herring on a stick. The things he sells are all mixed up with parts of his own boats and pieces of canvas and rope-ends, and curly shavings that skitter across the floor when the wind blows in from the harbor. There is a window at one end of his shop-place that goes all the way to the floor, like a doorway, and it is always open. His shop is half on the ferry-wharf so that the window hangs right over the water, very high above it. It is quite a dizzyish place, but wonderful to look out at. Far away you see boats coming in, and Wecanicut all flat and gray, and then right below is nice sloshy green water with old boxes and straws floating by, and sometimes horrid orange-peels that picnic people throw in.

That afternoon Captain Moss was mending the stern of one of his boats, and when we asked him what he was fitting on, he said: "Rudder-gudgeons."

He grunted it out so funnily that it sounded just like some queer old flounder trying to talk, and we thought he was joking. But he wasn't at all. Sometimes he is very nice and tells us the longest yarns about when he shipped on a whaler, but this time he was busy and the rudder-gudgeons didn't behave right, I think, so he let us do all the talking. We told him a good deal about the bottle, and also something about the city under the sea. He said he shouldn't wonder at it, for there was powerful curious things under the sea. He also said he supposed now we'd be wanting to hire the _Jolly Nancy_ "fer to find submarine cities, sence he wouldn't let us have her to go a-stavin' in her bottom on them rocks off Wecanicut."

We decided that he really didn't want to be bothered, so we went away presently. To soothe him, Jerry bought some of the dry herring things and carried them home in a pasteboard box that said "1/2 doz. galvanized line cleats. Extra quality" on the lid. Lena cooked the herrings for supper, but I don't think she could have done it right, because they were quite horrid.

The second day was the perfectly gorgeous kind that makes you want to go off to seek your fortune or dance on top of a high hill or do anything rather than stay at home, however nice your own garden may be. We agreed about this at breakfast, and I said:

"Let's go to Wecanicut."

We'd never gone to Wecanicut alone, but I couldn't see any reason why we shouldn't. Captain Lewis, on the ferry, always watches over every one on board with a fatherly sort of eye, and Wecanicut itself is a perfectly safe, mild place, without any quicksands or tigers or anything that Mother would object to.

"I tell you what," Jerry said, "let's make it a real adventure and take some costumes along. We never had any proper ones there before."

I thought this was a rather good idea, and after breakfast we went up to select things that wouldn't be too bothersome to carry, from the Property Basket.

"Is it to be pirates or smugglers or what?" Greg asked, poking in the corner where he keeps his own special rigs.

"Explorers, my fine fellow," Jerry said, "exploring after a submerged city."

"Oh!" Greg said, evidently changing his ideas.

Jerry and I went down to ask Katy to make us some lunch.

"Just food; nothing careful," Jerry explained.

"What are ye goin' to do with it?" Katy asked.

Jerry was all ready to say, "Eat it, of course," but I saw what Katy meant and said:

"We're going out; it's such a nice day. We thought we'd take our lunch with us to save Lena trouble."

"Don't get streelin' off too far," Katy said, "Where are ye goin'?"

"Oh, down by the shore," I said, which was not quite the whole truth, because of course it was not our shore, but the shore of Wecanicut I meant. Yes, all of it was my fault.

Just as we were putting the lunch into the kit-bag Greg came staggering downstairs, trailing along the weirdest lot of stuff he'd collected.

"What on earth is all that?" Jerry asked him. "Drop it and get your hat."

"It's--my costume," Greg explained, out of breath from having dragged all the things down from the attic.

"Glory!" Jerry said, "You don't suppose you're going to lug all that

rubbish on to the ferry, do you? Not while _I'm_ with you, my boy."

"You couldn't begin to put on half of it, Gregs," I said. "Let's weed it out a little."

"And look sharp about it," Jerry said, jingling the money for the ferry in his pocket.

Greg finally took a Turkish fez thing, and a black-and-orange sash, and a white brocade waistcoat that Father once had for a masque ball ages ago. We hadn't time to tell him that it was no sort of outfit for an explorer, so we bundled the things up with our own and stuffed them all into the kit-bag on top of the lunch.

Luke Street has a turn in it just beyond our house, so neither Katy nor Lena could have seen which way we went; anyhow, I think they were both in the back kitchen, which looks out on the clothes-yard. I thought perhaps we should have told Katy where we were going after all, but Jerry said:

"Fiddlesticks, Chris; we're not babies. I suppose you'd like Katy to take us in a perambulator."

This was horrid of him, but he made up for everything later on.

Our Captain Lewis was not in the pilot-house of the _Wecanicut_. Instead there was a strange captain, a scraggly, cross-looking person, staring at a little book and not watching the people who came on board, the way Captain Lewis does. Jerry and I sat on campstools on the windy side, and Greg went to watch the walking-beam, which he thinks will some day knock the top off its house. It always stops and plunges down just when he thinks it surely will forget and go smashing on up through the roof. He is quite disappointed that it never does. It behaved perfectly properly this time and paddled the old ferry-boat over to Wecanicut as usual.

We went up the hot little road that goes from the landing, and then ran through a prickly, stony short-cut that leads among wild rose-bushes and sweet fern to our part of the shore. There were tiny little wavelets splashing over the rocks, and you couldn't think which was bluer--the sea or the sky. The first thing we did was to bury our bottle of root-beer in a pool up to its neck and mark the place with two white stones. This is something we have learned by experience, for nothing is nastier than warm root-beer. Then we put on the costumes and capered about a little. I had a tight, striped football jersey, and my gym bloomers, and a black, villainous-looking felt hat; and Jerry had a ruffle pinned on the front of his shirt, and a wide belt with the big tinfoil-covered buckle that Mother made for us once, and a felt hat fastened up on the sides so that it looked like a real three-cornered one. Greg had arrayed himself in his things, and he did look too absurd, with more than a foot of the brocade waistcoat dangling below the sash, the end of which trailed on the ground behind.

It gave us a queer, wild feeling, being there without the grown-ups, and we decided to tell them that as we'd proved we could do it, we might go again. We never did tell them that, as it happens.

We all grew hungry so soon that we had lunch much earlier than the

grown-ups would have had it. The food Katy had fixed was wonderful, though rather squashed on account of all the costumes being on top of it in the kit-bag. While we ate we organized the Submerged-City-Seeking-Expedition. Jerry was "Terry Loganshaw," in charge of the party, and I was "Christopher Hole, shipmaster," and Greg was "Baroo, the Madagascar cabin-boy," because we couldn't think of what else he could be, with such clothes.

