Castlemon Harry

Marcy, the Refugee

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Castlemon H.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
WHAT BROUGHT BEARDSLEY HOME

In this story we take up once more the history of the exploits and adventures of our Union hero Marcy Gray, the North Carolina boy, who tried so hard and so unsuccessfully to be "True to his Colors." Marcy, as we know, was loyal to the old flag but he had had few opportunities to prove it, until he took his brother, Sailor Jack, out to the Federal blockading fleet in his little schooner Fairy Belle, to give him a chance to enlist in the navy. That was by far the most dangerous undertaking in which Marcy had ever engaged, and at the time of which we write, he had not seen the beginning of the trouble it was destined to bring him. Not only was he liable to be overhauled by the Confederates when he attempted to pass their forts at Plymouth and Roanoke Island, but he was in danger of being shot to pieces by the watchful steam launches of the Union fleet that had of late taken to patrolling the coast. But he came through without any very serious mishaps, and returned to his home to find the plantation in an uproar, and his mother in a most anxious frame of mind.

Although Marcy Gray was a good pilot for that part of the coast, and knew all its little bays and out-of-the-way inlets as well as he knew the road from his home to the post-office, his older brother Jack was the real sailor of the family. He made his living on the water. At the time we first brought him to the notice of the reader he had been at sea for more than two years, and it was while he was on his way home that his vessel, the *Sabine*, fell into the hands of Captain Semmes, who had just begun his piratical career in the Confederate steamer *Sumter.* But, fortunately for Jack, Semmes was not as vigilant in those days as he afterward became. He gave the *Sabine's* crew an opportunity to recapture their vessel and escape from his power, and they were prompt to improve it. By the most skilful manoeuvring, and without firing a shot, they made prisoners of the prize crew that Semmes had put on board the *Sabine*, turned them over to the Union naval authorities at Key West, and took their vessel to a Northern port. On the way to Boston, and while she was off the coast of North Carolina, the brig was pursued and fired at by a little schooner which turned out to be Captain Beardsley's privateer *Osprey*, on which Marcy Gray was serving in the capacity of pilot.

When Jack Gray found himself in Boston, the first thing he thought of was getting home. The Potomac being closely guarded against mail-carriers and smugglers who, in spite of all the precautions taken against them, continued to pass freely, and almost without detection, between the lines as long as the war lasted, the only plan he could pursue was to go by water. Being intensely loyal himself, Jack never dreamed that Northern men would be guilty of loading vessels to run the blockade, but there was at least one such craft in Boston – the *West Wind;* and through the good offices of his old commander, the captain of the *Sabine*, Jack Gray was shipped on board of her as second mate and pilot. Her cargo was duly consigned to some house in Havana, but the owners meant that it should be sold in Newbern; and there were scattered about among the bales and boxes in her hold, a good many packages that would have brought the vessel and all connected with her into serious trouble, if they had been discovered by the custom-house officers.

When the *West Wind* was a short distance out from Boston, the second mate learned by accident that one of his best foremast hands was also bound for his home in North Carolina. His name was Aleck Webster, and his father lived on a small plantation which was not more than an hour's ride from Nashville. Being a poor man Mr. Webster did not stand very high in the estimation of his rich neighbors, but that made no sort of difference to Jack Gray, and a warm and lasting friendship at

once sprung up between officer and man. Although they belonged to a vessel that was fitted out to run the blockade they were both strong for the Union, and many an hour of the mid-watch did they while away in talking over the situation. All they knew about their friends at home was that they were opposed to secession; but they dared not say so, because they were surrounded by rebels who would have been glad of an excuse to burn them out of house and home. The two friends got angry as often as they talked of these things, but of course they could not decide upon a plan of operations until they had been at home long enough to "see how the wind set," and "how the land lay." We have told what they did when they got ashore. When they were paid off and discharged in Newborn they made their way home by different routes, Jack arousing his brother in the dead of the night by tossing pebbles against his bedroom window, and afterward going off to the Federal fleet to enlist under the flag he believed in. Aleck Webster remained ashore for a longer time; and finding that his father belonged to an organized band of Union men who held secret meetings in the swamp, and whose object it was to oppose the tactics pursued by their rebel neighbors, he joined his fortunes with theirs, and went to work with such energy that in less that two weeks' time he had the settlement in such a panic that its prominent citizens thought seriously of calling upon the garrison at Plymouth for protection.

It was Mrs. Gray's misfortune to have many secret enemies about her, and the meanest and most dangerous among them were Lon Beardsley, who lived on an adjoining plantation, and was the owner and captain of the schooner to which Marcy belonged, and her overseer, whose name was Hanson. Beardsley's enmity was purely personal; but with Hanson it was a matter of dollars and cents. The captain took Marcy to sea against his will, because he wanted to persecute his mother; while the overseer was working for the large reward Colonel Shelby had promised to give if Hanson would bring him positive information that Mrs. Gray was in reality the Union woman she was supposed to be, and that she had money concealed in her house. When Sailor Jack had been at home long enough to find out how and by whom his mother was being persecuted, he told Aleck Webster about it, and the latter stopped it so quickly that everybody was astonished, and the guilty ones alarmed.

While Marcy was gone to take his brother out to the fleet, a very strange and startling incident happened on Mrs. Gray's plantation. Sailor Jack had predicted that the morning was coming when the negroes would not hear the horn blown to call them to their work, for the very good reason that there would be no overseer on the plantation to blow it, and his prediction had been verified. One dark night, just after Marcy and Jack set out on their perilous voyage, a band of masked men came to the plantation, took Hanson, the overseer, out of his house and carried him away. Where he was now none could tell for certain; but Marcy had heard from Aleck Webster that he had been "turned loose with orders never to show his face in the settlement again." Perhaps he had gone for good; but the fear that he might some day come back to trouble her caused Mrs. Gray no little uneasiness.

While every one else in the settlement was so excited and uneasy, and wondering what other mysterious things were about to happen, Marcy Gray was as calm as a summer's morning. To use his own words, he was "getting ready to settle down to business." The overseer being gone, there was no one but himself left to manage the plantation; and he was glad to have the responsibility, for it gave him something to occupy his mind. When Aleck Webster told him that Hanson would not trouble him or his mother any more, he had also given him the assurance that he would never again be obliged to go to sea as Captain Beardsley's pilot. There was a world of comfort in the words, and Marcy hoped the man knew what he was promising when he uttered them; but he thought he would feel more at his ease when he saw Beardsley's schooner at her moorings in the creek, and Beardsley himself at work in the field with his negroes.

On the morning of the day on which our story begins, the leaden clouds hung low, and the piercing wind which came off the Sound, bringing with it occasional dashes of rain, and scattering the few remaining leaves the early frosts had left upon the trees, seemed to cause no little discomfort to the young horseman who was riding along the road that led from his father's plantation to the village of Nashville. He had turned the collar of his heavy coat about his ears, dropped the reins upon his

horse's neck, and buried his hands deep in his pockets. It was Tom Allison, the boastful young rebel whom Marcy Gray, then the newly appointed pilot of Captain Beardsley's privateer schooner, had once rebuked and silenced in the presence of a room full of secession sympathizers.

Allison was on his way to the post-office after the mail, and to listen to any little items of news which the idlers he was sure to find there might have picked up since he last saw them; and, as he rode, he thought about some things that puzzled him. He went over the events that had taken place along the coast during the last few months, beginning with the bombardment and capture of forts Hatteras and Clark, and ending with the Confederate occupation of Roanoke Island, and he was obliged to confess to himself that things did not look as bright for the South now, as they did after that glorious victory at Bull Run. Finally, he thought of the incidents that had lately happened in his own neighborhood, and in which some of his acquaintances and friends were personally interested. In fact he was deeply interested in them himself, and would have given any article of value he owned for the privilege of holding five minutes' conversation with some one who could tell him what had become of Jack Gray and Hanson.

