

The Moving Picture Boys on the Coast

By
Victor Appleton

Freeditorial 

THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS ON THE COAST

CHAPTER I

AN UNEXPECTED ATTACK

“Well, Blake, it doesn’t seem possible that we have succeeded; does it?” and the lad who asked the question threw one leg over the saddle of his pony, to ride side fashion for a while, as a rest and change.

“No, Joe, it doesn’t,” answered another youth. “But we sure have got some dandy films in those boxes!” and he looked back on some laden burros that were following the cow ponies across a stretch of Arizona desert.

“Well, all I’ve got to say,” remarked the cowboy, the third member of the trio; “is that taking moving pictures is about as strenuous work as rounding up or

branding cattle.”

“I guess you don’t quite believe that, Hank; do you?” asked Blake Stewart. “You haven’t seen us work so very hard; have you?”

“Work hard? I should say I have,” answered Hank Selby. “Why, the time those Indians charged our cave, and Joe and I, and Munson and his crowd were getting ready to fire point-blank at them, there you stood, with bullets whizzing near you more than once, grinding away at the handle of your moving picture camera as hard as you could. Hard work—huh!”

“But we got the films,” declared Blake, not caring to go too deeply into an argument. “And I’m anxious to see how they will develop.”

“So am I,” declared Joe. “I wonder what will be next on the program?”

“Why, you’re going to look for your father; aren’t you, Joe—your father whom you haven’t seen since you were a little chap—whom you can’t even remember?” and Blake looked sharply at his chum and partner, Joe Duncan.

“That’s what I am, Blake, just as soon as I can get to the coast. But I mean, what will we do after that? Go back to New York?”

“I suppose so, and take up our trade of making moving picture films for whoever wants them. It will be a rather tame life after the excitement we have had out here.”

“That’s what. But maybe it will be good for a change.”

The two moving picture boys, I might explain briefly, were on their way to Flagstaff, Arizona, after having gone out into the wilds, with a cowboy guide, Hank Selby, to make moving picture films of some Moqui Indians who had broken away from their reservation, to indulge in some of their weird dances and ceremonies.

While making these films, the boys and their companion, who were hidden in a cave where the Indians could not see them, saw the redmen about to torture, as they thought, four white prisoners. Joe and Blake recognized these men as their business rivals, who were also trying to get some moving picture films of the Indians, to secure a prize of a thousand dollars, offered by a New York geographical and ethnological society.

To fire on the Indians, and thus save the white captives, meant that Joe, Blake and Hank would disclose their position in the cave, but there was nothing else to do, and they did it.

The white captives, unexpectedly freed, came rushing toward the shelter, with the savages after them, and it looked as if there would be a fierce fight. In spite of this Blake held his ground, taking picture after picture.

And, in the nick of time, a troop of United States cavalry came dashing up to capture the renegade Indians, who surrendered; Blake also getting pictures of the dash of the troopers.

Unexpectedly in the company was a Sergeant Duncan who proved to be a half-uncle of Joe Duncan, and the sergeant was able to tell the lad where his long-lost father was last heard from, since Joe had only lately learned that his parent was living.

And so, after their strenuous time in getting pictures of the Indians, the boys were on their way to Big B ranch, where Hank Selby was employed, and whence they had started to find the hidden savages.

But Flagstaff was the real temporary headquarters of the lads, since there was located a theatrical company, engaged in doing some moving picture dramas based on Western life, and Joe and Blake had been hired to “film” those plays.

They had been given a little time off to make an attempt to get views of the Indians at their ceremonies, and they expected to resume, for a time, making films of more peaceful scenes among their theatrical friends.

“Yes, we sure did have a strenuous time,” remarked Blake, as they rode along at an easy pace. “And how those Indians threw down their guns, and gave in, when the troopers charged against them!”

“That’s right,” agreed Joe. “And those bugle notes, when they started to gallop, telling us that help was on the way, was the sweetest music I ever heard.”

“Same here,” came from Hank. “But say, if it’s all the same to you boys, I think we might as well camp here and have grub. This looks like good water and there’s enough grazing for the critters to-night. Then we can push on early in the morning, and in a couple of days more we ought to make Big B ranch.”

“It seems to take us longer coming back than it did going,” remarked Blake, as he slid from his pony, and pulled the reins over the animal’s head as a signal for it not to wander. “I thought we’d sure come in sight of the ranch to-day.”

“Oh, it’s farther than that,” said Hank, as he looked about for wood with which to make a fire. “I guess you were so anxious to get on the trail of the Indians on your way out that you didn’t notice how much ground you covered. And it was quite a few miles, believe me!”

“I do!” said Joe, with half a groan. “I’m sore and stiff from so much saddle riding. I’m not used to it.”

“Oh, you’ll limber up soon,” said Hank, cheerfully. “Now, if you boys will get the water, and break out the grub, I’ll get supper. It’ll soon be dark.”

The lads busied themselves, and soon a cheerful little blaze was going, while the tired horses and burros, relieved of the burden of saddles and packs, were rolling luxuriously around at the length of their tether ropes.

“I wonder if all the Moquis and Navajos who skipped off their reservations have been driven back?” asked Joe, as they were about ready to eat.

“What makes you ask that?” inquired Blake quickly, and with a curious look at his chum.

“Oh, no special reason. But you know Captain Marsh, of the troop in which my uncle, Sergeant Duncan, was enlisted, said he had rounded up several bands of ’em, and I was just thinking that——”

“That maybe there were some more running around loose that we could make pictures of; is that it, Joe?”

“Well, yes. You know that society offered a prize of a thousand dollars for the best reel of ceremonial dances, but there were smaller prizes for ordinary pictures of Indians in various activities. I thought maybe we could get some of those.”

“I’m afraid not—not on this trip, at least,” spoke Blake. “I don’t believe there is ten feet of unexposed film left, and that wouldn’t make much of a reel. We used up all we brought with us making those cowboy pictures, the forest fire and the time the bear chased Hank, besides the Indian views. Nothing more doing in the camera line until we get back to Flagstaff.”

“Oh, well, I was just wondering,” spoke Joe, and he gazed off across the uneven stretch of country. But there was that in his voice and glance which did not bear out his unconcerned words.

However, Blake was too much occupied in getting supper just then to pay much attention to his chum, for the lad was hungry—as, indeed, his companions also seemed to be, for they attacked the simple provender with eagerness when Hank announced that it was ready.

The evening was setting in when they had finished, and, bringing up a pail of fresh water, in case they should get thirsty during the hours of darkness, and placing the saddles and packs in a compact mass, the three proceeded to spend

the night in the open.

And yet not exactly without shelter, either, for they had with them small dog-tents, as they are called, that afford considerable protection against the night winds and dew. And, with a fire glowing at their feet, the travelers were far from being uncomfortable.

A pile of wood had been collected near the blaze, and while nothing was said about standing watch, it was understood that if any of them roused in the night he was to pile fuel on the embers, not only to keep up the genial heat, but to drive off any prowling beasts that might try to raid their stock of provisions.

“Well, I’m going to turn in,” finally announced Blake. “I’m dead tired.”

“And I’m with you,” added Joe.

Hank said nothing, but the boys watched him as he walked some little distance from the camp, to a slight elevation. On this he stood, gazing off into the distance.

“I wonder what he’s looking for?” queried Joe.

“I—I hardly know,” replied Blake.

And yet, in his heart, each lad was aware of something that he hesitated to put into words. Presently Hank came back, and as the firelight shone on his face his expression betrayed no anxiety—in fact, no emotion of any kind.

“Did—did you see anything, Hank?” asked Blake.

“No—nothing. Snooze away. I think—I’ll have a pipe before I go to bed,” and he sat down on a small box and looked into the glowing embers.

Soon afterward, Joe, looking from his small shelter tent, saw Hank fingering his big revolver, spinning the cylinder, and testing the mechanism.

“Something’s up!” whispered Joe to himself. “I wonder if it can be that he saw _____”

He did not finish the sentence, for just then Hank put away the weapon and soon the aromatic odor of burning tobacco filled the night air.

“Oh, pshaw!” exclaimed the lad. “I’m foolish to worry about nothing; I’m going to sleep!” and he turned over, and closed his eyes. But, somehow, sleep would not come at once. Even with his eyes closed he could fancy the figure of the cowboy guide sitting by the fire.

Blake seemed to be less uneasy than did his chum. If he saw Hank by the fire he made no mention of it, and from his tent came no movement that showed he was awake.

Presently Joe began to speculate on the new experience he felt would come to him, if he succeeded in locating his father.

“It really doesn’t seem possible—that I’m going to have folks at last,” murmured Joe. “And maybe not only a father, but brothers and sisters—Uncle Bill Duncan said he didn’t know. I may have more than Blake, if I keep on,” and then, with more pleasurable thoughts than worrying about an indefinable something, the lad finally lost himself in slumber.

The camp was still. Even Hank had crawled into his little tent, after a final pipe. He did not get to sleep soon, and had either of the boys been awake they would have seen him come out several times before midnight, and stalk about, peering off into the darkness.

Then, after looking to the tether ropes of the animals, he would go back to the small shelters, throw some embers on the fire, and drop off into a doze. For the cowboy was a light sleeper, and the least sound awakened him.

“I guess there’ll be nothing doing,” he whispered to himself after one of these little observations. “I thought I saw some signs just about dusk, but maybe it was some slinking coyote, or a big jack rabbit. Anyhow, if—if anything does happen it won’t come during darkness; that is, unless it’s some of them half-breed or Mexican rustlers, and I don’t believe they’ve been around these diggings lately. I’m going to snooze.”

Soon his heavy breathing told that he slept, and several hours passed before he again awoke. If he had made one other observation, probably he would have seen that which would have aroused his suspicions, for, about an hour after midnight, there was an uneasy movement among the animals.

And in the starlight, which in a measure made the night less black, several shadowy, slinking forms might have been observed creeping toward the camp and the pile of provisions and supplies, among the latter of which were the boxes containing the valuable films of the moving pictures.

It was Hank, as might have been expected, who awakened. One of the burros, always an excitable, nervous beast, capered about and uttered a shrill whinny as if in fright.

Hank was out of his tent in an instant. Leaping to his feet he blazed away with his revolver. Its flash lit up the darkness, and was at once answered by half a

dozen other flashes.

“Come on, boys!” yelled Hank. “They’re after us! I wasn’t mistaken, after all! I did see some of ’em sneaking around! Lively, now!” and he blazed away again.

“What is it?” cried Blake.

“Indians! They’re after our horses!” yelled the cowboy, as the two lads joined him.

CHAPTER II

A DARING RAID

“Where are they?”

“Which way shall we shoot?”

Joe and Blake questioned thus by turn as they leaped to Hank’s side. They were in darkness now, for the cowboy had ceased shooting, and those who had come to attack had likewise allowed their weapons to become silent. As a matter of fact, Hank Selby had only fired in the air, if possible to frighten off the Indians, and it seemed that the redmen had done the same, since there was no whine of bullets over the head of the guide.

“What is it?” asked Blake, fingering the rifle he had caught up as he rushed from the tent.

“Indians,” replied Hank, in a low voice. “It’s probably some band of Moquis or Navajos, who escaped being rounded up as the others were. Probably they were chased so hard, or were so surprised at one of their camps, that they had to leave without their ponies. And they do hate to walk. They saw our animals and tried to get ’em, but I was suspicious all along.”

“But where are they now?” asked Joe, peering out into the darkness. “I can’t see a thing, and our animals seem to be all there.”

“The beggars dropped down, and are hiding,” said the cowboy. “They didn’t like the quick way I fired on ’em, I guess; though, land knows! I don’t want to hurt any of ’em if I can help it. They don’t know just what to do, and they’re biding their time.”

“Did they get any of our horses—or things?” asked Blake, anxiously, his thoughts on the valuable films.

“Not as yet,” replied Hank. “But this thing isn’t over with. They’ll come back, once they decide it’s worth while. We’ve got to get ready for ’em.”

“How?” asked Blake.

“Well, we’ve got to pile our stuff up as a sort of shelter, and then we’ve got to bring in the animals. It won’t do to have the imps run off with ’em, and that’s what they’re aiming to do.”

“But won’t it be risky to go out there in the darkness to bring in the ponies and burros?” asked Joe. “You say the Indians are concealed out there.”

“So I believe they are,” replied Hank. “But I fancy my shooting drove ’em back a bit, even though I did fire in the air, or so high over their heads that they couldn’t be harmed. So I guess we can make a move out there without getting hurt. Anyhow, it’s got to be done, and, as I know more about such business than you boys, having been at it longer, I’ll just attend to that. You’d better make the best sort of breastworks you can. For, though I don’t believe these beggars will actually shoot to hurt, still it’s best to be on the safe side. Be cautious, now.”

And, while Hank is thus preparing to secure the pack and saddle animals, and the boys to gather the boxes and bales into a compact mass, I will take just a few moments to tell you more about the moving picture lads than I have yet done.

In the first book of this series, entitled “The Moving Picture Boys; Or, The Perils of a Great City Depicted,” I introduced to you Joe Duncan and Blake Stewart. At that time they lived in the village of Fayetteburg, in the central part of New York State. Blake worked on the farm of his uncle, Jonathan Haverstraw, while Joe was hired boy for Zachariah Bradley. And it happened that they both lost their places at the same time.

Blake’s uncle decided to retire to a Home for the Aged, and Mr. Bradley said he could no longer afford to pay Joe any wages. The boys did not know what to do until they made the acquaintance of Mr. Calvert Hadley, a moving picture photographer. The latter had come to Fayetteburg with a theatrical company to get some views in a country drama that was being enacted, some of the scenes being laid in the nearby city of Syracuse.

Blake and Joe watched a mimic rescue scene in the creek, thinking it real, and later Mr. Hadley offered them work as his assistants in New York. He was

employed by the Film Theatrical Company, to make its moving pictures.

The boys jumped at the chance. Before the little country drama was over, however, an accident occurred, in full view of the moving picture camera. Mrs. Betty Randolph, a wealthy Southern lady, was run into, while riding in her carriage, by a reckless autoist. Mrs. Randolph offered a reward for the arrest of this man, who escaped in the confusion, and urged the two boys to try to effect his capture.

They said they would, and how they went to New York, learned the moving picture business, and helped Mr. Hadley get films for his “moving picture newspaper,” is all set down in the first book.

The perils of taking views in a great city, at fires, elevated railroad accidents, burning vessels, of divers at work, in making educational films—all this is told.

Eventually, while making scenes at a thrilling balloon ascension, Joe and Blake discovered the reckless autoist and gave chase in a car. They caught him, too, and got the reward, with which they purchased some moving picture cameras, and went into business on their own account. They made films to order, and were often employed by Mr. Hadley or by Mr. Ringold, head of the Film Theatrical Company.

This company consisted of a number of actors and actresses who were engaged to enact various sorts of plays and dramas before the camera.

Among them was Henry Robertson, who did “juvenile leads”; Harris Levinberg, the “villain”; Miss Nellie Shay, the leading lady, and Miss Birdie Lee, who did girls’ parts. Last, but not least, was Christopher Cutler Piper—known variously as “C. C.” or “Gloomy.” He preferred to be called just C. C., not liking his two first names, but he was so often looking on the dark side of life, and predicting direful happenings that never came to pass, that he was often dubbed “Gloomy.” However, he was the comedian of the troupe, and could utter the most unhappy expressions while doing the most comical acting.

It was not all easy sailing for the two lads. One man—James Munson, a rival moving picture proprietor—often made trouble for them, and once put them in no little danger.

After having helped Mr. Hadley make a success of his moving picture newspaper, by means of which current happenings, and accidents, were nightly thrown on a screen in various theatres, Joe and Blake, as I said, went into business for themselves.

In the second volume of the series, entitled “The Moving Picture Boys in the West; Or, Taking Scenes Among the Cowboys and Indians,” our heroes had an entirely different series of adventures.

Mr. Ringold decided to take his theatrical troupe to Arizona, there to make films for a number of Western dramas. He asked the boys if they would like to join Mr. Hadley in doing this work. At the same time a New York scientific society, engaged in preserving records, pictures and photographic reproductions of the Indians, made a prize offer for the best film showing the redmen in their ceremonial dances. The time was particularly ripe for this, as a band of the Moquis, as well as several tribes of Navajos, had broken from the government reservations to indulge in their strange rites.

As the boys found that they could do the two things—take the views of the Indians, and make the theatrical pictures—they accepted the offer.

Just before they left, however, Joe received a strange letter. It was from a man signing himself Sam Houston Reed, who stated that he had met a man who was looking for a Joe Duncan. Joe, who had known there was some mystery about his early life, was overjoyed at the prospect of finding some “folks,” and wished very much to meet Mr. Reed. But the latter had neglected to date, or put any heading on his letter. All there was to go by was part of a postmark, which showed it came from Arizona, and Mr. Reed also mentioned Big B ranch.

However, the moving picture boys and the theatrical company started West. On the way the boys had a glimpse of their rivals, also hastening to get the Indian views.

How they got to Flagstaff, made many views there, and then how Joe and Blake started to find the place where the runaway Indians were hidden away, doing their mysterious dances—all this is told in the second volume.

Eventually they reached Big B ranch, only to find that Mr. Reed, like a rolling stone, had gone. However, some of the cowboys remembered him, and had heard him talk of having met a certain Bill Duncan, whose half-brother, Nate, was looking for a lost son. It was supposed that this Nate Duncan was Joe’s father.

As nothing toward finding Mr. Duncan could then be done, Joe and Blake kept on toward the Indian country. A cowboy, Hank Selby, offered to accompany them, and they were glad he did.

They had many adventures before getting on the track of the Indians, and when they found them in a secret valley, and, concealed in a cave, began

taking moving pictures, they discovered, as I have said, four white men in danger of torture.

How they rescued them, how the troopers came, and how one turned out to be Bill Duncan, Joe's half-uncle, I have mentioned in this book as well as in the second volume. And, on their way back to Big B ranch and to Flagstaff, the night attack had taken place.

"How are you making out, Blake?" asked Joe, as he worked at stacking up the boxes and bales into a sort of rude breastwork near the shelter tents.

"All right, Joe," was the answer. "I hope Hank makes the animals safe."

"He doesn't seem to be having much trouble. I can't see any of the Indians now."

"No, they're probably hiding down in the grass, waiting for a chance to make a raid. I wonder how many there are?"

"Quite a bunch, I should say, from the shooting. Here comes Hank now."

As he spoke, the cowboy appeared, leading by their long tether ropes the riding ponies and the pack animals. The steeds showed signs of their recent excitement. Had it not been for the alarm they gave they might have been stolen without our friends being any the wiser.

"See any of 'em, Hank?" questioned Joe.

"No, but they're there, all right. Boys, there may be some hot work ahead of us. You want to get ready for it."

"Do—do you think they'll shoot?" asked Blake.

"Well, they'll do their best to get our things away from us," was the answer. "They're desperate, I'm afraid."

Hank busied himself tethering the steeds nearer the temporary camp, while Joe and Blake finished their labors in building a defense against the possible rush of the redmen.

This was hardly finished, and they had scarcely collected a pile of brush to make a bright fire, if necessary, when there arose all around fierce shouts. At the same time there was a fusillade of shots; but, as far as could be seen, all the Indians were firing in the air.

"Look out!" yelled Hank. "They're going to rush us!"

Before he ceased speaking there was the sound of many feet running forward. The shooting and shouting redoubled in volume, and the restless animals tried to break loose.

“The imps!” cried Hank. “They’re trying to stampede our animals, just as they did the cattle that time. Look out, boys!”

But nothing could be done against such numbers. The camp was overwhelmed in a daring raid, and though the boys and Hank did all they could, firing wildly in the air, they could not stand off the attack. Strangely enough, no effort was made to mistreat the boys or their companion. The Indians simply rushed over them and made for the pile of goods in the rear of the tents. They did not even seem to be after the horses.

“Stop ’em!” cried Blake. “They’ll take all our things!”

“Our cameras!” yelled Joe. “They may break ’em!”

Hank had all he could do to restrain the wild steeds, which sought to break loose.

The rush was over almost as quickly as it had started. Off into the darkness disappeared the Indians, their shooting and yelling growing fainter and fainter.

“I saved the horses!” cried Hank.

“Yes, but they got a lot of our stuff!” exclaimed Blake. “Joe, throw some wood on the fire, so we can see what is missing!”

CHAPTER III

THE PURSUIT

Blazing up brightly, after Joe had thrown some light sticks on the embers, the fire revealed a much disordered camp. The Indians had rushed over it as a squad of football players might tear through a rival eleven, leaving devastation in their wake. The only consolation was that Hank had managed to prevent the animals from stampeding, and the possession of their ponies, in a country where foot travel is almost out of the question, was a big factor.

“But they got almost everything else,” said Blake, as he looked about the temporary camp.

“They made for the grub, that’s sure,” spoke Joe. “I guess they were hungry.”

“But why they didn’t try harder to make off with the horses is what I can’t understand,” spoke Blake, as he continued to make an examination of the damage done. “I thought that was what they were after.”

“They were,” declared Hank; “but I guess they realized that taking horses is a pretty serious crime out here. They knew that all sorts of efforts would be made to recapture ’em, and by men who would not be as gentle with ’em as Uncle Sam’s soldiers. So I guess they decided to pass up the horses and only take some grub. That isn’t so serious, especially as the poor beggars are probably well-nigh starving, having been away from their regular rations so long. Well, it might be worse, I suppose. They will hardly come back to-night, and I guess we can get a little rest when I picket these animals out again. We got off pretty lucky, I take it, for there was sure a big bunch of them.”

“Lucky?” cried Blake. “I should say not. Look here!” and he pointed to the upset pile of boxes and bales, only a few of which were now left. “We have had the worst kind of bad luck!”

“How’s that?” demanded Joe, hurrying to the side of his chum. The fire was brighter now. “What did they take?”

“Our reels of exposed film, for one thing!” cried Blake.

“What! Not our prize Indian pictures?” gasped Joe.

“That’s what they did, Joe! Every one of those films we worked so hard to get is gone!”

“But what could the Indians want with them?” asked Joe. “They don’t know how to develop ’em, and, even if they did, they would be of no use. They can’t know what they are, but if the least ray of light gets into the boxes it means that the films are ruined!”

“That’s right,” assented Blake, hopelessly. “What can we do?”

“They probably didn’t know they were taking your films, boys,” spoke Hank, who had finished making fast the horses. “They very likely thought the boxes held some new kind of food, and they just grabbed up anything they could get their hands on. I reckon the beggars are nearly starving, and that’s what made ’em so bold. You’ll notice they didn’t once fire at us—only up in the air. They just wanted to scare us.”

“And they took our films, thinking they were something good to eat,” murmured Blake.

“Yes. I’m not saying, though, that they didn’t hope to stampede the animals; but they went wrong on that calculation, if they had it in mind.”

“They have our films,” continued Joe, in a sort of daze, so suddenly had the events of the last half-hour occurred. “What can we do?”

“Chase after ’em and get our stuff back!” exclaimed Blake, quickly. “I’m not going to stand that loss. They can have the grub if they want it, but I’m going to get back those films that we went to such trouble, and so much danger, to snap.”

“But how are you going to do it?” asked Joe.

“Start in pursuit!” cried his chum with energy. “Come on, Hank, you can follow an Indian trail; can’t you?”

“I sure can, when it’s as broad as the one they’ll be likely to leave. But not now.”

“Why not?” asked Blake.

For answer the cowboy guide waved his hand toward the darkness all about. There seemed to be a haze over the sky, obscuring the stars.

“It would be worse than useless to start out on the chase now,” said Hank. “We can’t do anything until morning.”

“But they’ll be too far away then,” objected Blake. “And, while it might do little harm if they opened those film boxes in the darkness, it sure would spoil every picture we took to have them exposed in daylight. Let’s go now!” and he started toward the animals.

“No,” and Hank shook his head. “I don’t think you need worry about not catching those fellers in daylight,” he went on. “They won’t go far before stopping to eat the stuff they took from us. Then they’ll have a sleep and start on the trail by daylight. We can do the same, and I think we can catch up with them. It would be risky to start out at night in a country we know so little about. We’ll have to wait.”