We tidied up all the picnic things so that there was nothing left, and put the root-beer bottle into the kit-bag, because it was a good one with a patent top. The kit-bag we took with us for duffle, and we set off for the point. We went by the longest way we could think of, to make it seem like a real expedition,--'cross country and back again. Jerry led us through the scratchy, overgrown part of Wecanicut, and we pretended that it was a long, weary trek through the most poisonous jungles to the coast of Peru; and when Greg walked right into a spider's web with a huge yellow spider gloating in the middle of it, he said he'd been bitten by a tarantula. We told him that we should have to leave him there to die, for we must press on to the sea, but he cured himself by eating a magic sweet-fern leaf and came running after us, tripping over his sash. The trekking took a long time, and when we reached the end of the point we were quite exhausted and flung our weary frames down on the tropic sand to rest. All at once Jerry clutched my arm and said:

"Look yonder, Hole! Does not yon strange form appear to you like the topper-most minaret of a sunken tower?"

He was pointing at the Sea Monster, and it really did look much more like a rough sort of dome than a monster's head. There was a lot of haze in the air, which made it look bluish and mysterious instead of rocky.

"It do indeed, sir," I said. "Could it be that city we be seeking?"

"Would that we had a boat!" said Greg, which might have been quite proper if he'd been somebody else, instead of Baroo.

We'd been sprawling on the sand again for quite a while, when Jerry suddenly jumped up and shouted:

"Glory! Look, Chris!" not at all like Terry Loganshaw.

I did look, and saw what he had seen. It was an empty boat, a sort of dinghy, bobbing and butting along beside the rocks a little way down the shore. We all ran helter-skelter, and Jerry pulled off his shoes like a flash and waded out and pulled the boat in.

"It's one of those old tubs from around the ferry-landing," he said. "It must have got adrift and come down with the tide. Oars in it and all."

We stood there silently, Jerry in the water holding the boat, and we were all thinking the same thing. It was Greg who said it first, quite solemnly.

"We could go out to the Sea Monster."

Of course it was then that I ought to have said that we couldn't,

but Jerry pulled the boat up the beach and ran back to the end of the point to see how high the waves were before I could say it. It was too late to say it afterwards, because when we saw that there was not even the faintest curl of white foam around the Sea Monster, it did seem as though we could do it.

"It'll only take about five minutes to row out there," Jerry said, "and then we'll have seen it at last. It couldn't be a better time. Why, a newly hatched duckling could swim out there to-day."

It did look very near, and the water was calm and shiny, with just a long, heaving roll now and then, as if something underneath were humping its shoulders.

So I said, "All right; let's," and we climbed into the boat. Jerry rows very well, and he pulled both the oars while I bailed with an old tin can that I found under the stern thwart. The boat didn't leak badly enough to worry about, but I thought it might be just as well to keep it bailed. We talked in a very nautical way, though Jerry kept forgetting he was Terry Loganshaw and mixing up "Treasure Island" and Captain Moss. But I didn't feel so much like being Chris Hole, anyway, even to please the boys, and I didn't say much.

The Sea Monster was much further away than you might suppose. When there was ever so much smooth, swelling water between us and Wecanicut, the Monster's head still seemed almost as far away as before. Somehow the water looked very deep, although you couldn't see down into it, and it humped itself under the boat.

CHAPTER VIII

Presently Wecanicut began to drop further away, and then the Sea Monster loomed up suddenly right over us, and Jerry had to fend the boat off with an oar. We had never guessed how big the thing really was,—not big at all for an island, but very large for a bare, off-shore rock. I should say that it was just about the bigness of an ordinary house, and very black and beetling, with not a spear of grass or anything on it. When Jerry said, "My stars, _what_ a weird place!" his voice went booming and rumbling in among the rocks, and a lot of gulls flew up suddenly, flapping and shrieking. He held the boat up against the edge of a rock while Greg and I got out. We took the kit-bag ashore, and Jerry made the boat fast by putting a big piece of stone on top of the rope. There was nothing like a beach or even a shelving rock to pull it up on, so that was the best we could do. The boat backed away as far as it could, but the rope was firmly wedged between the rock and the stone so it couldn't get away.

Of course we went first to look at the black cave-entrance. Sure enough, a great flat slab had fallen down from it and lay half in the water,—we could see scratchy marks and broken places where it had slid. The cave itself was about six feet deep, and very dank and dismal-looking. There was no sign of there ever having been treasure, for nobody could possibly have buried it, unless they'd hewn places in the living rock, like ancient Egyptians. We might have thought of that before, but of course we didn't honestly

believe that there was treasure. Somehow the Sea Monster didn't seem nearly so jolly and exciting as it had from Wecanicut. It was so real and big, and whenever a wave came in, it boomed and echoed under the hanging-over rocks. We climbed around to the other side and went up on top of the highest place, which was about three times as high as I am. From there we could see the Headland, very far away and blue, and Wecanicut behind us, safe and green and friendly-looking, but a long way off; and nothing else but a smeary line of smoke from a steamer at sea.

"We named this place well," I said; "it is a Monster."

"Brrrr, hear it roar!" Jerry said. "The waves must be bigger, or something. There weren't any when we came out."

We looked down and saw that the water was behaving differently. Instead of being smooth and rolling, there was a skitter of sharp ripples all over it, and the waves went slap and frothed white when they hit the rock. The sky had changed, too. It was not so blue, and there were switchy mares' tails across it, and the wind was blowing from Wecanicut, instead of toward it.

"We'd better start back," I said. "I'm afraid we'll be late for the next ferry, as it is, and Father and Mother will be home on the six o'clock train."

"Whew!" said Jerry, "I'd forgotten that. It's latish already, judging by the sun. Come along, Greg, and loop up your sash so you won't fall off this beast."

It was latish. The sun was quite low, and we saw that the Sea Monster threw a long, queer shadow on the water, as if the sea had been land. We hurried along to the boat, Jerry ahead.

"She's all right," he shouted, turning around.

When he turned back he made a sort of wild spring that I didn't understand at first. Then I saw the stone we had put over the rope rolling off the rock,--joggled off by the boat's pulling harder when a wave lifted it. The stone rolled in cornery bounces, with a dull noise, and the rope slipped after it slowly. I thought Jerry would be in time. I couldn't believe that I really saw the rope floating its whole length on the water, dry at first, then darkening wetly.

"Hang on, Chris!" Jerry said. "I can get it."

I caught his hand, and he snatched after the rope. But he plunged wildly, nearly pulling me in, and scrambled up at once with one leg wet to the hip.

"There's no bottom at all," he said queerly. "I believe the thing rises straight out of the sea."

By that time the boat was ten feet away from the Monster. It circled once, very quietly, as if it were trying to decide which way to go, and then it drifted gently away toward the sea, with the rope trailing along like a snake swimming beside it.

We stood there looking at the boat until it faded to a hazy speck,

and by that time the sun was really low. I don't think Greg altogether realized what had happened. We'd played at being marooned so often that I suppose he didn't quite see that this was different.

