

The Stone Chest

OR, The Secret of Cedar Island

by George Alfred Henty, 1832-1902

Published: 1899

Hurst & Company Publishers, New York



Table of Contents

Chapter I ...	A Mystery of the Storm.
Chapter II ...	Off for Zaruth.
Chapter III ...	Among the Icebergs.
Chapter IV ...	The Escape from the Icebergs.
Chapter V ...	The Arctic Island.
Chapter VI ...	The Madman.
Chapter VII ...	A Fearful Fall.

Chapter VIII ...	A Remarkable Story.
Chapter IX ...	The Volcano of Ice.
Chapter X ...	The Escape of the DART.
Chapter XI ...	Among a Strange Foe.
Chapter XII ...	Bob's Discovery.
Chapter XIII ...	The big Polar Bear.
Chapter XIV ...	The Finding of the Stone Chest.
Chapter XV ...	Bob Rescues his Father—Conclusion.



Chapter I

A Mystery of the Storm.

„What a fearful night, Bob!“

„Yes, mother; it's about the worst storm of the season,“ replied Bob Cromwell, as he entered the seaside cottage and shook the water from his cap. „It will go hard on any vessel near the coast. The wind is rising to a perfect gale. Just listen to it sing.“

There was no need to listen. The storm was so violent one could scarcely hear aught else. The little cottage, standing so boldly out upon the sea cliff, shook and rocked from end to end as if preparing to leave its foundations.

„I see supper is ready,“ went on Bob. „By the way, was Mr. Vasty here?“

At once Mrs. Cromwell's face grew dark and troubled. It was an aristocratic face, and plainly indicated that the lady had seen better days.

„Yes, he was here, Bob.“

„And what did he say?“

„We must leave on Monday. The cottage has been sold over our heads.“

Tears stood in Mrs. Cromwell's eyes as she spoke.

„Sold!“

„Yes, my boy. He said he could wait no longer. He believes, as do all in Sea Cove, that your father is dead.“

„Perhaps he is,“ sighed Bob. „It is now over six months since the »Bluebell« went down. If he escaped in a small boat we should have heard from him before this.“

„Oh, I cannot believe your father dead, Bob,“ cried the mother, bursting into tears. „If I thought that—“ She did not finish.

Bob sat down to the supper table in silence. He had little heart to eat, and swallowed the food mechanically.

Bob was seventeen years of age, bright, handsome, and fearless. He was Mrs. Cromwell's only son and his father had been a sea captain.

We say, had been, for the »Bluebell« had been wrecked some time before and all in Sea Cove thought the captain dead—all saving Mrs. Cromwell, who still hoped for his safe return—hoping, as it were, against hope.

Years before the Cromwells had been rich, owning four large trading vessels. But bad luck had come and continued until the fortune dwindled down to nothing but the ownership of the old »Bluebell«. It was then that the captain had determined on a voyage to Alaska, taking with him a party of men who wished to explore the new gold mines in that territory.

The »Bluebell« was supposed to have gone down in sight of the coast and only two of the survivors had thus far returned.

As time went by the little cottage, a poor affair at the best, was mortgaged to pay outstanding debts. It was the last of the Cromwell belongings.

Bob worked at the docks, handling freight. It was not what he had been brought up to, but it was the best employment he could obtain in the vicinity.

„I don't see what's to be done, Bob,“ said Mrs. Cromwell, during a lull in the storm. „We must move and I have only three dollars in all.“

„Oh, I forgot!“ he suddenly exclaimed, and pulled a ten-dollar bill from his pocket. „Here, mother, is a little to help us.“

„Why, where in the world did you get that, Bob?“ she ejaculated.

„A young gentleman gave it to me—insisted I should take it.“

„What for?“

„He said I saved his life.“

„And did you?“

„Well, I don't know—perhaps,“ mused Bob. „You see, it was Captain Randolph Sumner, the gentleman who owns that splendid new yacht down to Marcey's. He fell into the water right in front of the incoming steamer »Flag«, and I fished him out just as he was on the point of being struck. He was very grateful and made me keep the money, although I didn't want it and told him so.“

That was all Bob said. He was too modest to mention that Randolph Sumner had called him a hero and that the crowd standing by had given him a cheer for his bravery.

„Ten dollars is a windfall,“ began Mrs. Cromwell. „Now if we—Gracious, the signal gun, Bob!“

Boom!

Bob sprang up from the table. He knew that sound only too well.

Boom!

„Ship has struck, mother!“ he cried. „I must go down and see if I can help in any way.“

And waiting for no reply, the youth grabbed up his cap and storm coat and rushed out into the storm.

Bob was right—a ship had struck. Away off through the mist and rain he could see the colored lights and the flash of the gun, calling for help.

The lifeboat men were already out and getting ready to launch their heavy craft.

„Look! look! The ship is going down!“

The cry thrilled everyone to the very heart. It was true. The stately ship was sinking fast. Down she went and came up again, once, twice—and then no more.

The lifeboat went out in a hurry, but it was of no avail. The storm had done its work and all on board had perished.

No, not all. Walking at the foot of the cliff a little later, Bob heard a low moan, and soon came upon the body of an aged seaman jammed in between the rocks. The man was fearfully bruised and did nothing but moan as the youth bore him up to the cottage.

Here he was made as comfortable as possible on a cot. It was an hour before he was able to open his eyes.

„Where am I?“ he asked faintly. „Oh, the storm. I was hit in the back—I am dying; I know it. Take me to Mrs. Leon Cromwell.“

At this utterance Mrs. Cromwell and Bob were both greatly astonished.

„I am Mrs. Cromwell, sir.“

„You! It is not possible!“

„Mother tells the truth,“ put in Bob. „What do you want?“

„You are the wife of Leon Cromwell?“

„I am,“ said the woman.

„Heaven be praised! Who brought you to me?“

„I brought you to our cottage,“ returned Bob. „You lay unconscious on the rocks.“

„It is the work of Providence,“ murmured the sufferer. „I was on my way hither when the storm overtook the »Mary Lee«. I—I—a drink—I am fainting!“

Water with brandy was brought and the man revived a little. He glared strangely at Mrs. Cromwell.

„I must speak quickly, for I am dying—I know it, feel it. I was sick on board; that’s why I know. The doctor said I couldn’t live, and the storm has only hastened matters. I want to talk to you about your husband.“

„Is he alive?“ came from mother and son simultaneously.

„He is—or was three months ago. At Zaruth, on the Siberian coast—where the stone chest was left—we—more drink—quick!“

Again the sufferer had a relapse.

„The stone chest caused the trouble. There was gold and silver, and after the wreck——“

„Never mind the gold and silver. Where is my husband?“ interrupted Mrs. Cromwell.

„I was going to tell you. We started for—for——“ The man gasped for breath. „It’s my head. We started for the coast, when the people living there who had seen the stone chest, got together and—oh!“

The sufferer fell back in a spasm of pain, from which it was almost impossible to revive him. At last he spoke again.

„He was made a prisoner, and—water, or I die—I can’t drink—it is growing dark—the papers in my pocket are for you—and may Heaven forgive me!“

The man leaped almost to his feet, then fell back in another spasm. A minute later he was dead. With tenderness mother and son cared for the body. In one of the seaman’s pockets was found a packet of papers yellow with age.

Bob opened the packet and looked over the paper with interest. An hour passed. Then the youth sprang to his feet.

„Mother, I am going to Cedar Island on the Siberian coast and to father’s rescue!“ he cried, with sudden determination.

Chapter II

Off for Zaruth.

„To Siberia—Cedar Island!“

„Yes, mother. From what I can make out, father is there, a prisoner of some people called the Svlachkys, and all on account of a wonderful stone chest, said to be filled with gold and silver.“

„It cannot be true, Bob.“

„I think it is. This dead sailor's name was Ruel Gross——“

„Ruel Gross!“ Mrs. Cromwell started. „I heard of him before. Your father said he possessed a wonderful secret.“

„He did—about the stone chest. The whole truth is, so far as I can understand, he got father to go up there in search of it. After it was found they got into some trouble with the natives, and Ruel Gross abandoned father to his fate. Here is a handmade map of the locality.“

„Pray Heaven your father still lives,“ murmured Mrs. Cromwell. „But you say you are going up there. How?“

„I don't know. But I'll find a way, even if I have to go up on a whaler.“

Mrs. Cromwell shook her head.