Blake sighed, but there was no help for it. The upset camp was put in some kind of shape, the horses were again looked to, and the fire once more replenished. The travelers carried an unusually large supply of provisions, and though most of these had been taken, there was still enough food left for a day or two. In that time they might be able to get more, if they could not recapture their own from the Indians.

“We’ll start the first thing in the morning, as soon as it is light enough to see,” decided Hank. “And now, if it’s all the same to you boys, I’m going to have a bite to eat. That excitement made me hungry.”

“Same here,” confessed Joe, and soon they were all satisfying their appetites.

“Oh, but I do hope we can catch up with them and take those films away from ’em,” murmured Blake, as he again sought his tent.

“We will,” declared Joe, with conviction. “If we have to, I’ll get word to my soldier uncle and have the troops chase ’em.”

“The only trouble is that it might be too late,” spoke Blake. “I’m afraid of the films getting light-struck. But I guess all we can do is to wait and trust to luck.”

There was no further alarm that night, and after a hasty breakfast, eaten when it was hardly light enough to see, the remaining supplies and provisions were packed and the ponies saddled.

“I guess we can start now,” exclaimed Hank, as he leaped to his steed. “It will soon be lighter. Forward, march!”

CHAPTER IV

BACK TO “BIG B.”

“Well, we haven’t caught up to ’em yet,” remarked Joe Duncan, about noon the next day, when they stopped for a little lunch and to allow the horses to drink at a water hole and rest.

“No, the beggars keep well ahead of us,” agreed Blake, shading his eyes with his hand and gazing off across the hot, sunlit stretch that lay before them. “Oh, if they have opened those film boxes!” he exclaimed hopelessly.

“They have ponies, and that’s more than I calculated on,” remarked Hank. “I thought when they raided our camp that they were after our animals, and when they didn’t take ’em I thought it was because they were afraid of being chased as horse-thieves by a sheriff’s posse. Now I see they didn’t want our mounts, as they had plenty of their own. It was grub they were after, and they got it.”

“And our picture films,” added Blake. “Don’t forget that.”

“That was only a mistake, I tell you,” insisted Hank, “though, for that matter, the Indians wouldn’t hesitate to take ’em just for fun, if they thought they could make trouble that way.”

“And they will make a heap of trouble, too, I’m afraid,” spoke Blake.

“Here now!” called Joe, in jollier tones. “Don’t come any of that C. C. Piper business, Blake. Look on the bright side.”

“Well, I suppose I ought to, but it’s hard work.”

They had traveled all that morning, hoping to come up with the roving band of Indians. But they had had no success.

Hank did pick up the trail of the raiders soon after starting out. The Indians had left their horses tethered some distance from the camp, and had crept up afoot, probably having spied Blake, Joe and Hank from afar the previous evening. And though the moccasined feet of the savages left little trace on the hard and sun-baked earth, there was enough “sign” for so experienced a trailer as was Hank to pick up.

Thus he had been led to where the horses had been left, and after that it was easy enough to follow the marks of the hoofs.

“There are about twenty-five in this band, as near as I can make out,” said Hank, “and every one of ’em has a horse of some sort. Pretty good travelers, too, I take it, since our animals were fresh and we haven’t been able to come up to ’em yet, though we’ve kept up a pretty fair gait. But we’ll get ’em yet.”

“If only it isn’t too late,” spoke Blake, whose one fear was that the valuable picture films would be spoiled. “Let’s hurry on.”

“Another little rest will do the horses good,” said the cowboy guide. “Then we can push on so much the faster. Our horses are our best friends, and we’ve got to treat ’em right if we want the best service out of them. Another half-hour and we’ll push on.”

And, though Blake fretted and fumed at the delay, he knew it would not be best to insist on having his way. Soon, however, they were in the saddle again and once more in pursuit.

“The trail is getting fresher,” declared Hank, about four o’clock that afternoon. “Their horses are tiring, I guess, and ours seem to be holding out pretty well.”

“Which means——” began Joe.

“That we may get up to them before dark,” went on the cowboy. “And then

we'll see what happens.”

“Will they run, do you think?” inquired Blake.

“They will as long as their horses hold out, for they must know that this ghost-dance business is about over and that most of their friends are back on the reservations. But when we come up to them——” and the cowboy paused and significantly examined his revolver.

“Does it mean a fight?” went on Blake, and he could not restrain a catch in his breath. It was one thing to have an Indian fight with some shelter, but different out in the open.

“Well, I hardly think it will be what you might call regular and up-to-date fighting,” replied Hank. “They may fire their guns and revolvers at us to try and frighten us back, but I don't actually believe that they'll make trouble. They know the punishment would be too serious. And I believe a lot of those Indians have only blank cartridges that they had when they were in some Wild West show. I know there was mighty little whining of bullets, for all the shooting they did last night. But, at the same time,” he went on, “it's best to be prepared for emergencies.”

They continued on, and the boys had now become so used to the signs of the Indian trail that they could note the changes almost as well as could Hank.

Here they could see where a rest was made, and again where some animal went out of the beaten path. Bits of the Indians' finery, too, were noted every once in a while—a bit of gaudy bead trimming, a discarded moccasin or some dyed feathers.

“I do hope we come up with them before dark,” said Joe. “If we have to stay out on the trail all night, and part of next day, we may find nothing left of our things and the pack burros when we reach camp again.”

In order to make better time our friends had left behind, at the place where the Indians had raided them, the pack animals, their cameras, a few films not taken by the Indians, and as much of their provisions as they thought would not be needed on the trail.

“I think this evening will end it,” declared Hank. “We might push on a little faster, as the going is good right here.”

The horses were urged to greater speed, and they responded gamely. They seemed to realize the necessity for haste, and took advantage of the momentary betterment in the surface over which they were traveling.

The sun was sinking lower and lower in the west and the shadows were lengthening. Eagerly the boys and the cowboy scout peered ahead, straining their eyes for a glimpse of those whom they were pursuing. Then there came a bit of rough ground, and the pace was slower. Next followed a little rise, and, as this was topped, Blake, who had taken the lead for a short distance, uttered a cry and pointed forward with eager hand.

“What is it?” cried Joe and Hank together.

“There they are!” yelled Blake. “The Indians! Right below us! Come on!”

Riding to his side, the others saw a sharp descent, then a level plain stretching away for many miles. And moving slowly over this plain was a band of about twenty-five Indians, mounted on ponies that seemed scarcely able to move.

“That’s them!” cried Hank, as he dug his heels into the sides of his horse. “At ’em, boys! A short, swift gallop will bring us up to ’em now, and then—well, we’ll see what will happen!”

“Come on!” yelled Blake, and side by side the trio rode down into the valley, their animals seeming to take on new strength as they saw their quarry before them.

“They’ve noticed us!” exclaimed Blake.

“That’s right!” agreed Hank. “Well, now to see if we can catch ’em!”

A movement amid the stragglers of the band told that they had glimpsed the approach of the whites. There was a distant shout, and at once the whole party was galloping off.

“They’ll distance us!” cried Blake. “They’re going to get away!”

“Not very far,” was Hank’s opinion. “Their horses are about done up. This is a last spurt.”

His trained eye had shown him that the Indians were using quirts and their heels to spur the tired animals to a last burst of speed. True, the ponies did leap ahead for a few minutes; but not even the wild shouting of the redmen, the frantic beating of their steeds, and the firing of their guns could make the wearied muscles of the ponies respond for long.

The spurt lasted only a few seconds, and then came a noticeable slowing down. On the contrary, the horses of our friends, though they had traveled far and hard, were in better condition and much fresher.

“Come on!” cried Hank, rising in his stirrups and swinging his hat around his

head, while he sent forth yells of defiance. “Come on, boys! We have ’em!”

He, too, began to shoot, but in the air as before, and the boys followed his example. Their horses were shortening the distance between the two parties.

Suddenly one of the Indians was observed to toss something from him. It fell to the ground and rolled to one side of the trail.

“What’s that?” cried Joe.

“One of the boxes of exposed film!” cried Blake. “They know what we’re after. Oh, if only it isn’t damaged!”

“We can soon tell!” cried Hank, taking the lead. Then he yelled, between reports of his revolver:

“Hi there! you red beggars, give up! Drop that stuff you took from our camp! You haven’t any of the grub left, I suppose, but we want those pictures! Drop ’em!”

Whether his talk was understood, or not, was not known; but others of the Indians began tossing away either boxes of film or other things—aside from food—which they had taken from the camp. They never stopped their horses, though, but ever urged on the tired beasts.

“Here’s the first reel!” cried Blake, as he came up to where it lay. Quickly dismounting, he picked it up.

“Not hurt a bit!” he cried exultantly; “and the seals haven’t been broken, showing that it hasn’t been opened.”

“Good!” cried Hank. “You go slow and pick up what you can, and Joe and I will chase after the Indians. Evidently they’re going to run for it.”

And it did seem so. The Indians never paused, but continued to toss away article after article. They seemed afraid of the consequences should they be caught with anything belonging to the whites in their possession. They may have taken Hank and the boys for the advance-guard of a sheriff’s posse, and, knowing they had been doing wrong, were afraid. At any rate they made no stand.

“I’ve got ’em all!” finally yelled Blake.

“Then there’s no use chasing after ’em any farther,” said Hank. “Hold on, Joe,” for the boy was pushing on.

The horses of the pursuers were pulled down to a walk. The Indians noticed

this at once, and, seeming to realize that the chase was over, they halted, and, turning, gazed in a body at the moving picture boys and their cowboy guide.

“Had enough, I reckon,” murmured Hank. “I guess you can’t go on much farther. Well, we’ll turn back a ways and put some miles between us, so you won’t try any of your tricks again, and then we’ll go into camp ourselves. Got everything, Blake?”

“Yes, every reel of film, and not one has been opened, by good luck. Maybe they thought it was powerful ‘medicine,’ and didn’t want to run any chances.”

“We don’t care, as long as we have ’em back,” remarked Joe, gleefully. “And now for a good rest.”

They turned back, and as they did so the Indians gave a last shout of defiance and began to make camp for themselves. It was as if a lot of schoolboys, playing truant, had been rounded up, and as a last indication of defiance had given their class yell.

“Good riddance to you,” remarked Hank. “I don’t want to see you again for a good many years.”

Collecting the things the Indians had thrown away, our friends rode on until dark, and then, out of sight of the roving redmen, they made a simple camp. They stood guard by turns, but there was no night alarm. The next day they reached the place where they had picketed the pack animals. Nothing had been disturbed.

“And now for Big B ranch!” exclaimed Blake, when once more the little cavalcade was under way.

“And glad enough I’ll be to see it!” said Hank; “though I sure will miss you fellows.”

“The same here,” echoed Joe, and Blake nodded in accord.

They traveled on for another day, finding good water and plenty of grazing for the steeds. Their provisions ran a bit low, for the Indians had helped themselves liberally, but they managed to shoot some small game.

And, on the second day after parting from the Indians, they topped a rise, from the height of which Hank cried:

“There she is, boys!”

“What?” asked Blake.

“Big B ranch! We’re back in civilization again!”

CHAPTER V.

A NEW KIND OF DRAMA

“And so you really got what you went for; eh, boys?” asked Mr. Alden, proprietor of Big B ranch, as the trio rode in. “Well, you had luck.”

“Both kinds—good and bad,” remarked Hank, as he told how, after getting the rare films, they had nearly been lost again.

“And you rescued your enemies, too? What became of Munson?”

“Oh, he and his crowd went off by themselves,” explained Blake. “They felt badly about us beating them.”

“I’ve got a surprise for you, Joe,” went on the proprietor.

“What sort?” asked the lad, eagerly; “is my father——?”

“No, not that; but Sam Reed is back here again, and he can tell you what you want to know. He came the day after you left.”

“But I did better than that!” exclaimed Joe. “I met my uncle, and I’m soon going to find my father, I hope,” and he related his meeting with the trooper.

“Good!” cried Mr. Alden. “Here comes Sam now. I told him you might be along soon,” and he turned to introduce a rather shiftless-looking cowboy who sauntered up.

“Pleased to meet you,” said Sam Reed. “I never cal’lated when I writ that there letter that I’d ever see you in flesh and blood. I’ve got your pictures, though,” and he showed those that had appeared in a magazine, giving an account of the work of Joe and Blake.

As might have been expected, Sam knew nothing of Joe’s father. The best the cowboy had hoped to do was to put the boy on the track of Mr. William Duncan, and, considering that Joe’s uncle, as I shall call him—though he was really only a half-uncle—had enlisted in the army, Mr. Reed would probably have had hard work to carry out his plans.

“Well, I’m glad you met your relative, anyhow,” said Sam to Joe; “and I wish you luck in looking for your father. So he’s somewhere on the southern

California coast?”

“Yes, in one of the lighthouses,” explained Joe. “My uncle didn’t know exactly where, but I can easily find out from the government office when I get on the coast.”

The boys were made welcome again at Big B ranch, and talked over once more the exciting time that had happened to them there when the Indians stampeded the cattle.

“Here are the films you left with me,” said Mr. Alden, giving the boys those they had made of the cattle stampede and of the cowboys doing their stunts. “And so you got other good ones?”

“Yes, fine ones,” replied Blake. “And we must soon be getting back to Flagstaff. We have stayed away longer than we meant to, and Mr. Hadley and Mr. Ringold may need our services.”

But the boys at the ranch would not hear of their starting for a few days, and so Joe and Blake stayed on, being royally entertained. They witnessed a round-up and the branding of cattle, but could get no pictures, as their films were all used up. However, the subjects had often been filmed before, so there was no great regret.

Then came a time when they had to say farewell, and they turned their horses’ heads toward Flagstaff. The cowboys gave them a parting salute of cheers and blank cartridges, riding madly around meanwhile.

“It reminds me of the Indian attack,” said Blake.

“Yes,” assented Joe. “I wonder if we’ll go through another scare like that?”

“I hope not,” spoke his chum; but, though they did not know it, they were destined to face many more perils in the pursuit of their chosen calling.

The ride to Flagstaff from Big B ranch was without incident. It was through a fairly well settled part of the country, as settlements go in Arizona, and they made it in good time. Joe often talked about the strange fate that had put him on the track of his father.

“I wonder what kind of a man he’ll be?” he often said to his chum.

“The best ever!” Blake would answer; “that is, if he’s anything like you—and I think he must be.”

“That’s very nice of you, and I hope he does turn out to be what I wish him to be. I can’t even picture him in my mind, though.”

“Well, I should think he’d be something like your uncle—even if they were only half-brothers.”

“If he is, I suppose it will be all right, though Uncle Bill is a little too wild to suit me. I’d want my father to be more settled in life.”

“Well, it won’t be a great while before you know,” consoled Blake.

The boys received a royal welcome from Mr. Hadley and the members of the theatrical troupe.

“Oh, but it’s good to see you back!” exclaimed Birdie Lee to Blake, as she shook hands with him, and if he held her fingers a little longer than was necessary I’m sure it’s none of our affair.

“So you didn’t get scalped, after all?” remarked C. C., gloomily, as he surveyed the boys. “Well, you will next time, or else they will hold you as captives.”

“Oh, stop it, Gloomy!” called Miss Shay. “What do you want to spoil their welcome for, just as we have a little spread arranged for them?” for she had gotten one up on the spur of the moment, on sighting the boys.

“A spread, eh? Humph, I know I’ll get indigestion if I eat any of it. Oh, life isn’t worth living, anyhow!” and he sighed heavily and proceeded to practice making new comical faces at himself in a looking-glass.

“Well, I’m glad you boys are back,” said Mr. Ringold a little later at the impromptu feast, at which C. C. ate as much as anyone and with seemingly as good an appetite. “Yes,” went on the theatrical manager, “I shall need you and Mr. Hadley right along, now. I am going to produce a new kind of drama.”

“I—er—I’m afraid I can’t be with you,” said Joe, hesitatingly. “I am at last on the track of my father, and I must find him.”

“Where is he?” asked Mr. Ringold, when the lad had told his story.

“Somewhere on the Southern California coast. In a lighthouse—just where I can’t say. But I am going there, and so you will have to get some one else, Mr. Ringold, to take my place. Blake can stay here, of course, and make moving pictures, but I——”

“I’m going with you,” said his chum, simply.

There was a moment’s silence, and then the theatrical manager exclaimed:

“Well, say, this just fits in all right. There’s no need for any of us to be

separated, for I intend taking my whole company to the coast to get a new series of sea dramas. The Southern California coast will suit me as well as any.

“Joe, you can’t shake me that way. We’ll all go together, and you’ll have plenty of chance to locate your father!”

CHAPTER VI ON THE COAST

The announcement of Mr. Ringold was followed by a silence, during which Joe and Blake looked at each other. It seemed like too much good fortune to learn that they would still have the company of their friends in this new quest.

“Do you really mean that?” asked Joe. “You’re not saying it just to help us out; are you, Mr. Ringold?”

“No. What makes you think that?”

“Because it seems too good to be true. I wouldn’t like anything better than to go with your company and make pictures.”

“The same here,” added Blake.

“And if, at the same time, I can locate my father,” went on Joe, “so much the better, though I don’t imagine I will have any trouble finding him, once I can communicate with the government lighthouse board, and learn where he is stationed. They have a list of all employees, I imagine.”

“Yes, I think so,” spoke Mr. Hadley. “As you say, it will be easy to locate him. And, boys, I’m very glad you’re going to be with us again. I wouldn’t like to break in two new lads, and we will certainly need three photographers to take all the scenes in the sea dramas that are planned.”

“Will we have to go very far to sea?” asked Macaroni, who was among those who had greeted the moving picture boys. The lads’ thin assistant had been kept busy assisting Mr. Hadley while they were after the Indians. “Because if it’s very far out on the ocean wave I don’t believe I want to go; I’m very easily made seasick.”

“Oh, we can arrange to keep you near shore,” said the theatrical man, with a laugh.

“He may be drowned, even near shore,” put in C. C., with his most gloomy voice; though he was, at the same time, practicing some new facial contortions that were sending the women members of the troupe into spasms of laughter.

“Oh, there you go, Gloomy!” exclaimed Mr. Hadley. “First we know you’ll be saying we’ll all be smashed in a train wreck going to the coast; or, if not, that we’ll be carried off by a tidal wave as soon as we get there.”

“It might happen,” spoke the gloomy comedian, as though both accidents were possible at the same time.

“And it may rain—but not to-day,” put in Miss Shay, with a look at the hot, cloudless sky.

“Then it’s all settled,” went on Mr. Ringold. “It is understood, Joe, that you can have considerable time, if you need it, to locate your father. The dramas I intend to film will extend over a considerable time, and they can be made whenever it is most convenient. After all, I think it is a good thing that we are going to the Southern California coast. The climate there will be just what we want, and the sunlight will be almost constant.”

“I’m sure I’m much obliged to you,” said Joe. “This trip after the Indian films cost us more than we counted on, and we’ll be glad of a chance to make more money. We’re down pretty low; aren’t we, Blake?”

“I’m afraid so. But then, we may get that prize money, and that will help a lot.”

“That’s so,” put in Mr. Hadley. “You had better have those films developed, and send them to the geographical society. I wouldn’t ship them undeveloped, for they might be light-struck. You were lucky the Indians didn’t spoil them.”

The boys decided to do this, and during the next few days the reels of moving pictures were developed, and some positives printed from them. While the lads had been after the Indians Mr. Ringold had sent for a complete, though small, moving picture outfit, and with this some of the pictures were thrown on a screen.

“They’re the finest I’ve ever seen!” declared Mr. Hadley, after inspecting them critically. “That charge of the soldiers can’t be beaten, and as for the Indian dances, they are as plain as if we were right on the ground. You’ll get the prize, I’m sure; especially since you’re the only ones who got any views, as I understand it.”

Mr. Hadley proved a good prophet, for in due time, after the films reached New York, came a letter from the geographical society, enclosing a substantial

check for the two boys.

The films were excellent, it was stated, and just what were needed. One other concern, aside from Mr. Munson's, and the one the latter mentioned, which had gone to Indian land, had succeeded in getting a few views of the Indians in another part of the State, but they were nowhere near as good as those Blake and Joe had secured after such trouble and risk. The attempt to get phonographic records had been a failure, the officers of the society wrote, though another attempt would be made if ever the Indians again broke from their reservations.

"And if they do," spoke Blake, "I'm not going to chase after them."

"Me, either," decided Joe. "I've had enough. Now the sooner we can get to the coast the better I'll like it. Just think, my father must be as anxious to see me as I am to find him; but as near as I can understand it, he doesn't even know that I am alive. Think of that!"

"It is rather hard," said Blake, sympathetically. "But it won't be long now. I heard Mr. Ringold say we would start soon."

There were a few scenes in some of the dramas enacted in Arizona that yet needed to be filmed, and Joe and Blake helped with this work, Macaroni assisting them and Mr. Hadley.

"And after this, nearly all our work will have to do with the sea," said the theatrical man. "I want to depict it in all its phases; showing it calm, and during a storm, the delights of it, as well as the perils of the deep."

Before leaving Flagstaff it was decided to give a few exhibitions of some of the moving pictures, so that the residents there, and a number of the cowboys and Indians who had taken part in the plays, might see how they looked on the screen. A suitable building was obtained, and it was crowded at every performance.

The Indians were at first frightened, thinking it was some new and powerful kind of "medicine" that might have a bad effect on them. With one accord, when the film the boys had taken, showing the charge of the soldiers on the Moquis, was put on, the redmen rushed from the building. And it was some time before they could be induced to return.

"Say, there's my uncle, as plain as anything!" exclaimed Joe, when the excitement had calmed down, and the reel was run over again. "There's Sergeant Duncan, close to Captain Marsh!" and he indicated where the trooper was riding beside the commander of the cavalry.

“That’s right,” agreed Blake, as the pictures flickered over the screen, the figures being almost life size. “And he looks like you, too.”

“I wonder if my father looks like that?” said Joe, softly.

There were busy days ahead of them all now, and there was much work to be done in transporting all the “properties” to the coast, and arranging to move the picture outfit, the cameras and the entire company. The boys had little leisure, but Joe managed to get a letter off to the government lighthouse board, asking for news of his father, Nathaniel Duncan.

In reply he got a communication stating that a Mr. Duncan was stationed as assistant keeper at a light near San Diego, and not far from Point Loma.

“That’s where we want to head for, then,” said Joe, as he talked the matter over with his chum. “I wonder if that will suit Mr. Ringold?”

It did, as the theatrical manager stated, when the subject was broached to him. Accordingly arrangements were made to ship everything there.

The day came to bid farewell to Flagstaff, which had been the stopping place of the theatrical troupe for several months. They had made many friends, and the Indians had become so used to taking their parts in the dramas, and in getting good pay for it, that they were very sorry to see the “palefaces” leave. So, too, were the cowboys, many of whom had become very friendly with our heroes and the theatrical people.

“But we’ve got to go,” said Blake, as he shook hands with his acquaintances.

“Indeed, if we didn’t leave soon,” said Joe, “I’d be tempted to start off by myself. I’ve sent a letter to my dad, telling him all about how strangely I found him, and I’m just aching to see him. I guess he’ll be pretty well surprised to get it.”

“I should imagine so,” agreed Blake.

“One last round-up to say good-bye!” cried one of the cowboys, as the party started away from the quarters they had occupied. “Everybody get in on this. Whoop her up, boys!”

He leaped to his steed, flourished his hat, and began riding around in a circle, firing his big revolver at intervals.

“That’s the ticket!” shouted the others, as they followed his example.

Soon two score of the light-hearted chaps were riding around the little crowd of the boys and their friends, saluting them, and saying farewell in this lively

fashion.

“Whoop her up!”

“Never say die!”

“Come again, and we’ll exterminate a whole band of redskins for you!”

“And have a cattle stampede made to order any day you want!”

These were only a few of the many expressions from the cowboys.