I hope that I shall never, never forget, as long as I live, what a brick Jerry was through the whole of that nightmarish thing. I know I never shall.

"Chris," he said, "you stay on this side. I'll go around to the Headland side. Greg, you climb up on top. If any of us sees a boat near enough to do any good, call the others, and we'll all yell and wave things."

I'd never heard his voice so commanding, even in plays. He still had on the cocked hat, and it looked very strange indeed. We scattered as he ordered, and when the others had gone, I remembered that Greg had on slippery-soled shoes instead of sneakers, which we usually wear. I thought of calling after him to be careful, but he never was a falling-down sort of person, even as a baby. I hoped, too, that he would have sense enough to loop up that sash or take it off entirely.

I sat on the Wecanicut side and stared at the shore and the water till my eyes ached. More and more wind was blowing all the time, straight from Wecanicut. It blew so hard in my face that my eyes watered and I couldn't be sure whether or not I did see boats. In books, people think of all their past sins when they're in perilous positions, but all I could think of was that a boat must come before dark. I did think of how much it all was my fault, but that was not far enough in the past to count. Presently Jerry came back and said that if we moved a little toward each other we could see just as much of the bay and consult at the same time. So we did, and sat down not very far apart. I said that I supposed we ought to change off with Greg, because it was horrid lonely up there, but Jerry said:

"Nonsense; he likes to be alone. He's probably pretending he's the King of the Cannibal Isle, or something, and not worrying a bit."

"I was looking us up in the dictionary the other day," I said, trying to forget the Sea Monster for a minute, "and Gregory means 'watchful, vigilant'."

"Now's the first time he's ever lived up to his name, then," said Jerry. "Keep looking, Chris, and don't moon about."

We sat there for quite a long time without saying anything, and the last little golden sliver of sun disappeared behind the point, and the lighthouse on the Headland came out suddenly, though it was still quite light, and began to wink--two long flashes and two short ones.

"Isn't it queer," Jerry said, "to think that people are there and we can't possibly tell them."

"It's worse than queer," I said.

Then we were still again, till presently Jerry said:

"Do you hear that funny noise, Chris?"

I had been listening to it just then, and said "Yes" and that I supposed it was the horrid noise the water made around on the other side. For quite a time we didn't hear it, and then Jerry said:

"There it is again! The water must suck into those echoey hollows. It sounds almost like a person groaning."

"Don't!" I said.

All at once he turned toward me and said in a queer, quick voice:

"Do you suppose it could possibly be Greg?"

I can't describe the way I felt when he said it, but if you've ever felt the same you know what I mean. It was a little as though something heavy dropped from my throat down to my toes, through me, leaving me all empty, with cold, tingly things rushing up again to my head. They were still rushing as we flew around the rock, and I kept saying:

"It can't be Greg.... It _can't_ be...."

But it was.

He was lying doubled up, just below the high place where Jerry had told him to keep watch. We didn't dare to touch him, because we didn't know how badly he was hurt, and he couldn't seem to tell us. But when I tried to put my arm under him, he pushed me a little and said, "No, no," so I stopped. Then I saw that his right arm was twisted under him horridly and that his shoulder looked all wrong. I touched it very gently and asked him if it was that, and he said, "Yes; don't!" We had to get him out somehow from that jaggedy place in the rocks where he was lying. So Jerry got him under the arm that wasn't hurt, and I took his legs, and we hauled him to a flattish part of the rock.

I pulled off the football jersey and put it under him, and Jerry ran back to get my skirt, which I'd put in the kit-bag when we fixed our costumes. Just after Jerry had gone something dreadful happened. Quite suddenly Greg seemed to shrink smaller, and his face grew rather greenish and not at all like his, and his hand was perfectly cold when I snatched it. I suppose he'd fainted from our carrying him so stupidly, but I'd never seen anybody do it before and I didn't know that was the way it looked. I'd never heard of people dying from hurting their arms, but I thought that perhaps he was hurt somewhere else that we didn't know about. But by the time Jerry came back with the skirt Greg had opened his eyes and looked at me a little like himself. There is a book in our medicine cupboard at home called, "Hints on First Aid." Jerry and I used to like to look at it, and Father said:

"Go ahead; you may need it some day." But neither of us could remember anything that was at all useful now. I could plainly see the picture of some queerly-drawn hands doing a "Spanish Windlass," but that wouldn't have done poor Greg any good at all. Jerry did remember that you ought to cut people's clothes and not try to take them off in the ordinary way, so he took out his knife and ripped up

the sleeve of Greg's jumper and the shoulder-seam of the white brocaded waistcoat. I don't see how people can stand being Red Cross nurses in France, for I'm sure I never could be one. Greg's shoulder was quite awful,--what we could see, for it was almost dark now. There was nothing at all we dared to do. We couldn't even bathe it, for there was only sea-water, so I just sat and held Greg's other hand and patted it. He didn't cry,--I think the hurting was too bad for that,--but he moaned a little, and sometimes he said, "Hurts, Chris."

I tried to tell him a story, the way I did when we all had the measles and he was so much sicker than the rest of us, but he couldn't listen. So we just sat there in the dark--it was perfectly dark now and we couldn't see one another at all--and I began to count the flashes of the Headland light--two long and two short, two long and two short--till I thought I should scream. Suddenly Jerry said:

"Are you hungry, Chris?"

I said that I wasn't, and asked him if he was. But he said:

"No, not very."

There were real waves on the Wecanicut side of the Monster now, and the wind was still blowing from that direction harder than ever. Now and then a drop of spray would flick my cheek, and I think the sound of the wind around the rock was really more horrid than the noise the water made. It seemed like midnight, but it was really quite early in the evening, when Jerry saw the lights bobbing along the shore of Wecanicut. They were lanterns, two of them, and they stopped quite often, as if the people were looking for something. For a minute I couldn't even move. Then I scrambled and slid after Jerry to the place on the Monster that most nearly faced the Wecanicut point. I don't think Greg really knew we'd left him; at least he didn't make a sound.

The lanterns swung and bobbed nearer till they almost reached the point, and we could hear faint shouts. Jerry and I braced our feet against the slimy rocks and shrieked into the dark, and the wind rushed down our throats and burned them. We could hear the people quite clearly now.

"It's Father's voice," Jerry said. "Oh, Chris, the wind is dead against us. _Now_ for it!"

I'd always thought Jerry could shout louder than any boy I ever heard, but you can't imagine how high and thin both our voices sounded out there on the Sea Monster. We heard Father's voice quite distinctly:

"Chris-ti-ine ... Jer-r-r-y ... ti-in-e!"