On the following morning the dead body of the sailor was turned over to the village authorities.

Between them mother and son decided for the present to say nothing to the simple fisher-folks concerning Ruel Gross' revelation.

„They'll sneer at us—that's all,“ said Bob.

But Bob confided in his chum, Jack Larmore, an orphan boy of his own age. Jack was tremendously interested.

„Say, Bob, I'll go along, if you say the word,“ he said. „I'm sick of Sea Cove and the mean folks living around here.“

„All right.“

That noon, when Bob returned home he found Captain Sumner present, talking to his mother.

The captain had come to offer Bob a position on his yacht.

„I would like to go—if you're going up the coast,“ said Bob. „I want to get to Alaska, and then to Cedar Island, off Siberia.“

The rich yacht owner was much astonished. He proceeded to draw Bob out, and an hour later had the youth's story in full. With Mrs. Cromwell he looked over the papers and map.

Then he lit a cigar and began to pace up and down the parlor of the cottage.

„I've half a mind to cruise up there,“ he said. „To me, one place is as good as another. I love to roam the wide world over, and have already been to the South Seas and to the coast of Africa. What if I should take you up there, my boy?“

„Will you?“ shouted Bob, in quick delight. „Do it, and you shall have the contents of that stone chest—if we can get it.“

„No, I'll only want my share of it,“ laughed Captain Sumner.

On the next day they talked the matter over once more. The captain was a widower with one child, a girl of fifteen. The girl, whose name was Viola, said she would like to go up the coast to new lands. But she would like Mrs. Cromwell, or some other lady, to go along.

Persuaded by Bob, Mrs. Cromwell said she would undertake the trip, and before they knew it, all arrangements were made.

The »Dart«, as the yacht was named, was sent to San Francisco for stores, and three days later Bob and Mrs. Cromwell and Jack Larmore left Sea Cove, and left it forever!

It is not the purpose of this tale to tell of all that happened ere the »Dart« put to sea on that memorable voyage up the coast to Alaska.

For awhile all went well on board. But one day there was trouble among the crew. The trouble grew worse and three of the fellows had to be put into irons.

They were let go later on, but ever after they showed their ugliness only too plainly.

Bob and Jack were not idle while on board. Both did their full share of work and both proved themselves good sailors.

A strong friendship sprang up between Mrs. Cromwell and Viola Sumner, and the two became almost inseparable.

Bob found Captain Sumner a fine man to get along with, stern at times, but always fair and square. He had, as he said, been a great rover, and often told interesting stories of his adventures.

As days went by and they got further north it became colder. Then a storm was encountered which took them many miles out of their course.

So suddenly did it fall upon them that the sails were blown to ribbons.

Viola Sumner, who was on deck, got drenched and nearly drowned. She was saved by Bob only at peril of his life, and carried down into the cabin nearly senseless.

And now we find the »Dart« storm-beaten, but still water-tight, blown far out to sea.

Bob, who had just come on deck, cast his eye first aloft, like the true sailor he was becoming, and then around him.

Not more than half a mile distant towered an immense iceberg, its topmost pinnacles glowing in the bright morning sun.

Other bergs floated to the southward, while to both east and west could be seen long floes of rugged ice.

The yacht was trying to beat to the northward by making short tacks through the ice-floes, but, as Bob could see, she made but little way.

„Have we done any good since I went below?“ he asked Bok, a sailor who was steering.

„No, faith, yer honor. The current sets so fast to the south that sorra a bit more north do we make in an hour than I could throw a cat by her tail. It's wearisome work, yer honor, and, be jabbers! it's bitterly cold.“

Bob buttoned his pilot coat closer around him and shivered.

„You are right, Bok.“

„Hullo, Bob!“

Our hero looked around and perceived Jack Larmore's head above the companion.

„Come down to breakfast, before it's cold,“ cried Jack.

Our hero made a bolt down the ladder after his friend.

„What is your opinion, Bob, about the men?“ asked Captain Sumner, as Bob took his place at the table. „I mean the rascals I had to iron up last week.“

„Well, sir,“ replied our hero, „they seem to go about their duty all right, but after our experience, we must never trust them.“

„It's that scoundrel, Nockey, that I mistrust. The others are more fools than knaves. He will never forgive that flogging I gave him.“

„It served him all right,“ broke in Bob. „When we gave them the choice of taking a couple of dozen or going ashore, not one hesitated.“

„Well, even now, we have only eight hands and ourselves.“

„What do you mean to do, papa?“ broke in Viola. „Surely not go further among these dreadful icebergs? I have read that ships are often crushed by them.“

„I should be only too glad to be out of these regions, dear; but, with the wind and current against us, I don't know what to do.“

As soon as breakfast was finished the captain went on deck. His eye rested on the floe to the westward.

„Where are your eyes, you Irish lubber?“ he shouted to the steersman. „Don't you see yon ice closing in on us? You ought to have let me know of this.“

„Blest if I can see much change,“ muttered Bok.

„But I can. The channel is narrowed by half. We shall never get clear of it before we are nipped. 'Bout ship, boys, and be smart!“

„All hands!“ bellowed the mate.

In a couple of minutes the small crew were on deck, hauling in the ropes and halyards.

The topsail-yards swung round, the helm was put hard down.

The sails shivered in the wind as the yacht came about.

„Put both the main- and fore-sails on her, Leeks. We must be out of this trap as soon as possible,“ cried the captain.

It took some time to get full sail on the »Dart«.

Once done, however, she flew onward, with the wind on her quarter, at a tremendous speed.

„Sixteen knots an hour! Bravo!“ cried the captain. „Can't she move, Bob?“

„That she can, sir. But I can't help dreading this still going through the ice. There are few ships, except whalers, that have penetrated as far as we, I should think.“

„Right, sir. But desperate circumstances require desperate means. None of us want to spend a winter here, and, though we happen to be fortunate as to the time of year, another month or six weeks will see this sea covered with ice.“

Chapter III

Among the Icebergs.

Bang! crash!

At that instant a shock nearly threw them off their feet.

Viola caught Bob's arm, and Mrs. Cromwell and the captain almost fell together.

„We are foul of the ice!“ shouted the mate, rushing forward.

„What!“ roared the captain. „Where's that rascally lookout? Down with helm! The sea is full of loose ice.“

For the rest of the day the »Dart« was dodging through hummocks of ice, which looked as if a floe had been broken up by a storm.

When Bob came on deck for his watch at midnight, it was intensely dark. A thin scud shut out the light of the stars and moon.

He was joined by Jack, for the two lads usually kept watch together.

„I am afraid we are in a tight fix,“ said the latter. „I doubt if we shall ever again find our way home.“

„Never say die,“ cried our hero. „But look! What’s that yonder?“

The two chums peered into the darkness ahead.

„I think there is a blacker spot than the rest over the starboard bow,“ said Bob, after a while.

„There are some blue signal-lights here. I’ll ignite one,“ suggested Jack.

Retiring under shelter of the companionway he struck a light and ignited the blue fire.

Clambering on to the bulwarks, and holding on to the forestay with one hand, he held it above his head.

Right in front of them loomed two bergs, not a quarter of a mile apart, the sea dashing in spray along their sides.

There was not a moment for hesitation.

„Port your helm!“ sang out our hero. „Keep her so!“ he added, as he saw the bows of the schooner point for the narrow passage.

Jack lit another blue light, and thumped on the deck to wake those below.

In half a minute Captain Sumner and the mate were beside them.

„The bergs are closing in on us,“ said the captain quietly. „Go to your helm, Bok; it will be safer.“

The bergs were more than a mile long, and the vessel, under easy sail, was not making more than six knots an hour.

„Here, gentlemen, take the halyards, and rouse up the topgallant sails. I won’t trust the crew on deck till the last minute.“

With the assistance of the man Bob had relieved at the wheel, they soon had the topgallant sails, which had been furled, chock-a-block.

„It will be a narrow squeak,“ muttered the captain, as he glanced at the icebergs, whose tops seemed quite close, though the bases were yet some distance from the schooner.

„Is there any hope?“ whispered a soft voice in our hero’s ear.

„I trust so, Miss Viola,“ he answered. „See! yonder is the end of the ice mountain on the starboard bow.“

„But how close they are!“

„They look closer than they are in reality,“ he replied.