“Say, if they don’t kill themselves, they’ll make us deaf, with all that noise,” predicted C. C.

“This isn’t a funeral,” declared Mr. Hadley. “It’s a jolly occasion, Gloomy Gus!”

“Huh! Jolly? First you know some one will be hurt.”

But no one was, in spite of the direful predictions, and soon the cowboys drew off, with final shots from their revolvers, discharging them in the air. The Indians, too, had their share in the farewell, though they were not so demonstrative as were their companions.

“And now for the coast!” cried Blake, as they reached the train.

“And my dad,” added Joe, and there was a trace of tears in his eyes, which he did not attempt to conceal. Blake knew just how his chum felt, and he found himself wishing that he, too, was going to find some relative. But he knew the only one he had was his aged uncle.

Little of incident occurred on the trip to San Diego, which had been decided on as headquarters until a suitable location, away from any town, could be selected directly on the ocean beach. I say little of moment, but C. C. was continually predicting that something would happen, from a real hold-up to a train wreck.

“And if that doesn’t happen, a bridge will go go down with us,” he said.

But nothing of the kind occurred, and finally the boys and their friends reached the coast, going to the boarding place they had engaged.

“And there’s the old Pacific!” exclaimed Joe, as he and Blake went down to the shore of the bay on which San Diego stands. “It isn’t very rough, however, and Mr. Ringold said he wanted tumbling waves as a background.”

“It gets rough at times, though,” remarked a fisherman. “Of course, if you

want to see big waves you'll have to go beyond this bay. It's pretty well land-locked. Oh, yes, the old Pacific isn't always as peaceful as her name."

CHAPTER VII

AT THE LIGHTHOUSE

The two boys talked for some time with the old fisherman, and then Blake whispered to Joe:

"Why don't you ask him where the lighthouse is where your father is supposed to be, and the best way of getting to it?"

"I will," replied his chum.

"The Rockypoint light?" repeated the fisherman, in response to Joe's inquiry. "Why yes, I know it well. It's only a few miles from here. You can see her flash on a clear night, but you can't make out the house itself, even on a clear day, because she's down behind that spur of coast. From the ocean, though, she's seen easily enough."

"And how can we get there?" asked Blake.

"Well, you can walk right down the beach, though it's a middlin' long tramp; or you can go back to town, and hire a rig."

"We'll walk," decided Joe. "Do you happen to know of a Mr. Duncan there?" He waited anxiously for the answer.

"No, lad, I can't rightly say I do," said the fisherman. "I know the keeper, Harry Stanton, and, now I come to think of it, I did hear the other day that he had a new assistant."

"That's him!" cried Joe, eagerly.

"Who?"

"My father, I hope," was the reply, and in his joy Joe told something of his story.

"Well, you sure have spun a queer yarn," said the old fisherman, "and I wish you all sorts of luck. You'll soon be at the light if you go right down the beach. I'd row you down in my dory, only I've just come in from taking up my nets

and I'm sort of tired."

"Oh, we wouldn't think of asking you," put in Blake. "We can easily walk it."

"Some day I'll take you out fishing," promised the man. "And so you're here to get moving pictures; eh? Well, I don't know much about 'em, but you couldn't come to a nicer place than this spot on the coast. And you only have to go a little way to get right where the real surf comes smashing up on the beach. Of course, as I said, we're so land-locked just here that we don't see much of it, even in a storm. Moving pictures; eh? I'd like to see some."

"I guess you can be in them, if you want to," said Blake. "I heard Mr. Ringold say he had one drama that called for a lot of fishermen."

"Me in moving pictures!" cried the old man. "Ho! Ho! I wonder what my wife'd say to that. I've been in lots of queer situations. I've been knocked overboard by a whale, I've been wrecked, and half drowned, and almost starved, but I've never been in a picture, except I once had a tintype taken—that was when I was married," and he chuckled at the remembrance. "These movin' pictures aren't like tintypes; are they?"

"Not much," laughed Joe, as he and Blake moved off in the direction of the lighthouse, calling a good-bye to their new friend. They had told Mr. Hadley, in starting out that morning, that they might not be back until late, for Joe had a half notion that he would try to find the lighthouse that day.

"I wonder what I shall say to him, when I first see him, Blake?" Joe asked, as they trudged along.

"Why—er—I hardly know," replied his chum. "I never found a lost father, myself."

"And I never did, either. I guess I'll just say: 'Hello, Dad; do you know me?'"

"That sounds all right," said Blake. "He sure will be surprised."

The walk was longer than they had thought, and when noon came they still had some distance to go. As they were hungry they sought out a fisherman's cottage, where, for a small sum, they had a fine meal. Starting out again, they turned an intervening point of land about three o'clock, and then came in view of a lighthouse, located on a pile of rocks, not far from the high-water mark.

"That's the place," said Blake, in a low voice.

"Yes," agreed Joe. "It looks comfortable and homelike, too."

Back of the lighthouse was a small garden, and also a flower bed, and a man

could be seen working there. His back was toward the boys.

“I—I wonder if that’s him—my father?” said Joe, softly. “He seems to be very old,” for they had a glimpse of a long white beard, and the man seemed to be bent with the weight of many years.

“Go up and ask,” said Blake. “I’ll wait here.”

“No, I want you to come with me,” insisted his chum. “You were with me when I first heard the good news, and now I want you along to hear the conclusion of it. Come on, Blake.”

“No, I’d rather not,” and nothing Joe could say would induce his chum to accompany him.

Their talk had been carried on in low voices, and the aged man, working in the garden, had apparently not heard them. He continued to hoe away among the rows.

“Well, here goes!” exclaimed Joe, with a sigh. Now that he felt he was at the end of his quest his sensations were almost as sorrowful as joyful. In fact, he did not know exactly how he did feel.

Walking up toward the old man, he paused, and then coughed slightly to attract his attention. The lighthouse keeper turned, surveyed the boy and in a pleasant voice asked:

“Well?”

“If—if you—are you my father?” asked Joe, in trembling voice, holding out his hands.

“Your father!” cried the man in unmistakable surprise. “What is your name?”

“Joe Duncan.”

“Joe Duncan? Did Duncan have a son?”

“Yes, and I’m the boy!” went on Joe, eagerly, yet a doubt began creeping into his heart. “But are you Mr. Nathaniel Duncan?”

The old man paused a moment, and then said gently:

“No, my boy. I’m Harry Stanton, keeper of Rockypoint light.”

“But my father!” exclaimed Joe. “I understood he was here! Where is he?”

“He was here,” went on Mr. Stanton, as he leaned on his hoe and looked

compassionately at the lad standing before him; “but he went away more than a week ago.”

“Gone away!” echoed Joe. “Did he—did he get my letter?”

“I don’t know whether it was your letter or not,” said the keeper. “One came for him the day after he left. It’s here yet. It was from Flagstaff, Arizona, I believe.”

“That’s my letter!” exclaimed Joe. “And he never got it! Poor Dad, he doesn’t yet know that I’m alive!” and he turned away with tears in his eyes.

CHAPTER VIII

BLAKE LEARNS A SECRET

Blake, looking on from a little distance, saw Joe turn aside from the aged man.

“That’s rather queer,” thought the lad. “If that was his father it isn’t a very cordial welcome.”

As he looked, he saw Joe walking out of the garden.

“Queerer still,” Blake mused. “Even if that isn’t Mr. Duncan, he must be somewhere around, for lighthouse keepers can’t be very far away from their station, as I understand it.”

Joe came walking toward his chum. His face showed his disappointment so unmistakably that Blake called out:

“What’s the matter, Joe?”

“He’s gone—he isn’t here! He never got my letter!”

“Where has he gone?” asked Blake, always practical.

“I—I don’t know. I didn’t ask.”

“Look here, Joe!” exclaimed his chum. “I guess you’re too excited over this. You let me make some inquiries for you. Suppose he has gone? We may be able to trace him. Men in the lighthouse service get transferred from one place to another just as soldiers do, I imagine. Now you sit down here and look at the sad sea waves, as C. C. would say if he were here, and I’ll go tackle that lighthouse keeper. You were too flustered to get any clues, I expect.”

“I guess I was,” admitted Joe. “When I found he wasn’t there I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t feel like asking any questions.”

Blake placed his arm around his chum’s shoulder, patted him on the back, and started toward the aged man, who was still leaning on his hoe, looking in mild surprise at the two lads.

“I’ll find out all about it,” called back Blake.

“Ha! Another boy!” exclaimed Mr. Stanton, as Blake approached. “I didn’t know this was going to be visiting day, or I might have put on my other suit,” and he laughed genially. “Are you another son of Mr. Duncan?” he asked.

“No,” replied Blake. “I’m Joe’s chum. We’re in the moving picture business together. But he says his father has left, and, as he naturally feels badly, I thought I’d make some inquiries for him, so we can locate him. Do you know where Mr. Duncan went?”

“No—I can’t say that I do,” was the slow answer. “And so you are chums; eh?”

“Yes, and we have been for some years.”

“That’s nice. You tell each other all your secrets, I suppose?”

“Well, most of ’em.”

“Never hold anything back?”

“Why, what do you mean?” asked Blake, for there seemed to be a strange meaning in the old man’s voice.

“I mean, lad,” and the lighthouse keeper’s tones sank to a whisper; “I mean, if I tell you something, can you keep it from him?”

“Why—yes—I suppose so,” spoke Blake, wonderingly. “But what is the matter? Isn’t his father here?”

“No, he’s gone, just as I told him. But look here—he seems a nice sort of lad, and I didn’t want to hurt his feelings. I’d rather tell you, as long as you’re his chum, and if you can keep a secret.”

He looked to where Joe was sitting on the rocks, watching the waves roll lazily up the beach and break. Joe was far enough off so that the low-voiced conversation could not reach him.

“I can keep a secret if I have to,” replied Blake. “But what is it all about? Is

Mr. Duncan—is he—dead?”

The old man hesitated, and, for a moment, Blake thought that his guess was correct. Then the aged man said slowly:

“No, my boy, he isn’t dead; but maybe, for the sake of his son, he had better be. At any rate, it’s better, all around, that he’s away from here.”

“Why?” asked Blake quickly. “Tell me what you mean!”

“That I will, lad, and maybe you can figure a way out of the puzzle. I’m an old man, and not as smart as I was, so my brain doesn’t work quickly. Maybe you can find a way out. Come inside where we can talk so he won’t hear us,” and he nodded toward the quiet figure of Joe on the beach.

Blake wondered more than ever what the disclosure might be. He followed the aged man into the living quarters of the house attached to the light tower.

“Sit ye there, lad,” went on Mr. Stanton, “and I’ll tell you all about it. Maybe you can find a way out.”

He paused, as if to gather his thoughts, and then resumed:

“You see I’m pretty old, and I have to have an assistant at this light. I expect soon I’ll have to give up altogether. But I’m going to hang on as long as I can. I’ve had three assistants in the last year, and one of ’em, as you know now, was Nathaniel Duncan, Joe’s father. Before him I had a likely young fellow named—ah, well, I’ve forgotten, and the name doesn’t matter much anyhow. But when he left the board sent me this Duncan, and I must say I liked him right well.”

“What sort of a man was he?” asked Blake.

“A nice sort of man. He was about middle aged, tall, well built, and strong as a horse. He looked as if he had had trouble, though, and gradually he told me his story. His wife had died when his boy and girl were young——”

“Girl! Was there a girl?” cried Blake. “Has Joe a sister, too?”

“He had—whether he has yet, I don’t know,” went on Mr. Stanton. “I’ll tell you all I know.

“As I said, Nate Duncan seemed to have had lots of sorrow, and he told me how, after his wife died, he had placed the boy and girl in charge of some people, and gone off to the California mines to make some money. When he come back, rich, the children had disappeared, and so had the people he left ’em with. He never could locate ’em, though he tried hard, and so did his half-

brother, Bill. But Bill was different from Nate, so I understand. Bill was a reckless sort of chap, while Joe's father was quite steady."

"That's right," spoke Blake, and then he related how Joe had come to get a trace of his father.

"Well," resumed Mr. Stanton, "as I said, Duncan came here, and he and I got along well together. Then there came trouble."

"Trouble? What kind?" asked Joe.

"Trouble with wreckers, lad. The meanest and most wicked kind of trouble there can be on a seacoast. A band of bad men got together and by means of false lights lured small vessels out of their course so they went on the rocks. Then they got what they could when the cargo was washed ashore."

"But what has that got to do with Joe's father?" asked Blake.

"Too much, I'm afraid, lad. It was said that the light here was allowed to go out some nights, so the false light would be more effective."

"Well?"

"Well, Nate Duncan had charge of the light at night after I went off duty. And it was always when I was off duty that the wrecks occurred."

"Do you mean to accuse Joe's father of being in with the wreckers?"

"No, lad. I don't accuse anybody; I'm too old a man to do anything like that. But ugly stories began to be circulated. Government inspectors began to call more often than they used to, inspecting my light—my light, that I've tended night onto twenty-five years now. I began to hear rumors that my assistant wasn't altogether straight. He was said to be seen consorting with the wreckers, though it was hard to get proof that the men were wreckers, for they pretended to be fishermen.

"Then come a day when, with my own eyes, I saw Nate Duncan walking along the beach with one of the men who was said to be at the head of the wrecking gang. I could see that they were quarreling, and then Nate knocked the man down. He didn't get up right away, for, as I said, Nate was strong. I knew something would come of that, and I wasn't much surprised when that day Nate disappeared."

"Disappeared?" cried Blake.

"Went off completely, and left me alone at the light. I tended it all night, same as I had done before, many a time, and the next day I reported matters, and I

had a new assistant—the same one I have now.”

“But that doesn’t prove anything,” said Blake. “Just because Joe’s father, and a man suspected of being a wrecker, had a quarrel, doesn’t say that Mr. Duncan was a wrecker, too.”

“There’s more to it,” went on the old man. “The day after Nate Duncan disappeared detectives came here looking for him.”

Blake started. There was more to the story than he had suspected. He looked at Mr. Stanton, and glanced out of the window to where Joe still sat.

“So that’s why I say maybe it would be better for Joe if his father was dead,” went on Mr. Stanton. “Disgrace is a terrible thing, and I couldn’t bear to tell Joe, when he asked me about his father.”

“But where did he go?” asked Blake. “Didn’t he leave any trace at all?”

“Not a trace, lad—folks most generally doesn’t when the detectives are after ’em. Hold on, though, I won’t say Nate was guilty on my own hook. I’m only telling you what happened. I’d hate to believe he was a wrecker, misusing this light to draw vessels on the dangerous rocks; but it looks black, it looks black.”

“Did the detectives actually accuse Mr. Duncan?” asked Blake.

“Well, they as much as did. They said some of the wreckers had been arrested, and had incriminated the assistant light-keeper. But Duncan was smart enough—provided he was guilty—to skip out. As I told Joe, his father left just before the letter from Flagstaff came, so he doesn’t know his son is alive. Poor man, I’m sorry for him. He told me how he had searched all over for his children, and at last, becoming tired and discouraged, he took this job just to have something to do, for he’s well enough off not to have to work.”

“And there’s no way of telling where he went?” questioned Blake.

“Nary a one that I know of, lad. As I said, maybe he’s better off lost.”

“Not for Joe.”

“Well, maybe not; but for himself. There are heavy penalties for wrecking, and it’s well he wasn’t caught, though, as I say, I don’t accuse him. Only it looks black, it looks black. If he was innocent why didn’t he stay and fight it out? Yes, lad, it looks black.”

“I’m afraid so,” sighed Blake. “How can I ever tell Joe the news?”

“You mustn’t!” exclaimed the old man. “That’s just it. You must not tell him. I’d hate to destroy his faith in his father. It would be cruel. That’s why I asked if you could keep a secret. You won’t tell him; will you?”

“No,” said Blake, in a low voice; “I won’t tell him.”

CHAPTER IX

AT PRACTICE

There was silence between man and boy for a space, and then Blake, understanding how hard it would be to keep the news from Joe, said:

“I’ll have to tell him something, Mr. Stanton. Joe will want to know why his father went away, and where. Isn’t there any way in which we may get a clue to the direction he took?”

“Wait a minute until I think, lad,” said the old man. “It may be that we can find a clue, after all. Nate Duncan left some papers behind. I haven’t looked at ’em, not wishing to make trouble, but there may be a clue there. I’ll get ’em.”

“And I’ll call Joe in to go over them with me,” said Blake. “He’ll want to see them.”

“But, mind you, not a word about what I’ve told you.”

“No, I’ll keep quiet,” promised Blake. “I’ll call him in, while you get the papers.”

Going to the door of the little cottage, Blake called to his chum.

“What is it?” asked Joe, eagerly. “Was there some mistake? Is my father somewhere around here, after all?”

“Well, we hope to find him,” said Blake, with an assurance he did not feel. “Look here, Joe, your father went away rather suddenly, it seems, but you mustn’t think anything about that. He’s been traveling all over, you know, looking for you and your sister——”

“Sister?” cried Joe.

“Yes, you had a sister, though I can’t get much information about her. Neither could your uncle tell you, as you remember.”

“That’s right. Oh, if I could only find dad and her!” and Joe sighed. “But maybe she isn’t alive.”

“It’s this way,” went on Blake, and he told as much of the lighthouse keeper’s story as was wise, keeping from Joe all information about the wreckers. “Now, your father may have heard of some new clue about you,” continued Joe’s chum, “and he may have gone to hunt that up,” which was true enough, for with the warning that he was likely to be arrested as a criminal, there may have come to Mr. Duncan some information about his missing children.

“But in that case,” asked Joe, “why didn’t he leave some word as to where he was going?”

“He may have been in too much of a hurry,” suggested Blake, realizing that he was going to have considerable difficulty in keeping Joe from guessing the truth.

“Well, perhaps that’s so,” agreed the lad. “But maybe Mr. Stanton has some clues.”

The lighthouse keeper came downstairs at this moment with a bundle of papers in his hand.

“Here is all I found,” he said. “It isn’t much, but among the things he left behind is the letter you wrote,” and he extended to Joe the missive the lad had penned in such hope at Flagstaff.

“Poor Dad,” murmured Joe. “I wonder if he will ever get this?”

Together he and Blake looked over the documents. As the keeper had said, there was not much. Some memoranda, evidently made as different clues came to him; paid bills, some business letters, a few notes, and that was all.

“What’s this?” exclaimed Blake, as he read one letter. “It seems to be from some shipping agent in San Francisco, saying he can place—why, Joe, it’s to your father, and it says he can have a place as mate any time he wants it. Was he a sailor?” he asked, eagerly, turning to the keeper.

“So I understood.”

“Then this is the very thing we’re looking for!” cried Blake. “Look, it is dated only a short time before he left. I see now,” and he gave the lighthouse keeper a peculiar look, when Joe was not glancing in his direction. “Mr. Duncan got word that he could ship as a mate, and he left in a hurry.”

“Maybe so,” assented Mr. Stanton.

“Perhaps he had some new clue about you, Joe, or possibly about your sister,” suggested Blake, hoping his chum would come to take this view.

“Maybe,” assented Joe. “But it’s queer he didn’t leave some word, or tell someone he was going.”

“He may not have had time,” went on Blake. “Vessels have to sail in a hurry, lots of times, and he may have had to act quickly.”

“It’s possible,” admitted the keeper.

“Then I’ll tell you what we’ll do,” continued Blake. “We’ll go to San Francisco the first chance we get, and see this shipping agent. He may be able to put us on the right track.”

“I guess it’s the only thing to do,” agreed Joe, in despondent tones. “Poor Dad! I nearly found him, and then I lost him again.”

They looked over the other papers. None offered as promising a clue as did the agent’s letter, and this Joe took with him, also his own to his father.

“Maybe I’ll get a chance to deliver it to him myself,” he said, with a smile that had little of hope in it.

There was nothing more to be learned at the lighthouse. The boys left, after thanking the keeper, and promising to come and see him again. As they went out Mr. Stanton gave Blake a little sign, warning him not to disclose the secret.

“Well, failure number one,” said Joe, as they took a carriage back to San Diego, it being rather late.

“Yes, but we’ll win out yet!” declared Blake, with a confidence he did not feel. “We’ll find your father and your sister, too.”

“I’ll have more relations than you, Blake, if I keep on, and can find them,” said Joe, after a bit.

“That’s right. Well, I wish you luck,” and Blake wondered if Joe would be glad he had found his father, after all. “Wrecking is a black business,” mused the lad. “But, like Mr. Stanton, I’m not going to think Joe’s father guilty until I have to. I wonder, though, if the story is known about San Diego? If it is I’ll have trouble keeping it from Joe.”

But Joe’s chum found he had little to fear on this score, for, on getting back to the quarters of the theatrical troupe, the boys were told that the next day they would all take up their residence in a small seacoast settlement, out on the main ocean beach, away from the land-locked bay and where bigger waves

could be pictured.

“And there we’ll enact the first of the sea dramas,” said Mr. Ringold.

“And all get drowned,” murmured C. C., in his gloomiest tone.

“I’ll wash your face with snow—the first time it snows in this summer land—if you don’t be more cheerful,” threatened Miss Shay.

“Well, something will happen, I’m sure,” declared C. C. “When do we move?”

“To-morrow,” said Mr. Ringold, while Blake and Joe told Mr. Hadley of their poor success in finding Mr. Duncan. The photographer, as did the other members of the company, sympathized with the lad. Mr. Ringold said that as soon as they got settled the boys could go to San Francisco to look up the shipping agent.

The transfer to the small seacoast settlement was a matter of some work, but in a week all was arranged, and the members of the company were settled in a large, comfortable house, close to the beach.

“And now for some rehearsals,” said Mr. Ringold, one morning. “One of the scenes calls for a shipwrecked man coming ashore in a small boat. Now, C. C., I guess you’ll have to be the man this time, as I need the others for shore parts. Get the cameras ready.”

“I—I’m to be shipwrecked; am I?” inquired Mr. Piper. “Do I have to fall overboard?”

“Not unless you want to,” said Mr. Ringold, consulting the manuscript of the play.

“Then I’m not going to, for I’ll catch my death of cold if I do.”

“Hum! I’m glad he didn’t have any other objections,” murmured the theatrical man. “This is going to be easy.”

The preparations were made, it being customary to rehearse the scenes and acts before “filming” them to secure good results. A boat was launched, after some trouble on account of the surf, and with the aid of some fishermen, “C. C. was finally sent to sea,” which was a joke, as Blake remarked.

“And now come in with the waves,” ordered Mr. Ringold, who was directing the drama. “Hang over the edge of the boat, C. C., and look as if you hadn’t had any food or water for a week.”

“They say an actor never eats, anyhow,” murmured Mr. Hadley, who, with the

boys, was ready with the cameras; “so I guess C. C. won’t have to pretend much.”

“Come on!” cried Mr. Ringold. “Hang more over the side of the boat.”

C. C. Piper obeyed orders—too literally, in fact. He leaned so far over that, a moment later, when there came a particularly large wave, the craft slewed sideways, got into the trough, and an instant later capsized.

“He’s overboard!” yelled Miss Lee.

“Save him!” cried Miss Shay.

“Stop the cameras,” came from Mr. Ringold. “We don’t want that in the picture.”

“Man overboard!” bawled the fishermen, who were interestedly watching the scene. “Launch the motor boat!”

CHAPTER X

TO SAN FRANCISCO

For a moment there was excitement, and then the trained men of the sea got into action. Nearby there were several fishing boats, operated by gasoline motors. There were planks at hand, and rollers on which the craft could be launched in the surf, being eased along the slope by releasing a cable rigged to a post some distance away.

It did not take long for the fishermen to launch one of these motor boats, and while C. C. Piper was struggling in the surf, endeavoring as best he could to climb into his overturned boat, they put out to rescue him.

“Do you want that in the picture?” asked Joe, who was at one of the cameras.

“No indeed!” cried Mr. Ringold. “It won’t fit in at all! He must drift ashore. We’ll have to do all this over again.”

“I can see Gloomy doing it,” murmured Blake.

At that moment there came a hail from the comedian.