"I can tell you in few words what I think about it," said Tom to himself. "There's more behind the disappearance of those two fellows than the men folks around here are willing to acknowledge. That's what *I* think. I notice that Shelby, Dillon, and the postmaster don't talk quite as much nor as loudly as they did before Hanson and Gray left so suddenly, and when I ask father what he thinks of it, he shakes his head and looks troubled; and that's all I can get out of him. They are frightened, the whole gang of them; and to my mind we would all be safer if that Gray family was burned out and driven from the country. They know everything that is said about them, and it beats me where they get the news. The settlement is full of traitors, and probably I meet and speak to some of them every day."

While Allison was talking to himself in this strain his nag brought him to a cross-road, and almost to the side of another horseman who, like himself, was riding in the direction of Nashville. The two pulled their collars down from their faces, raised their hats, and looked at each other; and then Allison was surprised to find that he was in the company of Lon Beardsley, the privateersman and blockade runner. There had been a time when he would not have noticed the man any further than to give him a slight nod or a civil word or two, for he was the son of a wealthy planter, and thought himself better than one who had often been seen working in the field with his negroes. There used to be a wide gulf between such people in the South. For example, N. B. Forrest was not recognized socially while he was a civilian and made the most of his money by buying and selling men and women whose skins were darker than his own, but *General* Forrest, the man who massacred Union soldiers at Fort Pillow and took their commander, Major Bradford, into the woods and shot him after he had surrendered himself a prisoner of war, was held in high esteem. To Allison's mind, Captain Beardsley, who had smelled Yankee powder and run two cargoes of contraband goods safely through the blockade, was more worthy of respect than Lon Beardsley the smuggler, and he was willing to gain his good-will now if he could, for he believed the captain had it in his power to punish Marcy Gray – the boy who had dared to taunt Allison with being a coward because he did not shoulder a musket and go into the army.

"Why, captain, I thought you were miles away and making money hand over fist by running the blockade," said Allison, with an awkward flourish which was intended for a military salute. "I hope when you go out again you will be sure and take that so-called pilot of yours with you, for we don't want him hanging about here any longer. I don't believe his arm is so very badly hurt, and neither does anybody else. I am glad to see you back safe and sound. When did you get in?"

"In where?" said Beardsley gruffly; and then the boy saw that he was in bad humor about something.

"Into Newbern, of course. And when and how did you come up here?"

"I came up last night in the *Hattie*."

"You did? You don't mean to say that your schooner is in the creek, do you?" exclaimed Allison, who was surprised to hear it. "You did not do a very bright thing when you brought her there, for the first thing you know the Yankees will send some of their gunboats up to the island, and then you will be blocked in. I should think you would have stayed at Newbern, where you could run out and in as often as you felt like it."

"Don't you reckon I know my own affairs better'n you do?" snapped Beardsley. "I didn't quit a money-making business of my own free will and come home because I wanted to, but because I couldn't help myself."

"I don't understand you," answered Tom, who was all in the dark. "Our authorities didn't send you home, of course, and the Yankees couldn't. If your schooner is in good shape – "

"The *Hattie* is all right," said Beardsley, with a ring of pride in his tones. "She has been in some tight places, I can tell you, and if she hadn't showed herself to be just the sweetest, fastest thing of her inches that ever floated, I wouldn't be here talking to you now. And the Yankees did send me home too; or their friends did, which amounts to the same thing. What's become of Mrs. Gray's overseer, Hanson?"

"I can't make out what you mean, when you say that the Yankees or their friends sent you home," replied Allison. "We haven't heard of their making many captures along the coast lately."

"I dunno as it makes any sort of odds to me what you didn't hear. I know what I am talking about. What's happened to Hanson, I ask you?"

"How do you suppose I can tell? And if you only came home last night, how does it come that you know anything has happened to him?" inquired Tom, who thought he saw a chance to learn something. "I haven't seen that man Hanson for a long time."

"Nor me; but I know well enough that there's something went wrong with him," said Beardsley very decidedly. "I know that he was took out of his house at dead of night by a gang of men, that he was carried away, and that nobody ain't likely to see hide nor hair of him any more."

"That news is old, and I don't see why you should assume so mysterious an air in speaking of it," said Tom. "Your daughter has had time enough to tell you all about it since you came home."

"But I heard about it before I left Newbern."

"You did! Who told you?"

"Well, I heard all about it."

"What if you did? I don't see how Hanson's disappearance could interfere with your blockade-running."

"Mebbe you don't, but I do. If you had been in my place, and somebody had sent you a letter saying that if you didn't quit business and come home at once, some of your buildings would be burned up, what would you think then? Do you reckon it would bust up your blockade running or not?"

"Do you pretend to tell me that you received such a letter?" cried Allison, who could scarcely believe his ears.

"That is just what I pretend to tell you – no less," answered the captain, tapping the breast of his coat as if to say that he could prove his words if necessary.

"Why – why, who could have sent it to you? Who do you think wrote it?"

"You tell. I don't know the first thing about it; I wish I did. I am here now, and if I could only put my finger on the chap who caused me all this bother, I'd fix him."

"Would you bushwhack him?" inquired Allison, wondering if there was any way in which he could prevail upon Beardsley to show him that letter.

"No; but I would put the authorities on to him tolerable sudden and have him forced into the army. Because why, I am scart of that chap myself. He's hanging around here now, waiting for a good chance to do some more meanness."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Tom, growing frightened. "He ought to be got rid of. But who is he? Is there any one about here that you know of who has reason to be down on you? Any one besides the Grays, I mean?"

Beardsley dropped his reins, pulled the collar of his coat down from his face with both hands, and looked hard at his companion.

"Why, of course the Grays are down on you heavy, and all your friends and mine know it," continued Tom. "You know it, don't you?"

"There, now!" exclaimed the captain, rearranging his collar and picking up his reins again. "I never once thought of blaming it on that there Marcy."

"I don't blame it on him, and I don't want you to think so for a moment," said Tom, who had not yet arrived at the point of being confidential with Beardsley. "I never hinted that Marcy wrote the letter; but just look at the way the thing stands. A man who knows as much about this coast as you do never wanted a pilot, but you did want to marry Mrs. Gray's plantation; and when she gave you to understand that she wouldn't have it so – "

"See here, young feller, you're going too fur," cried the captain, pulling his collar down with one hand and shaking his whip threateningly at Allison with the other. "You don't know what you're talking about, and I won't hear another word of it."

"What's the use of getting mad because somebody tells you the truth?" demanded Tom. "Every one says so, and what every one holds to can't be so very far wrong. You know you don't need a pilot, and I know it too. You have nothing against Marcy Gray personally – "

"I ain't, hey?" shouted the angry captain. "He's just the biggest kind of a traitor that ever – "

"That isn't what I am trying to get at, and you know it," interrupted Tom. "You want to hurt him and his mother by taking him to sea against his will and hers. Now if you were in Marcy's place, and knew all these things, as he most likely does, and you saw a good chance to get even with the man who was persecuting you, would you let that chance slip? I reckon not."

"But if it's Marcy who has been a-pestering of me, how can I prove it on him?" inquired Beardsley, who was as angry as Allison had ever known him to be.

"Let me see the letter," replied Tom.

"No, I reckon not. What do you want to see it fur?"

"I can tell you whether or not Marcy Gray wrote it, for I know his hand as well as I know my own."

Beardsley hesitated. Ever since the morning he took the letter in question from the office in Newbern, he had been burning with anxiety and impatience to find out whom he had to thank for sending it to him, and he was now on his way to call upon his friends Shelby and Dillon to see if they could not put him on the track of the writer. He wanted to ask them what they thought of the whole miserable business any way, and did not care to show the letter until he heard what they had to say about it.

"I know the handwriting of every man and boy in this settlement," continued Allison, "and if I can't tell you who wrote it no one can; not even the postmaster."