All the time he was wondering if their end had really come.

Suppose the wind were to fail!

Fortunately for them, however, caught between the two bergs, it rather increased in force than diminished.

The icy tops seemed now ready to topple down on the deck.

The waves, running up the sides of the bergs, lifted the vessel on their swell as they rebounded.

Fifty yards on either side towered the glittering mountains.

Thirty yards, twenty yards! and the salt spray of the billows, which dashed on the icy cliffs, fell on deck.

Viola’s hand was clasped in Bob’s, and our hero felt some relief in facing death with her and his mother.

„Call your comrades,“ cried Captain Sumner to the sailor. „Give them a chance for life. Come, Mrs. Cromwell, Viola, Bob, Jack—all of you. Prepare to jump for the ice, when we strike! It’s our only hope!“

Chapter IV

The Escape from the Icebergs.

To Captain Sumner it looked as if the »Dart« would surely be crushed.

„Be prepared to jump!“ he sang out again.

But even as he spoke a strong gust filled the yacht’s topsails.

She plunged forward.

The starboard berg was left behind, and the sea on that bow was open.

Bok instantly shifted the helm.

The »Dart’s« head fell away from the danger on the port bow.

A few minutes passed.

Then, with a crash as if an earthquake had riven a mountain chain, the two bergs met.

Our hero, who, with the others, was watching with breathless interest, saw them rebound.

Huge blocks and pinnacles of ice, thousands of tons in weight, fell into the gap between them.

Before these could rise to the surface the ice mountains had again collided.

A crunching, rending sound struck the ears of our friends, as the two monsters ground their sides against one another.

The rugged summits fell into the sea, and formed smaller bergs.

The yacht was lifted on to the top of the giant waves caused by the concussion, then sank into the hollow, only to be caught up again by the still higher swell.

But the danger was over!

After escaping so narrowly being crushed the »Dart« found the sea free from ice, and made good way to the southward.

However, about eight bells on the following day, a gale sprang up from the northeast, which drove down the eastern floe in dangerous proximity.

The waves rose, and sheets of spray flew over the fast-driven schooner.

It was so cold that, in spite of all the warm clothing they could find on board, all hands felt numbed.

„Land ahead!“ was an appalling cry which rang out suddenly.

Captain Sumner himself hurried forward.

A rough, rocky island, the waves dashing in foam against its low cliffs, was discerned through the flying spray.

Already the edge of the eastern floe was crushing itself to pieces against the projecting reefs.

On the right, or western side, was a lane of broken water.

To venture into it was very dangerous, but seemed their only chance.

Bok and another sailor were at the wheel.

Over it went, strained down by their united strength, and the »Dart« dashed through the breaking water.

The western side of the island was about a mile long.

Twice, by porting the helm, the little vessel escaped clear of rocks, over which the water spurted.

As she approached the southern end of the isle, Bok, who had been sent into the foretop, shouted that again there was land ahead, and that the passage between was full of ice.

The captain ascended the shrouds himself, halfway to the top.

„It's like a cauldron,“ he exclaimed on descending. „No ship, except perhaps a very powerful steam whaler, could live in it.

„There is only one chance for us,“ he continued. „We must get under shelter of this island.“

As the south coast line opened, the helm was put down, and the vessel was hove to under a high cliff and jutting cape, which protected her from the rush of the ice-laden current.

Both anchors were at once let go.

Fortunately they found good holding ground.

All the rest of that day, and till dawn the next, did the gale rage; but as the short night passed, the wind sank, and by midday it was but a breeze.

The current running between the islands soon swept the ice away.

But before trusting himself in these strange waters the captain determined to send a boat across to the greater island, on which rose a rugged hill of considerable height.

Both Mrs. Cromwell and Viola begged for a run on shore, so the larger boat was manned by Bok and three seamen, Bob and Jack each taking an oar, while the captain and the women occupied the stern-sheets.

Chapter V

The Arctic Island.

Once on the island, it was seen that the hill rose on its southernmost point.

The ground was rocky, and covered with deep patches of snow in sheltered places.

„I don't like the look of that,“ observed the captain. „That is this year's snow. Once the frost sets in we are done.“

Finding it hard work to traverse the direct route, they made for the western shore.

Here, though they had to clamber over hillocks and steep rocks, they got along quicker.

Suddenly Bok, who was in front, uttered a shout.

On the others hastening up they saw the cause of his astonishment.

Beached in a little bay, with her topmasts gone and the hulk lying over on the port side, was a brig.

The water only washed her rudder-case, and the captain noticed, to his dismay, a thin coating of ice fringing the shore of the inlet.

Not a sign of life was to be seen.

„We must examine her before we do anything else,“ exclaimed Bob.

Captain Sumner looked at his watch.

„We can spare an hour,“ he said, „but not more.“

There was a rush down the steep rocks on to the sand.

Arriving alongside, for some time they could find no means of climbing on board, till our hero found a rope hanging from the port-bow, which, on being pulled, seemed strong and firm.

As soon as he, the captain, Bok, and one of the men were on deck, which sloped acutely, Bob called to the ladies to say that he would fetch a chair, or something to serve as one, and hoist them up.

To their surprise the companionway was not blocked with ice and the doorway was shut.

It opened easily, and our hero was the first to descend.

An extraordinary scene presented itself to his eyes directly they got accustomed to the gloom.

Seated at a table, some upright, others with their heads sunk in their folded arms, which rested on the table, were the shrunken bodies of a dozen or more men.

So life-like were they that not until he had summoned up courage to touch one did Bob believe them dead.

Some empty bottles, and a cup or two, stood on the table.

They might have dropped to sleep after a carouse.

If they had it was the sleep of death.

Remembering his promise, Bob looked around for a chair.

Not seeing one unoccupied, he was obliged to lift up one of the bodies and lay it on a locker.

Within another locker was found a length of stout rope, which seemed uninjured, and, accompanied by Bok, he repaired on deck and hastened to the side.

The chair was soon rigged, and Mrs. Cromwell and Viola were hauled on board.

To prepare them for the ghastly sight, our hero told them and Jack what they would see.

Opening a door at the bulkhead, Captain Sumner, closely followed by the two lads and the others, stepped into a narrow passage, which had berths on each side.

Passing through a second door they came into a square room, in which was built a clay and stone fireplace.

The captain stopped short.

A fire smoldered on the hearth.

„Hullo!“ cried the captain. „Someone still lives!“

„Yonder lies the body of a man!“ exclaimed Viola, who had crept to Bob’s side and taken his arm between her hands.

„Don’t be afraid,“ he whispered. „We must be glad that we have arrived in time, if indeed we have.“

The captain and Bob advanced to the prostrate man’s side.

He was lying on a rug of seals’ skins, with another pulled over him, under which was a blanket.

„He lives!“ cried the captain, placing his hand over the heart of the unconscious man.

After a minute a faint color mantled his white cheek and he heaved a long sigh.

Presently the eyelids trembled, and a moment later he opened them.

They rested on the captain, who was stooping over him.

A look of surprise came into them, but they almost immediately closed again.

A dose of hot brandy was given.

This time he recovered considerably, and looked round him inquiringly.

„You will do now, my man,“ cried the captain encouragingly. „Try him with the food,“ he added.

Mrs. Cromwell brought the roughly minced meat and soddened bread and placed a spoonful in the sufferer's mouth.

He swallowed it eagerly.

After he had taken some half-dozen spoonfuls he turned his head on the pillow and fell asleep.

„He will be all right now,“ whispered the captain. „But someone must stay with him while we ransack the ship.“

A second door led forward, and, leaving the watchers, the rest of the party passed through it.

Forward was found a number of great casks, such as are used to receive the blubber cut from the whale.

„She is a whaler, evidently,“ exclaimed the captain.

In the forecabin there was nothing except some hammocks and a chest or two.

„We can get warmer clothing than what we possess, anyhow,“ remarked the captain. „Now, what's the best thing to do?“

„We can carry the man back in a hammock,“ suggested one. „I doubt it,“ replied the captain. „What I propose is that some of us stay the night with him, and we will return in the morning, by which time he will be much stronger.“

On their return to the square room, Bob and Jack volunteered to remain.

This done, Bok was delegated to bring them some supper.

On arriving Bok first fastened to the rope the package he had brought, which was drawn on board, and then the rope was lowered again.