“Hello!” he cried. “Are you going to—gulp—let me—glub—sink out here? Can’t some of you——” and the rest was lost amid a series of gurgles as the

salty water got in C. C.'s mouth.

“Hold on just a little longer,” called one of the fishermen, as he directed the craft toward the struggling actor. “We’ll have you out presently.”

“You’d—better—hurry—up!” panted the comedian, who might well be excused at this moment from taking a gloomy view of life.

He managed to cling to one side of the dory until the rescuing motor craft reached him. Then he was soon hauled aboard, dripping wet, all but exhausted, and unable to utter a sound save sighs.

“Well, it was too bad,” said Mr. Ringold, when C. C. was once more ashore. “I guess we’ll have to get you a little larger boat.”

“Get me one?” asked the actor, with the accent on the personal pronoun.

“Certainly. We’ll have to do this scene over again. I guess we could use one of the fishing boats, though they’re a little large. But we can move the cameras back. Take one of those, C. C.”

“I guess not.”

“What’s that?”

“I said I guess not. No more for mine!”

“Do you mean to say you won’t go on with this act? Are you going to balk as you did in the Indian scene?”

“Say,” began C. C., earnestly, as, dripping wet as he was, he strode up to the theatrical man, “I can’t swim, and I don’t like the water. I told you that the time you took me up in the country, where we found these boys,” and he motioned to Blake and Joe, who were looking interestedly on, ready to work the cameras as soon as required.

“And yet,” went on Mr. Piper, “you insisted that I jump overboard then and rescue Miss Shay. Now you want me to drift in as a shipwrecked sailor. It’s too much, I tell you. There is entirely too much water and tank drama in this business. I know I’ll get my death of cold, if I don’t drown.”

“Oh, can’t you look on the bright side?” asked Miss Shay, who was to come into the drama later. “Why, it’s so warm I should think you’d like to get into the surf.”

“Not for mine!” exclaimed C. C., firmly, and it took some persuasion on the part of the theatrical manager, accompanied by a promise of an increase of

salary every time he had to go into the water, to induce C. C. to try the shipwreck scene over again.

This time a larger boat was used, and, though it came near to capsizing, it did not quite go over, though considerable water was shipped. C. C. managed to stay aboard, and the cameras, rapidly clicking, registered each movement of the actor and those who later took part in the drama.

Then some shore scenes were photographed, the supposed shipwrecked persons building a fire, pretending to catch fish from the ocean, and cooking them.

All this the moving picture boys, or Mr. Hadley, faithfully registered on the films, to be later thrown on the screen for the delight of the public.

“I wonder if the folks who look at moving pictures realize how they are made?” said Joe, as they stopped work for the day.

“I don’t believe so,” answered Blake. “There are tricks in all trades, it’s said; but I guess the moving picture business is as full of them as any.”

The next two days were busy ones, as a number of elaborate acts had to be filmed, and the boys were kept on the jump from morning to night. Mr. Hadley, also, had all he could do with the camera. There were fishing views to get, scenes on the beach, where a number of children were induced to play at games in the sand, building castles and tunnels, boating incidents and the like.

C. C. did not fall overboard again, though he often was sent out to do some funny stunt that was to be used in the play.

“I wonder when we can go to San Francisco?” queried Joe one afternoon, following a particularly hard day. “I want to see that shipping agent, and ask him if he can give me any clue to my father.”

“Maybe we’d better speak to Mr. Ringold,” suggested Blake, and they did, with the result that the theatrical man informed them that the end of the week would be free, as he had to wait for some costumes to arrive before he could produce any more dramas.

“I want to get a good wreck scene,” he said, “and that is going to be rather hard.”

“Will it be a real wreck scene?” asked Joe.

“Yes, as real as we can make it. I’m negotiating now for an old schooner that I can scuttle out at sea. All the company will be aboard, and they’ll drift about

for a long time without food and water.”

“Am I supposed to be in on that?” asked C. C., suspiciously.

“Of course,” was the theatrical man’s answer. “This is a circus company returning from abroad that is wrecked, and you are the clown. Be as funny as you can.”

“Wrecked?” queried C. C.

“That’s it.”

“And I’m to be funny?”

“Certainly.”

“Without food and water for days, and I’m expected to be funny!” exclaimed the comedian, with a groan. “Oh, why did I ever get into this business? I’ll not do it!”

“Oh you’re only supposed to be starving and thirsty,” explained Mr. Ringold. “If you want, you can take some sandwiches and cold coffee with you, and have lunch—but don’t do it when the cameras are working. It wouldn’t look well in the moving pictures to have a note on the screen saying that the shipwrecked persons were starving, and then show you chewing away; would it, now?”

“No, I suppose not,” admitted C. C., with a sigh. “Oh, but this is a miserable business, though! I’m sure I’ll be drowned before we get through with it!”

“Oh, cheer up!” called Miss Lee, but there seemed to be no need for the advice, for a moment later C. C. broke forth into a comic song.

While the preparations for producing the wreck scene were under way, there was small need for the services of the boys, and they made ready to go to San Francisco.

“Even if he has gone away somewhere,” suggested Blake, “he may have left some address where you can reach him.”

“Do you think he’ll be gone?” asked Joe.

“Well, if he left the lighthouse in a hurry, intending to call on a shipping agent, naturally he wouldn’t stay in port long,” said Blake. “Besides——” He stopped suddenly, being on the verge of saying something that would give Joe a hint of the truth.

“What is it?” asked his chum, quickly. “What were you going to say, Blake?”

“Nothing.”

“Yes, you were, I’m sure of it. Blake, is there anything you’re holding back from me?”

Joe looked earnestly at his chum.

“I—er—” began Blake—when there came a knock on the door.

“What is it?” called Blake, glad of the interruption.

“Mr. Ringold wants you to get ready to take some scenes to-night,” said the voice of Macaroni.

“Scenes at night?” inquired Joe, opening the door, and forgetting the question he had put to his chum.

“Yes,” went on their young helper. “Flashlight scenes. He wants you at once.”

The boys reported to their superiors, and learned that a smuggling scene, to fit in one of the sea dramas, was to be attempted. By means of powerful flash and electric lights, the current coming over cables from San Diego, it was planned to make views at night.

As this was an unexpected turn to affairs, they had to postpone their trip to San Francisco for a few days. The night pictures came out well, however, and the first of the following week saw Joe and Blake start on their way to the city of the Golden Gate.

CHAPTER XI

A STRANGE CHARGE

“Are you going to take a camera with you, boys?” asked Mr. Ringold, as Joe and Blake were saying good-bye to their friend, preparatory to making a brief stay in San Francisco.

“A camera? No. Why?” inquired Blake.

“Well, I happen to need some San Francisco street scenes for one of the dramas,” went on the theatrical man; “and it occurred to me that you could get them when you weren’t busy.”

“Of course we could,” answered Joe. “We can take the automatic, and set it up wherever you say, and go looking for that shipping agent. When we come back we’ll have all the pictures we need.”

“Good!” exclaimed Mr. Ringold. “Try that, if you don’t mind. Get some scenes down in the financial district, and others in the residential section. Then, as long as you have to go to the shipping offices, get some there.”

The boys promised they would, and added the small but compact automatic camera to their luggage as they started off.

This camera worked by compressed air. There was a small motor inside, operated by a cylinder of air that could be filled by an ordinary bicycle pump. Otherwise it was just like the other moving picture cameras.

There was the upper box, in which was wound the unexposed reel of film. From this it went over a roller, and the cog wheel, which engaged in the perforations, thence down by means of the “gate,” behind the lens and shutter. There two claws reached up and grasped the film as the motor operated, pulling down three-quarters of an inch each time, to be exposed as the shutter was automatically opened in front of the lens.

Each one of the thousands of moving pictures, as I have explained in previous books, is three-quarters of an inch deep, though, of course, on the screen it is enormously enlarged.

After the film has been exposed, three-quarters of an inch at a time, it goes below into another light-tight box of the camera, whence it is removed to be developed and printed. The movement of the film, the operation of the claws and the opening and closing of the shutter, making it possible to take sixteen pictures a second, was, in this camera, all controlled by the air motor.

Joe and Blake found much to amuse them in San Francisco, which they had never before visited. They were a bit “green,” but after their experiences in New York they had no trouble in finding their way around.

“We’d better go to some hotel, or boarding house,” suggested Joe, after their arrival. “Pick out one where we can leave the camera working while we’re gone.”

They did this, being fortunate enough to secure rooms in a good, though not expensive, hotel near the financial district. One of their windows looked directly out on a busy scene.

“That’ll be just the place, and the sort of scene Mr. Ringold wants,” declared Blake. “Let’s set the camera there on the sill and see what it gets. The light is

good to-day.”

It was, the sun shining brightly, and being directly back of the camera, which would insure the proper illumination.

They adjusted the machine, and set the mechanism to go off about an hour after they had left the room. Then they went to find the shipping agent, to see if they could get any news of Joe’s father.

But, to their disappointment, he was out, and none of the clerks could tell them what they wanted to know. They were directed to return the next day.

“More disappointment!” exclaimed Joe. “It does seem as if I was up against it, Blake.”

“Oh, don’t worry. To-morrow will do just as well as to-day. And you don’t want to get in C. C.’s habit, you know.”

“No, that’s right. Well, what shall we do?”

“Let’s look around a bit, and then go see how the camera is working.”

They found so much to interest them in the streets of San Francisco that they did not go back to the hotel as soon as they had intended. When they did reach the street on which it stood they saw a crowd gathered.

“Look at that!” cried Blake.

“Yes! Maybe it’s a fire!” exclaimed Joe. “Our camera——”

“There’s no fire, or else we’d see some smoke,” answered his chum. “But we’ll see what it is. There’s been some sort of an accident, that’s sure.”

They broke into a run, pushing their way through the throng about the front doors of the hotel. As they entered the lobby, they were surprised to see the clerk point his finger at them, and exclaim:

“There are the two lads now!”

Everyone turned to look at Joe and Blake, and a man, dressed in some sort of uniform, approached them.

“Are you the lads that have rooms sixty-six and sixty-seven?” he asked, sharply.

“Yes,” replied Blake.

“Why, has anything happened there?” asked Joe.

“Well, yes, there has, and we thought perhaps you could explain.”

“Have we been robbed?” burst out Blake.

“Robbed? No,” answered the clerk. “But——”

“Perhaps I had better explain,” put in the uniformed man. “I think I shall have to ask you boys to come with me,” he went on.

“Come where?” Joe wanted to know.

“To police headquarters.”

“What for?” burst out Blake. “We haven’t done anything! We only came here to——”

“Be careful,” warned the man in uniform. “Whatever you say may be used against you.”

“Why—why?” stammered Joe. “What’s it all about?”

“An infernal machine!” exclaimed the hotel clerk. “How dare you poke one out of the window, right toward one of our largest banks, and go out, leaving the mechanism clicking? How dare you?”

Joe and Blake staggered back, half amused and half alarmed at the strange charge.

CHAPTER XII

ON A LONG VOYAGE

“This is a serious charge,” went on the man in uniform, who was evidently from the police department. “We have had some dynamiting outrages here, and we don’t want any more.”

“Dynamite!” exclaimed the hotel clerk; “do you think it could be that, officer?”

“That’s what it seems like to me,” said the other. “I have investigated a number of infernal machines, and they all make the same sort of sound before they go off.”

“Go off!” cried the clerk, while Joe and Blake were vainly endeavoring to get

in a word that would explain matters. “If it’s dynamite, and goes off here, it will blow up the hotel. Get it away! Porter, go up and get that infernal machine, and dump it in a pail of water.”

“Scuse me!” exclaimed the colored porter, as he made a break for the door. “I—I guess as how it’s time fo’ me to sweep off de sidewalk. It hain’t been swept dish yeah day, as yit. I’s gwine outside.”

“But we’ve got to get rid of that infernal machine!” insisted the clerk. “It’s been clicking away now for some time, and there’s no telling when it may go off. Get it, somebody—throw it out of the window.”

“No! Don’t do that!” cried the officer. “That will only make it go off the sooner. I’ll get some one from the bureau of combustibles and——”

“Say, you’re giving yourselves a needless lot of alarm!” interrupted Blake. “That’s no infernal machine!”

“No more than that ink bottle is!” added Joe, pointing to one on the clerk’s desk.

“But it clicks,” insisted the clerk. “It sounds just like a clock ticking inside that box.”

“And it’s pointing right at the bank,” went on the officer. “That bank was once partly wrecked because it was built by non-union labor, and we don’t want it to happen again.”

“There’s no danger—not the slightest,” cried Blake, while the crowd in the hotel lobby pressed around him. “That’s only an automatic moving picture camera, that we set this morning, and pointed out of the window to take street scenes. It works by compressed air, and the clicking you hear is the motor. Come, I’ll show you,” and he started toward his room, followed by Joe.

“Is—is that right?” asked the hotel clerk, doubtfully.

“Are you sure it isn’t dynamite?” inquired the officer.

“Well, if we’re not afraid to take a chance in going in the same room with what you call an infernal machine, you ought not to be,” said Joe, with a smile.

This was logic that could not be refuted, and they followed the boys to the room. There, just where they had left it, was the camera, the motor clicking away industriously. It worked intermittently, running for five minutes, and then ceasing for half an hour, so as not to use up the reel of film too quickly.

Also, it made a diversity of street scenes, an automatic arrangement swinging the lens slightly after each series of views, so as to get the new ones at a different angle.

“Now we’ll show you,” said Blake, as, having noted that all the film was run out, and was in the light-tight exposed box, he opened the camera and showed the harmless mechanism. Several of the hotel employees crowded into the room, once they learned there was no danger.

The boys explained the working of the apparatus, and this seemed to satisfy the officer.

“But we were surely suspicious of you at first,” he said, with a smile.

“Yes,” said the clerk. “A chambermaid called my attention to the clicking sound when she was making up the room. I investigated, and when I heard it, and saw the queer box, and remembered that we had had dynamiting here, I sent for the police.”

“We’re sorry to have given you a scare,” said Blake, and then the incident was over, and the crowd in the street dispersed on learning there was to be no sensation.

“Say, I think there’s some sort of hoodoo about us,” remarked Joe, as he and Blake sat in their room.

“Why, you’re not going to come any of that gloomy C. C. business on me; are you?” asked Blake.

“Not at all,” went on his chum. “But what I mean by a hoodoo is that something always seems to happen when we start out anywhere. We’ve been on the jump, you might say, ever since we lost our places on the farms and got into this moving picture business.”

“That’s so. And the latest is being taken for dynamiters.”

“Yes. But if things are going to keep on happening to us I wish they’d take a turn and help me find my father,” went on Joe. “You don’t know how it feels, Blake, to know you’ve got a parent somewhere and not be able to locate him. It’s—why, it’s almost as bad as if—as if he were dead,” and Joe spoke the words with an obvious effort.

“That’s right,” agreed Blake, and then there came to him the memory of what the lighthouse keeper had said about Mr. Duncan being implicated in the wrecking. If this was true, it might be better for Joe not to find his father.

“But he may not be guilty,” thought Blake, and he mused on this possibility, while Joe looked curiously at his chum.

“Say, Blake,” suddenly asked Joe. “What’s the matter?”

“Matter? Why, what do you mean?” asked Blake, with a start.

“Oh, I don’t know, but something seems to be the matter with you. You’ve acted strangely of late, ever since—yes, ever since we were at the lighthouse. Is anything troubling you?”

“No—no—not at all; that is, not exactly.”

“You don’t speak as if you meant it.”

“But I do, Joe. There’s nothing the matter with me—really there isn’t.”

“Well, I’m glad of it. If there is, and you need help, don’t forget to come to me. Remember we’re pards, and chums, not only in the moving picture business, but in everything else, Blake. Anything I’ve got is yours for the asking.”

“That’s good of you, Joe, and if you can help me I’ll let you know. I didn’t realize that I was acting any way strange. I must brighten up a bit. I guess we’ve both been working too hard. We need some amusement. Let’s go to a moving picture show to-night, and see how they run things here, and what sort of films they have. We may even see one of our own.”

“All right. I’ll go you. We can’t see that shipping agent until to-morrow. A moving picture show for ours to-night, then. Though, being in the business, as we are, it’s rather like a fireman going around to the engine-house on his day off, and staying there—a queer sort of a day’s vacation.”

But, nevertheless, they thoroughly enjoyed the moving picture play, interspersed, as it was, with vaudeville acts. Among the films were several that Mr. Ringold’s company had posed for, and several that the boys themselves had taken. The reels were good ones, too, the pictures standing out clear and bright as evidence of good work on the part of the boys and Mr. Hadley.

“Had enough?” asked Joe, after about an hour spent in the theatre.

“Yes, let’s go out and take a walk.”

“Feel any brighter?” went on Joe.

“Yes, I think I do,” and Blake linked his arm in that of Joe, wondering the while, as they tramped on, how he should ever break the news to his chum, in

case Joe himself did not find it out. “The only hope is that he isn’t guilty,” mused Blake, “and yet running away just before the accusation was made public looks bad, just as Mr. Stanton said. However, I’m not going to think about it.” As long as it had gone thus far without any outsider giving away the secret to Joe, his chum began to feel that there was little danger.

“Well, you haven’t any more infernal machines; have you, boys?” the hotel clerk asked them when they came in to get their keys. “Because, if you have, just keep quiet about ’em. I don’t want to be awakened in the middle of the night with some one from the bureau of combustibles coming down here,” and he laughed.

“No, we’re all out of dynamite,” responded Blake, in the same spirit.

He and Joe were early at the office of the sailing master, who made a specialty of fitting out vessels with crews. With a rather trembling voice Joe asked for information about Mr. Duncan.

“Duncan—Duncan,” mused the agent, as he looked over his books. “Seems to me I remember the name. Was he the Duncan from somewhere down the coast?”

“The Rockypoint light,” supplied Joe.

“Oh, yes, now I know. But why are you asking?” and the agent turned a rather suspicious look on Joe. “Is there anything wrong—is Mr. Duncan wanted for anything? I always try to protect my clients, you know, and I must find out why you are asking. Has he committed any crime, or is he wanted by anyone?”

Blake started at the coincidence of the words.

“Yes,” answered Joe; “he is wanted by me—I’m his son, and I’d like very much to find him. We found some of his letters, and there was one from you about a berth you might have vacant.”

“That’s right, my boy, and I’m glad to learn that is why you want Nate Duncan, for he and I are friends in a way.”

“But has he shipped?” asked Joe, eagerly.

“He has,” answered the agent. “He signed for a trip to China, and it will be a good while before he gets back here, I’m afraid. It’s a long voyage.”

“To China!” cried Joe. “Oh, if he had only received my letter he would be here now with me. Poor Dad!”

CHAPTER XIII

A MIMIC FIRE

“Sorry I can’t do any more for you,” went on the agent, after a pause, during which he gazed sympathetically at Joe. “I can give you the name of the vessel your father is on, and you can write to Hong Kong, but it will be some time before she arrives. She’s a sailing ship, you know, one of the few left in the trade.”

“I didn’t know my father was a regular sailor,” said Joe.

“You didn’t know he was a sailor? Say, don’t you know your father’s business?”

“It’s been a good many years since I’ve seen him,” spoke Joe. “In fact, I can’t remember him,” and he told something of how he came to be on the strange quest.

“Well, this is certainly odd,” remarked the agent. “I’ve known Nate some years, more or less, and I’ve often heard him speak of a son he had lost track of. Of late he had given up hope.”

“And just when I was on the verge of finding him,” added Joe.

“His daughter, too,” continued the agent. “He said he felt sure he’d never locate her, though he’d spent lots of money in hunting. And he felt pretty bad, too, over the thought that he might never see his children again.”

“And have I really a sister?” asked Joe, eagerly.

“I can’t rightly say,” spoke the shipping master. “You had one, but whether she’s alive now or not no one seems to know. There’s one satisfaction, though, you can find your father in time, and as soon as he hears from you, when his ship reaches Hong Kong, he won’t lose any time taking the fastest steamer back. I know Nate Duncan well enough for that.”

“Will he, though?” thought Blake. “Will he come back when he knows of the wrecking charge that may be made against him? Even the prospect of seeing Joe may not overbalance that. Yet, I suppose he could send for Joe. They couldn’t make any charge against him over in China. But it’s a bad business.”

Joe talked a little longer with the agent, who gave him the name of the ship on

which Mr. Duncan had sailed, and also directions how to address the letter.

“Well, there’s no use staying in ’Frisco much longer,” said Joe, as they finished their business. “We’ll get what other moving pictures of street scenes we want, and as I can’t find Dad here, we’ll leave. We’ll get back to San Diego, and out to the beach colony to film some more dramas.”

A return trip to their hotel, a visit to various localities for films, then to pack their belongings—and the automatic camera did not take them long—and they were soon journeying down the coast again. They were welcomed warmly by the members of the theatrical colony.

As I have said, for the purpose of being unhampered in their work of taking films, Mr. Ringold had moved his company from San Diego proper to a small fishing settlement, directly on the beach. This place was called Chester, after the man who owned the fishery there. He had a fleet, consisting of several motor boats, in which the fishermen went out twice each day to pull up the nets that were fast to long poles, sunk into the sand of the ocean bed in water about forty feet deep.

The fish were brought to the main building, and packed in ice for transportation. Numbers of local dealers called each day with wagons to get a load to peddle about. There were only a few houses in the place, and a store or two.

Once some millionaire had built an elaborate cottage on the beach, but gave it up for some whim. It was in this cottage, which in size was almost a mansion, that the moving picture boys and their friends had their abode. A boarding mistress was installed, and thus the actors and actresses lived right at the scene of their work, with almost as much comfort as they would have had in a hotel. The place was not far from San Diego, and it had the advantage of a heavy surf on the beach, the big waves making just the background Mr. Ringold wanted. Of course, not all the scenes were on the water-front, some taking place in front of, or within, some of the cottages, which were hired for the short time needed. The fishermen could not seem to understand why a man should pay them good money for the use of their humble dwellings for a short time.

“It just seems plumb foolishness,” declared one grizzled salt. “I don’t see why folks want to make so many pictures of men and women walkin’ in and out of my cottage and sayin’ such outlandish things like: ‘Gal, you shall give me them papers!’ or, ‘Meet me on yonder cliff at midnight!’ I give up!”

“It does seem out of reason, Pete,” agreed another. “But as long as they pay me for it, and don’t go to bustin’ up things, I’m willin’.”

“Oh, so’m I. Keep it up, I says,” and Mr. Ringold did, using different cottages in turn to get a diversity of views.

Sympathy was expressed for Joe on the failure of his mission to find his father.

“But don’t you give up!” exclaimed Mr. Hadley. “China is far off, but it isn’t out of the world. Don’t give up, Joe.”

“I’ll not. I’m going to write to him to-day,” and he did, dispatching the letter to far-off Hong Kong.

There was plenty of work waiting for the boys, some new manuscripts of sea dramas having come in. Mr. Ringold decided to film several of them, and rehearsals were already under way.

“I’m going to have a novelty in one of the plays,” said the manager. “It’s going to be a fire scene. We’ll buy one of these cottages, or else have one built that will do well enough for picture purposes, and set it ablaze. Then, when C. C. comes running out, carrying Miss Shay—or maybe Miss Lee, for she’s lighter—we’ll——”

“Hold on there!” called the comedian. “Did I understand you to say I had to rush out of a burning building?”

“That’s it, C. C.”

“But to rush out I’ve got to go in; haven’t I?”

“Why, naturally, C. C.”

“Then I serve notice here and now that I resign. I’m tired of being an actor. I’m going into the coal business,” and he stopped making odd faces in the glass, practicing some facial contortions for a new clown act, and began to dress as though to go out.

“Hold on, C. C.; what’s the matter?” asked Mr. Ringold.

“Plenty! If you think I’m going to run the risk of being burned to death you’ve got another guess coming. I’m through.”

“Why, C. C.,” spoke the theatrical manager, with a laugh; “there’s no danger.”

“Not in going into a burning building, even if it is only a fisherman’s shanty! No danger!”