This settled the matter, to Allison's satisfaction. The captain opened his coat and drew out the letter, which was written in a hand that was plainly disguised, for the same characters were not formed twice alike. It was not very long, but it was to the point, and ran as follows:

> This is to inform you that you have spent jes time enough in persecuting Union folks in this settlement on account of them not beleeving as you rebbels do, and likewise time enough in cheeting the government by bringing contraband goods through the blockade. And this is to inform you that if you do not immediately upon resep of this stop your disloyal practices and come home at once, you will not find as many buildings standing, when you do come, as you have got standing now at this present time of writing. And this is likewise to inform you that the first proof that

> we mean jes what we say, you will get in a letter from your folks, who will tell you that a letter something like this was found on the front gallery of your house on a certain night, and that a lot of dry weeds and stuff was likewise found piled against the back of said house. Proof number 2 will be in the same letter, which will tell you that Mrs. Gray's overseer has been toted away by armed men, and that he won't never be seen in this settlement again. For every day you delay in coming home immediately after this letter has had time to reach you in Newbern, you will loose a building of some kind or sort, beginning with the house you live in. This is from those who believe in defending the wemen and children you rebbels are making war on, and so we sign ourselves, THE PERTECTORS OF THE HELPLESS.

"Marcy Gray never had a hand in getting up this letter, more's the pity," thought Tom, as he again ran his eye over the plainly written lines in the hope of finding something that would give him an excuse for saying that Marcy did write it. "Look at the spelling and the bungling language! Marcy couldn't do that if he tried."

"Well, what do you reckon you make of it?" demanded the captain.

"It's perfectly scandalous the most outrageous thing I ever heard of!" exclaimed Allison. "Just think of the impudence this fellow shows in ordering you – ordering, I say – "

"Oh, there's more'n one feller mixed up in it," said Beardsley, with a groan.

"Perhaps there is, and then again, perhaps there isn't," replied Tom. "Couldn't I write a letter and sign a hundred names to it, if I wanted to? I say it is a burning shame that good and loyal Confederates should submit to be ordered about in this way, and you were foolish for paying the least attention to it. You ought to have gone on with your business and come home when you got ready."

Beardsley turned down the collar of his coat, threw his left leg over the horn of his saddle, and shook his whip at Allison as if he were about to say something impressive.

CHAPTER II.
ALLISON IS SURPRISED

"Oh, I mean it," said Tom, and one would have thought by the way he shook his head and frowned and made his riding-whip whistle through the air, that it would be useless for anybody to try to order him around. "Just try me and see; that's all."

"And if you had been in my place you wouldn't have come home till you got good and ready?" said Beardsley.

"You bet I wouldn't. I wouldn't be guilty of setting such an example to the timid ones at home. This is the time when every man – "

"How many buildings have you got in this part of the country?" inquired the captain, shutting his right eye and laying his finger by the side of his nose. "Have you forgot the men who took Hanson away in the night, and piled up those weeds and stuff up agin my house?"

"Well, that's so; but still I don't think they would have been bold enough to do anything to you. You are a wealthy planter, while Hanson was nothing but a common overseer, without a friend or relative in the world so far as any one knows. Did you receive the proofs this letter speaks of?"

"You bet I did," answered Beardsley, shaking his whip in the air. "My daughter got old Miss Brown to write to me just as them Pertectors of the Helpless – dog-gone the last one of 'em – said she would, and sure as you live she found another letter on the gallery, and a whole passel of stuff piled up agin the house, ready to be touched off with a match; and the very same night Mrs. Gray's overseer was carried away. When she told me all them things and begged me to come home I thought I had best come. But I don't mean to let the matter drop here, tell your folks. The fellers who wrote that letter must be hunted down and whopped like they was niggers. Did Marcy Gray do it?"

"I can't swear that he didn't," replied Tom guardedly. "But if he did, he disguised his hand so that I do not recognize it. I can't find the first letter in it that looks like Marcy's work."

Beardsley seemed disappointed as he returned the letter to his pocket and buttoned his coat, and Tom Allison certainly was. Two or three times it was on the end of his tongue to declare that Marcy was the guilty one, but he lacked the courage. He was afraid of the mysterious men who had begun to carry things with so high a hand in the settlement, for he did not know how soon they might turn their attention to him or to his father's property.

"Marcy is quite mean enough to do a thing of that kind, hoping to bring you home so that you would not take him to sea any more," said Tom, who could not resist the longing he had to say something that would lead Beardsley to declare war upon the boy who had served as his pilot. "He may have written the letter, but he could not have piled that light stuff against your house, for he was not at home when the thing happened. Has it struck you that the work must have been done by some one who belongs on your plantation? Your dogs would have raised a terrible racket if a stranger – "

"No, it wasn't," said Beardsley earnestly. "The dogs made furse enough that night to wake up everybody in Nashville; but they didn't none of 'em do nothing, and that shows that they were afraid of the crowd that was there. My folks was that scared that they dassent none of 'em look out of the winder; but the next morning the letter that was put on the gallery and the stuff to burn the house was both there."

"It's very strange that I never heard of it before," said Tom, who could not help telling himself that the recital made him feel very uncomfortable. "It's just awful that things like these can go on in the settlement and nobody be punished for them."

"Well, it ain't so strange that you didn't hear of it, when you bear in mind that my folks didn't say much about it for fear that they might speak to the wrong person," said Beardsley. "I reckon it

was done by the same fellers who took Hanson away to the swamp. Ain't nary idee who they were, have you?"

"Nary an idea. I wish I had, so that I could expose them. Why, just think of it, captain! If things like these are allowed to go on, who is safe? How do we know but you or I may be marched off in the same way some dark night?"

"I don't know it, and that's just what's a-troubling of me," said Beardsley, groaning again and rubbing his gloved hands nervously together. "Such doings is too shameful to be bore any longer. There's a heap of traitors right here amongst us, and I don't see how we are going to get shet of 'em."

"That's the thought that was running in my mind when I met you," said Tom savagely. "I know who some of the traitors are, but the truth is, they are so cunning you can't prove the first thing against them.

There's that Marcy Gray for one."

"Say!" whispered Beardsley, reining his horse a little closer to Tom's and tapping the boy's shoulder with his riding-whip, "you have hit the very identical idee I have had in my mind for a long time. If Marcy ain't a traitor, what's him and his mother keeping that money of theirn stowed away so quiet for?"

"Say!" whispered Allison in his turn, at the same time laying the handle of his own whip lightly upon the captain's knee, "that is something I have thought about more times than I can remember. If they haven't got money, and plenty of it, hidden somewhere, I am mistaken. You know that before Marcy came home from school his mother made a good many trips to Richmond, Newbern, and Wilmington; and everybody says those trips were not made solely for the purpose of buying supplies for the plantation."

"I know it," assented Beardsley.

"When Mrs. Gray came home she made a big show of parading all her niggers in bran' new suits of clothes," continued Allison. "But she did not have to go to three cities to buy the cloth those clothes were made of, did she? She's got money, and I am sure of it."

"I know it," said Beardsley again. "I tried my best to make Marcy say so, but he was too sharp for me. You see his share of the prize-money the *Hollins* sold for amounted to seventeen hunderd dollars."

"Great Moses!" ejaculated Tom. "What a plum for that traitor to put into his pocket! I wish I had it. But he told me he was to get eight hundred and fifty dollars."

"P'raps he did, for that was what the foremast hands got; but I promised to give Marcy more for acting as pilot and I done it, consarn my fule pictur'! I wanted to get on the blind side of him, so't he would sorter confide in me for a friend, don't you see? But I didn't make it. That boy might have cleared five thousand dollars if he had took out a venture the first time we run the blockade, but he wouldn't do it for fear he might lose the money. He said he might want to use them seventeen hunderd before the war was over."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Tom.

"That's what I thought," replied Beardsley.

"Seventeen hundred dollars are not a drop in the bucket to the sum he and his mother have on hand at this moment, and I'll bet on it," added Tom. "They've got thousands, and I wish I could have the handling of some of it."