„Be jabbers! but it's cold, it is,“ he cried. „If I might be so bold, I would just suggest that we should go down below. How is the dead man?“

„He isn't dead yet,“ replied Bob, laughing. „But he is sleeping still. I hope you have brought something good for him.“

„Good, is it? There's a tin of soup, and another of salmon, besides a piece of seal, that Leeks shot while we were away.

„Then there is a bottle of wine—that's for yerselves and the sick man—and half a bottle of good rum, which I hope I may have my share in.

„Faith, there is enough to make us as merry and comfortable as if we were waking the dead man below there.“

Chapter VI

The Madman.

Taking the things with them, they hastily descended the companionway.

It was not without a shudder that they passed the many bodies.

As they were preparing supper they noticed the sick man stirring.

„Who are you?“ he suddenly muttered.

„We are Americans, like yourself,“ replied Bob. „Here, have something to eat?“

The man's eyes glistened.

„Give it me—quick!“ he exclaimed, in a hoarse voice.

Jack, who had warmed some of the soup, brought it in a basin he had found, with a spoon and a piece of bread.

Bob took it from him and fed the invalid slowly.

„More,“ cried the latter, when it was finished.

„Not yet,“ replied our hero. „Have a doze, and you shall have as much as you want next time.“

Giving him a glass of wine, they left him, and in a few minutes his regular breathing showed that he slept again.

By this time the joint of seal was roasted, and the little party of three sat down together.

„What can that noise come from?“ exclaimed our hero, as he stayed his fork halfway to his mouth to listen.

„I heard it once or twice before,“ returned Jack, „but thought it rats.“

„Faith, but I hope there's no ghosts here,“ cried Bok. „Heaven stand between us and harm.“

„Bah! don't be foolish. It's rats, sure enough.“

It was not long after this that the sick man sat up to partake of more food.

This done, he told his story.

He said he belonged to the whaler, »Cross of Gold«, which had been caught in a large icepack.

„This pack we attempted to cross,“ continued the sailor, „by dragging our boats over rollers we had brought with us.

„On the third day, however, a snow-storm set in, and continued for hours.

„Knowing as how time was valuable, after a rest, we tried to make our way through the drifting snow.

„But, after toiling for a long while, we found ourselves back where we started from.

„The captain, I and one or two others wanted to try again, but the rest outvoted us.

„We, therefore, tried to turn the pack by coasting along it, but, although we ran over a hundred miles along its edge, in a westerly direction, never a lead did we come across which offered any hopes of getting through.

„At length we came to the end, where it was joined on to another pack, which extended to the south.

„This we ran along till we saw high land before us.

„But all the shore was a rampart of old ice, so that it was next to impossible to approach.

„However, we killed quantities of seals and saw many whales floating in the open water.

„We then determined to make once more for the brig and start anew, taking an easterly route.

„But our luck was out. We lost many days in finding these islands, and when we did get back to them, hardly had we got on board than the weather broke up.

„For days the snow was driven in whirling clouds all around us.

„The decks were covered feet deep.

„It was impossible to get out in search of food, and we were almost starved.

„At length the weather cleared up, and we, with difficulty, forced our way on deck.

„The whole view was changed.

„A sharp frost had set in, and bound the snow-covered country with iron bands.

„Fresh ice had formed round the brig.

„I don't want to tell of the horrors of that winter.

„Some of us were mad, I guess.“

„But what of the men frozen to death in the cabin?“ asked Bob.

„Well, sir, we had built this kitchen, and the fireplace, and most of us in an evening would sit here and smoke.

„But dinner and supper was mostly taken in the cabin, where the big table was.

„It was the very bitterest of weather.

„Food at last there was none, except a lump of seal.

„It had been so awfully cold that none had dared venture out hunting.

„It was my day for being cook, and as soon as the joint was done we carried it into the cabin, which was warmed with a stove.“

„Well, go on, man,“ exclaimed our hero, for the sailor had suddenly stopped in his narrative, as if some distant sound had caught his ear.

„Beg pardon, sir. Well, in spite of the stove, the meat was no sooner cut in slices than it was cold.

„I took mine back to the fire and rewarmed it.

„There was still a good supply of rum, and I took a swig at the bottle, and then, whether because of the cold or the rum, I don't know, but I fell sound asleep in front of the blaze.

„I woke up numbed with cold.

„The fire was nearly out, and the first thing I did was to make it up.

„Then, after heating myself a drop of grog, I fell to wondering what had become of my comrades.

„I stumbled along the passage, which felt as cold as the grave, and there, just as you see them now, sat our cap'n and his crew, frozen to death.

„The fire in the stove was out, and the companion door open.

„I took up one of the bodies, after I had recovered my nerve a bit, and dragged it along the passage into the kitchen.

„But I could not restore it to life, though I tried hard.

„So you see, sir, here have I been—Heaven in mercy! what's that?“

The sick sailor had risen to his feet.

Bob and Jack had done the same.

Bok crouched near the fire, with a horror-struck look in his eyes.

„It's the dead walking, maybe,“ he gasped.

A muffled thump, thump, thump! was again heard.

A minute or more passed.

Then our hero again seized a brand, and made a rush along the cabin passage.

Jack followed, and after him Bok.

A glance sufficed.

The body from the head of the table had disappeared.

„What can it mean?“ exclaimed Jack. „I don't think I am a coward, but this is horrible.“

„Something in that sick man's face tells me he has not spoken all the truth. We must have it out of him,“ said our hero.

But at that moment a mournful howl came from above.

Rushing to where their arms were stacked, Bob and Jack seized each a rifle and made their way on deck, not heeding, in their excitement, a cry not to fire from Horton, the sick man.

On lifting their eyes aloft they beheld a singular-looking object gazing at them over the edge of the foretop.

It appeared to be some huge animal, though of what kind they could not make out.

Scarcely waiting to consider what they were doing, Bob and Jack prepared to fire.

A wild shriek echoed along the deck.

„Stop that noise!“ cried Bob, glancing round and seeing that Horton had managed to ascend the companion ladder.

Bob had thrown up his rifle to his shoulder, when the weak voice of the sailor arrested him in the act of firing.

„For heaven's sake, sir, don't fire! It's murder, nothing else.“

As Horton spoke, the object of his solicitude, with incredible speed, slid down the forestay and disappeared through the scuttle of the forecabin.

„Please, sir, listen to me.“

„All right; only be quick, and don't talk such nonsense about it's being murder.“

With their guns in their hands, and taking good care to shut the door both at the top and bottom of the companionway, the two lads followed Bob and Horton through the dark death-cabin and passage to the kitchen, lit up by the cheerful firelight.

„Now, say what you have to, and be quick about it,“ cried our hero. „I can't rest quiet when a huge wild animal is within a few yards of us, though how it got there I can't imagine, for I thought there were no such things in the polar regions.“

„That animal, as you call him, is Charlow, one of our sailors. He has gone mad.“

No more was just then seen or heard of the crazy sailor, and the party retired for the balance of the night.

When the captain came from the yacht he brought Mrs. Cromwell and Viola with him, but left them in the small boat.

Bob quickly repeated Horton's tale.

„We must capture that madman and bind him with ropes,“ said Captain Sumner.

To this all, including Horton, agreed.

The descent to where the madman had disappeared was quickly made, but he could not be found.

„Hark!“ cried Bob suddenly.

A wild cry of alarm arose on the cold air, coming from off the water.

„It's my mother and Miss Viola crying for help!“ Bob went on.

„We must get to them at once!“ returned Captain Sumner.

The party were quickly on the snow, running toward the small boat, Bob and Jack leading.

When they came in sight of the craft a scene met their gaze which filled them with horror.

The madman had boarded the boat and was in the act of shoving off.

Terror-stricken, Mrs. Cromwell and Viola shrank back on the stern sheets.

„Stop! stop!“ yelled Bob.

With a snarl the madman bent to his work. Soon the boat was in deep water.

In desperation Bob leaped into the water after it.

Ere he could reach the craft the madman picked up the long ice pole and aimed a vicious prod with it at our hero's breast.

Bob was struck squarely, and on the instant disappeared beneath the surface with the shrill laugh of the crazy sailor ringing in his ears.

Chapter VII

A Fearful Fall.

„Where am I? Where are mother and Miss Viola?“

It was Bob who spoke. Jack Larmore stood over him in the snow.