“No. Listen. You go in before the building is afire. The blaze is started from the outside by your enemy, and with some red fire, which makes a lot of

smoke, we can show on the screen some pictures that will look like a real fire. Then out you rush, before the flames have had a chance to spread, and after you and the lady are safe, the fire gains great headway, and the cottage burns to the ground. But the pictures are being taken all the while, and it will show up great! There's not a bit of danger."

"Not that way," said Miss Lee. "I'm willing to do my part, Mr. Ringold."

"Well, I suppose I'll have to also," spoke C. C., with a sigh. "But I know something will happen. Some sparks will fall on me and scorch me, anyhow, I'm sure."

"Oh, Gloomy!" reproachfully exclaimed Miss Shay. "Do look on the bright side for once."

"There isn't any," asserted the comedian, as he resumed his practice of making strange faces.

Mr. Ringold succeeded in purchasing, for a moderate sum, one of the older cottages, and it was put in shape for its share in the moving picture story, some changes being necessary. The fisherman and his family moved out, glad of the chance to better themselves.

"We won't say anything about planning to fire the shack," declared Mr. Ringold to the boys and the members of his company. "If we do it will attract a crowd, and that's just what we don't want. The fewer the better. Now we'll go over to the shack, and have a rehearsal."

"A dress one?" asked Mr. Piper, meaning that everything would be done just as if the pictures were being taken. "You're not going to have the real fire now; are you?"

"No, indeed," said the manager. "We can only burn the cottage down once."

The rehearsal went off well, and Blake and Joe, who were to make the films, watched the work with interest. They were anxious for the time to come to set the fire.

"Well, I guess that will do," decided Mr. Ringold, after a day or two spent in getting the actors and actresses familiar with their parts. "We'll do the business to-morrow morning."

Accordingly, they all assembled at the shack, and went through the various acts leading up to the fire scene. The boys ground away industriously at the handles of the moving picture cameras.

All went well until it came time to set the fire. Then, whether the building was older and more tinder-like than was supposed, or whether Mr. Levinberg, the “villain” who fired the shack, used too much red fire and kerosene, was not explained.

At any rate, the little building was more quickly wrapped in flame and smoke than was expected, and Mr. Ringold yelled excitedly:

“Come on out, C. C.! Don’t wait any longer. Never mind if it isn’t time! Rush out with the girl before it’s too late!”

“That’s what I’ll do!” cried the comedian, appearing in the doorway, carrying Miss Lee. There was little danger now, as long as he was in the open, unless some tongue of fire should catch the girl’s dress.

“Hurry!” cried the manager, and C. C. sprinted out of the reach of the fire.

And then something entirely unexpected, and not down on the bill, happened. A number of fishermen, who had seen the blaze from down the beach, came running up, all excited, thinking the fire was an accident.

“Get that old pumping engine!” shouted one grizzled salt. “We’ll have that blaze out in no time!”

“Form a bucket brigade!” suggested another.

“No! No! Let it burn!” cried Mr. Ringold. “We want it to burn!”

“Want it to burn?” was shouted at him, by the fisherman who had proposed the pump. “Be you plumb crazy? Come on, boys, form that bucket brigade. Some of you run that hand-pump over here where we can pour water in the tank. Stretch the hose!”

“They’ll spoil the picture!” cried Mr. Ringold, rushing about, and trying to keep the fishermen away.

Joe and Blake, not having orders to the contrary, and not knowing but what this was all part of the play, continued to grind away at their cameras, two reels of this play being taken, as an additional one was needed.

“Here she comes!” cried the fisherman, as some of his companions came rushing from a shed with an ancient style of hand fire-engine, consisting of a tank, on wheels, with a force-pump arrangement, worked by long handles. Water was poured in the tank by means of buckets, and forced out on the blaze through a hose.

“Bring her up as clost as ye kin!” directed the self-appointed chief of the

amateur fire department; “’cause our hose ain’t very long. Form lines now, and dip water up from the ocean. Salt water is good for fires!”

CHAPTER XIV

ATTACKED BY A SWORDFISH

“Don’t do it!” cried Mr. Ringold. “Let that fire burn!”

But there were now so many fishermen rushing about here and there that they paid no attention to the excited theatrical man, who issued orders right and left.

“What shall we do?” demanded C. C., who had gotten off to one side with the girl he was supposed to have “rescued” from the burning cabin.

“I don’t know!” cried Mr. Ringold. “The whole play is spoiled by those fellows butting in. Hi, there!” he called to Blake and Joe, as he saw them operating the cameras. “Stop the reel! We don’t want any of this!”

The clicking machines grew silent, and then the boys knew that something was wrong.

Meanwhile, the hand engine was placed in position. It was learned, later, that the fish concern kept it for use in cases of emergency. There had been some small blazes, in which the old engine had proved its worth.

The fishermen knew how to operate it to advantage, too, and soon a double line of them, extending from the surf to the tank, began passing the filled buckets up one side and the empty ones down the other. As the tank filled, other men worked the handles and a stream of water was soon spurting on the fire.

“Quit it! Oh, quit it!” begged Mr. Ringold. “I want that shack to burn!”

“He’s crazy—don’t mind him!” shouted the self-appointed chief. “We’ll soon have it out now.”

“I’ll see if I can stop them,” said C. C., for the water had about quenched the blaze, and it was useless to try to go on with the play. “They’ll listen to me,” the comedian declared.

He rushed forward, but at that moment the hose got from the control of the

two men holding it. The nozzle swung around, and the stream came full force over Christopher Cutler Piper, drenching him in an instant.

“I say there—hold on—shut that water off! I—I’m being drowned!” he spluttered. And then, as the men again got the nozzle under control, the comedian, dripping water at every point, walked away, saying:

“There, I told you something would happen!”

“I should say it has!” declared Mr. Ringold, for once agreeing with the gloomy actor.

A few more strokes of the pump handles, a few more gallons of water, and the fire, which had quickly attacked all parts of the cottage at once, died out.

“There!” cried Abe Haskill, the old fisherman-chief. “We saved your building for ye, Mr. Ringold. Ain’t no use in buyin’ a shack an’ then havin’ it burn down—no matter if it ain’t wuth much. We saved her for you, though at one time it looked pretty dubious. This is the first fire we’ve had in some time, an’ I reckon we got a bit rusty.

“I might add,” he went on, “that it’s customary, in cases where a volunteer department saves a buildin’ from destruction—it’s customary, I say, for the owner to donate a leetle suthin’ to the department. In this case, seein’ as how Jim Belton sold his shack to you—why, you’re the owner. And, as I say, we saved her for you!” he concluded, proudly.

“Yes, I see you did,” remarked Mr. Ringold, dubiously. “Now I’ve got to buy another, and burn that down, for this play is spoiled.”

“What! Did you want her to burn?” asked Mr. Haskill, in accents of horror. “Did you want the devourin’ element to consume that buildin’?”

“I did,” replied the theatrical man.

“Well—I vum!” declared the volunteer chief. “Boys, we made a mistake.”

“The next time I’ll tell the inhabitants here what my plans are,” went on Mr. Ringold, grimly. “I told you I wanted it to burn.”

“I know you did,” admitted the chief; “but I thought you was so excited you didn’t know what you was sayin’.”

“So did I,” admitted several of the volunteer fire-fighters. “It’s too bad!”

“Well, you meant all right, anyhow,” went on Mr. Ringold, with cheerful philosophy; “and I’ll make the department a donation. But next time, please

don't interfere. I'll set another shack on fire as soon as I can arrange to buy one," he said to his company. "Meanwhile we'll go on with another drama. Save whatever you can of the films," he added to Blake and Joe. "Up to the time the firemen broke in they'll be all right. Next time I'll be more explicit."

"I knew something would happen," declared C. C., gloomily, as he tried to wring some of the water from his clothes. "I didn't burn, but I nearly drowned."

There was nothing to do but return to their boarding place and arrange for another drama, rehearsals for which would take place in a day or so.

"Meanwhile," said Mr. Ringold to Joe and Blake, "you may have a little time off. I tell you what you might do. We could use a fishing scene, I believe. Suppose you go out in one of the small boats here and get a series of views when they lift their nets."

"The very thing!" cried Blake. "We'll do it; eh, Joe?"

"Sure thing!"

"You might, in fact," went on Mr. Ringold, "show the whole process of fishing, from the launching of the boats until they come back filled with the day's catch."

This the boys arranged to do, and that noon, when the power boats were launched, they were on hand to make moving pictures.

The craft, as I have explained, were "eased down" the sloping beach, by means of rollers and planks, until the stern was just at the edge of the surf. The motor was then started, the boat being still held fast by a rope. This rope was fastened in a peculiar knot, so that one man, standing near it, could loosen it with one pull when the word was given to "cut loose."

The men watched the rollers with practiced eyes, for if the surf was heavy the boat might get into the trough, on being launched, and capsize. Often fishermen are drowned in this way, being struck by the heavy boat, or getting under it.

With the engine racing, the men got into the boat. One remained on the beach, holding the restraining rope. Another took his place at the stern, with a long steering oar that was to be used to get her bow on to the waves.

A particularly large wave was seen coming in.

"Get ready!" ordered the captain.

The man at the big oar took his place. The boat was almost afloat now.

“Cut loose!” came the order.

The man at the rope yanked the knot loose. The boat slid into the water and the next instant was being tossed about in the breakers, the man with the oar forcing her head around, aided by the powerful gasoline engine that turned the propeller. The craft came near to capsizing, but kept upright, and a little later was beyond the surf, into deep water, speeding out to the nets two miles away.

Blake and Joe, working by turns, got some fine views of the launching. Then, getting into another of the fishing boats with their cameras, and with Macaroni to aid them, they prepared to go out to the fishing grounds, where the nets were.

“Say, this is rough, all right!” exclaimed Blake, as they found themselves in the boiling, frothing surf.

“That’s what!” agreed Joe.

“Let me out! I want to walk!” pleaded Macaroni, who was not very fond of the water.

“You’ll be all right in a minute!” called Abe Haskill, who was captain of the boat. “Soon as you git out beyond the breakers you won’t mind it.”

And they found that they did not, though there was some motion, as there was quite a swell on. They reached the nets safely, and while the meshes were hauled up, bringing a good catch of fish, the moving picture boys took many views. It was interesting as well as instructive.

“This would make a good educational reel,” suggested Blake, as he spread his legs to maintain his balance against the rocking motion of the boat.

“Indeed it would,” observed Joe. “Look, there’s some one overboard!” and he pointed to one of the other boats.

A man had indeed slipped into the sea. The moving picture boys were ready, however, and trained one of the cameras on the fisherman, who, laughing at his mishap, soon swam to the boat again, and was pulled in.

It took some little time to haul the nets, but at last, with their own boat well filled with flapping fish, as were the others, Joe and Blake started for shore.

“Well, we made out all right, I think,” said Blake, as he looked to see if there was any more film left in his machine.

“Sure we did,” declared his chum. “If we had to take some other views we could.”

“We’ll want some of the landing of the boats, and the carting of the fish up to the sheds,” Blake reminded him.

“That’s right, we will. I guess I can——”

Joe did not finish his sentence. At that moment there came a jar and Blake cried:

“We’ve hit something!”

“No, something has hit us!” corrected one of the fishermen, leaping up, and grabbing a long, iron-shod pole.

“What is it?” demanded Joe.

“A pesky swordfish. He’s ramming us, and he may poke a hole in us! If I can get a chance I’ll jab him!” and the man leaned over the side. As he did so there came another attack on the craft, so fierce that it heeled over, and the man with the pole, giving a cry, was flung overboard.

CHAPTER XV

SUSPICIOUS ACTIONS

“Man overboard!” cried several of the fishermen.

“Yes, and with a pesky swordfish too close for comfort!” added Abe Haskill. “Stop that motor, Bunker; we’ll have to pick him up.”

The fisherman who was called to, pulled out the switch, thus stopping the motor, and the boat drifted about on the slowly rising and falling billows.

“Can you see him?” asked the captain of the man who acted as mate.

“Yes, he’s right astern, but that fish——”

“Is he coming after Jake?”

“Full tilt!”

“Grab that prod, one of you!” yelled the captain. “See if you can harpoon him with it. I’ll git out the duck gun, though land knows it ain’t much use against a

pesky swordfish!”

One of the fishermen picked up the iron-shod pole the unfortunate man had dropped as he went overboard, and stood ready to cast it at the big fish, which could be seen swirling along in the water, near the swimmer.

“Say!” cried Blake to Joe. “It may seem a heartless thing to do, but why can’t we get some moving pictures of this?”

“We can,” decided his chum. “We can’t help any, and we might as well film it.”

“Come on, then. You hold the camera steady and I’ll turn the handle.”

They had a machine all in readiness, its tripod shortened so that the lens could be brought close to the water.

“He’s dived!” cried one of the men.

“Who—the fish, or Jake?” demanded the captain.

“Jake. He saw the fish coming at him, and he went under. Lucky he did, or he might have been cut in two.”

“Throw that prod; can’t you? I’ll have this gun ready in a minute.”

The captain had pulled from a locker an old-fashioned, double-barreled duck gun.

“It’s loaded with slugs,” he called to the boys, who were even now taking moving pictures of the strange scene. “I carry it for sharks, but it’ll do as well against a swordfish, though they don’t commonly attack men.”

“Here goes for a cast!” cried the man with the prod, which was a sort of boathook without the hook. “I’ll see if I can spear him!”

Leaning forward he threw the weapon with all his force. The other fishermen, some of whom had grasped the spare oars to swing the boat around, looked eagerly to see the result.

“Missed, by ginger!” exclaimed the captain. “Here, let me try. Where’s Jake?”

“Out there. He’s swimming strong,” was the answer. “The pesky fish is coming back at him again.”

“Duck, Jake, duck!” cried the captain, as he got ready with the gun. “I’m going to shoot. Get down out of the way, and hold your breath. We’ll have you in another minute!”

He could see the swordfish plainly now, rushing directly toward the swimmer. The man heard and followed directions. Deep down he dived, and the fish shot directly over him.

“Say, that’s a great picture!” cried Blake.

“That’s what!” yelled Joe, and then his voice was drowned in the report of the gun, which was doubly charged.

“I got him! By cracky, I got him!” cried the captain. “That’s his blood showing.”

The waves were indeed red with the blood of the big fish, and a moment later its body was floating on the swells.

“There’s Jake!” cried one of the fishermen.

“All right!” was the response. “Throw him a line. He’s in no danger now.”

A few moments later the man was safe aboard, minus his boots, which he had kicked off in the sea, and some of his heavier clothing.

“That’s the end of Mr. Swordfish,” murmured the captain, in gratified tones, as he watched the lifeless body sink. “The sharks will get him. Are you all right, Jake?”

“Sure. It was hard work, though; and once I thought he had me. I dived just in time.”

“That’s what you did,” said Blake. “It was a great exhibition, and when it’s thrown on the screen it will make a sensation, I’m sure.”

“Say, you don’t mean to tell me you snapped what happened?” asked the fisherman, in surprise.

“We sure did,” declared Joe. “We got every move.”

“Plucky lads,” murmured the captain; “and right on the job, too. Start the motor,” he added to the man in charge of it.

“We’ve sprung a leak, captain!” exclaimed a man up in the bow. “Water’s coming in.”

“It’s where that pesky swordfish rammed us, I reckon. But stuff something in and it will hold until we get to shore. We haven’t far to go.”

The boat was soon under way again, and offers of aid from sister craft that circled around were declined. A bundle of rags served to stop the inrush of

most of the water, and a little later the craft, with its load of fish, was hauled up on the beach by means of a tackle and fall, horses being the motive power. Joe and Blake got pictures of the other boats making a similar landing, theirs being the first in.

“Well, we got some fine views,” said Blake, as he and his chum started for their boarding place.

“We sure did, and something unexpected, too. I never counted on a swordfish attack.”

“No, and I guess the fishermen didn’t either. But it will make a realistic film, as Mr. Hadley would say.”

“It’s just our hoodoo luck again,” went on Joe. “Something out of the ordinary seems to be happening all the while to us.”

“Well, it’s better than monotony.”

“I suppose so. But I wonder what it will be next?”

The boys were congratulated on their success by Mr. Hadley and Mr. Ringold, and the films, when developed and printed a little later, furnished a series of fine views.

For the next week the boys had little time to themselves. The drama with the burning shack was enacted over again, this time with success, the volunteer firemen not throwing any water on the blaze. Other sea dramas were also made, and then came a period of rest, in which Blake and Joe had hardly anything to do.

“Say,” exclaimed Blake, one afternoon, “let’s go for a walk down the beach, by the cliffs. It’s a fine day and it will do us good.”

“All right,” agreed Joe. “I was thinking of paying another visit to the lighthouse, and asking if there was any news of my father; but, of course, there can’t be.”

“Hardly,” agreed Blake, thinking that the only news his chum would get there would be bad.

They strolled along the shore, making excursions here and there as something attracted them. Going through a little group of scrub oak, somewhat back from the shore, and climbing a slight elevation to get a view of the Pacific, the boys were startled, as they were about to emerge into a little open glade, to hear voices.

“Some one else besides us out here to-day,” spoke Joe, in a low voice.

“That’s right,” agreed his chum. “Keep still until we see who it is.”

Cautiously they advanced until they stood behind a little screen of trees, and were gazing into the open place. They saw several men at work erecting some sort of tower, or pile of rocks, and on top of it was mounted a large lantern.

“There—that ought to show pretty well,” remarked one of the men.

“Yes, and be seen a good distance out to sea,” put in another. “It’s just in the right place, too; for the rocks extend a good way out, and you can’t see ’em even at dead low water.”

“And anything drawing more than ten feet will be sure to strike on ’em,” suggested a third.

“That’s right, Sandy,” came the retort. “Have you got the lantern fixed so that she’ll flash like the other?”

“I sure have. All we’ve got to do is to pull one wire—this way—and the light is shut off. Another pull, and she gives a flash, just like a revolving light.”

“Good. We’ll give it a trial to-night.”

“Say, what do you think they are?” whispered Joe.

“I hardly know, and yet——”

“Maybe they’re experimenting with a new kind of light?” suggested the other lad.

“Experimenting? Yes!” spoke Blake, in a low, tense voice. “And I can guess what they’re experimenting for.”

“What?”

Blake was about to answer, when one of the men, looking in the direction where the boys were concealed, uttered an exclamation.

“Hark!” he cried. “I think I heard something.”

“It was the wind,” declared one.

“A bird in the bushes,” said another.

“I’m going to see!” declared the man. And he came straight toward their hiding place.

CHAPTER XVI

JOE SUSPECTS SOMETHING

“What’ll we do, Blake?” was the whispered question.

“Stay here, I guess. If we run they’ll see us or hear us. Besides, we haven’t done anything to run for.”

“I know it, but those men look like ugly customers. I wonder what they can be up to?”

“They are—” began Blake, and then he pulled Joe down beside him in the bushes.

“He’s turned off to one side,” Blake went on. “He hasn’t seen us, and he doesn’t know just where to look. He may pass us by. Keep still!”

Together they crouched down. The man looked around as though to trace the noise which had been made when Joe accidentally stepped on a stick, which broke under his weight.

“Don’t breathe,” whispered Blake, with his lips close to Joe’s ear. “I think he’s going to pass us by.”

The man paused, seemed as if about to come directly for them again, and then dashed off to one side. He made a leap into the bushes, only to discover nothing, as his chagrined exclamation showed.

“I told you so!” growled one of his companions. “It was only the wind.”

“The wind doesn’t break sticks,” was the snappish reply.

“Then it was a bird—maybe a fishhawk.”

“Maybe,” assented the man who had started to make the search. “But I thought some one was spying on us, and if they were——” He did not finish, but glared angrily around. He was so close to the boys that they could hear his rapid breathing, but the leafy screen effectively hid them from view. “If I catch any one,” he went on, “he’ll wish he never ran across Hemp Danforth!” and he shook a big fist.

“Oh, come on!” called some of his companions. “There’s lots to be done yet before we get this lantern finished. And if we want any rich pickings we’ll

have to hustle for 'em. The weather looks like it was going to break, and that will be just what we want. Come on, Hemp.”

“All right, I will, only don't talk so bold and free.”

“Why not?”

“Because some one might be spying and listening to us.”

“He's got that on his mind yet,” laughed one of the men. “There's no one around here.”

“And if they were, what could they pick up?” demanded another.

“That's all right—it's best to be careful,” said the one called Hemp Danforth. “I'm taking no chances. Some of us might—well, no telling what might happen to us if we was to be found out.”

“Don't talk that way,” spoke a tall, thin man. “It isn't altogether cheerful—especially with what work we have on hand. Come on, now; let's make this pillar a little higher, and the light will show better.”

“Say, what do you imagine they are doing?” whispered Joe. “It's a queer game, Blake.”

“It sure is. I've about made up my mind what they are up to, and yet I may be wrong. Let's wait here a while longer, and maybe we can pick up some information that will give us a better clue.”

The men were now engaged in heaping more stones on the pile where the lantern had set, and were making so much noise at it that the whispering of the boys could not be heard.

“Any special vessels in view?” asked one of the men, after they had worked away for some time in silence.

“No, but there'll sure be one along before long. We can count on that. Of course, we'll have to keep the light going several nights, maybe, but it'll be worth while.”

“It ought to fool 'em, all right,” went on Hemp Danforth. “If it hadn't been that Nate Duncan tripped us up, and didn't come across with that information we wanted, we wouldn't have all this trouble.”

For a moment Joe seemed to stiffen as he heard the name, and then, in a hoarse whisper, he turned to Blake and said:

“Did you hear that? These men know my father. They used his name.”

“Yes, but keep quiet!” urged Blake, for Joe had raised his voice. “We don’t want them to know we’re here.”

“But they know my father, Blake,” went on Joe, using more caution, however, in his tones. “I must speak to them. Maybe they were associated with him in lighthouse work, and this may be some new patent lantern they’re trying. Maybe my father hasn’t gone to China at all, and these men can tell where he is.”

Joe made a move as though to leave the screened hiding place and approach the men.

“No—don’t go!” whispered Blake, hoarsely, holding his chum back. “Stay here, Joe. Don’t speak to those men!”

“But they have something to do with my father.”

“No matter; do as I say, please! Believe me, Joe, I can’t explain now, for I promised I would not. But you’ll understand—later. Don’t approach those men!”

“Why not?”

“Because—well, I can’t tell you!”

“Then I’m going!” declared Joe, half fiercely. “Blake, I’m sure you’re keeping something from me. I’ve suspected it for some time, for you’ve looked at me in a queer fashion when I spoke of my father. Now what is it?”

“Really, Joe, it’s nothing—that is——”

“Yes, it is something. If you don’t tell me I’ll go out there and take the consequences!”

Joe broke from Blake’s restraining grasp as he whispered this, and was about to dash for the bushes, when Hemp Danforth, dashing down a stone he was raising, cried out:

“Boys, you can’t fool me! There is some one here, and they’re spying on us. I’ll make ’em sorry for it! I hear whispering, and I’ve felt right along as though unseen eyes were looking at me. Now I’m going to find out who it is!”

Once more he started for the place where Blake and Joe were concealed. This time it could be seen that he would not be swerved from his quest.

“Come on, Joe. We’ve got to run for it!” exclaimed Blake, and, not caring now how much noise they made—being under the necessity of betraying their presence—they dashed back in the direction they had come.

“Here they are!” yelled Hemp, as he ran after them, tearing through the underbrush. “I knew we were being spied on! Come along, men!” he yelled.

Blake and Joe looked back as they got to the path that led along the cliff, below which was the rolling ocean. They had a glimpse of the big man racing after them, several others in his wake.

“Stop!” commanded Hemp Danforth. “Hold on, you spies!”

“Don’t answer,” advised Blake. “Save your breath for running, Joe.”

“Um!” grunted his chum.

They were fleet of foot, and had a start. They were also lighter in weight than was their pursuer. In a short time they were well ahead.

“But he’s still coming on!” declared Blake.