We shouted till our chests felt scraped raw, the way you feel when you've run too hard, and the wind tore our voices straight out to sea, away from Wecanicut. The lanterns stood quite still for a minute more, and then they bobbed away. At first I didn't believe that they were really growing smaller and smaller. But they were, and at last they were gone entirely, far down the shore.

"Are you crying, Chris?" Jerry said suddenly, in a queer, wheezy voice. He'd been shouting even harder than I had.

"I think not," I said, and my own voice was very strange indeed.

Jerry whacked me hard on the back, and said:

"Good old Chris! _Good_ old Chris!"

The shore of Wecanicut was so black that we might have dreamed the lanterns, but I still could hear the way Father's own voice had sounded, calling "Chris-ti-ine!" We almost stumbled over Greg when we crawled back to him, and he said: "Can we go home now, Chris?"

The wind gnashed around in a spiteful kind of way, and Jerry touched my hand suddenly and said: "Chris, it's raining."

CHAPTER IX

It _was_ raining,--big cold splashes that came faster and faster. I felt my blouse stick coldly to my shoulder in the places where it was wet.

"We _can't_ let Greg lie there and have it rain on him," I said.

Jerry and I thought of the pirate cave at the same moment, but we didn't see how we could possibly carry Greg to it in the dark. We thought that as it wasn't his legs that were hurt he might be able to walk there, if we helped him. He was very brave and quite willing to try, though a little dazed about why we wanted him to, but when we stood him carefully on his feet, he said, "Chris--no--" and we had to lay him down again. By this time it was really raining, and I put the skirt over Greg, instead of under him, while we tried to think.

"It might work if we made a chair," Jerry suggested.

So we stooped down and clasped each other's wrists criss-cross, the way you do to make a human chair, and got Greg on to it, with the arm that wasn't hurt around my neck. The darkness was perfectly pitchy, and we had to feel for every step to be sure that it was a solid place and not the slippery edge that went straight down into the sea. Greg cried a little and said, "_Please--_ stop." I could feel his hair against my face. It was all wet, and his cheek was wet, too, and cold.

The rain blew a little way into the cave, but not much, and we put Greg as far back as we could. The bottom of the cave was very jaggy and not comfortable to lie on, but we made it as soft as we could with the skirt and the jersey. I tripped and stumbled against Jerry, and when I caught him I felt that he was shivering. His shirt was quite wet. When I asked him if he was cold, he said "Not very," and we crawled into the cave place beside Greg, and sat as close together as possible to keep warm. We couldn't see the Headland

light, and I was rather glad, because it had made me almost crazy, flashing and flashing so steadily and not caring a bit.

The rain went _plop_ into the pools, and made a flattish, spattery sound on the rock. I don't know why I thought of the "Air Religieux" just then, but I suppose it was because of the rain. I could see the straight yellow candle-flames all blue around the wick, and Father's head tucked down looking at the 'cello, and his hands, nice and strong, playing it; then I got a little mixed and heard him calling "Christi-ine," fainter and fainter. I think I must have been almost asleep, because I know the real rain surprised me, like something I'd forgotten, and a very sharp, cornery rock was poking into my back.

It was then that Greg said:

"Want--Simpson."

That frightened me more than anything almost, for Simpson was a sort of stuffed flannel duck-thing that he'd had when he was very little, and he hadn't thought of it for years. None of us ever knew why he called it "Simpson," but he adored the thing and made it sleep beside him in the crib every night. But that was when he was three, and "Simpson" had been for ages on the top shelf where we keep the toys that we think we'll play with again sometime before we're really grown up. We never have done it yet, but there are certain ones that we couldn't possibly give away, not even to the Deservingest poor children.

So when Greg said that, in a tired, far-off sort of way, it did frighten me, because I _had_ heard of people dying when they were ravingly delirious. Greg wasn't raving exactly, but it was almost worse, because his voice was so small and different from his own dear usual one. When I told him I couldn't get Simpson I tried to make my voice sound soft and cooey like Mother's when she's sorry, but it went up into a queer squeak instead, and I couldn't finish somehow. Greg kept saying, "Simpson;--please--" and crying to himself.

I heard Jerry feeling around in the dark and then the click of his knife opening. I couldn't think what he was doing, but after quite a long time he pushed something into my hand and said:

"Does that feel anything like it?"

"Like what?" I said, but the next minute I knew.

It _did_ feel like Simpson--soft and flannelly, with a round, bumpy sort of head at one end.

"Oh, how did you do it!" I said. "Oh, Jerry, you brick!"

"I chopped a big piece out of your skirt," he said. "I hope you don't mind. I happened to have the string off the sandwich bundle in my pocket, and I squeezed up a head and tied it."

Greg was a little frightened when Jerry leaned over him suddenly.

"It's just me, Greg," Jerry said; "just Jerry-o. Here's Simpson, old

lamb."

I'd never heard Jerry's voice at all like that before. I don't know whether Greg really thought it was Simpson, but he took it and sighed--a long, quivery sort of sigh, the way very little children do when they're asleep sometimes.

Then there was no sound at all but the different horrid noises that the Monster made.

Presently I felt Jerry start, and then he shuffled back a little so that he was quite tight against my knees. I asked him what was the matter, and he said "Nothing." After a while, though, he said:

"Chris, I'd better tell you."

"What? Oh, what _is_ it?" I said.

"Do you remember how the tide was when we came out?" he asked.

"Yes," I said; "on the ebb. Don't you remember the rocks at Wecanicut, with bushels of wet sea-weed hanging off?"

"Well?" Jerry said.

I didn't understand for a minute, then I whispered:

"Do--you mean--"

"A wave just hit my foot," said Jerry in a low voice.

The first thing that we did was a lot of quick figuring. We thought fearfully hard and remembered that Turkshead Rock was just coming out of water when we left Wecanicut at four o'clock, so that the tide must have been within about an hour of ebb. Therefore full flood would be at eleven o'clock. But we hadn't any idea of whether it was ten or eleven or twelve, because there was no light to see Jerry's watch by. He had just an ordinary Ingersoll, not the grand Radiolite kind that you can see in the dark and it was perfectly maddening to hear it ticking away cheerfully, and no good to us at all. Just then something cold wrapped itself around my ankle. It was the edge of another wavelet.

We knew that if the cave was going to be flooded we must get Greg out of it before the water came much higher, but it was still raining pitch-forks outside, and we didn't know whether to risk waiting a bit longer or not.

"Perhaps there's sea-weed and we can feel high watermark," I said. "Try, Jerry."

We felt all the way around the sides of the cave toward the bottom, but as far as we could tell there was no sea-weed at all.

"That doesn't help us much," Jerry said, "because we don't know whether the tide is really full now and has covered it, or whether it just doesn't grow here."