„You're all right—I got you out of the water,“ Jack made answer.

„And the others?“

„Gone.“

„Gone! In the power of that madman?“

„Yes.“

Bob gave a groan and leaped up. His breast hurt him not a little.

Where is Captain Sumner?“

„The yacht has given chase. Look!“

Jack pointed up the coast. The yacht was disappearing around a distant point.

But in a hour the vessel returned. The captain's sad face told his story. He had been unable to catch the crazy fugitive and rescue his daughter and Mrs. Cromwell.

What was to be done? Night came on rapidly, and they were compelled to wait until morning.

At early dawn Bob and Jack commenced to climb a near-by hill of ice to look for the small boat.

It was perilous work, but they did not falter.

At length they reached the level summit and glanced down.

The yacht looked beautiful as she lay to, with her topsails backed, and every movement of the figures on deck could be distinctly seen.

Crossing some rough, porous ice, they came to the pinnacle.

This was rougher than it had looked from below, and they found not much difficulty in mounting.

Soon they reached the summit, or, rather, within a few yards of it, where there was a tolerably safe and level spot.

With anxious speed, Bob extended the telescope, which he had carried slung over his shoulder.

For some time he swept the ocean in vain, but at length, far to the westward, just on the edge of the horizon, he caught sight of a white speck, which could be nothing but a sail.

„Look, Jack, and tell me what you think!“ he exclaimed.

„I can see it!“ cried the latter, after a lengthened search. „I agree with you—it must be a boat-sail; anyway, it’s too distant to be a bird’s wing. It must be many miles off.“

„Let’s make haste and descend!“ cried our hero. „My chest, where the fellow struck me, is getting stiff up here in this rare air.“

Most haste less speed.

They had reached within twenty feet of the level portion of the berg when our hero slipped.

His arm could not bear his weight, and he half fell, half slid rapidly to the bottom of the peak.

„Are you much hurt, old fellow?“ exclaimed Jack, as soon as he could reach his friend’s side.

„Only bruised, I think. Just help me up.“

When assisted to his feet it was evident that Bob had twisted his ankle, or slightly strained it.

„Misfortunes never come alone,“ he said, with a laugh. „We must get on. If I find the descent difficult, you must help me.“

A stream of water from the melting of the ice on the peak ran along in a little channel it had worn, to where it came to the ravine.

Here it fell over in a cascade, and divided, one part, now joined by other trickling streams, descended the gorge into the sea, the other flowing into the mouth of an ice cavern.

The friends had crossed about half the summit of the berg when a sudden gust of wind, forming an eddy, blew up a cloud of ice dust.

These tiny particles stung like needle points when carried by the breeze against the faces of the two boys.

They had to stand still and cover their eyes with their hands.

When the dust subsided they again hurried forward.

At the edge of the ravine a fiercer gust than the first hurled up millions of icy particles.

They glittered like a cloud of diamond dust in the sun’s rays.

Wishing to escape, both the lads dropped on to the lower ledge.

„It’s worse here than ever,“ exclaimed Bob, holding his rifle in one hand and placing the other so as partly to protect his face. „Let’s get into yonder cave.“

They both ran toward it—that is, Jack ran, and Bob hobbled after.

The former had only just time to see that the floor of the cavern sank at a sharp angle, when he felt his feet fly from under him.

Our hero, arriving at the cave’s mouth at the instant of his friend’s fall, was horror-struck to see him slide on his side toward the edge of a dark abyss, over which the water trickled.

„Help, Bob!“ cried Jack, in vain trying to regain his feet.

Our hero clearly saw the fearful danger of his comrade’s position.

Jack’s feet were already over the edge.

„I am gone! Help!“ he gasped.

Then, with a stifled cry, he disappeared over verge of the abyss.

Chapter VIII

A Remarkable Story.

„Jack! Jack!“ shouted Bob.

A sound as of falling rocks or ice blocks reached his ears, but no answering voice.

The echoes of the falling masses died away.

Bob was filled with dismay at the dreadful ending of his chum.

He had reached his gun to him, but Larmore had been unable to grasp it.

He shuddered as he thought of Jack's feelings as he felt himself shooting over the precipice.

There was nothing to do but to return.

He found, lame as he was, the path extremely difficult.

But at length he reached the yacht and told his story.

„It's dreadful,“ said Captain Sumner. „First my daughter and your mother, and now your friend, a young gentleman we all liked and I, for one, looked on as a comrade, for we fought side by side against that rascally crew of ours.“

The captain was quite affected.

When the »Dart« was once more going through the water in the direction in which Bob had seen what he took for a boat sail, he came to the side of our hero, who stood leaning on the after-bulwarks, gazing at the berg, whose southern point they were now passing.

„He was a fine young fellow!“ he exclaimed, „and would have made a good officer.

„But what are you looking at?“

„A seal, sir,“ said Bob. „Don't you see it, lying in the shade of that block of ice, on the ledge, lapped by the swell?“

„Seals don't lie in the shade—they bask in the sun. Give me the glass, Bob.“

But our hero was already drawing it out to his focus.

No sooner did he get it pointed correctly than he uttered a cry of surprise.

„That's his body!“ he exclaimed. „At all events, a man's body. How on earth did it come there?“

A small boat was still towing astern.

Bob, forgetful of his sprain, lowered himself into her, and grasped the oars, while the captain followed.

„Hold hard!“ shouted the mate.

Our hero impatiently, though he never for a moment expected to find his friend alive, complied.

In two minutes Leeks reappeared and let down a flask into the boat.

Our hero dashed the oars into the water, and the small boat moved faster over the heaving face of the ocean than she had ever done before.

„Don't deceive yourself. If it is your friend, he can't be alive,“ said the captain, as they approached the body of the ledge.

„It is Jack!“ he added, a couple of minutes later. „But how on earth did he come there?“

Another score of vigorous strokes brought the little boat alongside the berg.

Hardly waiting to fasten the painter, they rushed to the body.

It was lying on its back, and as Bob bent over it he noticed a faint tinge of color on the cheek.

„He’s only stunned, I believe, after all,“ cried our hero.

The captain unscrewed the top of the flask and poured a mouthful of wine between the teeth of the senseless lad.

In a minute it took effect.

Jack sighed and opened his eyes.

„Let’s get him on board the yacht at once,“ exclaimed the captain.

First, however, he passed his hand along each limb, and then felt Jack’s ribs.

The patient winced at the last experiment and uttered a low cry.

„Legs and arms all right,“ muttered the captain, as he with our hero’s help carried the boy to the small boat; „so, if a rib’s broken, he must consider himself well out of a bad scrape.“

Bob again pulled his hardest, and when alongside the yacht his comrade with some difficulty was got on board.

It was not until late that evening that Jack was able to tell of his wonderful escape.

„I don’t know much about it,“ he said, „but never shall I forget the awful feeling as I shot over the edge of the precipice.

„Of course I thought that I should fall down a well that penetrated right through the berg into the sea.

„However, instead of that, I did not fall a great distance before I came down feet first among a lot of pieces of loose ice, or, if not loose, they gave way with me, and together we went clattering down a second slope.

„All of a sudden I was pulled up by my rifle, which was slung round my shoulders, getting jammed across the passage.

„I tried to gain my feet, but failed; the slope was too smooth and steep.

„There was but one thing for it, and that was to go on.

„I slipped the sling over my head, and away I went again.

„Then came another fall.

„This nearly knocked me senseless.

„I just remember another slide, then daylight, then a last fall, and I lost all consciousness, only coming to myself to find you leaning over me.“

„How is your side?“ asked the captain. „Your escape was most wonderful. Another foot farther, and you would have been drowned.“

„It was, as you say, a narrow escape. As for my side, I must say it’s rather painful.“

However, on the captain pressing it, he came to the conclusion that no ribs were broken.

It was bandaged up, and Jack was able to walk about, thankful that things were not worse.

Chapter IX

The Volcano of Ice.

For three long days the »Dart« bore away northwest, the direction in which the last had been seen of the missing boat.

„Luckily it's the right course to steer for the Siberian coast," remarked the captain, as he sat over his wine after midday dinner. „We shall sight the high land to-morrow morning, if not before."

„Surely we shall come across the boat in time, captain?" remarked Bob.

„Well, we have had wonderfully fine weather," replied the captain. „But, after all she was but a cutter, handled by a lunatic."