“We’ve got to give him the slip,” declared Joe. “Can’t you see some side path we can take?”

“Yes, here’s one,” was the panting answer, and at that moment Blake parted some low bushes and jumped into a sort of cross path, almost concealed from view. “Come on, Joe!”

His chum lost no time in following, and for a few moments, at least, they were comparatively safe.

“Now, Blake,” said Joe, when they felt that they could slacken their pace to get their breath, “I want you to tell me that secret!”

CHAPTER XVII

AFTER THE WRECKERS

Blake Stewart was at a loss. He did not know what to do, and, though he had been expecting to hear this request at almost any time, he was no more prepared for it now than he would have been had it been made directly after Blake learned of Mr. Duncan’s flight.

“Well?” asked Joe, suggestively, when his chum did not answer. “Aren’t you going to tell me?”

“What makes you think I have a secret, Joe?” Thus Blake tried to temporize, so that he might think what was best to do.

“Oh, I’m sure you have,” declared Joe, “and you might as well tell me now as any time, for I’m bound to find it out. I don’t believe there’s any more danger now,” and he paused to look back along the almost hidden path they had followed. “I can’t see anything of that man,” he added. “We gave him the slip, all right.

“Now go ahead, Blake, and end my suspense. I’ve seen for some time that you’ve been keeping something back from me. I don’t know what it is, but it’s something about my father. And I appreciate why you’re doing it. You want to spare my feelings.”

“That’s it!” cried Blake, eagerly, glad of any chance to put off what he regarded as a most unpleasant duty. “It is for your sake, Joe, that I have been keeping silent, and I wish you would go on letting me do so. Believe me, if I thought it well for you to know I’d tell you.”

“Is it—is it that he isn’t my father, after all?” faltered the lad, following a silence in which all sound of pursuit had died away. The boys felt that they were safe now. “Do you mean to say, Blake, that this man whom I’ve traced after such hard work, isn’t any relation to me—haven’t I any folks, after all?”

“No, Joe, it isn’t that at all. He’s your father, as far as I know, and I will admit there is some secret about him. But I’d rather not tell you.”

“I want to know it,” insisted Joe, firmly.

“If you’ll only wait,” went on his chum, “it may all be explained when—when he comes back. Then there won’t be any need of a secret. Better wait, Joe.”

“No, I’ve got to hear it right away. If it’s any disgrace—and it must be, or you’d be willing to tell me—if it’s any disgrace, it’s my duty to stand up for my father when he isn’t here. I’m his son, and I have a right to know about it, and protect his name as much as I can. Tell me, Blake.”

The other hesitated a moment. If he told, it would be, he felt, breaking his promise made to the lighthouse keeper, but then the promise was not so sacred that it could not be broken. It was given under a sort of discretion, and Blake knew that he would be allowed to reveal what had been said if he felt that it was best to do so. The time now seemed to have come to do this. He took a sudden resolve.

“All right, Joe,” he said, “I’ll tell you. There is a secret about your father. I suppose you know what sort of men those were that we just got away from?” and he nodded in the direction of the hill down which they had raced.

“I’ve been puzzling my head about them, Blake,” came the answer, “and all I can say is that they must be either men who are experimenting with a new kind of light, or else they are—wreckers!”

“That’s it, Joe. They are wreckers, and they’re plotting to lure some vessel on the rocks by means of false lights.”

“The scoundrels!” burst out Joe. “We’ve got to spoil their wicked game.”

“That’s what we have. We’ll tell the police, or some one in authority.”

“But before we do,” broke in Joe, “tell me about my father, though I begin to suspect now,” and there was a look of sadness on his face.

“I presume you pretty well know what is coming,” said Blake, slowly, “now you have heard what those men said. The whole amount of it is, Joe, that your father is suspected of having been in league with those wreckers—that he helped to lure vessels on these same rocks.”

“My father a wrecker!” cried Joe. “It can’t be—I won’t believe it!”

“I didn’t want to either, when I heard it,” said Blake, “and maybe, now that I’ve told you, we can work together and find some way of proving him innocent.”

“That’s it!” cried the son. “Oh, if he were only here to help us! I wonder why he went away?”

“The lighthouse keeper said,” began Blake, “that your father left because he feared to be arrested. And the day after he went away an officer did come for him,” and he proceeded to relate what Mr. Stanton had said.

“I don’t believe it!” cried Joe, when the account was finished. “Of course, I don’t remember my father, and, naturally, I don’t know what sort of a man he was, but I don’t believe he was a wrecker!”

“And I don’t either!” added Blake. “Here’s my hand on it, Joe, and we’ll do our best to find out the truth of this thing,” and the two chums clasped hands warmly.

“But it’s mighty strange what those men said about him,” went on Joe. “To think that we would stumble on the wreckers right at work. We can lead the police to the very place where they have set up their false light.”

“Maybe we can do better than that, Joe.”

“How?”

“Why, we may be able to help the police catch these same fellows.”

“That’s so. Have you a plan, Blake?” asked his chum, eagerly, as they walked on along the path.

“Not yet, but we’ll make one up. But, Joe, did you notice just what it was that big wrecker said?”

“Not exactly; I was too excited when I heard them mention my father’s name.”

“Well, they as much as said that your father had refused to give them the information they wanted, and this spoiled their scheme. That might go to show that they made offers to him to have him help them in their wicked plans, and he refused. That made them turn against him, and——”

“I see, Blake! You mean that, maybe, after all, he left because he was afraid of the wreckers, and not because he had done anything wrong?”

“That’s it, Joe. Of course, it’s all guess work on our part, so far, and I think the best thing we can do is to go to the lighthouse and tell Mr. Stanton all we’ve seen and heard. He may be able to advise us, even if he is an old man. At any rate, he’ll know what police or government officers to go to, so we can catch these wreckers.”

“That’s right, Blake. Come on. I guess we can go down on the beach now. Those fellows won’t venture out into the open after us, I don’t believe.”

“No, they seem to have given up the chase,” replied Blake, and the two lads were soon down on the shore.

A look around showed no signs of the supposed wreckers, and a little later the two lads were in the lighthouse telling their story to the wondering and amazed keeper.

“So that’s how the scoundrels are planning to work; are they?” cried the old man. “Going to duplicate my light, and fool the poor sailors! But we’ll put a spoke in their wheel, boys. We’ll spike their guns for ’em, and have ’em behind the bars, if there’s any law in this land.

“Putting up a false light right opposite those rocks—the most dangerous on the coast! No punishment would be too bad for ’em. Did you happen to hear, boys, when they expected to play that wicked game?”

“They didn’t mention any special night,” replied Blake; “it seemed that they counted on getting some information which failed them—Joe’s father,” he added, thinking it well to let Mr. Stanton know that Joe had been informed of the secret.

“Joe’s father; eh?” said the old man, musingly. “Boy, I’m mighty sorry for you,” he said, softly; “for I know the disgrace is trying, and if it had been possible to keep this from you——”

“I’m glad I know!” burst out Joe. “There isn’t going to be any disgrace. My father is innocent, I’m sure of it; and I believe we can prove it, once we have these wreckers arrested.”

“That’s the way to talk!” cried the old man. “Boys, I’ll help you. We’ll get right after these miscreants. Maybe I was wrong, after all, in thinking Nate Duncan guilty. He was a good man, and it made me feel bad even to suspect him.”

“What do you think is the best thing to do?” asked Blake. “We ought to act quickly, or they may leave this part of the country, to try their scheme farther down the coast. It might succeed, then.”

“That’s right,” declared Mr. Stanton. “We must act at once. My assistant is here now, and I’ll have him go with you. I’m a little too old for such work. Besides, one of us will have to stay here to guard the light. No telling but what the scoundrels might try to wreck it. But if they come, I’ll be ready for ’em!” he cried, as he took down an old-fashioned musket from the wall. “I’ll stand by to repel boarders!” he exclaimed, holding the weapon above his head, and then sighting it at an imaginary enemy.

“I’ll call my assistant,” he went on. “Tom Cardiff is as sturdy a lad as you’d wish to see. He can get one of the men from the life saving station, and with a couple of the government secret service officers you ought to be able to get those wreckers, don’t you think?”

“Sure!” cried Joe.

“Did you mean for us to help catch ’em?” asked Blake.

“I certainly did,” went on the keeper. “That is, unless you’re——”

“Afraid? Not a bit of it!” cried Blake, vigorously.

“Besides, you know just where they were located,” continued Mr. Stanton.

“Though they may have taken the alarm and left,” suggested Joe.

“Then we’ll trace ’em!” cried his chum. “Where is your helper, Mr. Stanton?”

“I’ll call him. I say Tom—Tom Cardiff!” he shouted up the lantern tower. “I’ll finish cleaning the lens. I’ve got other work for you. Come down!”

“Coming!” was the answer, and a little later a well built young fellow, muscular and of fine appearance, greeted the boys. The introduction was soon made, and the story of the lads told.

“Wreckers; eh?” exclaimed Tom Cardiff. “I’d just like to get hold of some of the wretches,” and he stretched out his vigorous arms.

“Well, get after ’em, then!” exclaimed the old man. “You don’t want to lose any time. Telephone for the officers.”

The wire was soon busy, and arrangements made for the secret service men to come to the lighthouse. One of the life saving squad, from a station a little farther down the coast, was also engaged.

“Now you boys had better go back to your place,” said Mr. Stanton; “and arrange to come back to-night. That’s the only time to get after these fellows. They probably have finished their work, from what you told me, and they’ll lay low until it’s dark. Then we’ll get after ’em!”

CHAPTER XVIII

FAILURE

“Boys, if you could only get moving pictures of the capture of the wreckers!”

Thus exclaimed Mr. Ringold when his two young employees told of the plans afoot and asked to be excused from work a little longer.

“It would be great,” admitted Joe.

“But we’d need a powerful light,” said Blake, “and if we had that it would warn the men we’re after.”

“That’s so,” spoke the theatrical man. “I guess it’s out of the question. But you have done such wonderful work so far, that I’d like you to keep it up. A film of the capture of wreckers would make an audience sit up and take notice.”

“I guess I’ll have to invent some sort of a light that would make it possible,” put in Mr. Hadley; “but I’m afraid I can’t have it ready to-night.”

“Then you don’t mind if we go?” asked Blake.

“No, indeed!” exclaimed Mr. Ringold, “and I wish you all success.”

“It’s going to be a dark night,” remarked Blake, a little later, as he and Joe were on their way to the lighthouse. It was early evening, but the sky was clouding over and a wind was coming up that sent the big billows bounding up on the sand with a booming noise like the discharge of distant cannon.

“Yes, we’ll have to sort of feel our way along,” said Joe. “But I guess we can find the place, all right.”

“I hope so. But I wonder if the men will come back after the alarm we gave ’em?”

“That’s hard to tell, Blake. And yet they might; for, though they saw us, they may think we were only a couple of lads out for a stroll, who accidentally stumbled on their hiding place. In that case they wouldn’t think we’d give any alarm, and they’d go on with their plans.”

“That’s so. Well, we’ll see what happens. I hope there aren’t too many of them, so that our men can handle them.”

“That Tom Cardiff can get away with a couple on his own account, and with the life saver, and the secret service men, not to mention ourselves, Blake, I guess we’ll make out all right.”

“I reckon you and I together, Joe, can account for at least one,” and Blake looked quizzically at his chum.

“I feel almost as if I could handle one alone, when I think of how they got my father into trouble,” replied the other. “I’m going to give a good account of myself, if I get the chance.”

“Same here. Well, there’s the lighthouse just ahead, and two or three men waiting for us. I guess they’re the ones we are to go with.”

This proved to be the case, and a little later the boys were repeating to the life saver, and two secret service men, such parts of their story as Mr. Stanton and Tom Cardiff had omitted or forgotten.

“Well, if we’re all ready, we may as well start,” proposed Sam Wilton, one of the government agents. The other was Jerry Boundley, while the name of the life saver was Frank Hale.

“Yes, it’s quite a tramp,” said Tom Cardiff, “and the wreckers may be there now. Several small trading vessels are expected up the coast this week, and

some may be due to-night. Though seeing that a storm is coming up, they may keep so far out from shore that they won't see the false lights, in case the wreckers try to work them.

"This is about as wicked a piece of work as could well be done, trying to wreck vessels this way. A sailor has to depend absolutely on the lights, under certain conditions, and if they're wrong, it's like leading a blind man into danger. So let's get after 'em and stop their work!"

The men well knew the way nearly to the place where the boys had discovered the wreckers at work, and so they would not have to rely on Joe and Blake to guide them until they were almost there.

"When you see that you are close to the place," said Tom Cardiff, "you boys go ahead, and we'll trail along after you. And keep mighty quiet, too. If we can catch these fellows actually in the act of showing a false light, so much better for the chances of convicting them."

They went on in the darkness. Back of them, as they mounted the hill which ended in the high cliff, could be seen the flashing light tended by aged Mr. Stanton.

"He's right on the job," remarked Tom Cardiff. "Even if he's an old man he'll stay up all night to attend to that light, to see that it's trimmed properly, that the machinery is working, that there's oil in the reservoir, and that the lenses are clean. That light is just like a son or daughter to him. He can't bear to have anything happen to it and the very idea of any scoundrels trying to wreck vessels by means of a false beacon riles him up considerable."

"I should think it would," agreed Mr. Wilton. "Well, if we can catch these fellows we'll put 'em where they can't do any more harm. And I hope we'll get back in time, so Mr. Stanton won't have to stay up all night."

"I hope so, too," put in Tom Cardiff. "He isn't equal to the task."

"We're getting close to the place now," said Blake, in a low voice a little later.

"Then you boys come up here," ordered Tom Cardiff, who, in a measure, was a sort of leader. "And everybody keep quiet. Don't talk, except in whispers, and make as little noise as you can."

Cautiously they advanced, the boys in the lead. The lads recognized, even in the darkness, some of the larger landmarks they had passed in their flight that afternoon.

"Hold on a minute, and listen," suggested the life saver. "Maybe we can hear

them talking.”

They paused, but the only sound that came was the booming of the surf on the rocks below.

“Can you see anything of a light?” asked Mr. Boundley.

“Not a thing,” replied Joe, glancing all about him.

“Look up,” directed Tom Cardiff. “That’s the best way to locate a light that you can’t see directly. You may catch its reflection on the night mist.”

But the night was black all around them. Not a gleam could they make out. Once more they advanced until Joe and Blake recognized the place where they had been hiding, and whence they had looked into the open place where the wreckers had been putting up their false light.

“It’s here!” whispered Blake.

“Just ahead there,” added Joe.

“Get ready, men!” exclaimed Tom Cardiff, in a tense whisper. “We’ll rush ’em before they know it—if they’re here.”

Stout clubs had been brought along in anticipation of a hand-to-hand struggle, it being decided that these weapons were best, safest and most effective at close quarters.

“All ready?” asked the leader.

“Yes—yes!” came the answers.

Blake leaned forward, cautiously parted the bushes and looked toward the open space. He had heard nothing, and seen nothing, and yet he knew that the men might be hidden about, and that the lantern might not yet be lighted.

“Come on!” cried Tom Cardiff, and together they leaped from their place of concealment.

There was a moment of silence, and then a disappointed exclamation burst from the lips of the assistant lighthouse keeper.

“They’re not here!” he declared. That was evident, for there had been no response as the searchers burst out.

“Are you sure this is the place?” asked Mr. Wilton, turning to the boys.

“Positive,” answered Joe.

“Here’s the pile of rocks on which the lantern was set,” added Blake.

“But there’s no lantern here now,” said Tom Cardiff.

“Then they’ve skipped!” declared the life saver. “They got suspicious and left, taking the lantern with ’em!”

CHAPTER XIX

ON THE TRAIL

There was no doubt about it, the wreckers were not there, and the indications were that they had betaken themselves to some other location.

When the men flashed the pocket electric lamps they had brought with them, the little opening at the top of the cliff was well illuminated.

“Nothing doing!” exclaimed Joe, regretfully.

“They must have skipped out right after they chased us,” decided Blake.

“And they went in a hurry, too,” declared Tom Cardiff.

“What makes you think so?” asked one of the government officers.

“Look at how this stone pile, which they intended to use as a base for their lantern, is disturbed, and pulled apart,” went on the assistant lighthouse keeper, as he flashed his torch on it. “I’ll wager, boys, that when you saw it, with that contrivance atop by which they hoped to fool some vessels, this stone pile was well built up; wasn’t it?”

“Yes,” said Blake, “it was.”

“Because,” went on Tom Cardiff, “it would have to be so to make their light steady, to give the impression that it was one of the regular government lights. They were going to work a shutter, you boys say, to give the impression of a revolving light, and that would make it necessary to have a firm foundation.

“And yet now the whole top of this stone pile is torn apart, showing that they must have ripped out whatever they had here to hold the lantern. They got away in a hurry, is my opinion.”

“And I guess we’ll all have to agree,” put in the life saver. “The question is—where did they go?”

“And that’s a question we’ve got to answer,” added Tom Cardiff. “We’ve got to get on the trail.”

“Why so?” asked the life saver. “If you’ve driven ’em off, so they can’t try any of their dastardly tricks to lure vessels ashore, isn’t that all you want? You’ve spoiled their game.”

“Yes!” cried Tom Cardiff, “we’ve spoiled it for this one place, but they’ll be at it somewhere else.”

“What do you mean?” asked Joe.

“I mean that they’ve gone somewhere else!” exclaimed the assistant keeper. “They’ve made tracks away from here, but they’ve gone to some other place to set up their light, and try the same thing they were going to try here. It’s our duty to keep after ’em, and break up the gang!”

“That’s right!” cried Mr. Wilton. “There’s no telling what damage they might do, if left alone. Why, they might even get to some place where large passenger steamers pass, and wreck one of them, though mostly they aim to pick out a spot where small cargo boats would be lured on the rocks. We’ve got to keep after ’em!”

“Then come on!” cried Joe. He was fired with enthusiasm, not only to capture the wreckers for the purpose of protecting human life and property, but he was also eager to have the scoundrels safe in confinement so that he might question them, and learn the source of the suspicion against his father.

“On the trail!” cried Blake. “Maybe we can easily find the wreckers.”

“No, not to-night,” advised Mr. Boundley. “It wouldn’t be practical, in the first place; and if it was, it wouldn’t be safe. We don’t know this locality very well. There may be hidden dangers and pitfalls that would injure some of us. Then, too, we don’t want to stumble on a nest of wreckers without knowing something of the lay of the ground.”

“What’s best to be done?” asked Tom Cardiff.

“Do nothing to-night,” advised the government man. “To-morrow we can take up the trail, and by daylight we may be able to pick up something that will give us a clue. I think they won’t try any of their tricks to-night, so it will be safe for us to go back.”

The others agreed with this view, and, after looking about the place a little more, and trying, but unsuccessfully, to find clues in the darkness, partly illuminated by the electric torches, they gave it up and started back to the

lighthouse.

“Well, what do you think?” asked Blake of Joe, as the two lads reached their boarding house in the little theatrical colony. It was quite late.

“Think of it?” echoed Joe. “I’m terribly disappointed, that’s what. I hoped I’d be able to get a start on disproving this accusation against my father.”

“Yes, it was a disappointment,” agreed Blake.

“And now there’s no telling when I can.”

“No, not exactly; but, Joe, I have a plan.”

“What is it?”

“What’s the matter with getting on the trail after these fellows the first thing in the morning. No use waiting any longer, and we can’t tell how prompt those government men may be. Of course they’re interested, in a general way, in making the capture; but aside from that, you and I have a personal motive; for I’ll admit I’m as interested as you are in proving that your father is innocent.

“So what’s the matter with getting back up on the cliff as soon as we can, and seeing if we can trace those fellows. You know we’ve had some experience after taking films of those Indians, and can follow signs pretty well.”

“I’m with you, Blake!” cried Joe. “We’ll do it. I guess Mr. Ringold will let us off when he knows how important it is.”

They spoke of the matter to the theatrical man early the next morning, and he readily agreed to let them continue the work of trying to capture the wreckers.

“Go ahead, boys,” he said. “Mr. Hadley and your lad, Macaroni, can take what films we want to-day. And I would like to see you get those wreckers. There’s no meaner criminal alive. All we’ll do for the next couple of days is to get ready for our big drama—I’ve planned a new one—and I sure will want you boys to help film it for me.”

“What’s it going to be about?” asked Blake.

“It’s a sea story, and a wreck figures in it.”

“A real wreck?” asked Joe, in some surprise. “That will be hard to do; won’t it?”

“It sure will, and I don’t just know how to manage it. I could buy some old tub, and wreck it, I suppose, but I want it to look natural. While I don’t wish

anyone bad luck, I do wish, if a wreck had to happen, that it would come about here, so we could get moving pictures of it. But I don't suppose I'll have any such good luck.

"However, I'll have to think about this. Now you boys can have a couple of days off, if you like, and I hope you'll find those miscreants."

"I wish we could get you some moving pictures of them," spoke Blake; "but I'm afraid it's out of the question."

The boys were soon at the scene of the disappointment the night before. Daylight revealed more clearly the haste with which the wreckers had removed their false lantern. Stones were scattered about, as were bits of broken wood, wire, rope and other accessories.

"Now," said Joe, after they had looked about, "the thing to do is to trail them."

"And the first thing is to get a clue," added Blake.

They looked about, using the knowledge they had gained from being with the cowboy the time they filmed the pictures of the Moqui Indians. For some time their efforts were without success. They cast about in all directions, looking for some lead that would tell them in which direction the wreckers had gone.

"I should think they'd go farther down the coast," suggested Joe. "They certainly wouldn't come toward the lighthouse, and they wouldn't go inland, for to work their plan they need to be near the shore."

"That's right, to an extent," decided Blake; "but, at the same time, they may have wanted to give a false clue. So we mustn't let that fool us. Keep on looking."

Narrowly they scanned the ground. It was covered with marks, not only of the footsteps of the wreckers, but of the men and boys themselves who had made the unsuccessful raid the night before.

"Hello!" cried Blake, suddenly, as he dived into a clump of bushes. "Here's something!"

"What is it?" asked Joe.

"A piece of cloth, evidently torn from a man's clothing. And, Joe, now that I recall it, it's the same color as the suit worn by Hemp Danforth when he chased us. We're on the trail at last, Joe!"

CHAPTER XX

THE DISCOVERY

Joe Duncan leaped to his chum's side. Eagerly he looked at the bit of cloth which, caught on a thorn bush, had ripped from some man's garment. The cloth was not weather-beaten, which, to the boys, showed that it had not long been hanging there.

"Blake, I believe you're right," assented his chum. "They went this way, and they must have done it for a blind, or else to get to some path that goes farther down the beach a different way," for the cloth was caught on a bush toward the landward side of the little clearing.

"We'll follow this," said Blake.

"Of course," agreed his chum.

They pushed into the bushes. There was no semblance of a path, but this did not discourage the boys. They realized that the wreckers would want to cover up their trail, and would take a way that would not seem to lead anywhere.

"This will branch off pretty soon," was Blake's opinion. "This is just a blind, to make us believe they have given up, and gone inland. Come on, Joe, and keep a sharp lookout for any other signs."

They found none for some time, and then they came to a little open place where the soft ground held several footprints.

"We're getting warmer!" exclaimed Joe.

"Hush!" cautioned his chum. "They may hear us."

"Why, you don't think they're around here; do you?"

"There's no telling. It's best to be on the safe side. Keep quiet. Hello! here's something else!" and Blake, moving cautiously, so as not to make any more noise than possible, picked up a bit of metal.

"What is it?" asked Joe.

"Part of their lantern," answered his chum. "It was made of black sheet iron, you remember. This piece may have fallen off when they dragged it through the bushes. We're on the right trail, all right."

"I believe you. But I wish it would turn on to a better path. It's no fun forcing

your way through these bushes.”

“It’ll turn soon now,” predicted Blake. “They only took this lead long enough to discourage pursuit. They didn’t like it any better than we do.”

His surmise proved correct and about five minutes later, having found other evidences of the passage of the wreckers, they came out on an open trail.