We curled our feet under us and waited. We could hear the water

sloshing around very close to us. Once when I put out my hand it went right into a cold pool. It was then that Jerry had a most wonderful idea. I heard his knife snap open again and asked him what it was this time.

"If I take the crystal off my watch," he said, "I can feel where the hands are."

I heard the little clicking pop that the front of a watch makes when you pry it off, and I knew he was feeling the hands very gently.

"The little one's in line with the winder stem thing," he said, "and the big one--Chris, it's about twenty minutes of twelve. The water _can't_ come any higher. We must have had the worst of it."

It was queer that I cried then, because I hadn't felt at all like crying when we thought that the cave would be flooded.

Greg had been quiet for so long that it frightened me suddenly, and I groped after him to be sure that he was all right. I found his hand, and I couldn't believe that it was really hot when ours were so cold. His forehead was hot, too, and dry, in spite of his hair being damp still from the rain. He curled his hand into mine and said very clearly:

"Will you please bring me a drink of water?"

It was perfectly awful, because he said it so politely and very carefully, as if he were trying not to bother somebody. And there was no drink to give him. I thought of the people in stories who lie on deserts and battle-fields burning in agonies of fever, but I couldn't remember reading about anybody dying of fever on a rock in the middle of the sea. I dipped my handkerchief in the pool just beside me and laid it, all dripping, on Greg's forehead. I didn't know whether it was a proper First Aid thing to do, but he seemed to like it and was still again, holding my hand. Presently he said:

"Mother, why isn't there a drink?"

"This is awful, Chris," Jerry said.

Then I thought of the rain-pools. There were lots, of course, in the hollows of the Monster, but we had nothing to scoop up the water with. Greg's forehead was just as hot as ever, and he thrashed about and hurt his shoulder and cried miserably.

I don't know how Jerry could have thought of so many things; for it was he who thought of very carefully breaking the bottom off the root-beer bottle and using it for a cup. Of course the bottom might have cracked all to pieces, but it was quite heavy and Jerry was very careful. It came off wonderfully well, though rather jaggy. Jerry tried to grind the cutty edges off by rubbing them against the rock, but it didn't work. Then we remembered being very thirsty once on a long picnic-walk ages ago, and Father wrapping his handkerchief around the top of the tin can the soup had come in and giving us a drink at a pump. So we knew that we could do that with the broken bottle. Jerry dodged out into the rain through the tide-pools and came back after a while with some water.

"I couldn't get much," he said, "because the place I found was very shallow, but I can go again."

I remembered reading in books that you mustn't give much water to fever-stricken people in any case. We lifted Greg's head up,--that is, Jerry did, while I held the root-beer bottle glass, and said:

"Here's the drink, Gregs, dear."

It was very hard to tell what I was doing, and some of the water trickled over the handkerchief and down the front of Greg's jumper. But he drank the rest, and said: "Thank you very much" in the same careful voice.

"Oh, I wish he wouldn't be so blooming polite!" Jerry said sharply, as we were laying Greg back again, and I felt something wet and warm splash down on my wrist. But I didn't tell Jerry I'd felt it.

CHAPTER X

If I wrote volumes and volumes I couldn't begin to tell how long that night seemed. It was longer than years and years in prison; it was as long as a century. I think Jerry slept a little, and perhaps I did, too, for when I peered out at the cave entrance again there were two or three bluish, wet stars in the piece of sky I could see, and the rain-sound had stopped. Jerry was huddled up at my feet with his dear old head propped uncomfortably against me. He was snoring a little, and somehow it was the nicest sound I'd ever heard. Greg's hand was still in mine, and it was not very hot.

Dawn always disappoints me a little. You think it's going to be perfectly gorgeous, and then it's usually nothing but one cold, pinkish streak, and the shadows all going the wrong way. But when I saw a faint wet grayness beginning to creep along the horizon beyond the Headland, I thought it was the most wonderful thing I'd ever seen in my life. The gray spread till the whole sky was the color of zinc, with the sea a little darker, and then one spikey yellow strip began to show on the sky-line. I could see Greg at last, with the jersey under his head, and the white brocade waistcoat all dark and stained at the shoulder, and his poor dear face ghastly white. And Jerry asleep, with the ruffle still pinned to his wet shirt and a big hole torn in the knee of his knickerbockers. And I saw the slimy pools that the tide had left beside us--it was on the ebb again--and the pieces of the root-beer bottle that Jerry had broken off, and the horrible, high, black head of the Sea Monster above us.

There was no boat of any sort to be seen, near or far away, but I woke Jerry so that we could both keep watch in case one came. Just as Jerry crawled out of the cave and stretched himself stiffly, Greg took his hand away from mine and blinked out at the sky, and said in almost his own voice:

"Have we been here all the time?"

"Yes, all the time, ducky," I said, and then I cried, "Don't try to

move, Gregs!" for I saw him trying to squirm over.

He lay back and said "Why?" but then in an instant he knew why. I couldn't do anything but cuddle my cheek down against his, and he sobbed:

"Make me stop crying, Chris."

The light grew stronger and stronger till there were shadows among the rocks and Wecanicut came out green and brown. Jerry came back presently, and I wondered if he'd seen anything, but he said:

"Chris, I just wanted to ask you. How long does it take for a person to starve?"

I said days, I thought, and Jerry sighed a little and went back to his watching-place. Somehow I didn't feel very hungry, myself,—that is, not the kind of hungry you are when you've played tennis all morning and then gone in swimming. There was a sharp, sickish feeling inside me and my head felt a little queer, but it was not exactly like being hungry.

I think Greg's arm must have stopped hurting quite so badly, or else he was being tremendously spunky, because we talked a lot and I told him that Father would come for us pretty soon. I didn't feel at all sure of this, because I knew that Father would never have given up the Sea Monster the night before if he'd had any idea we were there. But it was so perfectly blessed to have Greg talking sensibly at all, even with such a wobbly sort of voice, that I didn't much care what I said.

All at once Jerry came tumbling around the corner, shouting:

"Oh, Chris, come quick! _Hurry!_"

I left Greg and ran after Jerry, and I'd been sitting so long humped up on the rocks that my knees gave way and I barked my shins against a sharp ledge. I didn't even know it until ever so long afterwards, when I found a bruise as big as a saucer and remembered then. Jerry didn't need to point so wildly out across the water; I saw the boat before he could say a word. It was a catboat, quite far off, tacking down from the Headland. The sail was orange, and we'd never seen an orange sail in our harbor or anywhere, in fact, so we knew it must be a strange boat.

Jerry pulled off his shirt like winking and stood there in his bare arms waving it madly. We both began to shout before the catboat people could possibly have heard us, but we thought that they might see the white shirt flying up and down. The boat was tacking a long leg and a short one. The long one carried it so far out that we thought it was going to cross the mouth of the bay and not come near enough to see us. Jerry stopped shouting just long enough to gasp:

"When she's all ready to go about on the short tack is the time to yell loudest."