And he and Bob interchanged looks of despair as they ascended the companion ladder.

„Bok, go to the foremast-head," ordered the captain. „Take the glass, and have a look around."

The sailor slung the telescope over his shoulder and nimbly mounted the rigging.

When he arrived at the topgallant-yard he passed his arm round the skypole, and, adjusting the glass, swept the line of the horizon.

There was a long pause.

„Deck ahoy!"

„What is it?" bellowed the captain.

„Sure, there is a mist, or smoke right ahead, and above it I see what looks like the top of a mountain," replied the Irishman.

„Nothing else?"

„There is a low, flat berg."

„Nothing more? No sign of a boat-sail?"

„Nothing the size of a pocket handkerchief, yer honor."

„Well, we must give up the search for the present and start for the Siberian shore. But I give you my word, Bob, I shall not give up this hunt for many a week."

The wind fell light, and the »Dart« did not make more than three knots an hour during that afternoon.

The strange misty appearance still hung over the water.

They were gradually approaching it, and it was not more than a couple of miles ahead, when, as the sun set, the captain and the two boys went to supper, leaving Leeks in charge of the deck.

They had just finished their meal when the latter shouted down the companion for them to come up.

An extraordinary scene met their gaze when they reached the deck.

The yacht was still in moderately smooth water, but a quarter of a mile before her the sea was covered with a thick mist, while it was tossed hither and thither in tumbling waves, which met and crossed one another in wild confusion.

As they looked a thick body of smoke was belched from the midst of the turmoil.

„Port! hard aport!" shouted the captain. „Round with the yards! Flatten in the jib! Be smart, there!"

Rushing forward, followed by Bok and Jack, the captain himself seized the rope and aided the sailors to execute his orders, while Leeks attended to the jib.

Bok was at the wheel.

When on the new tack the »Dart« was not a cable's length from the boiling water.

„It's a subterranean eruption!" exclaimed the captain. „Look—look yonder!"

Where he pointed, from the midst of the curling waves, a great black patch of what seemed to be mud rose above the surface.

Round it were thick columns of smoke, which instantly shut it out from view. The wind chopped round, and a fierce gust came, laden with steam and smoke, from the north.

The yacht heeled over till her copper sheeting gleamed above the water-line.

Gasping for breath, for a fearful stench accompanied the smoke, which enveloped them, all on board could do nothing but hold on to whatever was handiest.

A rushing, roaring sound filled their ears as the »Dart« dashed onward, throwing the boiling water in showers of spray over her bows.

The men forward were forced to stagger aft.

It looked as if the »Dart« was doomed!

Chapter X

The Escape of the DART.

For fully ten minutes no one could tell whether the yacht would right herself or not.

Captain Sumner, aided by our hero and Jack, at length found the topgallant halyards, and lowered the sail in the peak.

We say found, for the darkness was intense.

Then the gallant little vessel, as if freed from an overpowering load, came up to her bracings.

Once more she flew with increased speed through the water.

A few seconds and the star-lit sky again appeared overhead, and the rolling smoke wreaths were left behind.

„Heavens!“ cried the captain; „never in all my life have I seen the like. What a death to have escaped!“

As if exhausted with its own fury, the squall subsided as suddenly as it had sprung up. The smoke gradually blew away.

And there, over the starboard quarter, some two miles distant, lay a long, low, black island.

„Look! look!“ yelled Bob suddenly.

All eyes followed his outstretched hand.

There on the shore rested a familiar-looking boat, containing three figures—Mrs. Cromwell, Viola, and the madman.

Mrs. Cromwell and Viola were waving their hands. Then, assured they were seen, both fell back unconscious.

As for the mad sailor, he never stirred. He was dead.

It did not take the captain and Bob long to reach the women folks. They were taken on board the »Dart«, and, after Bob had kissed his mother and the captain had hugged his daughter, and both were given food, they told their story.

„When the madman struck Bob I nearly fainted,“ said Mrs. Cromwell. „When I came to he had hoisted the sail, and we were leaving the shore. The crazy fellow was eating some ship biscuit, which lay in a basket.

„When the madman had appeased his hunger he looked at us for some minutes without speaking.

„We were dreadfully frightened, but he never once came aft to annoy us.

„He placed some tinned meat and water near us, and then sat by the mast, singing loudly and rocking himself backward and forward.

„Viola and myself slept in turn; but the madman sat in the bow, looking out ahead, hour after hour.

„When the wind rose and the waves broke into the cutter he reefed the sail, and managed her wonderfully well.

„Still he never spoke.

„A shower fell, and Viola and myself collected the water and had a good drink.

„Another time snow fell.

„This also we collected and put into the barrel.

„Time after time a fresh can of meat was placed out for us.

„But we ate very sparingly.

„I think at this period the man's senses were returning to him, for soon after he spoke.

„He told us he did not know where we were, but trusted it was off the coast of Siberia, and that we had every chance of being picked up.

„He said that his name was Charlow, and that he had been mate of a brig that had been wrecked, but he had gone mad through misery, loneliness, and want.

„We had just sighted the coast, when first the smoke from your vessel came into view.

„Charlow was very weak, but he altered the direction the boat was going, and told us how to steer toward you.

„Presently the yacht came in sight, and we tried to get him to put us on board; but he was too weak, and just before Bob saw us he breathed his last.“

Such was Mrs. Cromwell's narrative, and Viola corroborated it.

A happy day was spent on board of the »Dart«. „I trust we are never separated again,“ said Bob to his mother.

„So do I, Bob,“ she returned fondly. Then she gave a sigh. „I wonder when we will reach Cedar Island. I see nothing like cedar trees around here.“

„The map has but one cedar on it,“ he returned. „It must have floated up here in the water and taken root in the ice. Even Captain Sumner can't understand that part of it.“

On the following day the »Dart« again set sail for the coast of Siberia.

They were well into the sea of Kamtchatka, and felt that they must soon strike the spot mentioned in Ruel Gross' memorandums, if the old sailor had taken his observations correctly.

„If only we were sure father was alive!“ Bob murmured more than once.

Three days passed, and Bob was one morning in the foretop when suddenly he gave a wild shout.

„Land ahoy!“

„Where away?“ asked Captain Sumner quickly.

For from the deck nothing but icebergs were to be seen.

„To the northwest, sir. Will you let me have the glass?“

The glass was quickly brought and adjusted. The captain gave one glance.

„Ah! Bob, look!“

The boy did so, and then gave a shout that brought everyone on board on deck.

„Cedar Island!“

Chapter XI

Among a Strange Foe.

It was true.

Far off to the northwest they could see the shore of a land that was covered with ice and snow.

The snow was of a reddish color, and the ice a deep blue.

But this was not all, nor by far the strangest part of the picture.

On the top of a hill, amid the snow, there stood a large cedar tree.

Its heavy branches swayed in the breeze mournfully; for though standing as if planted, the tree was dead.

For several minutes those on the »Dart« viewed the scene.

Then Bob broke the spell.

„Do you know what I think?“ he said.

„I think that dead cedar was stuck up on the hill for a guide.“

„Perhaps you are right,“ returned Captain Sumner. „One thing is certain—we have reached Cedar Island, as Gross called it. Probably the ground has a Russian name a yard long.“

„Let us waste no time in getting ashore,“ cried Bob. „My father may be waiting for us!“

At this the captain said nothing, not wishing to hurt the boy's feelings. But the »Dart« continued on her course, and soon they dropped anchor in deep water but a few rods from the edge of the land.

Bob was the first to enter the small boat. He was followed by the captain and Jack and two sailors.

The shore of the land reached, they gazed around curiously.

„Looks deserted,“ said Bob, in a disappointed tone of voice. „But come on up to the cedar. We may be able to discover something from the top of the hill.“ The ascent was quickly made by Bob, but scarcely was the top gained than a shout was heard from below.

„Savages!“

Bob was right. The sight that met his eyes startled him as he had never been startled before.

Rushing forward, they perceived the yacht surrounded by a half-score of canoes.

Two others were drawn up on the beach, and half a dozen or more copper-colored savages were standing round the dingy.

„We must save our boat at any cost!“ cried Captain Sumner.

As they dashed down the hill the savages turned, armed with clubs, to face them.

One was bending a bow, but a shot from Bob's gun broke his arm.