It was a narrow path, leading along in both directions from where they came out on it, and following the coast line, but some distance inland. There were evidences that men had passed in both directions, and that at no distant time, for footprints turned to both the left and right, as the boys emerged from the blind trail in the brush.

“Well, what about this?” questioned Joe, as he looked in silence at the tell-tale marks. “Which way shall we go, Blake?”

“To the right!” came the answer, almost immediately.

“What makes you say that?” asked his chum. “I don’t see anything to show that they went to the right, any more than that they went to the left.”

“Don’t you?” asked Blake. “Look here, and remember some of the things our cowboy guide told us when we were after the Indians. Now you see footprints going off to the left and right from this point; don’t you?”

“Sure.”

“Well, do you happen to notice that on the left there are footprints coming back as well as going.”

“Yes, I see that. But what does it mean?”

“And on the right side, counting from this dividing point, there are only footprints in one direction.”

“That’s so, Blake. But——”

“Now what’s the answer? Why the men got here, and, thinking they might be followed, tried a simple trick. They doubled their trail.”

“What’s that?”

“Why, some of them went off to the left, walked on a little way, doubled, or turned, and came back, joining the others, who had turned to the right and kept on.”

“Why was that?”

“Because they wanted to fool us. Naturally a person, not looking carefully, would see both lines of footprints, and would reason that the men might have divided, or that there might have been two separate parties. He wouldn’t know which trail to take. He might pick out the right one, and, again, he might select the wrong one.”

“And you say the right one is——”

“To the right. We’ll follow that. If they think to fool us, or make us divide our forces, they’re going to be disappointed. Another thing.”

“What’s that, Blake?” asked Joe, as he noticed his chum leaning over and carefully examining the marks in the dirt.

“Why, naturally they wouldn’t go to the left, as that eventually leads to the lighthouse. They want to keep some distance from that. Of course they’d go to the right. And here’s where we go after ’em. Come on!”

There was no hesitation now. Joe was as sure as his chum that the wreckers had gone farther down the coast, perhaps to some other high cliff where they could set up their lantern.

They followed the path. The trail was plain now, showing that a number of men had passed along. Footprints were the only clues, however, a number overlapping one another.

“What shall we do if we find them?” asked Joe.

“I—I don’t know,” answered Blake. This was when they had been following the new trail for about an hour.

“We can’t tackle ’em alone, that’s sure,” went on Joe.

“No, but we can—Hark! What’s that?” whispered Blake, suddenly.

They listened intently. Far off they could hear the roar of the surf on the beach; but, closer at hand, was another sound. It was the clink of metal. And then came the distant murmur of men’s voices.

“Joe, I think we’ve found them,” whispered Blake. “Come on, but don’t make any noise.”

Cautiously they crept forward, the sounds becoming more and more plain.

Suddenly they heard a loud voice exclaim:

“There! I guess that will do the business! And those fellows won’t find us here!”

“That’s them!” whispered Blake in Joe’s ear. “I know the voice of Hemp Danforth. We’ve found ’em, Joe!”

CHAPTER XXI

THE CAPTURE

Impulsively the boys clasped hands as they realized what the discovery meant. They had come upon the new hiding place of the wreckers, and the chances were good for capture if no alarm was given.

Joe, perhaps, felt more elated than did Blake, though the latter was glad that

his theory in regard to the direction taken by the men had proved correct.

But Joe felt that now he had a better chance to prove his father innocent of the charge made against him—that he was involved with the wreckers.

“We’ve got ’em!” he whispered.

“Yes—we’ve got ’em—to get!” agreed Blake. “No slip-up this time.”

In whispers they consulted, and decided to creep forward a short distance to make sure of their first surmise that the men, whose voices they heard, were really the wreckers.

“We want to be certain about it,” warned Blake, in a cautious whisper.

“That’s right,” agreed his chum. “Go ahead, and I’ll come after you.”

Cautiously they advanced until they were in a position to look forward and make out a number of men working on a sort of mound of rock that rose from the surface of the cliff.

“This is a better place, from their standpoint, than the other,” whispered Blake. “A light can be seen farther.”

“Yes, and they’re putting up the same lantern on a rock pile,” remarked Joe. Both lads recognized the apparatus they had seen before. The men were busily engaged in setting it in place, evidently working fast to make up for lost time.

“It’s the same gang,” observed Blake; “and they must know of some vessel that is to pass here soon, or they wouldn’t be in such a hurry. Probably they count on the steersman mistaking this light for the one at Rockypoint, and standing in close here. Up at Rockypoint there is deep water close in shore, but it shoals very fast both ways, up or down the beach. So if a vessel saw a false light, and stood close in to get her bearings, she’d be on the rocks in no time.”

“That’s right,” agreed Joe. “She’d be wrecked and these fellows would get what they could out of her, caring nothing for the lives lost. Blake, we’ve got to stop ’em!”

“We sure have.”

“Not only to clear my father, but to save others,” went on Joe. “What’s best to be done?”

“Well, we can’t capture ’em by ourselves; that’s sure,” went on Blake, each lad speaking in a cautious whisper. “The best thing for us to do is to go back, I think, and tell Tom Cardiff. He’ll know what to do.”

“Maybe one of us had better stay here to keep watch. They may skip out.”

“No danger. They don’t know that we have followed ’em, or that we are here.”

“Then we’ll go back together.”

“Sure, and give the alarm. Then to make the capture, if we can.”

For a few minutes longer the eager boys looked on, unseen by the men whom they had trailed. The wreckers were busy putting up their lantern, and were making as much noise, talking and hammering on the apparatus, as though they were far removed from possible discovery.

“Well, we’d better be going,” suggested Blake, after a bit; and they made their departure without causing any suspicious sounds, so that the wreckers had no idea, as far as our heroes could ascertain, that they were being spied upon.

In order to save time, as soon as they got to the nearest small settlement, Joe and Blake hired a carriage, and drove to the lighthouse. As may well be imagined their report caused considerable excitement.

“We’ll get right after ’em!” cried Tom Cardiff. “I just got a telephone message from the secret service men that they are on their way here. They’ll arrive in about an hour. We were counting on getting on the trail ourselves to-day, but you boys got ahead of us. So in about an hour we’ll start. I guess they’ll be there then; won’t they, lads.”

“I should judge so,” was Blake’s answer. “They’ve got quite a good deal yet to do to get that fake lantern in shape, and they don’t seem suspicious.”

“We can’t have our life saving friend with us now,” went on the assistant keeper, “as he is on duty, but I guess the five of us will be enough.”

“Say!” cried Blake, with sudden thought, “if it’s going to be an hour before we start we’ve got time to get our automatic moving picture camera, Joe.”

“What for?”

“To get some views of this capture. It ought to make a dandy film, and we can set the machine in place, start the motor and then you and I can jump in and help catch these wreckers!”

“The very thing!” cried his chum. “I wonder I didn’t think of it myself. Come on!”

“Don’t be late!” advised Tom Cardiff, as they ran toward the ancient carriage they had hired. “We don’t want any slip-up this time. I’m glad we’re going to

try for the capture by daylight, though, instead of darkness; it gives us a better chance.”

Mr. Ringold and Mr. Hadley were surprised and delighted at the news the boys brought, but they voted against the automatic camera.

“This is a rare chance to get a film,” said Mr. Hadley, “and we don’t want to miss it. I’ll go along with you, taking a regular moving picture camera, and while you capture the wreckers I’ll make a film of it.”

This suited the boys as well, and a little later, with the chief photographer, they started back for the lighthouse. They found the secret service men and Tom Cardiff waiting for them, and, well armed, in addition to the clubs they carried, and with ropes to bind the wreckers, they started off.

“We’re almost there now,” said Blake, in a whisper, when they neared the second hiding place of the desperate men. “Go easy, now.”

“Let me get a chance to go ahead and place the camera,” suggested Mr. Hadley, who had the apparatus fully adjusted.

“That’s a great idea,” declared one of the government men. “Taking their photographs in moving pictures! There’ll be no chance for them to deny they were present when they were captured,” and he chuckled grimly.

Mr. Hadley was given an opportunity to move forward alone. He found an advantageous spot and almost at once beckoned to the others to hasten.

“They’re getting ready to leave!” he whispered, as they reached his side.

“Come on, then!” cried Tom Cardiff. “Jump in on ’em, boys. Lively now!”

As he spoke he leaped forward, followed by the others.

“Surrender! We’ve got you surrounded!” yelled the assistant keeper. “It’s all over but the shouting!” and as he made a grab for one of the men the moving picture machine began clicking.

“Hands up!” ordered Mr. Wilton.

“At ’em, boys!” called the other government man, as he and Blake and Joe leaped to the attack together.

For a moment the wreckers stood as if paralyzed about the stone pedestal on which the false lantern was being built. Then, with one accord, the desperate men made a dash for the bush.

“Stop ’em!” cried Tom Cardiff. “Don’t let ’em get away!”

“Come on!” yelled Blake to his chum. “We’ve got to get in this fracas!”

And as they dashed after the wreckers the moving picture camera in the hands of Mr. Hadley recorded view after view of the exciting scene.

CHAPTER XXII

A LIFE GUARD’S ALARM

Fortune played into the hands of our friends in two ways as they sought to capture the wreckers. Otherwise the desperate men might have gotten away, so quickly did they dash out of the clearing at the first alarm.

But, as he ran along, big Hemp Danforth, the leader of the criminals, stumbled and fell. Right behind him was sturdy Tom Cardiff, and the assistant lighthouse keeper was quick to take advantage of the chance thus put in his way.

“I’ve got you!” he yelled, as he fairly threw himself on the prostrate wrecker. “I’ve got you! Give up, you varmint!”

There was a struggle, none the less desperate because the wrecker was underneath. The two rolled on the ground until Tom got a grip on his opponent. Then, by putting forth his enormous strength, Tom quickly subdued the man.

“Give up, I tell you!” panted Tom, breathing hard. “I’ll teach you to wreck ships. Give up!”

“I give up!” was the sullen response.

With a quick turn of the ropes he had brought, Tom had the wrecker trussed up.

Meanwhile the others had been busy. The secret service men had each tackled a man, and had him secure by now, while Joe and Blake, by mutual agreement picking out another member of the party had, after a struggle, succeeded in tying him, too.

But the wreckers outnumbered our friends two to one, and some, if not all, of the desperate characters might have escaped had not reinforcements appeared.

These were in the shape of four sturdy fishermen from the little colony where the moving picture boys lived.

“Oh, if we could only capture the others!” cried Tom Cardiff, when he had finished with his man, and saw some of the wreckers struggling to make their way through the thick bush. “Come on, boys!” he yelled to his friends. “When you finish with those fellows keep after the rest of the gang, though I’m afraid they’ll give us the slip.”

“No, they won’t!” cried a new voice, and then appeared the husky toilers of the sea, armed with stout clubs. At the sight of them the wreckers not yet captured gave up in despair. Counting those tied up, the forces were now equal, and as Mr. Hadley had taken all the moving pictures possible, owing to the struggle taking place out of range of his camera, he left the apparatus, and joined his friends.

“Well, we got ’em!” cried Tom Cardiff, as he surveyed the line of prisoners, fastened together with ropes. “Every one of ’em, I guess. You’re a nice crowd!” he sneered at big Hemp Danforth. “A nice lot of men to be let loose!”

“A little later and you wouldn’t have had us!” snarled the leader of the wreckers. “You were too many for us.”

“That’s so,” spoke Tom. “How did you happen to come to help us?” he asked of Abe Haskill, who was one of the reinforcing fishermen. “Who sent you?”

“Old Stanton telephoned over from the lighthouse,” was the answer. “He said you were on your way here, and that the gang might be too much for you. So I got a couple of my friends, and over we came—just in time, too, I take it.”

“That’s right!” exclaimed Blake, trying to staunch the flow of blood from a cut on his face, received in the fight he and Joe had with their prisoner. Joe himself was somewhat bruised. “A little later and we’d had only half of ’em,” went on Blake.

“It looks as if the lantern was nearly finished, too,” went on Joe.

“Um!” sneered the chief wrecker. “You may think you have us, but it’s a long way from proving anything against us. What have we done that’s wrong?” and he looked defiantly at Tom Cardiff.

“Wrong!” cried the lighthouse man. “Don’t you call it wrong to set up a false light to lure unsuspecting captains on the rocks, so you can get your pickings? Wrong!”

“Huh! How do you know but what this light was put here as a range finder for

us fishermen?" asked the other.

"Fishermen! Why, you men never did an honest day's fishing in your lives!" cried Abe Haskill. "Fishing! When you haven't been smuggling you've been wrecking, or robbing other honest men's nets. You're a bunch of scoundrels, and it's the best day's work we've done in many a year to get you!"

"That's all right," retorted Hemp, easily. "Words don't prove anything."

"They don't; eh?" cried Tom Cardiff. "You'll see what they do. We'll convict you by your own words!"

"Our own words?" asked Hemp Danforth, uneasily.

"Yes, overheard by these two lads, whom you chased but couldn't catch. I guess when Blake Stewart and Joe Duncan go into court, and testify about hearing you talk of wrecking vessels by your false lantern, the jury'll convict you, all right!"

Hemp seemed less concerned with what Tom said than with the name Joe Duncan. As this was uttered the wrecker looked at the two lads.

"Did I understand him to say that one of you is a Duncan?" asked Hemp, curiously.

"I am," replied Joe.

"Are you Nate Duncan's son?"

"I hope so—yes, I'm sure I am."

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the wrecker.

"What's the joke?" inquired Tom Cardiff.

"This, and it's a good one, too. You think to convict us on the testimony of Nate Duncan's son. Why, Nate is one of us! His son's evidence wouldn't be any good. Besides, a son wouldn't help to convict his father. That's a good one. Nate Duncan is one of us!"

"That's not so!" burst out Joe, jumping toward the big wrecker, as though to strike him. "It isn't true. My father never was a wrecker."

"He wasn't; eh?" sneered Hemp. "Well, I'm not saying we are, either; but if your father isn't a wrecker why did he run away before the officers came for him? Answer me that—if you can!"

"I—I—" began Joe, when Blake stepped to his chum's side.

“Don’t answer him,” counseled Blake. “It will only make matters worse. It will all come out right.”

“I’m sure of it,” said Joe. “Poor Dad, I wish he were here to defend himself; but, as he isn’t, I’ll stick up for him.”

“Well, if you’re through talking I guess we’ll move along,” suggested Tom at this point. “There are a few empty cells in the jail at San Diego, I understand, and they’ll just about accommodate you chaps.”

“Are—are you going to put us in jail?” faltered one of the prisoners, a young man.

“That’s what we are,” answered Tom.

“Oh, don’t. I’ll tell—I’ll——”

“You’ll keep still—that’s what you’ll do!” snapped Hemp. “I’ll fix you if you don’t!” and he glared at the youth in such a way that the latter said no more. “I’ll manage this thing,” went on Hemp. “You keep still and they can’t do a thing to us. Now go ahead; take us to jail if you want to.”

“That’s what we will,” declared Tom, and a little later the prisoners were on their way to San Diego, where they were locked up. Some suspected wreckers had been taken into custody when Mr. Duncan was accused, but nothing had been proved against them.

“Well, that was a good day’s work!” declared Mr. Hadley late that afternoon, when he and the moving picture boys were back at their quarters. “We not only got the wreckers, but a fine film of the capture besides.”

“And we’re in it,” said Blake. “Joe, how will it seem to see yourself on a screen?”

“Oh, rather odd, I guess,” and Joe spoke listlessly.

“Now look here!” exclaimed his chum. “I know what’s worrying you. It’s what Hemp said about your father; isn’t it?”

“Yes, Blake, it is.”

“Well then, you just stop thinking about it. Before you know it your father may arrive in Hong Kong, get your letter, and send back an answer. Then everything will be cleared up. Meanwhile, we’ve got to get busy; there are a lot of films to make, I understand.”

“Indeed there are,” declared Mr. Ringold. “I have my sea drama all ready for

the films now. I don't know what to do about a wreck, though. I'm afraid I can't make it realistic enough. I must make other plans about that scene. But get your cameras in good shape, boys, for there is plenty of work ahead."

"We can keep right on the job," said Joe, "for I guess we've about cleaned up the wreckers."

No members of the gang had escaped, as far as could be learned, and the renewed work of getting evidence to be used at the trial was in the hands of the government men. The false lantern, which had first given the boys the clue, was taken down, and proved to be a most ingenious piece of apparatus. Had it been used it would undoubtedly have lured some ships on the rocks.

The work of making the preliminary scenes of the sea drama were under way. It took the best part of three weeks to get what was needed, for Mr. Ringold was very particular, and insisted on many rehearsals, these taking longer than the actual making of the films.

Joe and Blake were kept busy, as was also their young assistant, Macaroni, and Mr. Hadley.

"Everything is going beautifully," said Mr. Ringold one day. "If we could only have a storm and wreck to order, now, I would ask nothing better."

"Yes, everything is nice, except that we're being worked to death," spoke C. C. Piper, gloomily. "I've lost ten pounds in the last week."

"It will do you good," said Miss Lee, with a laugh. "You were getting too stout, anyhow."

"Oh, what a world!" sighed the comedian, as he began whistling the latest comic song.

"It looks like a storm," remarked Blake, as he and Joe came in one evening from a stroll on the beach.

"And when it does come," added Joe, "it's going to be a bad one, so old Abe, the fisherman, says. They're putting storm signals up all along the coast, and all leaves of absence for the life guards have been cancelled for the next week. A storm sometimes lasts that long, Abe says."

"A storm; eh?" remarked Mr. Ringold, absentmindedly. "Well, that will interfere with our plans for to-morrow. I had intended to have some peaceful scenes on the beach; but I'll postpone them. I wish I could work out this wreck problem," he added, as he pored over the manuscript of the sea drama.

One did not need to go outdoors that morning to appreciate the fury of the storm. The gale had come in the night, and the force of the wind had steadily increased until its violence was terrific. There was no rain, as yet, but the sky was obscured by hurrying black clouds.

“Let’s go down to the beach and see the big waves,” proposed Blake to Joe after breakfast.

“All right,” agreed his chum. “There won’t be anything doing in the moving picture line to-day, I guess.”

“Say, that’s some surf!” cried Joe in his chum’s ear, as they got to the sandy stretch. “Look at those waves!”

“I guess they’re what you call ‘mountain high,’” answered Blake, himself yelling, for their ordinary voices could not be heard above the thunder of the surf and the roar of the gale.

They stood for a few minutes watching the big rollers pounding on the sand, and then, looking down the strand, they saw a figure running toward them.

“Here comes a life guard,” remarked Joe.

“And he acts as if something was up,” added Blake.

Nearer came the man, dressed in yellow oilskins, for the spray from the sea flew far inland, almost like rain. Joe and Blake had on rubber coats.

“What is it?” cried Blake, as the man came opposite.

He held his hands in funnel shape and yelled:

“A wreck—a big sailing vessel is coming ashore! Her masts are gone, and she can’t get off! She’ll strike soon. I want all the men I can get to help us with the breeches buoy. We can’t launch our boat—too heavy surf!”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DOOMED VESSEL

“You say there’s a wreck?” cried Blake.

“Yes, we just made her out through the glass. She’s driving on the rocks fast. The current is setting inshore and the wind is helping it.”

“Where is she?” asked Joe.

“Right down there,” answered the life guard. “But she’ll come up farther this way,” and he pointed down toward the rocks opposite which the boys had first surprised the wreckers at work.

“I’ve got to give the alarm,” went on the life saver. “We need all the help we can get. We’re short-handed, anyhow, and two of our men were hurt early this morning trying to launch the surf-boat.”

“Can’t you get some of the fishermen from around here?” asked Joe.

“That’s what I came for.”

“And we’ll help, too!” cried Blake, bracing himself by leaning against the wind, which seemed to grow stronger every minute.

“Sure we will,” added Joe. “Can you see the vessel?” he asked, peering eagerly into the spume and spray.

“Maybe she’s drifted far enough up by now,” went on the coast guard, as he looked intently in the direction he had pointed. “Yes,” he cried a moment later, “I can catch glimpses of her at times, when the waves go down a bit. See! There she is now!”

Looking in the direction the guard pointed, Blake and Joe caught a glimpse of a distant black object rising and falling at the mercy of the wind and waves. It was the hull of a vessel, and when Blake used the glass the guard handed him a moment later, he could see the jagged stumps of broken masts.

“She’s in a bad way,” remarked the lad, gravely.

“Indeed she is,” assented the life saver.

“I wonder if my father is in any such storm as this, on his way to China?” mused Joe, as he, too, looked through the binoculars.

“It’s a bad storm—and a big one, too,” said the guard. “But I must hurry on and give the alarm to the fishermen. The ship will strike soon, and we want to send a line aboard if we can.”

“Wait!” cried Blake, as the man started off. “We’ll tell the fishermen. You can go back to the station. We’ll come to help as soon as we can, and bring all the men we can find.”

“Good!” shouted the man. “It’ll take some time to get the apparatus in shape, and we’ll have to drag it up the beach from the station, to about the place

where she'll come on the rocks. Go ahead, give the alarm, and I'll go back. Whew! But this is a fierce storm!"

"Come on!" cried Blake to his chum, and they raced toward the little fishing hamlet.

"Say!" shouted Joe. "I've got an idea!"

"What is it?"

"The wreck—it'll come close on shore, the guard says; why not make some moving pictures of it? They'll be just what Mr. Hadley wants."

"That's it!" yelled Blake. "You've struck it. Go on and tell Mr. Ringold, Mr. Hadley and the others, and I'll get the fishermen. Then we'll go down the beach until we meet the life savers. It's a great chance, Joe!"

The lads separated, one to arouse the fishermen, most of whom were in their shacks, for it was out of the question to lift the nets in the tremendous seas that were running.

"Come on!" cried Blake, as he saw old Abe Haskill come out to look at the weather. "Wreck—ship coming ashore. The coast guards need help!"

"Aye, aye, lad. We're with you!" cried the sturdy old man. "I'll get the boys. A wreck; eh? Pity the poor sailors that come ashore in such a blow!"

Having given the alarm, Blake turned back to join his chum and the others of the theatrical colony.

"We may need all three cameras," he reasoned; "it is such a good chance we don't want to risk it on one film."

Blake found Mr. Hadley and his chum, with the theatrical manager and the male members of the company, ready to set out. Joe had his own camera, while Mr. Hadley was getting the largest one in readiness.

"Let's take the automatic, too," suggested Joe. "We can start it going and not have to worry about it."

"All right," agreed Blake.

"Say, this is the very chance we wanted!" cried Mr. Ringold. "Think of it! A regular wreck, right at our doors!"

"Oh, but the poor sailors!" exclaimed Miss Shay. "I do hope they may be saved!"

“Of course they can!” cried C. C. Piper. “We’ll all help. Never fear; we’ll save them!”

His tone and manner, to say nothing of his words, were in such contrast to his usual demeanor that everyone looked at his or her neighbor in surprise.

“Don’t give up!” went on the comedian, cheerfully. “We’ll help the life guards—we’ll do anything. We’ll save those sailors!”

“Well, get on to Gloomy; would you!” exclaimed Joe, in a low voice, to his chum. “That is the best ever! It’s the first time he hasn’t predicted a calamity.”

“And just when anyone else would,” added Blake. “For it sure is going to be hard work to save anyone from a vessel that comes ashore in such a storm as this,” and he looked toward the tumbling billows in view from the windows.

Films were threaded into the moving picture cameras, the mechanism was tested, and then the whole company, even to the ladies, set forth.

“I hope the wreck gets near enough so we can get some good pictures of it,” said Mr. Ringold.

“It’ll have to come pretty well in shore, or the breeches buoy rope won’t reach,” said Mr. Hadley. “I guess we can get some good pictures.”

“It’s good it doesn’t rain,” went on the theatrical man; “though I think it’s going to, soon. We’ll have to get up on some elevation to avoid the spray.”

Down the beach they made their way, to be joined presently by the band of sturdy fishermen.