That was what Captain Beardsley wished; but the trouble was he did not know where the money was concealed, or just how to go to work to get hold of it. He had a partly formed plan in his head, but he did not think that it would be quite safe to let Tom into the secret of it. At any rate, he would tell all his news first, and think about that afterward.

"That boy Marcy is a plum dunce to act the way he is doing now," said the captain, after a little pause. "If he would go into our navy, and this war should happen to last a year or so longer, he would make a big officer of himself."

"It won't last six months longer," said Allison confidently. "The Yankees can't stand more than one Bull Run drubbing. But tell me honestly, captain: Did Gray really show pluck on the night he got that broken arm?"

"He did for a fact," replied Beardsley. "He stood up to the rack like a man, and took the schooner through the inlet with that arm hanging by his side as limp as a dish-rag. I'm free to say it, though I ain't no friend of his'n."

"I am sorry you said it in the letters you wrote home to Shelby and Dillon. I wish that splinter, or whatever it was, had hit his head instead of his arm, for he carries himself altogether too stiff-legged on the strength of it. If he had whipped the whole Yankee fleet he could not throw on more airs. But why do you say he could win promotion by enlisting in our navy? Do you think he would go among the Federals if he wasn't afraid?"

"That's where he would go if it wasn't for his mother. It's where his brother Jack is at this minute."

"Captain," said Tom impressively, "you and I ought to be the very best of friends, for we think alike on a good many points. Somebody, I don't know who it was, gave it out through the settlement that Jack Gray went to Newbern to ship on a Confederate iron-clad; but I didn't believe it, and I don't think so now. If he and Marcy wanted to go to Newbern they would have gone by rail, wouldn't they? Instead of that they went in Marcy's schooner."

"I don't care what anybody has give out or what anybody thinks," said Beardsley doggedly. "I know what I know, and believe what I have seen with my own two eyes, don't I? While I was standing into Crooked Inlet on my way – say! I don't know as I had best tell you what I seen with my own two eyes."

"Why not?" demanded Allison, who was sure he was about to hear some exciting news. "You have already told me more than you had any business to tell, if you don't think I can keep a secret."

"Well, that there is a fact. Look a-here. I aint said a word to nobody about this, and you mustn't let on that I told you; but while I was running into Crooked Inlet on my way home from the last trip I made to Nassau, I didn't see the steam launch that I was afraid might be waiting there for me, but I did see Marcy Gray's schooner."

"Isn't that what I said?" exclaimed Tom gleefully. "What was Marcy Gray's schooner doing outside, and in the night-time, too?"

"Hold on till I tell you how it was," replied the captain. "The first thing I see was that the schooner had been disguised, but that didn't by no means fool your uncle Lon. Them two boys, Marcy and Jack, had towed her through the inlet with their skiff and were just about to get aboard again and make sail, when I run on to 'em in the dark. I was that scared to see 'em that I couldn't move from my tracks, for a minute or two. I thought the Yankees had me sure."

"It almost takes my breath to have my suspicions confirmed in this way," said Tom. "Did you watch them to see where they went?"

"Listen at the fule!" exclaimed the captain, in a tone of disgust. "Not much, I didn't watch them boys. I had enough to do to mind my own business; and knowing what brung them outside at that time of night, didn't I know where they had started for without watching 'em? They didn't go nigh Newbern. They went straight out to the Yankee fleet, and there's where Jack Gray is, while me and you are riding along this road."

"Captain, I wouldn't have missed seeing you this morning for a bushel of money," declared Tom, whose first impulse was to whip up his horse and carry the joyful news to Nashville. "I've got a hold on Marcy Gray now that I shan't be slow to use."

"What are you going to do?" asked Beardsley anxiously.

"I'll let him know who he called a coward before a whole post-office full of people," said Allison savagely. "He will take that word back on his knees and do his best to make a friend of me, or I'll – "

"There, now!" cried Beardsley; and the tone in which he uttered the words was quite as savage as Tom's. "I knew well enough that I had no call to tell you all them things without first speaking to Shelby and Dillon about them."

"Of course I shall consult you, before doing or saying anything to Marcy," replied Tom, wishing he had net been so quick to speak the thoughts that were in his mind. "I don't want you to think that I am going to take these matters out of your hands, for I don't mean to do anything of the sort."

"You had better not. You are nothing but a boy, and you would be sure to make a mess of the whole thing if you tried it. Me and Shelby will deal with Marcy and his mother."

"I shall be satisfied, so long as you do something to him that he can feel. All I ask is to be around when it is done, so that I can see it. But you will have to be careful, captain. There are some about here who believe that the Grays are the best kind of Confederates."

"What makes them believe that when me and you know it aint so?"

"It's the way they worked things; and it was about the slickest scheme I ever heard of," replied Allison. "Why, captain, they ran down the river past Plymouth and Roanoke, with our flag flying from the *Fairy Belle's* masthead."

"Of all the imperdence! Where did they get a flag of our'n?"

"No one knows, unless Jack got it off the smuggler *West Wind*, that he piloted into Newbern. Anyhow he got it, and kept it hung upon the wall of his mother's house in plain sight of all who went there."

"It was nothing but a cheat and a swindle, I tell you," shouted the captain. "Both them boys is Union, and their mother is too. I'll fix 'em!"

"I say again that you had better be careful," cautioned Tom. "If it turns out that they are in favor of the South, you will burn your fingers if you touch them; and if they are Union, they have friends to watch over and see that no harm comes to them. Have you forgotten the men who carried Hanson away in the night?"

"No, I ain't; and that's what makes me so mad. We-uns about here can't do nothing with that money – Say! mebbe I could tell you something else if you'll promise never to let on about it."

"All right. I never will," answered Allison, who was becoming impatient to hear all the man had on his mind. Nashville was in plain sight now, and of course there could be no more talking of this sort done after they got there. "Hold up a bit. Don't let your horse walk so fast."

"What I thought of saying to you is this," said Beardsley, once more sinking his voice to a whisper. "We-uns who live about here can't do nothing by ourselves, but we can hint – just hint, I say – to some outsiders that there's a pile of money in that there house of Mrs. Gray's that's to be had for the taking."

"Go on," said Tom, when Beardsley stopped and looked at him. "I am listening, but I don't catch your meaning."

"I could easy find half a dozen fellers right around here who would be up and doing mighty sudden if I should say that much in their private ears," continued the captain. "But mebbe that plan wouldn't work. I can't tell till I hear what Shelby thinks about it. But if it don't work, we might put the Richmond officers onto them."

"What good would that do? If there is money in Mrs. Gray's house the Richmond authorities have no right to touch it."

"Aint they, now!" chuckled Beardsley. "Don't the law say that we-uns mustn't pay no debts to the Yankees, but must turn the money over to the fellers at Richmond?"

"But I am afraid Mrs. Gray doesn't owe any money to the Yankees."

"What's the odds whether you think so or not?" said the captain earnestly. "We can hint that she does, can't we? And can't we hint furder, that instead of turning that money over, like the law says she must do, she is keeping it hid for her own use!"

"Then why not make a sure thing of it by putting the government officers on the scent the first thing?"

"Because they won't divide, the officers won't. Don't you see? The other fellers will."

Tom Allison was astonished now, and no mistake. For a minute or two he looked hard at Beardsley, but he couldn't speak.

"What do you stare at me that-a-way for?" demanded the captain. "I don't see nothing so very amazing in what I said. Didn't you tell me a minute ago that you would like mighty well to have the handling of some of that there money?"

"Of course I did, and I say so yet; but I wouldn't dare touch it if it was got in that way. Don't misunderstand me now," said Allison, when he saw Beardsley gather up his reins and change his riding-whip to his right hand as if he were about to go on and leave Tom behind. "If you think it would be quite safe – "

"What other way is there to get it?" snarled Beardsley. "I wasn't joking. These here aint no times for joking, and I meant every word I said. Why aint it safe? The folks in the settlement are mostly our friends, and even if they knew that some of the money went into our pockets, they wouldn't say nothing about it."