Jack also fired, and the aborigines, all save one, took to flight, jumping into one of the canoes.

This brave chief, for such he looked, wielding a heavy club with both hands, rushed at our hero.

Bob threw up his gun to parry the blow.

The weapon was struck from his hand, but the blow fell harmless.

Before the tall savage could regain his balance Bob bounded on him, clasping him round the body.

But if our hero was strong, the native was stronger.

Dropping his club, he seized his adversary's throat, and, forcing back his head, made him relinquish his hold.

Then, seizing him round the waist, he flung him at the captain, whom he upset, at the same instant springing into the sea and swimming after his companions.

The whole affair did not last a minute.

Jack, who had reloaded, fired upon the overcrowded canoe.

Two paddles fell into the water and drifted away.

No sooner did they clamber on board than they were saluted with a score of spears, which stuck in the masts and deck, one passing through the fleshy part of a sailor's arm.

„Here, man, go below and bathe it in brandy,“ cried the captain. „Drink some, too. The rest of you get under shelter of the bulwarks.

„I have heard that these fellows poison their spears and arrowheads,“ he continued to our hero.

„Will they come back, do you think?“ questioned Bob.

„Perhaps—we must remain on guard.“

The next few hours were very anxious ones on board of the »Dart«.

Chapter XII

Bob's Discovery.

Night came, and the hostile natives showed no sign of returning.

A strict watch was kept until morning, but nothing out of the ordinary happened.

In the meantime Captain Sumner and Bob examined the map with great care and also read and reread the papers Ruel Gross had left behind him.

„Let us go on another tour of exploration,“ said the captain, on the following day. „If those natives come back Bok can fire a gun to warn us.“

The boy readily agreed and they set off without delay.

Once under the dead cedar tree they looked around them curiously.

A short distance further inland they saw a hollow, which had evidently at one time been a camp.

Tin cans were strewn around, along with a number of fish and animal bones.

„I wonder if father and Ruel Gross once encamped here?“ thought Bob.

Hardly had the idea occurred to him than Captain Sumner set up a shout.

He was pointing to a post set up in the ice. To the top of the post was attached a rude sign, which read:

„To the Svlachkys' Camp—One Mile.“

„Hurrah! here's a discovery!“ cried Bob. „Shall we go on?“

„Yes; but let us advance with extreme caution. These Svlachkys may be very bad people.“

„Undoubtedly there are, or they wouldn't keep my father a prisoner,“ rejoined Bob.

„That signpost must be the work of Ruel Gross,“ went on the captain. „The savages haven't dared to touch it, thinking there was something supernatural attached to it—something to injure them.“

On went the captain and Bob, down one hill of ice and up another. It was extremely cold, but neither minded that.

At last they reached a portion of the island that was very uneven. Great chasms yawned to the right and left of them. It was with difficulty that they pushed forward.

But they were bound to go on, and go they did, until at the mouth of what looked like a cave of ice the captain called a halt.

„Listen!“ he whispered. „I hear voices.“

Bob listened. Captain Sumner was right. From the cavern came the sounds of several human tongues.

„They are not speaking Russian,“ said the captain. „Perhaps we have stumbled upon more savages.“

Hardly had he spoken when three human beings came into view.

They were bundled up in furs, in strong contrast to the other natives, who had scarcely any body-covering.

The new-comers were jabbering among themselves at a great rate. Presently they came to a halt before a large slab of ice.

They tugged and pounded on this until the slab fell to one side, revealing a strange-looking opening.

„What are they up to now?“ whispered Bob.

„I don't know—wait.“

They waited. Presently the three men disappeared within the opening. Soon a smoke came out, and they saw that firebrands had been lit to light up the scene.

„That may be the place where the stone chest is kept,“ said Bob.

„More likely it is a burial place,“ replied Captain Sumner. „I've seen such spots before. Maybe they're preparing for a funeral.“

„Can't we get a little closer to them?“

„It would not be safe. Hark!“

From a distance they heard the mournful toot of a large horn.

„That's a funeral horn, I'm sure,“ said the captain. „If they are coming this way we had better—Hullo! look!“

The captain pointed to an opening to their left.

A band of men were advancing.

They were guarding a prisoner—a white man, who walked in their midst.

Bob gave the white man one swift look, and then shrieked out at the top of his voice:

„It's my father!“

Chapter XIII

The Big Polar Bear.

„Your father!“ cried Captain Sumner.

„Yes, my father,“ repeated Bob, in high excitement. „What shall we do?“

He felt like rushing forward, but the captain restrained him.

„We can do nothing against such a force of men,“ he said. „Wait—or—“ He hesitated.

„What?“

„You or I might go back to the »Dart« for help. Every man on board can come heavily armed. When these people see our number they may be willing to talk reasonably to us.“

„That’s so, but I hate to leave,“ returned Bob. „They may do some harm to my father in the meantime.“

„Then I will go, Bob. But mind, keep shady, unless they do something very bad.“

Bob promised, and without delay Captain Sumner started on the return to the »Dart«.

With a wildly beating heart Bob watched the people who held his father a captive.

They were marching along silently now and did not stop until the center of the cave of ice was reached.

Here the party assembled in a circle at a point where there was a slight elevation.

Two of the men had axes, and with these they began to chop at the elevation, causing the pieces of ice to fly in all directions.

„Now what are they going to do?“ thought our hero.

Presently he heard a slight noise behind him. Somewhat startled, he turned around to find himself face to face with a monstrous polar bear!

The beast had just discovered Bob. For a moment he stood still.

Then with a growl he leaped directly for the astonished youth.

Had Bob not sprung out of the way the bear would have landed on his head.

But Bob moved with the quickness of lightning, and this saved his life.

The bear, however, came down so close to the boy’s side that our hero had no time left to fire at him.

He struck the bear one hasty blow with his gun stock and then ran for dear life.

Recovering, the huge beast came after him.

Although a heavyweight, the bear managed to cover the ground with incredible swiftness.

Down the side of the icy hill went Bob, with the bear less than a dozen feet in the rear.

The plain below reached, Bob scarcely knew which way to turn.

The bear uttered growl after growl, showing that he was working himself up to a perfect fury.

„I must get to the yacht, if possible,“ thought Bob, and headed in the direction without delay.

On and on came the polar bear.

He did not seem to gain, neither did he lose.

So far the race had been about even, but Bob felt he could not keep up that terrific strain much longer.

As he ran he fingered his gun nervously.

Should he risk a shot?

„I must do something,“ he said to himself desperately.

And wheeling about he took hasty aim and blazed away.

The shot was not a bad one. The bullet struck the polar bear in the side of the head, causing him to stagger back and halt.

On went Bob again, and by the time the bear recovered sufficiently to continue the pursuit he was nearly fifty yards in advance.

But the bear was undaunted, and on he came as swiftly as before.

Once Bob stumbled and almost gave himself up for lost.

But he scrambled up quickly, and was relieved to see the bear stop, no being able to make out what was about to happen.

Then on went again, until, with a cry of terror, Bob leaped back.

He had reached the edge of a swiftly flowing stream, which ran between smooth banks of ice.

To attempt to leap that body of water would be highly dangerous, and to enter it might cost him his life.

And now the polar bear was at his very heels.

Chapter XIV

The Finding of the Stone Chest.

„Help! help!“

Why he uttered the cry Bob could scarcely tell.

He did not imagine that any human beings were within sound of his voice.

Yet it is natural for a person in mortal peril to cry for assistance.

Luckily his cries were heard.

Captain Sumner was returning from the »Dart«, having hastily summoned Bok, Leeks, and the others.

Glancing in the direction, he saw the polar bear and then Bob.

He did not stop to think, but, taking hasty aim, fired.

Bok also discharged his weapon, and, hit twice in the neck, the beast staggered back.

Bob now saw his friends, and, running up the stream, joined them.

With so many against him the bear tried to flee, but a second bullet from the captain's gun finished him.

„Oh, how thankful I am that you have come,“ cried Bob gratefully. „I thought I was a goner.“

„Don't waste time here,“ exclaimed Captain Sumner. „These shots will alarm those people we left at the ice cave.“

„That is true,“ said Bob. „Come on—we must rescue my father!“

And he led the way, with the captain at his side.

It was a rough journey up the side of the hill again, and more than once they had to stop to catch their breath.

At the top a surprise awaited them.

The band of strange people had disappeared!