But the next short tack seemed to bring the boat no nearer than before, and the long leg carried it so far away that it was no more use shouting to the orange sail than to a stupid old herring-gull.

"Could you wave for a bit, Chris?" Jerry said. "My arms are off."

So I took the shirt and waved it by its sleeves, and the catboat began another short tack. It was just then that we saw something black flap-flapping against the sail.

"They've tied a coat or something to the flag halyard, and they're running it up and down," Jerry said. "They're trying to get here, but they _have_ to tack. Don't you _see_, Chris?"

Of course I saw, but I didn't blame Jerry for being snappy at the last minute.

The next tack showed very plainly that the boat was really coming to the Sea Monster, and somebody stood up in the stern and shouted. We shouted back--one last howl--and then stood there panting, because there was no use in wasting any more breath and our throats were quite split as it was. When the catboat came a little nearer we saw that there was only one man in it, and, sure enough, an old blue jersey was tied to the flag halyard. The man turned the boat around very neatly--I don't know the right sailing word for it--and anchored. Then he climbed into the dinghy that was trailing along behind and began rowing to the Sea Monster.

I sat down on the rock and I had to keep swallowing, because I felt as if my heart were bumping up against my throat. To save time, before the man landed, Jerry started to shout what had happened. There wasn't much left of his voice, but he managed to do it somehow.

"We've been here all night," he called huskily. "We came out to explore this thing, and our boat got away, and our little brother fell off the top and is hurt awfully, and" (this was just as the man climbed ashore on the sea-weedy rocks) "and we'd always called this place the 'Sea Monster' because it looked like one, but now we know it _is_ one."

The man was looking at us very hard, particularly at me, and he said:

"The 'Sea Monster'!" Then he looked again and said "Oh!"

He was a nice tall man, with a brown, squarish face, quite thin, and twinkly blue eyes and a lot of dark hair that blew around like Jerry's. He looked from one to the other of us and nodded his head to himself. I suppose we did look very queer,--quite dirty, and Jerry with the tin-foil-buckled belt still around him and no shirt; and my bloomers dangling down like a Turkish person's because of the elastics having burst when I fell down.

"It seems," said our man, "that I have arrived in the nick of time to perform a daring rescue."

He said it in a funny make-believe way, as if he were doing one of our plays, and then suddenly the twinklyness went out of his eyes and he said:

"But take me to Gregory."

If we hadn't been so perfectly bursting with thankfulness and so tired of shouting and the cold and the whole hideous place, we should have wondered how on earth he knew Greg's name, because neither of us had mentioned it. But we didn't think of it then, and just snatched his hands and pulled him over the rocks, trying to tell him a little how glad we were to see him.

When he saw Greg, his face grew quite different--very sorry, and not twinkly at all and he went down on his knees (he couldn't have stood up in the back of the cave) and he said:

"Poor old man!" And then, "I wonder who had the worst night of it?"

We said, "Greg, of course." But our man said, "I wonder." Then he changed again, and instead of being all sorry and gentle, he got quite commanding and very quick.

"Chris, you stay here," he said. "Gerald, come with me,--and here, put this on."

He pulled off his gray flannel coat and tossed it to Jerry, and Jerry did put it on and ran after him, tucking up the sleeves. I saw them get into the dinghy and row back to the boat, and I said:

"Oh, Gregs, we're going home, we're going home!" and we both cried a little.

They came back after what seemed a long time, and our man said:

"While I'm fixing Gregory, you and Gerald tackle this."

It was half a loaf of bread and some potted beef done up in oiled paper, and I'm sure Jerry ate the oiled paper, too. I'd heard of starving people falling on food and rending it savagely, but I never knew exactly what rending was until we did it to the bread. We gave some of it to Greg, too, while our man was fixing him.

I never saw any one before who could do things so fast and so gently. He had nice, brown, quick hands, and he looked so grown up and useful. He'd brought a roll of bandage stuff--the kind with a blue wrapper that you keep in First Aid kits--and a book that had "Coast Pilot Guide and Harbor Entrances of New England" on the cover. I didn't see what he could want that for, except on the boat, till he put it under Greg's armpit and bandaged his arm across it to keep it steady. The white waistcoat was in our man's way, so he ripped it down the side and got it off entirely.

"I was an explorer," Greg explained shakily.

"He was Baroo, the Madagascar cabin-boy," Jerry said, gnawing the loaf, and I thought it seemed years ago that we had _trekked_ across Wecanicut.

"I see," said our man, in his nice, kind, reliable way, and then he said to Greg, "I didn't hurt you much, did I, old fellow?"

And Greg shook his head, and said:

"Thank you for coming."

That was what we all felt, but none of us had put it so simply before.

"What's this?" the man said, as he was gathering up the rest of the bandages.

It was the Simpson-thing, and it did look very funny by daylight, I must say,—just a wob of blue flannel tied with a string. I was going to explain, but Jerry said, with his mouth full:

"Oh, just something we had," and stuffed it away in the kit-bag. He was quite red. Boys are funny sometimes.

"Now," said our man, "comes the embarkation, and I'm afraid I'll have to hurt you a little, Greg."

He picked Greg up in one swinging swoop, and I wished that Jerry and I had been strong enough to do that last night. Greg had only time for one gasp before he was quite comfortable against our man's shoulder. But he was brave, because it must have hurt like anything, even then, and I could see his jaw set hard. Jerry and I gathered up the kit-bag and the jersey and what was left of the skirt and followed along. Just beside the dinghy our man paused and looked all around at the ugly blackness of the Sea Monster and up to the jaggedy top of it. Then he looked down at Greg and smiled a little sorry smile, and said very slowly and gently:

"Ye be Three Poore Mariners."

Jerry and I stared at each other, and I said:

"You must know that song, too. We used to pretend being marooned, but we never thought it would really happen."

Then Jerry said suddenly:

"By the way, what's your name, sir?"

"You'll have to row, Jerry," said our man, "because I must keep the wounded just the way he is." Then he said:

"Some people call me Andrew, but my intimate friends call me 'The Bottle Man'."

CHAPTER XI

I thought that perhaps it might be a dream after all, because that's the way things happen in dreams, and that I would wake up and find it still night and the rain splashing down and poor Greg crying. But the dinghy was real and so were the slippery slidy wet rocks, and I had to watch what I was about and not go staring in astonishment at our man. We all had to be careful about the rocks, and that's why none of us said anything till we were in the dinghy, except for one

gasp of astonishment.

"But how _could_ you be?" Jerry and I asked together when we all were safely aboard, with our man in the stern holding Greg carefully.