“There she is!” cried old Abe, as he pointed out to sea. “There she is, blowing and drifting in fast. And right toward the Dolphin Rocks, too—the worst place on the beach!” They all gazed toward the doomed vessel, that was now much nearer shore. Blake even thought he could descry figures on deck, clinging to the stumps of masts.

CHAPTER XXIV

OUT OF THE WRECK

“Here come the life savers!” cried Blake a little later, as through the spray that flew over the beach a party of men, in yellow oilskins, could be seen dragging

something over the sand.

“Yes, and few enough of ’em there are to do the work,” said old Abe Haskill. “The government ought to put more men at the station.”

“Some were hurt, trying to launch the boat this morning,” said Joe.

“Very likely,” agreed the old fisherman. “The sea can be cruel when it wants to.”

“And there comes Tom Cardiff!” added Blake, as he pointed to another oncoming figure.

“Yes, and Harry Stanton is with him,” remarked Abe. “They must have left the lighthouse to look after itself, and they’re going to help in the rescue.”

“No danger to the light, now that them pesky wreckers have been caught,” remarked one of the fishermen.

“Boom!” came a dull report over the waste of tumultuous waters.

“What’s that?” asked Blake.

“The signal gun!” cried Abe. “She must be sinking and they want us to hurry help. But she’s too far out yet for a line to reach her.”

Again the signal gun sounded, and hearing it, the life savers hastened their pace, but it was hard work dragging their apparatus through the sand.

“Let’s help ’em!” cried Joe. “The ship is drifting up this way. If we make pictures it will have to be from about here. Let’s help drag the wagon!”

“That’s right!” echoed Blake, and the boys, leaving their cameras in charge of Mr. Hadley, hastened to relieve the fagged-out life savers. The fishermen and some of the theatrical men joined in also.

“Right about here,” directed the captain of the life saving crew, when the cart containing the gun, “shears” and other parts of the breeches buoy had been dragged farther along. “She’ll strike about here, I fancy.”

The doomed vessel was now much nearer shore, and on her wave-washed decks could be seen the sailors, some of them lashed to the stumps of masts, others to whatever of the standing rigging offered a hold against the grasp of the sea.

“Get ready, men!” the commander went on. “The wind is bringing her in fast, and it’s going to be against us shooting a line over her, but we’ll do our best. If

she strikes now, so much the better.”

“Why?” asked Blake, wonderingly.

“Because then she’ll be stationary, and we can keep our main line taut. If she keeps drifting inshore while we’re hauling the buoy back and forth it means that we’ll have to keep tightening up all the while.”

“There, she’s struck!” suddenly called one of the life savers. All gazed out to sea, where, amid a smother of foam, the craft could be seen. Her change in position was evident. Her decks sloped more, and instead of drifting she remained in one position.

“The rocks have gripped her,” spoke old Abe, solemnly. “She’ll go to pieces soon now.”

“Then get busy!” cried C. C. Piper, who seemed not to have lost his strangely cheerful mood. “Save those men!”

“That’s what we’re going to do,” said the captain. “All ready now, men.”

“And that means we’d better get busy, Joe,” said Blake. “We can’t do anything to help just now. Besides, there are a lot of men here. We must get our cameras in place.”

“That’s right, Blake,” and the two lads got their apparatus in shape to operate, Mr. Hadley doing the same. The machines were set up on some sand hills, far enough back to be out of the spray, which was like a fog close to the surface of the water.

While some of the life savers and their volunteer assistants were burying in the sand the heavy anchor that was to hold one end of the rope on which the breeches buoy would travel, others were getting ready to fire the gun.

In brief, the breeches buoy is operated as follows: A small mortar, or cannon, is used, and an elongated projectile is placed in it. Attached to the projectile is a thin and strong line. It is coiled in a box and placed on the sand near the mortar. The coils are laid around pegs in a peculiar manner to prevent tangling. The pegs are then pulled out, and the coils lie one upon the other so that the line may be paid out rapidly.

When the projectile is fired toward the ship, the aim is to make it shoot over her deck, carrying the cord with it. This is called “getting a line aboard.” Once this is done the crew on the vessel can, by means of the small cord, pull aboard a heavy cable. This is made fast to the highest point possible.

There is now a cable extending from the shore to the ship, the shore end being made fast to the anchor in the sand. The cable is raised as high as possible on a pair of wooden “shears,” to keep it above the waves.

Running on pulley wheels, on this stout, tight rope, is the “breeches buoy.” This is literally a pair of canvas breeches, into which the person to be saved places himself, getting into the apparatus from the deck of the sinking ship. There is a line fast to the buoy, one end being on shore. When the signal is given those on the beach pull, the buoy and the person in it are pulled along the tight rope by means of the pulleys to the beach and saved, though often they are well drenched in the process. Those remaining on the ship now pull the empty buoy back, and other persons come ashore until all are saved.

Sometimes, instead of the canvas breeches, a small enclosed car is used to slide along the rope. In this car more than one person can get, and they are protected from the waves.

“All ready?” asked the captain of the life saving crew, after he had inspected what his men and the others helping them had done.

“All ready, sir!” came the response.

“Then fire!”

The mortar boomed, through the wind shot the projectile toward the ship, carrying with it the swiftly uncoiling rope. All watched anxiously.

“Too short!” cried the captain a moment later, lowering the glass through which he had watched the effect of the shot. “Use a little more powder this time.”

The projectile was hauled back through the waves, and attached to another line, coiled in readiness, while some of the life savers busied themselves recoiling the first rope, in case the second shot failed too.

It did, again falling short.

“Try more powder,” said the captain, grimly. “We’ve got to reach her.”

“And soon,” murmured old Abe. “She’s breaking up fast.”

Once more the mortar was fired, Blake and Joe, as well as Mr. Hadley, getting films of every move.

“There she goes!” cried the captain, in delight, as he watched the third shot. “Over her decks as clean as you’d want! Now to get the poor souls ashore!”

On board the wrecked ship could be observed a scene of activity. The sailors began hauling on the line, and presently the big cable began paying out from shore. Soon it reached the side of the ship, to be hauled up, and made fast to the stump of one of the masts.

“Lively now, boys!” cried the captain. “Pull taut and then run out the buoy. She can’t last much longer!”

The men made redoubled efforts, and Blake and Joe, leaving their automatic camera working, while Mr. Hadley turned the operation of his over to Macaroni, the three moving picture experts aided in the work of rescue.

Soon the breeches buoy was hauled out to the ship for its first passenger, and presently the sagging of the cable told that some one was in it.

“Pull, boys!” cried the captain of the life savers, and through the dashing waves, that threw their crests over the shipwrecked person, the buoy was hauled ashore.

“Grab him!” cried the captain, as the first one saved was pulled up high on the beach.

“It isn’t a him, captain!” cried one of the men. “It’s a woman!”

“Bless my sea boots!” yelled the captain. “A woman! Are there any more of you aboard—or any children?”

“I—I’m the only one,” was the panting answer, for she had swallowed much water. “I’m the captain’s wife. Can you—can you save the others? They made me come first.”

“That’s right! Women and children always first!” shouted the captain.

“Of course we’ll save the others,” yelled C. C., who was running excitedly about, helping all he could. “We’ll save every one!” he repeated.

“Gloomy in a new rôle—a happy one!” remarked Blake.

The buoy was hauled back, and another was saved—one of the sailors, this time. He reported that there were in all twenty-five hands on the ship, exclusive of the captain.

“He’ll come last, of course,” he said, simply.

“Of course,” agreed Abe Haskill. “The captain allers does that. Once more, boys!”

Again was a rescue effected, the moving picture cameras registering faithfully everything that went on. The work had to be done quickly now, for the vessel was fast breaking up.

“Two more left!” cried the chief life saver. “Jack up that cable, boys; she’s sagging. I guess the old ship is working farther in. Jack her up!”

By means of pulleys attached to the main rope it was made tauter. Then came a heavy sag on it.

“What’s that?” asked one of the life savers.

“It’s two of ’em—two of ’em, clinging to the buoy!” cried Blake, who was watching through a glass. “I guess the ship must be going to pieces too fast to allow for another trip. You’ve got to save two at once.”

“And we can do it!” cried the captain. “All together, now, boys! But they’re going to get wet!”

By reason of the added weight the rope was sagging badly, and the men clinging to the buoy could be seen half in and half out of the water.

“Lively, men, or they’ll drown!” yelled the captain.

Hardy and intrepid as were the life-savers and the volunteers who had assembled to help them, they paused a moment now. It seemed impossible that the two in the buoy could be pulled ashore in time to be saved.

Over them broke great seas, the waves hissing and foaming as though angry at being cheated of their prey. The storm-swept waters seemed to seize on the rope, as though to pull it beneath the billows. The anchor that held the rope which passed over the “shears” seemed to be pulling out of the sand packed around it.

“Come on, men!” cried the captain. “Take a brace now, and we’ll have ’em ashore in a jiffy!”

“But she’s slipping!” cried a grizzled seaman. “She can’t hold any longer. The whole business is going!”

“She can’t go until we git ’em ashore!” yelled the captain of the life-savers. “I won’t let her! Here, Jim Black, you mosey back there and pile more sand around that anchor. Now then, men, pull as though you meant it. What! You’re not going to have it said that you let a little cat’s paw of wind like this beat you; are you?”

Something of the captain’s courage seemed to infuse itself into his men. They

had been half-hearted before, but they were brave now. Once more they ranged themselves on the rope that was used to haul the buoy from the ship to shore. It was as though the waves had tried to intimidate them, and had been bidden defiance.

The weight of the two persons in the buoy was almost too much. The waves had a doubly large surface against which to break, and well the captain knew that there was a limit to the strain to which the tackle could be subjected. Once the main rope leading from the anchor to the ship, on which cable the buoy ran, parted, and nothing could save those last two lives. No wonder the captain wanted haste.

“Haul away!” he bellowed through the roar of the wind, using his hands as a trumpet. “Haul away, men!”

His companions braced themselves in the shifting sand. They bent their backs. Their arms swelled into bunches of muscles that had been trained in the hard school of the sea.

“Will the haul-rope stand it?” cried one man.

“She’s got to stand it!” cried the captain. “She’s just got to! Pull, men; you’re not half hauling!”

“If that rope gives,” faltered an old, gray-haired man, who seemed too aged for this life, “if that rope gives way——”

“Don’t you talk about it!” snapped the captain. “I’ll take all the responsibility of that rope. It’ll hold all right. I looked at it the other day. All you’ve got to do is pull! Do you hear me? Pull as you never pulled before!”

Once more the backs of the men bent to the strain. The moving picture boys, watching and waiting; filled with anxiety even as they filmed the wreck, saw that the rise and fall of the waves had a good deal to do with the rescue.

“They can pull better when the waves don’t wash over those two poor souls in the buoy,” observed Blake.

“Yes, there’s less resistance,” agreed Joe. “Oh, there comes a big one!” and, as he spoke, an immense comber buried from sight the two whom the life-savers were endeavoring to pull from the grip of the sea.

“If they can only hold their breaths long enough, they may come through it,” said Blake. “But it’s a tough proposition.”

“It sure is,” agreed his chum. They had gone back to snap a few pictures, and

then, finding that the automatic apparatus was working well, they again joined the group on the sands.

“Another pull or two and we’ll have ’em ashore!” yelled the captain. “Lively, men!”

As he spoke a grizzled seaman rushed up to him.

“That anchor’s slippin’ ag’in!” he bellowed through the noise of the storm. “I can’t put sand on fast enough to hold it!”

“Then I’ll have some one help you!” cried the captain. “Here, Si Watson! You git back there and help Jim pile sand on that anchor. It mustn’t be allowed to pull out—do you understand? It mustn’t pull out if—if you have to—sit on it!”

“Aye—aye, sir,” was the answer, and the two men ran back to where the anchor was buried in the beach, to pile the sand on with the shovels provided for that purpose.

“Now one more pull, and we’ll have ’em safe!” yelled the captain a little later, and with a mighty haul his men bent to their task.

“There they come through the last line of surf!” yelled Joe, pointing to the buoy containing the two shipwrecked persons.

“If only the rope holds,” murmured his chum.

Even as he spoke there came a cry from the two men who had been sent to watch that the anchor in the sand did not drag.

“It’s coming! It’s coming out!” shouted one of them.

“Sit on it! Hold it down!” yelled the captain. “Into the water after ’em, boys! Come on, ye old seadogs!”

There was a snap—the rope had parted, but so near to the beach were the two that the life-savers waded into the foam and spume, and grabbed them, holding them safe.

They were hauled to the beach, on which huddled the others who had been saved from the wreck.

The lone woman had been taken in charge by the feminine members of the theatrical troupe, who led her toward their boarding house. They said they would soon have hot coffee ready for all the sailors.

“Get ’em out of the buoy!” cried the captain, as the two last rescued were seen

to be well-nigh insensible. They were assisted out, and sank helpless on the sand.

“Pretty far gone,” remarked a life saver. “One must be the captain, I reckon.”

“And the other,” began Harry Stanton, keeper of the Rockypoint light; “the other—why, if it isn’t Nate Duncan, who used to be my assistant! He came out of the wreck—Nate Duncan!”

CHAPTER XXV

A NEW QUEST

From where he was standing by a group of the rescued sailors, Joe Duncan heard what the lighthouse keeper said. The lad rushed forward.

“Nate Duncan!” he repeated, as he gazed at the two men, who were just beginning to revive under the application of stimulants. “Which one of you is Mr. Duncan?” he asked, eagerly.

“I—I am,” faltered the younger of the two men. “Why, who wants me. Oh, it’s you, Harry Stanton,” and he looked at the lighthouse keeper standing near him. “I—I can explain everything. I——”

“It wasn’t I who asked,” spoke the lighthouse keeper. “It was this lad here,” and he indicated Joe. “Your son.”

“My son!” cried the rescued man. “Are you sure—can it be true. Oh, is it possible? Don’t disappoint me! Are you my son?” and he held out his hands to Joe.

“I—I think so, father,” spoke the boy, softly. “I—I have been looking for you a long time.”

“And I have, too, Joe; yes, you are my boy. I can see it now. Oh, the dear Lord be praised!” and there was moisture in his eyes that was not the salt from the raging sea.

“But—but,” went on Joe. “I thought you went to China. I wrote to you at Hong Kong.”

“I did start for there, Joe; but the vessel on which I sailed was wrecked, and this craft, bound back for San Francisco, picked us up. So I didn’t get very far.

Oh, but I have found my boy!”

The others drew a little aside while father and son, so strangely restored to each other by the fury of the sea, clasped each other close.

“Now, friends,” said Mr. Ringold, bustling up; “those of you who are wet through had better let us take care of you. We have room for you all, and I’ll send word to any of your friends if you’ll give me the addresses. Your wreck, in a way, has been a great thing for me, for I have obtained some wonderful moving pictures of it and this rescue. It will make a great drama. So I want to help you all I can.”

By this time the captain of the vessel had been revived and with his wife and crew was taken to the theatrical boarding place, where the women busied themselves getting warm drinks and food, and the men changed into dry garments loaned by the fishermen and the others. Soon after the last one came ashore the wreck broke up and sank.

“Well, of all the wonderful things I ever experienced, this is the most marvelous,” declared Mr. Duncan, as he sat with his son’s hand in his. “I am wrecked twice, and come back to the same place I ran away from, to find Joe waiting for me.”

“It is wonderful,” agreed Joe, wondering how he was going to bring up the subject of the wreckers.

“Yes, this is the very place I left in such a hurry, a few months ago,” went on Mr. Duncan.

“Would you mind telling me why you left so suddenly?” asked the lighthouse keeper, solemnly. “Of course it’s none of my affair; but I might say it concerns you mightily, Nate Duncan. Can you prove your innocence?”

“Prove my innocence! Of what charge?” cried the man.

“Oh, father, of course we don’t believe it!” burst out Joe, unable to keep silent longer; “but Hemp Danforth says you were implicated with him in wrecking boats by means of false lights!”

“Hemp Danforth says that!” cried Joe’s father.

“Yes. Tell me—tell all of them—that it isn’t so!” pleaded the lad.

“Of course it isn’t so, Joe.”

“But why did you leave so suddenly, and why did the officer come for you the next day?” asked the lighthouse keeper. “It looked bad, Nate.”

“I suppose it did,” said Mr. Duncan, slowly. “But it can easily be explained. I was mixed up with those wreckers——”

“Father!” cried Joe.

“But not the way you think, son,” went on the former lighthouse worker quickly. “Hemp Danforth and I had a quarrel. It was over some business matters that he and I were mixed up in before I learned that he and his gang were wreckers.

“We quarreled, because he tried to defraud me of my rights, and I had to give him a severe beating. Perhaps I was wrong, but I acted on impulse. Then I heard that Hemp, to get even, had accused me of being a wrecker, and he had his men ready to swear to false testimony about me; even that I let the light go out, which I never did.

“I knew I could not refute it, especially at that time, and as something came up that made it necessary for me to leave for China at once, I decided to go away. I realize now that it must have looked bad, especially after the charge against me. But now I am ready to stay and face it. I can prove that I had nothing to do with the wrecking, and that as soon as I learned that Hemp and his gang were concerned in it I left them. If we can get hold of Hemp I can easily make him acknowledge this.”

“You can easily get hold of him,” said Blake. “He and his crowd are all in jail. They were caught in the act of setting a false light.”

“And I don’t believe you’ll even have to prove your innocence,” said Mr. Ringold. “They’ll be convicted, and their evidence will never be accepted. You are already cleared, Mr. Duncan.”

“My name cleared—and my son with me—what else could I want?” murmured the happy man.

“But, Dad,” asked Joe, his face showing his delight that he could now use that word. “Why did you have to leave so suddenly?”

“To try and find your sister, Joe.”

“My sister?”

“Yes, I have a daughter, as well as a son,” went on Mr. Duncan. “I have found one, and now to find the other.”

“Where is she?” cried Joe. “What is she like? Did I ever see her when we were both little?”

“Indeed you did, and when your mother died I left you with a family, who later disappeared. You must tell me your story, Joe, and how you found me. But now as to your sister.

“Most unexpectedly, after years of searching, I got word that she had been brought up in a minister’s family, and that lately she had gone as a missionary’s helper to China. I had long planned to take a sea voyage, and when I got this news I decided to go at once, and bring her back. Then I was to renew my search for you.

“An agent in San Francisco told me of a vessel about to sail for Hong Kong, and I deserted my post at the lighthouse and sailed. I admit I did wrong in leaving so suddenly, but it seemed to be the best thing to do. I did not want to be arrested as a wrecker even though I was innocent.”

“I’ll forgive you,” said Mr. Stanton, with a smile. “I’m so glad to learn you’re not one of them pesky wreckers.”

And then began a long series of explanations, Mr. Duncan listening with interest to Joe’s story, and, in turn, telling how his vessel was wrecked, and how he and the others were picked up, only to be wrecked again, nearer home.

Joe’s father paused a moment and then said:

“But, son, tell me something of yourself. I’ve been doing all the talking, it seems. Are you really in this queer business of taking moving pictures?”

“That’s what I am, Dad—Blake and I. We’ve been in it some time, and we’re doing well. We hope to be in it some time longer, too. If it hadn’t been for these pictures I might never have found you.”

“That’s so, Joe. After this I’ll never pass a moving picture theatre without thinking what it has done for me. It gave me back my boy!”

“Now I think you have talked enough, Mr. Duncan,” said one of the women, coming up. “You had a much harder time of it than we did, and you must quiet down. You must have swallowed a lot of salt water.”

“I guess I did—enough to preserve about a barrel of pickles,” he admitted, with a smile. “I would be glad of a little rest. But you won’t leave me; will you, Joe?”

“No indeed, Dad. I’ve had enough trouble finding you to lose you now. But you get a good rest. Blake and I have a lot to do yet. I want to get these latest films in shape to send off for development. I hope they came out good.”

“I don’t see how they could—with the weather conditions what they were,” remarked C. C. Piper, joining the group.

“Now that isn’t a nice thing to say,” Miss Lee reminded him. “Why can’t you be cheerful?”

“Why, I’m not at all gloomy. I only said——”

“You tried to throw cold water on what the boys did,” she reminded him.

“Water! Say, if anybody says water to me again to-day, I don’t know what I will do!” exclaimed Blake. “Shame on you, C. C.! You ought to be more careful.”

“Oh, well, I didn’t mean anything. I guess those pictures will be all right—if the salt spray doesn’t spoil the celluloid,” he added, as he moved off.

“You’re hopeless,” declared Miss Lee. “I’ll never speak to you again.”

The nonsensical talk served to raise the spirits of those who had been rather plunged in gloom ever since the wreck. Mr. Duncan was given a room to himself where he could be quiet and recover from the shock of having been so near death.

The moving picture boys found plenty to do. In addition to getting off to the developing studio the films they had taken that day, they had to prepare for a hard day’s work to follow, for, now that he had the wreck scene, Mr. Ringold declared that he needed some others to go with it to round out the drama of the sea that he had in mind when coming to the coast.

It may seem that it would not pay to go to such big expense to make a single films play, or even one or two, but I assure my readers that it is not uncommon for a concern to spend ten thousand dollars in making a single play, and some elaborate productions, such as Shakespearian plays, and historical dramas, will cost over fifty thousand dollars to get ready to be filmed.

Months are spent in preparation, rehearsals go on day after day, and finally the play itself is given, often not lasting more than an hour or half hour on the screen, yet representing many weary weeks of work, and the expenditure of large sums of money. Such is the moving picture business to-day.

The boys were kept busy nearly all the rest of that week, and then came a period of calm. Joe sought out his father, who had steadily gained in strength after his sensational rescue, and began to question him as to his experiences, for Mr. Duncan had only given a mere outline of his experiences up to this time.

“You must have had some strenuous adventures,” said Blake, who went with his chum.

“I certainly did. But, according to Joe, here, they weren’t much more than what you boys went through with in New York, and getting those Indian films.”

“That’s right; we did have a time,” admitted Blake.

“Well, I’m glad I’ve got my boy, anyhow,” went on the former lighthouse worker, with a fond glance at Joe. “Nothing is worse than to have folks, and not know where to find ’em. I hungered and longed for Joe for days and nights, and now I have him. And I’m not going to lose him again, either, if I can help it,” and he clasped his son’s hand warmly in his palm, while tears dimmed his eyes. Joe, too, was much affected.

“If you only had your daughter now, you’d be all right,” said Blake, anxious to turn the subject.

“Yes, so I would. My poor little girl! We must locate her next, Joe.”

“But what about my sister?” asked Joe. “Can we find her?”

“We’ll try, Joe, my boy!” exclaimed his father. “You and I together.”

“Count me in!” cried Blake.

“I sure will,” agreed Joe. “I wonder what will happen to us.”

And what did, and how the two lads went on their new quest, will be related in the next volume of this series, to be entitled “The Moving Picture Boys in the Jungle; Or, Stirring Times Among the Wild Animals.” In it will be told of their adventures and you may learn whether or not they found Joe’s sister.

“Well, we got everything we came for,” said Mr. Ringold, a few days later, when the shipwrecked ones had been sent to their homes with the exception of Mr. Duncan, who remained with Joe.

“Yes, all the dramas, and the storm and wreck as well,” agreed Mr. Hadley.

“But we’ll never have such good luck again,” predicted C. C. Piper, with a return of his gloomy manner. “I know something will happen to us on our way back East.”

“Oh, cheer up,” urged Miss Lee; “the sun is shining.”

“But it will rain to-morrow,” declared the comedian, as he did some odd little

dance steps.

Preparations for taking the theatrical company back East were made; but Joe, Blake and Mr. Duncan were uncertain about accompanying them. While Joe and his father were talking over their plans, Blake went to San Francisco on a vacation for a week.

But it was not much of a rest for him. While there he learned of a prize offered for the best moving picture of the fire department in action, and, though many operators tried, Blake's film was regarded as the best. He "scooped" the others easily, and beat some of the most skillful men in the business.

But now, for a time, we will take leave of the moving picture boys.



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