At first Bob could scarcely believe his eyes.

„Where are they?“

Gone!“

„But to where? I can't see them anywhere.“

Captain Sumner shook his head.

A telescope was brought into play, but it did no good.

Captors and captive had alike gone, no one could tell where.

A consultation was held, and it was decided to explore the cave before going back to the »Dart«.

The descent into the cold spot was not easy, and more than once a member of the party was in danger of breaking a leg.

The bottom reached they made their way to the place where the men had been at work with their axes.

They had cut out a square hole two by three feet and six feet deep.

Gazing down into the bottom of the hole, Bob gave a shout:

„The stone chest, as sure as I live!“

„What!“ cried the captain.

He too looked into the opening.

There rested what at first looked to be a square stone of a whitish-blue color.

But a closer examination proved that it was really a stone chest, having two immense hinges of iron. How had the object come there?

„I believe those people were going to dig it out when our firing frightened them off,“ said Captain Sumner.

„Let us see what the chest contains,“ returned Bob, in high curiosity.

The others were willing, and by the united efforts of the sailors the top of the chest was pried back.

A murmur of astonishment went up.

The chest contained three iron pots, one filled with silver and the others filled with gold!

„The treasure, sure enough!“ ejaculated Jack, who had come along with the sailors.

„There are thousands of dollars there!“ said Captain Sumner.

„We ought to take the stuff on board of the »Dart«,“ put in Bok. „Taint no use to leave it out here.“

The others agreed with him.

In the chest were two fur-covered sacks, and these the party used, filling them up to the top.

In the midst of the work a far-away shot was heard. Two more followed in quick succession.

„Tis an alarm from the yacht,“ cried the captain. „I told my daughter and Mrs. Cromwell to fire in case anything turned up.“

Without delay the sailors were sent off in advance.

Captain Sumner, Bob, and Jack started to follow with the treasure sacks, when a shout went up and a band of the hostile savages appeared at the far end of the ice cave.

„We must run for it!“ yelled Bob. „Come on—for the ship!“

„Give them a volley first!“ shouted the captain.

Six shots, poured into the advancing troop, threw them into confusion.

As the treasure-seekers turned to run a spear glanced over our hero's shoulder and stuck quivering in the ground a dozen yards beyond.

At the top of their speed they rushed toward the shore.

At first they fancied they were not pursued.

After going a hundred yards, however, a wild yell and the patter of feet told them they would have to do their best.

Encumbered as they were, with both the lads partly disabled and the captain no speedy runner, the savages soon gained on them.

„We must give them another volley!“ panted the captain.

Though the guns chosen were breech-loaders, it took some little time to reload them whilst at a run.

Suddenly Bob felt a shock, which nearly made him fall.

However, he recovered himself with a stagger.

„The sack saved you,“ gasped Captain Sumner. „But for that the spear would have pierced your back. Now wheel round and fire!“

As they fronted the natives they found that not thirty yards divided them.

At that short range every bullet told.

Three men fell dead, and as many were wounded.

The captain gave them a couple of shots from his revolver before he once more turned and ran for his life.

„That accounts for about half them,“ exclaimed our hero.

As they gained the head of the beach Jack stopped short.

„Go on!“ he gasped. „My side! I am stuck!“

Bob put his arm through that of his friend, who had dropped his gun, and dragged him onward.

The captain turned and fired the remaining chambers of his revolver among the crowd, now within a score of yards.

The small boat was in waiting, and into it they tumbled, amid a storm of spears.

Both the captain and Bok, who rowed, were stuck.

Our hero seized the oars from the hands of the latter and pulled with all his strength for the yacht.

The gunwale of the little boat was almost level with the water.

It was slow work.

Luckily, nearly all the enemies' spears were exhausted.

An arrow pierced Bob's cap, and the last spear which was thrown again wounded the captain, piercing his leg.

Fortunately the distance was so far that it only entered about an inch and fell out from its own weight.

Our hero and the captain clambered on board the schooner.

Jack was exhausted, but still clung to his bag of silver.

Scarcely had they gained the deck when a yell broke from the dark waters around them, and spears and arrows fell on all sides.

Every gun on board was now fired at the savages.

Yet they came on as if determined to kill every white person in sight.

Chapter XV

Bob Rescues His Father.

Conclusion.

The savages were pressing close upon the »Dart«. Something must be done.

„Slip the cable!“ shouted the captain. „Up with the jib, topgallant sails, and gaff!“

„We must trust to weathering the point,“ he added to the mate. „If we do, we are safe. The current will carry us to sea.“

His orders were executed.

The wind fortunately blew from the southward, and, filling the light sails, carried the »Dart« off the shore.

The yacht's head paid off, and, answering her helm, she, with the tide in her favor, bore seaward.

A few parting shots, and the »Dart«, now feeling the full force of the wind, left the fleet of canoes far behind.

The next few hours were employed in the dressing of wounds and making things a little ship-shape.

It had been a hard-fought fight, and everyone was tired out.

Fortunately, neither Mrs. Cromwell nor Viola had suffered from the attack.

Long before the crew were able to do anything more darkness set in.

Bob was very impatient to trace up his father, but just now that was impossible.

Anxiously the boy waited for dawn, while his mother wept in silence, thinking of her beloved husband.

Would they save him?

At the first signs of morning Bob was up and ready for the search.

Captain Sumner and Jack were not far behind.

The »Dart« proceeded slowly toward land.

Satisfied that the savages had left the vicinity, the party went ashore, and once more proceeded toward the cave of ice.

A light snow had fallen, and all former tracks had been obliterated.

In vain they looked about for some trace of the Svlachkys.

„Let us go on an exploring tour,“ suggested the captain, seeing how badly Bob felt.

They started off first for the far end of the cavern.

They had gone scarcely a dozen rods when the captain called a halt.

„Someone is coming!“ he whispered.

A crunching of snow and ice was now plainly to be heard.

The party ran for shelter behind a series of ice humps and waited.

Suddenly a man clad in furs dashed by them, running at top speed.

„Father!“

At that strange cry the man stopped as though shot.

„Who calls?“ he asked, but instead of replying, Bob rushed from his hiding place.

„My son! What does this mean? How came you here?“

„We came in search of you, father,“ replied Bob. Father and son embraced warmly. Then Captain Cromwell turned swiftly.

„We must fly! The Svlachkys are coming! I just escaped from them.“

He had just uttered the words when the crowd of strange people came down upon them.

The leader started to throw a sharp spear at Captain Cromwell, when Bob rushed in and, with one well-directed blow of his gun, laid the man on his back.

A fierce shout went up and a struggle ensued.

But the fall of their leader had demoralized the Svlachkys, and when half a dozen guns and pistols had been fired at them they fled in dismay.

After this the party from the »Dart« lost no time in returning to the vessel.

Bob and his father walked side by side, and never were parent and child happier.

When Mrs. Cromwell saw her husband alive and well, she cried for joy and threw herself into his arms. It was a happy time all around.

Captain Cromwell's story was a long one. In brief, it was as follows:

When the »Bluebell« went down, he and Ruel Gross escaped on a raft, and after several days of suffering, reached the coast of Siberia.

From there they set out for Cedar Island.

The island gained, they found the stone chest, and then Captain Cromwell was captured.

For a long while the Svlachkys held him, thinking he knew of more treasures than those already discovered.

At last, however, they grew weary of waiting, and had resolved to put him to death, when deliverance came as recorded.

That there was more treasures was proven later on.

The stone chest was taken up, and beneath was found a cross of gold that was valued at fifteen thousand dollars.

With the treasure on board, the »Dart« started southeastward for the United States.

In due course of time San Francisco was reached, and here the treasure was disposed of.

Each of the sailors belonging to the party was given five hundred dollars, besides his pay.

Jack received five hundred dollars also.

The remainder of the money was divided equally between Captain Sumner and Captain Cromwell.

With his portion of the treasure Captain Cromwell purchased an interest in another ship, and to-day is fast regaining his lost financial position.

Bob is with his father and Jack Larmore sticks to the pair.

Captain Sumner has given up his roving life and has settled down with Viola as his housekeeper. His residence is but a short distance from that occupied by Mrs. Cromwell, so the latter does not want for company when her husband and son are on the ocean.

And here let us leave, satisfied that in the future all will be well with those who have figured in the story of »The Stone Chest«.