"They would know it, and my father would say something to me, I bet you. But mind you," said Tom, as the two turned their horses toward the hitching-rack that stood across the street from the post-office, "if you and your friends think it can be done, I say go ahead and good luck to you. And if you make a success of it, as I hope you will, no one will hear from me that I knew a thing about it."

"And you won't let on about the other things I have told you?" said the captain, as he dismounted and spread a blanket over his horse. "I don't reckon I had oughter said so much. Mebbe Shelby won't like it."

"Will you tell me what he says after you have had a talk with him? Then you may depend upon me to keep a still tongue in my head. As for Shelby, I don't care whether he likes it or not. It is none of his business. I know, and have known for a long time, that he and his ring have some things in hand that they won't let me hear of, and I am as warm a friend to the South as they dare be, and just as ready to help her."

"But you see you're a boy; and some men don't like to take boys into their secrets," replied Beardsley.

"I know I am a boy, but all the same I am a wild horse in the cane and hard to curry. If Shelby and his gang don't pay a little more attention to me I will make them wish they had; and if Beardsley don't keep me posted in his plans, I'll knock them into the middle of next week. I'll find means to get Hanson's abductors after him. By George! That's an idea, and I'll think it over as I ride home."

So saying Tom Allison hitched his horse to one of the pins in the rack and followed Beardsley across the street toward the post-office.

CHAPTER III.
THE NEIGHBORHOOD GOSSIP

The streets of Nashville were almost deserted, for the cold wind, aided by the driving rain that was falling steadily, had forced all the idlers to seek comfort within doors. The post-office was full of them, and when the captain walked in with Allison at his heels they greeted him boisterously, and asked more questions in a minute than he could answer in ten. First and foremost they wanted to know why Beardsley had come home so unexpectedly, but that was a matter he did not care to say much about. All they could get from him was that he had some important business to attend to.

"But of course you are going back again," said one. "I would if I had such a chance to make money as you have got. But perhaps you are rich enough already."

"Well, no; I don't reckon I'll ran the blockade any more," replied the captain. "My schooner is safe and sound now and I want to keep her that way. The Yankees are getting tolerable thick outside, and I don't care to have them run me down some dark night and slap me into one of their prisons."

There were at least a dozen persons in the post-office, besides Tom Allison, who knew that Beardsley had other and better reasons for quitting the profitable business in which he had been engaged, and three of them were Shelby, Dillon, and the postmaster. These men knew by the captain's manner, as well as by the way he looked at them now and then, that he had something of importance on his mind, and they left the store one after another, expecting Beardsley to follow and join them as soon as he could do so without arousing suspicion. A fourth man was Aleck Webster, who leaned carelessly against one of the counters and listened to what the captain had to say, although he did not seem to pay much attention to it. If Aleck had been so disposed he could have told Beardsley who wrote the letter that broke up his blockade running and brought him home so suddenly, and so could several other Union men who were in the office on this particular morning. They went there every day to hear their doings discussed; and it gave them no little satisfaction to learn that they had aroused a feeling of uneasiness and insecurity among the citizens which grew more intense as the days went by and nothing was heard from Hanson. Although Tom Allison knew nothing about the letter that had been left on Beardsley's porch until the latter told him, there were many in the settlement who knew about it and were wondering who could have put it there. The captain's negroes were the first to find it out, and Mrs. Brown, the neighborhood gossip who read the letter for Beardsley's daughter, was the second; and among them all they had managed to spread the story considerably.

Tom Allison was like Captain Beardsley in one respect – he could not keep a secret any longer than it took him to find some congenial spirit who was willing to share it with him. He was eager to tell all he knew, and sometimes he told a good deal more; consequently, the first thing he did after Beardsley received his mail and left the office to find the three men who had gone out a while before, was to give his particular friend and crony Mark Goodwin, a swaggering, boastful young rebel like himself, a wink and a nod that brought him across to Tom's side of the store.

"What is it, old fellow?" whispered Mark. "Your face is full of news."

"And so is my head," replied Tom. "I am loaded clear to the muzzle, and anxious to shoot myself off at *your* head. I am going to ride down to exchange a few yarns with Mrs. Brown; will you go along?"

"What's the use?" exclaimed Mark, looking through the moist windows into the street. "You won't get anything but lies out of her. And just see how it rains!"

"It doesn't rain to hurt anything, and we can't talk here," said Tom. "I don't care whether Mrs. Brown tells me the truth or not, so long as she will aid me in spreading a few items of news that came to my ears this morning. Better go, for I promise that I will surprise you. You know I rode down with Beardsley."

"And I rather wondered at it. I can remember when you used to speak of him in a way that was anything but complimentary. Did he tell you what brought him home?" said Mark, in a whisper. "Come along then. I am ready to be surprised."

The two boys mounted their horses and rode away through the driving rain, and as they rode, Tom Allison electrified his friend by making a clean breast of everything Beardsley had told him, and which he had promised to keep to himself; and observing that Mark was interested and excited by the narrative, Tom added to it a few details of his own invention. He declared that Hanson had told Beardsley, in confidence, that Mrs. Gray owed a big pile of money to Northern men, and instead of turning it over to the government, as the law provided, she was keeping it for her own use.

"And how does it come that Hanson could learn so much of Mrs. Gray's private affairs?" demanded Mark. "He didn't live in the house, but in the quarter with the niggers."

"Probably some of the house servants posted him," answered Tom. "You know that prying darkies sometimes find out a heap of things."

"That's so," assented Mark. "Tom, you have told me great news – Mrs. Gray with a gold mine hidden somewhere in her house, and Marcy taking his brother Jack out to the Yankee fleet to give him a chance to enlist under the old flag! What are we coming to? What are you going to do about it? You must have some plan in your head, or you wouldn't be going to see Mrs. Brown. You had better be careful what you say in the presence of that old witch, or she may get you into trouble."

"That is the very thing I wanted to talk to you about," replied Tom. "What do you think we ought to do? I don't know whether I have the straight of the story or not, but I am sure Mrs. Brown has, for Beardsley probably told her all about it as soon as he got home last night. That man can't keep a thing to himself to save his life. I thought it might be a good idea to see what Mrs. Brown thinks about it, and to ask her if there is any truth in the report that a band of men has been got together to rob Mrs. Gray's house."

"I will tell you one thing confidentially," said Mark. "If that part of the story isn't true, a few wags of Mrs. Brown's tongue will make it true. There are dozens of men right here in this country, and you and I are acquainted with some of them, who would jump down on that house this very night if they were sure they could make anything by it."

"I know that, but I don't care; do you? I always did despise those Grays, and now that they have shown themselves to be traitors, I say let them suffer for it. You heard Marcy tell me to put a uniform on before I presumed to speak to him again, didn't you?"

"Yes; and I heard his brother Jack call you a stay-at-home blow-hard. I looked for you to tackle the pair of them the moment they insulted you; but you surprised me and all the rest of your friends by keeping perfectly still," observed Mark, who knew well enough that Tom lacked the courage to "tackle" the brothers, either of whom could have tossed him half-way across the post-office without very much trouble.

"I was biding my time," replied Allison, making his riding-whip whistle viciously through the air just above his horse's ears. "It has come now, and if Marcy Gray doesn't take that insulting word back as publicly as he gave it to me – "

"Oh, you needn't look for him to do that. Marcy isn't that sort of a fellow."

"He'll wish he was that sort before I am done with him," said Tom, with spiteful emphasis. "That's one reason why I am going to see Mrs. Brown. I want her to spread it around that Marcy took Jack out to the blockading fleet."

"She is just the one to do it," said Mark, with a laugh. "And the way to make her go about it as though she meant business is to tell her your story under a pledge of secrecy."

"And there is another matter that I want to speak to you about," continued Tom. "What scheme have Shelby and Dillon and the postmaster and your father and mine got in hand that they take so much pains to keep from us boys?"