"But how did you get un-oldened?" Greg asked.

"We thought you were a very old gentleman," I explained giddily.

"_I am_," said the Bottle Man. "Ancient."

"But what about your gray hairs?" Jerry demanded, tugging away at the oars.

"If you've more than one gray hair you've gray hairs," said our man. "I have eleven."

He ducked down his nice, dark, rumpled-up head for us to look, but I must say I couldn't see more than one little one all buried among the black.

"You're grown up, but you're not old at all," I said. "We've been imagining you as an aged old man with a long white beard."

"I never mentioned a long white beard," the Bottle Man said.

"Yes; but what about your tottering along on two sticks?" Jerry said suddenly.

But we had come alongside the catboat, and no one could talk for a little while until we were all arranged in the boat and our man had told Jerry and me to pull a mattressy thing out of the tiny little cabin and had laid Greg on it in the bottom of the boat. He gave him some stuff out of a little flasky bottle, too, and Greg sputtered over it and said "Ugh!" but afterward he said:

"It's nice and hot inside when I thought it had gone."

And we couldn't talk, either, when our man was hoisting the orange-painted sail and hauling up the anchor and running back and forth to pull ropes and things. But when he was settled at the tiller and all of us were cosy with sweaters and coats, Jerry asked him again.

"Why, you see," the Bottle Man said, "something had hit me very hard and for a long time all that I was able to do was to totter along on the two sticks."

"But what hit you?" I asked.

He dropped his voice, because Greg was actually asleep.

"An inconsiderate shell," he said.

For a minute, because I was so used to thinking of him on the lonely island, I imagined a big conch-shell being hurled at him from

somewhere. Then Jerry and I both gasped:

"You mean you were in the war?"

"Exactly," said our man.

"And the bearded man was a doctor?" Jerry asked.

"That he was!" the Bottle Man said.

We both asked him questions at once, but he was dreadfully vague, and kept looking at Greg and the sail and the shore, but we managed to piece together that he'd been wounded twice and left for dead in No-Man's-Land (after doing all sorts of heroic things, we know) and finally sent home to America from a French hospital. We found out, too, that his aunt was the "good soul" he talked about in his letters, and that she half-owned the island and had a beautiful big old house on it where she made him come while he convalesced. It was very hard to find out all these things, because he would be so mysterious and kept saying "Ah!" and "That's another story!" He also wanted to hear all of our adventures, but we wouldn't tell him those until we'd heard some of his.

Jerry asked him suddenly about the scar where the sea-thing bit him, or stabbed him, or whatever it did, and our man twinkled and pulled up his sleeve. And there, just above his right elbow where the tan stopped, was a little white three-cornered scar, sure enough. Jerry looked and said "Oh!" and our man said "Ah-ha!"

And at the end of all the stories we realized that we didn't know, even now, how he happened to be sailing along just in time to rescue us.

"I sailed all the way from Bluar Boor," he said, "on purpose to see you. To tell the truth, I had designs on the 'Sea Monster' which will not be carried out now. I laid up last night inside the Headland breakwater and made an early start this morning for the last leg of the trip. I recognized the 'Sea Monster' a long way off, but I must say I was surprised when I saw Jerry's shirt signaling so distressfully. Of course I knew who you were at once, when you called the place the 'Sea Monster,' but Christine did stagger me for a minute."

"Stagger you?" I said. "Why?"

"I've been thinking you were 'Christopher' all this time, you see," he said, "but, being a man of infinite resource and unparalleled sagacity, I immediately perceived the true state of affairs."

"Are you a professor?" Jerry asked.

"Heavens, no!" our man laughed. "Why do you ask?"

"On account of your style," Jerry said. "It's so grand and stately. So are your letters, sometimes."

"I am but a poor bridge-builder," the Bottle Man said, "but I can turn words on or off as I want 'em, like a hose."

By this time the boat was almost in, and our man brought it up

neatly to the float beside the ferry-slip, and some men came over and helped him to moor it. Then he got out and came back in a minute with the man who always meets the ferry in an automobile to hire. The man looked as if he were in a dazy dream, which I don't blame him for at all, because we did look quite weird. He and the Bottle Man lifted Gregg, mattress and all, and stowed him in on the back seat of the automobile. The rest of us perched on the front seat and the running-board, trying to conceal our strange appearance from the staring of quite a crowd which was gathering, as it was just ferry-time.

Our man said, "17 Luke Street, and go carefully." It surprised us for a second to hear him say our address as if he'd known it always, but then we realized that he had known it for quite a long time.

I think none of us will ever forget the way the house looked as we swung around the corner and came up Luke Street. Just the end of the gable first, behind the two big beeches in the front garden,--oh, we hadn't seen it for years and centuries,--and then the living-room windows open, with the curtains blowing, and the little box-bush that grows in a fat jar on the porch-steps. Mother was coming out at the front door, and she looked just the way she did when we got a telegram once saying that Grannie was very ill. Jerry jumped off the running-board before the automobile stopped, and he let Mother hug him right there in the middle of the path, which is a thing he generally hates. By that time our man and the chauffeur were lifting Greg and the mattress out, and Mother let go of Jerry and stood quite still, with her face all white and hollow-looking. We all began talking at once, and the Bottle Man managed to tell Mother more about everything in a few minutes than you would think possible.

He and the automobile man, who still looked flabbergasted, put Greg on the big bed in mother's room while she was telephoning to Dr. Topham. We all felt fidgetty and unsettled until Dr. Topham came, which was really very soon. I think he must have broken all the speed rules. Jerry and I, who had put on some other clothes, sat in the living-room with the Bottle Man while the doctor set Greg's arm, which was fractured. Mother stayed with Greg. The Bottle Man told us things about the war and his island, and he played soft, wonderful music on the piano to make us forget about Greg and the Sea Monster and all the awful things that had happened.

CHAPTER XII

It was the queerest topsy-turvy morning I ever spent. After Mother came down and told us that Gregs was fixed and that Doctor Topham had given him something to make him sleep, we all went in and had lots of breakfast.--Mother and the Bottle Man, too, for neither of them had had any. You would never have thought we'd eaten the bread and potted beef there on the Monster, if you'd seen the way we devoured the eggs and bacon and honey and toast that Katy and Lena kept bringing in. They both brought the things, because they were so glad to see us and so afraid that it had been their fault that we went to Wecanicut. But we told Mother that it wasn't.