"I wish I knew," answered Mark, whose face showed that his companion's words had made him angry. "They talk about something or other as often as they get together, and if I take a step in their direction they either send me about my business, or stop talking. And I tell you I don't like to be treated that way."

"That is just the way they treat me, and I don't like it either," said Tom. "More than that, I won't stand it."

"I don't see how you are going to help yourself."

"Perhaps you don't, but I think I do. Beardsley belongs to the ring, of course, and if he doesn't keep me posted in all their plans, I'll go to work to upset them."

"Why, Tom, are you crazy?" exclaimed Mark, who had never been more amazed.

"No; but I am mad clear through. I am not willing to go into the army unless I can have an office of some kind, but I am eager to fight traitors here at home; and if those men won't give me a chance to help them, I shall fight on my own hook."

"But how can you? And how will you go to work to upset their plans when you don't know what they are? You take a friend's advice and behave yourself. Why, Tom, I wouldn't willingly incur the enmity of the Union men about here for all the money there is in the State. They are too desperate a lot for me to fool with. Nobody knows for certain who they are, and that makes them all the more dangerous."

About this time the boys dismounted in front of Mrs. Brown's humble abode – a small log-cabin which Beardsley had built for her in the edge of a briar patch on his own plantation. That was the only neighborly act that anybody ever knew the captain to be guilty of; but then it was not entirely unselfish on his part. Beardsley received important letters now and then. He was not good at reading all sorts of writing, and when he came upon a sentence that he could not master, it was little trouble for him to run over to Mrs. Brown's cabin and ask her to decipher it for him. And – it is a remarkable thing to tell, but it is the truth – the contents of those letters were safe with Mrs. Brown. She would tell any and every thing else that came to her knowledge, no matter how it might hurt somebody, but who Beardsley's correspondents were and what they wrote about, no one could learn from her.

Having sheltered their horses in some fashion behind the cabin, the boys opened the door without knocking, and went in. There were two persons in the single room the cabin contained – a little, dried-up woman who sat in a low rocking-chair in front of the fire with a dingy snuff-stick between her toothless gums, and one of Beardsley's negro girls who had come over to "slick up things."

"How do you find yourself this fine morning, mother?" said Tom familiarly. "We thought we would drop in to warm by your comfortable blaze, and see if you are in need of any little things we can get for you. By the way," he added, putting his hand into his pocket, "it's a long time since I gave anything toward buying a jar of snuff. Take that till I come again."

"I see the captain has returned; and quite unexpectedly, too, I am told," said Mark, pulling off his dripping overcoat and hanging it upon a wooden peg in the chimney-corner. "I wish he might find the man who wrote him that threatening letter and broke up his business. I am sure he would make it warm for him."

"Every one of them triflin' hounds had oughter have a hickory wore out on their bare backs," said the old woman, in tones which sounded so nearly like the snarl of some wild animal that Tom Allison shuddered, although he had often heard her speak that way before.

"Do you know who they are?"

"Of course she knows who they are," exclaimed Mark. "The question is, is she at liberty to tell."

"Mebbe I know, an' mebbe I don't," said the woman, with a contortion of her wrinkled face that was intended for a wink and a smile. "I aint one of them folks who tells all they know. I am a master-hand to keep things to myself when they are told to me for a secret."

"Everybody knows that, and it is the reason why everybody is so willing to trust you," said Tom; and seeing that he had not given the old woman quite enough to loosen her tongue, he turned to

Mark and added: "I was sure we would forget it, we are so careless. We came away from your house without ever once thinking of that side of bacon we were going to bring to Mrs. Brown."

"I knew we had forgotten something," said Mark regretfully, "and sure's you live that's it. But it will keep till we come again, won't it, mother? Who did you say wrote that letter?"

"You're very good boys to be always thinkin' of a poor crippled body like me, who can't get about to hear a bit of news on account of the pesky rheumatiz that bothers me night an' day," whined the old woman. "Now when I was a bright, lively young gal – "

"Did I understand you to say that Jack Gray had something to do with the abduction of his mother's overseer?" interrupted Mark, who knew it would never do to let the old woman get started on the story of her girlhood. "You astonish me; you do for a fact!"

"I disremember that I have spoke Jack Gray's name at all sense you two have been here," said Mrs. Brown cautiously.

"But you did, though. Didn't she, Tom?"

"I thought so, certainly; and I told myself at the time, that I did not see how Jack could have had any hand in Hanson's taking off, for I have heard that he was not at home when the thing was done."

"No more he wasn't to hum. He was on his way to jine the Yankee navy, dog-gone him an' them," snapped the woman, whose tongue was fairly loosened now. "But he left them behine who works as well fur him when he aint to hum as when he is."

"We know that very well," said Tom, who was surprised to hear it, "but we don't know for certain who they are. Mark, don't you see that Mrs. Brown is looking for her pipe?"

Mark hadn't noticed it, but all the same he hunted around on the mantel until he found the well-blackened corn-cob, but he could not bring himself to light it. He filled the bowl with some natural leaf he saw in a box and handed it to the woman, who set it going with the aid of a live coal which she took from the hearth in her bony fingers.

"You two aint furgot the stranger who popped up in Nashville all on a sudden like, about the time that Jack Gray came hum from Newbern, have you?" continued the old woman, after she had assured herself by a few long, audible puffs that her pipe was well lighted. "Lemme see if I have disremembered his name. No; sounds to me like it was Aleck Webster."

"Don't know him," said Tom, in a disappointed tone.

"I don't know him either," chimed in Mark, "but I have seen him. You know old man Webster, Tom, who lives about six miles down the main road. Well, Aleck is his son."

"Now I do think, in my soul," exclaimed Allison, "things have come to a pretty pass when Crackers like those Websters can throw a settlement like this into a panic, and order prominent and wealthy planters like Captain Beardsley to quit business and come home on penalty of being burned out in case of disobedience."

"You're mighty right," said Mrs. Brown, who was pleased to hear the captain called a prominent and wealthy planter. "Sich trash aint no call to live on this broad 'arth. They're wuss than the niggers, an' a heap lower down."

"But have you any evidence against the Websters?" inquired Mark.

"I've got a plenty. In the fust place they don't say nothing; an' folks as don't say nothing these times ain't fitten to live. Now is the day when every man oughter come out an' show their colors," said the woman, quoting from Beardsley.

"That means Marcy Gray," said Tom. "I wish I could see a gang of armed men take him out of the house and carry him off."

"He mustn't be teched," said the woman very decidedly.

"Who mustn't – Marcy?" exclaimed Tom and Mark in a breath. "Who said so?

What's the reason he mustn't be touched? He's a traitor."

"I don't know whether he is or not; but he mustn't be pestered.

Leastwise by folks living around here in the settlement."

Tom looked at Mark, and Mark looked about for a chair and sat down. Then they both looked at the old woman. This was something mysterious, and they wanted to have it explained.

"I aint got no more to say on that there p'int," said Mrs. Brown, her tone and manner showing that the question did not admit of argument. "He'll be teched fast enough when the time comes, Marcy Gray will, an' don't you furget to remember what I'm tellin' you. But them as goes for Marcy will be folks that can't be pestered by the men who toted Hanson off to the swamp."

"Ah! Now I see daylight," said Tom, with something that sounded like a sigh of relief. "I thought you meant that Marcy was to be left alone altogether for the reason that he was believed to be a good Confederate. And when these friends of ours, whoever they may be, go for him, I suppose they'll not neglect to look for the money that Mrs. Gray is known to have in her house?"

"I aint heared that anybody knows for sartin that the money is there," said Mrs. Brown. "Leastwise, they don't know it *yit.* There won't be nothing much done till that there is settled fur a fact."

"Then Marcy will never be molested," declared Tom, throwing a chip spitefully into the fire. "He can go out to the blockading fleet as often as he pleases and ship a dozen brothers in the Yankee navy if he wants to, and nothing will be done to him. If Jack Gray left men behind to work for him while he is at sea, Marcy must know who they are and where to find them, and he can set them on to Mark's father or mine whenever he feels like it. I'll touch him the first good chance I get, and don't you forget to remember *that.* He is a traitor, and I wouldn't let him alone if all the Captain Beardsleys in the country should say so. And how is any one to find out for certain that his mother has money concealed in her house? She isn't going to publish it to the world, is she?"

The longer Allison talked the more his anger rose, and when he got through he was stalking about the narrow limits of the cabin, shaking his fists over his head in the most frantic manner. The old woman waited patiently for him to sit down again, and then she took her pipe from her mouth long enough to say:

"Kelsey is out of a job jest now."

"That's no news. He's always that way. He won't work when he gets the chance. He would rather beg his living or steal it."

"I know that he's mighty shiftless an' triflin', but he's a tol'able overseer, Kelsey is, when he onct makes up his mine to do something," said the woman. "Now that Hanson has went off the Grays aint got nobody to boss the hands."

"The idea!" cried Tom, who began to "see daylight" once more. "Does Captain Beardsley labor under the delusion that Marcy Gray will hire that man Kelsey, who is next door to a fool, and allow him – "

"Yes, Kelsey is tol'able triflin', an' that there is a fact," interrupted the woman. "But he aint nobody's fule. He's as sly an ole fox as you can meet in a day's travel."

"Marcy Gray will not have him on the place, I tell you," said Tom. "And even if he should be dunce enough to hire him, how could Kelsey find out whether or not there was any money in the house? If the captain has anything against Kelsey, and wants him to disappear some dark night as Hanson did, he is taking the right course to bring it about. That's what will happen to Kelsey if he goes to work on that plantation, and I want you both to remember my words."

"And let me tell you another thing," added Mark. "No one man is going to find the hiding-place of that money if there is any about the house. When the building is down and the foundations are torn up, then it will be found, and not before."

"That there is a fact," observed the woman.

"Where do you think it is concealed, any way?" inquired Tom. "I had an idea that it might be buried in the garden."

"I am willing to bet my horse against your jack-knife that it isn't," replied Mark. "It is so close to the house that the family can keep an eye on all the approaches to it, and it is where fire can't touch it."

"Then it must be buried in the cellar," exclaimed Tom. "I declare! I believe you have hit the exact spot. I should like to be left alone in that place for about an hour with a shovel to work with. I would be rich when I came out."

"You jest keep away from that there suller," said the old woman sternly.

"Don't go nigh the house, nary one of you."

The two boys elevated their eye-brows and looked at each other, and it was as much as half a min ate before Mark Goodwin continued:

"You would be fooled if you looked anywhere but in the walls for it. So a shovel would be of no use to you. I have been in that cellar when Marcy and I were on better terms than we are now, and I know that the floor is laid in cement. It would be a job, I tell you, for a woman to dig it up and put it down again, and she couldn't do it so that the spot would not show itself to the first person who might happen to go in there."

"A woman!" exclaimed Allison.

"Yes, for a woman did the work," answered Mark, who could not have spoken with more confidence if he had been in Mrs. Gray's company on the night the thirty thousand dollars were concealed. "You know Marcy was not at home when his mother made those trips about the country."

"What of that? Didn't she take some of her old servants into her confidence?"

"No, sir. When people are trying to carry water on both shoulders as Mrs. Gray is, they don't let one hand know what the other does."

"And I believe," said Allison, getting upon his feet again and walking about the cabin, "that if somebody should go for Mrs. Gray's coachman in the right way, he would find out all about it. But I say, Mark, it's time for us to be riding along. What shall we bring you when we come again, mother? Snuff and smoking tobacco are always acceptable, I suppose?"

"And don't forget to say that you haven't seen either one of us for more than a week," chimed in Mark. "Doings of some sort are liable to happen in the settlement at any hour of the day or night, and we don't want our names mixed up with them. We shall attend strictly to our own business, and hope that those ruffians who carried Hanson away will do the same."

"I am mighty glad to hear you say that, and I don't want you to disremember what I have tole you," answered the old woman, with some earnestness. "You aint to go a-pesterin' of Marcy Gray an' his maw, kase there is folks about here who won't by no means take it kind of you if you do."

The boys promised that they would bear her warning in mind, but Tom Allison told himself that he thought he should do as he pleased about heeding it. He was not obliged to consult anybody's wishes, in dealing with such a traitor as Marcy Gray had shown himself to be. He turned his back to the fire while Mark was putting on his overcoat, and just then a gentle snore reminded him that there was one person in the cabin whom he had forgotten. It was the negro girl who, having cleared away the late breakfast dishes and put the little furniture there was in the room to rights, had drawn a chair to the table and fallen fast asleep with her head resting on her folded arms. Tom took one look at her, and then he and Mark went out. Neither of them said a word, until they had mounted their horses and ridden into the road, and then Mark inquired:

"What do you know now more than you did when you came here? All I have learned is that Beardsley is afraid of Marcy Gray, and don't want anything to happen to him, if he can help it, for fear that the blame would be laid at his door. I tell you, Tom Allison, as long as those men who carried Hanson away are at large, we have got to look out what we say and do. It's an awful state of affairs, but that is the way it looks to me."

That was the way it looked to Tom also; and as he could not say anything encouraging, he held his peace, and rode on with his eyes fastened upon the horn of his saddle.

CHAPTER IV.
VISITORS IN PLENTY

Although we have said that Marcy Gray appeared to be as calm as a summer's morning, he was not so in reality. He had the most disquieting reflections for company during every one of his waking hours, and they troubled him so that he found it next to impossible to concentrate his mind on anything. On this particular morning he felt so very gloomy that he did not ride his filly to town, as was his usual custom, but sent old Morris and a mule instead. What was the use of going to the post-office through all that rain just to listen to the idle boasts of a few stay-at-home rebels who could not or would not tell him a single reliable item of news? He and his mother had been talking over the situation – it was what they always talked about when they were alone – and the conclusion to which they came was, that their affairs could not go on in this way much longer, and that a change for better or worse was sure to come before many days more had passed away.

"I suppose our situation might be worse, but I can't see how," said Marcy, rising from his seat on the sofa and looking out at one of the streaming windows.

"Would it not be worse if we had no roof to shelter us in weather like this?" inquired Mrs. Gray.

"It would be bad for us if our house was burned, of course," answered Marcy. "But as for a roof, we shall always have that. If they turn us out of here we'll go to the quarters; and if they burn us out of there, we'll go into the woods and throw up a shanty. As long as they leave me or a single darky on the place the weather will never trouble you, mother."

"But I am afraid they will not leave you with me," replied Mrs. Gray. "You know that General Wise has asked the Richmond authorities to re-enforce him at Roanoke Island, and they have told him to re-enforce himself. You know what that means?"

"Yes; it means a general drumming up of recruits among the lukewarm rebels hereabouts. But it doesn't scare me. When I see such fellows as Allison, Goodwin, Shelby, and Dillon, and a dozen others I could mention, shoulder a musket and go to the defence of the Island, then I shall begin to worry about myself, and not before. Mother, Captain Beardsley and his friends will not permit me to be forced into the army, and neither will they let harm come to you, if they have influence enough to prevent it."

"Marcy, I am afraid you are placing too much reliance upon Aleck Webster and his friends," said his mother. "They have not brought Beardsley home yet. Suppose he has the courage to defy them?"

"But he hasn't," said the boy earnestly. "He hasn't had time to answer that letter yet, but he will do it, and he will answer it in person. I know he would have the courage to brave an open enemy, especially if he was driven into a corner and couldn't run, but it worries him, as it does everyone else, to have people work against him in secret. He will come home before he will allow his property to be destroyed, and Aleck assured me that if anything happens to us, Beardsley will have to stand punishment for it. But I do wish he had not caught Jack and me at Crooked Inlet. He will tell all about it the minute he gets home – he would die if he had to keep it to himself – and I am afraid the folks about here will do something to us in spite of all Beardsley and his friends can do to prevent it. I wonder where those two horsemen are going in such haste. Why, mother, they are rebel officers, and they are turning toward the gate. Yes, sir; they are coming in. Now what do you suppose they want here?"