While we ate. Mother told us everything that had happened at home. She and Father came in on the six o'clock train and found Katy and Lena quite worried because we hadn't come back yet, but no one got really frightened until later. Father thought of Wecanicut and went to the ferry to ask, but Captain Lewis wasn't there, and of course the cross new captain that we'd seen looking at the book hadn't even noticed us and wouldn't have known us if he had. Our nice Portuguese man remembered our going over and was perfectly certain that he'd seen us come back, too, which of course he hadn't. So, after setting the policeman and every one else to search town, Father and Captain Moss went to Wecanicut on the chance. They reached the point at a quarter after nine, which was when we saw the lights, and they never for a moment thought of the Sea Monster, because no one had missed the old dinghy from the ferry-slip and they didn't imagine that we could get there. They didn't find any trace of us at the usual picnic place on Wecanicut, because we had everything with us, and though some of the Fort soldiers searched, too, nothing could be found. Father had been up all night and was still out, telephoning to all sorts of places.

If I deserved any punishment for its being my fault, I think I had it when I thought of how hard Father had been working and how wretched and anxious they all were. I hadn't quite realized that before.

Strangely enough, right after breakfast Jerry and I began to yawn tremendously, and Mother bundled us off to bed. We hadn't had time to think of it, but of course we hadn't slept particularly well on the Sea Monster. Just as we were going upstairs, Aunt Ailsa came running in with her hat on, crying:

"Is Katy telling the truth?"

And then we both leaped on her from the stairs. When she ducked her head up from our hugs, the Bottle Man was standing in the doorway, looking queer.

"Ailsa!" he said; and that really did floor us, because we knew we'd never even mentioned her existence to him. She stood staring, and then put her hand up against her throat, exactly like somebody in a book.

"Andrew!" she said, in a faint little voice.

Mother looked at them, and then said:

"Bedtime, chicks! Come along!" and went up with us.

It was quite weird, going to bed at nine o'clock in the morning. We pulled down all the shades so we could sleep, though I don't really think we needed to, because I know that as soon as I shut my eyes I was sound asleep.

When I woke up the room was quite dim, and Mother and Father were standing at the door talking. Father looked awfully tired, but dear and glad, and he wouldn't let me tell him how sorry I was about it all. Mother said that even more surprising things had been happening, and that if I'd slept enough for a time, I'd better come

down to supper. That was queer, too,--dressing in the twilight and coming down to supper, instead of to breakfast.

We all talked a lot at supper, of course, and people kept asking questions. I had to do most of the answering, because Jerry always left out the parts about himself, and yet it was he who did all the wonderful things. We had bottles of ginger-pop, because it was a sort of feast, and Father got up and proposed toasts, just like a real banquet. First he said:

"Jerry! I'm glad to have a son with a level head."

Then he said:

"Christine!" and looked at me very hard, till I wanted to turn away. But they all drank it just the same as Jerry's, though I didn't deserve it at all. Then Father held up his glass and said very gently:

"Greg!" And when I tried to drink it, the ginger-pop choked me, and Jerry banged me between the shoulders, which, of course, only made it worse, because it wasn't that sort of choke.

Then Jerry jumped up and said:

"We ought to drink to the Bottle Man, _I_ think. And, by the way, 'Bottle Man' looks all right in a letter, but it's queer, rather, to say to you. Haven't you really a real name?"

Our man and Aunt Ailsa looked at each other as if they were going to say something, and then the Bottle Man twinkled, and said:

"Very soon you'll be able to call me Uncle Andrew."

This part seems to be nothing but explanations, which are horrid, but there _were_ lots, and I can't help it. Of course Jerry and I sat staring in surprise, and there _had_ to be explanations. And what do you think! Our own Bottle Man was that "Somebody Westland" that Aunt Ailsa had wept so about. The casualty list was perfectly right in saying that he was wounded and missing (though it came very late, because by that time he was in America), and she thought, of course, that he was dead, because she didn't hear from him. And he'd written to her from the French hospital and the letter never came. When he came back, all sick and wounded, to America, somebody who didn't know anything about it told him that Aunt Ailsa was going to marry Mr. Something-or-other, so our poor man went off sadly to his island and didn't write to her any more. He'd never heard of us, because of course her name isn't Holford. And _she'd_ never heard of his aunt, nor Blue Harbor, nor the island, so of course she didn't know anything about it when we read his letters to her. Oh, it was very tangly and bewildering and it took lots of explaining, but at the end of supper there was just enough ginger-pop left to drink to both of them.

Afterwards she and Father played the 'cello and piano, because we asked them to, and the Bottle Man sat with his arm over Jerry's shoulders, watching, with the light on his nice, brown, kind face. And Father sat with his head tucked down over the 'cello, just the way I remembered there on the Sea Monster, and the candles shone on

Aunt Ailsa's amberish-colored hair, and I thought she was the beautifullest person in the world, except Mother. I thought about a lot of things while the music went on, and wondered whether we'd ever want to picnic on Wecanicut again. But I knew we would, because Wecanicut is a kind, friendly, safe place (and we do go there now lots, only we don't look at the Sea Monster much). I thought, too, that perhaps if we'd never thrown the message in the bottle into the harbor, Aunt Ailsa and Uncle Andrew would never have been married and lived happily ever after,--that is, they've lived happily so far and I think they'll keep on. Because if we hadn't, the Bottle Man would never have come sailing down to see us, and he might still be thinking Aunt Ailsa had married the Mr. Thingummy, when she hadn't at all.

He was such a nice Bottle Man! I sat there on the couch and thought how splendid it would be when he was our own uncle, and I laughed when I remembered how we'd imagined that he was an ancient old gentleman. The wind began to rise outside. I could hear it whisking around and bumping in the chimney, and I thought how glad I was--_oh_, how glad, _glad_ I was--that we were all at home, and I listened hard to the 'cello and tried not to remember the horrible old Sea Monster.

Mother slipped in and sat down beside me, and when the music ended, she said: "Greg wants to see the 'Bottle Man'." We asked if we might come, too, because we hadn't seen Greg since they carried him up to the house, all bloody and rumped and dirty. So we all went up, and Mother tip-toed in first with the lamp. He looked almost quite like himself, with clean pajamas and his hair brushed and all the frightened, hurt look gone out of his face.

The Bottle Man (I almost forget to call him that, because we've been calling him Uncle Andrew for months) leaned over and said:

"Lots better now, old man?"

Greg said "Lots," and then, "But what I _did_ want to ask you is, how you sailed all the way from the Mid-Equator to here in such a little boat?"

The Bottle Man laughed, and then said very soberly:

"But _are_ you sure you measured it right? To-morrow I'll show you on the map."

We only stayed a minute, and then said good-night and went out. I was the last one, and just as I was going through the door, Greg said:

"Chris! Come back!"

So I went and sat on the edge of the bed in the dark, and Greg put his good arm around my neck when I bent down.

"Do you know, Chris," he said, "sometimes that night I think I thought you were Mother. Oh, Chris, I _do_ love you awfully much!"

And I was happier then than I'd been since--oh, it seemed centuries ago.

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