This was a startling piece of news, and a question that Mrs. Gray could not answer. Although there were two garrisons within a few miles of the plantation, one being located at Plymouth and the other at Roanoke Island, Marcy and his mother seldom saw any soldiers, unless they happened to be neighbors who had enlisted, and come home on a few days' furlough. These furloughed men never

came near the house, but rode by without looking at it; while the two men who were now approaching were headed straight for it, and their actions seemed to indicate that they had business with some member of the family. Marcy glanced at his mother's pale but resolute face, and then he looked up at the Confederate banner – the one Captain Semmes hoisted at the *Sabine's* peak when he put his prize crew aboard of her, and which Sailor Jack had captured and brought home with him. That flag had twice taken the little *Fairy Belle* in safety past the rebel fortifications down the river, and Marcy had great hopes of it now.

"It may not serve you this time as well as it did before," said his mother, who seemed to read the thoughts that were passing in his mind. "I was afraid you would miss it by passing those batteries in broad daylight, but I do not understand these things, and did not think it best to raise any objections to Jack's plans."

"Why, mother, we never could have run those works in the dark without being seen and fired at and perhaps sunk," replied Marcy. "The very impudence of the thing was what disarmed suspicion and saved us from being searched. We'll soon know the worst now, for here they are at the bottom of the steps. I shall ask them right in here."

So saying Marcy opened the door that gave entrance into the hall, and called for Julius to run around to the front door and take charge of a couple of horses he would find there, after which he stepped out upon the gallery just as the Confederates were getting ready to hail the house.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," said he. "Alight, and give your nags over to this boy."

The officers replied in courteous tones, and when they had ascended the steps to the gallery and turned down the wide collars of their gray overcoats, Marcy was somewhat relieved to find that they were both strangers, and that they did not look at him as though they had anything unpleasant to say to him.

"I am Captain Porter, at your service, and my friend here is Lieutenant Anderson; no relation, however, to the Yankee hero of Fort Sumter, who, so I am told, is about to be canonized by the Northern people," said the elder of the two; and then he waited a moment for his subordinate to laugh at his wit. "If you are Marcy Gray and the head man of the plantation, you are the man we are looking for. Who wouldn't be a soldier this fine weather? How is your arm coming on by this time?"

Marcy was beginning to feel a little at his ease in the presence of his unwelcome visitors, but this abrupt question aroused his fears on the instant. Did the captain know what was the matter with his arm? and if he did, which one of their gossiping neighbors told him about it? He was anxious to know, but afraid to ask.

"It is getting better every day, thank you," was his reply. "Will you not come and speak to my mother? Julius will put your horses under shelter."

"We are 'most too muddy to go into the presence of a lady," said the captain, looking down at his boots, "but as I don't want to blot my notebook by taking it out in the rain, I think we'll have to go in. We had a short but interesting chat with your captain a while ago."

"Beardsley?" Marcy almost gasped. "Has he got home?"

"Of course he has. You didn't think the Yankees had captured him, I hope. He gave us a good account of you, and since you can't run the blockade any more, I wish you would hurry up and get well so that you can join – "

Right here the captain stopped long enough to permit Marcy to introduce him and his lieutenant to Mrs. Gray. They sat down in the easy-chairs that were brought for them, made a few remarks about the weather, and then the captain resumed.

"Yes; we saw Beardsley this morning, and would have been glad to spend a longer time with him, but business prevented. He says you are a brave and skilful pilot, and I happen to know that they are the sort of men who are needed on our gunboats; but, of course, you can't go just now. Hallo!" exclaimed the captain, whose gaze had wandered to the rebel flag that hung upon the wall. "Where did you get that, if it is a fair question?"

"It is one my brother brought home with him," answered Marcy, speaking with a calmness that surprised himself. "He was second mate and pilot of the blockade runner *West Wind* that was fitted out and loaded in the port of Boston."

"Oh, yes; we heard all about him too," said the captain, and Marcy afterward confessed that the words frightened him out of a year's growth. "He went down to Newbern to ship on an ironclad he didn't find; so I suppose he went into the army, did he not?"

"Not that I know of," answered Marcy, looking first one officer and then the other squarely in the eye. "Almost the last thing I heard him say was, that he was going to ship on a war vessel."

"Then he will have to come back here to do it, for there is no ironclad building at Newbern, and I don't see why he did not ship with Commodore Lynch in the first place," said Captain Porter. "But doubtless he wanted to serve on deep water. Now to business. We want negroes to work on the fortifications on and about the Island, and Captain Beardsley sent us here to get some. He said he thought you might spare, say fifty or more."

Marcy was suspicious of everything Beardsley said and did, and wondered if this was a new move on the man's part to bring him and his mother into trouble with the Confederate authorities. If it was a trap Marcy did not fall into it.

"You can call on my mother for double that number," said he without an instant's hesitation. "We can't spare them, of course, for there's work enough to be done on the place; but all the same you will have to get them."

"All right," answered the captain, pulling out his notebook. "Send them down to Plymouth as soon as you can and in any way you please, and we will furnish them with transportation and take care of them after that. By the way, it's rather queer about that overseer of yours. Where do you imagine he is now?"

If Marcy had not been fully on the alert this question would have struck him dumb; but the captain, whose suspicions had not been in the least aroused, and who believed Marcy and his mother to be as good Confederates as he was himself, had unwittingly paved the way for it by talking so freely about Captain Beardsley.

"It was a very strange as well as a most alarming proceeding," admitted Mrs. Gray, who thought it time for her to take part in the conversation.

"I have not yet fully recovered from the fright it gave me," she added, with a smile, "and we have not the faintest idea where Hanson is now."

"What was Hanson anyhow? Which side was he on?"

"I don't know," replied Marcy. "Sometimes he claimed to be one thing, and then he claimed to be another."

"Captain Beardsley thinks he was in favor of the South."

"That proves my words, for he assured me that he was a Union man, and wanted to know if I was going to discharge him on account of his principles. I told him I was not, and added that if Shelby and Dillon and their friends wanted him driven from the place they could come up and do the work themselves, for I would have no hand in it. I desire to live in peace with all my neighbors."

"Oh, you can't do that, and it's no use to try," exclaimed the captain, getting upon his feet and buttoning his heavy coat. "Beyond a doubt your overseer was a Confederate in principle; and if that is so, his abductors must have been Union men. If Confederates had carried him away they would not hesitate to say so. Those Unionists must be your near neighbors, and if I were in your place, I should not show my colors quite so plainly," added the captain, pointing to the banner on the wall. "I am surprised to learn that there are so many traitors in my State, and we shall turn our attention to them as soon as we have beaten back the Yankee invaders of our soil."

"Do you think there will be any more fighting, captain?" asked Mrs. Gray anxiously.

"Yes, madam, I do. I am not one of those who believe that the North is going to be easily whipped. They do not belong to our race, I am glad to say, but they are a hardy, enduring people, and

although they don't know how to fight they think they do, and they are going to give us a struggle. We must hold fast to Roanoke Island, for the possession of that important point would give the enemy a chance to operate in the rear of Norfolk. We expect to have a brush with them soon, and when it comes, we intend to make another Bull Run affair of it. I wish we could remain longer, but our duties call us away. I trust you will have those negroes down to us to-morrow."

Mrs. Gray replied that they should be sent without loss of time, and Marcy went out to tell Julius to bring up the horses. When he came back and followed the officers to the front door, he inquired if they had heard what Beardsley's reason was for quitting a profitable business and coming home so unexpectedly.

"Oh, yes; Beardsley told us all about it. He said he was afraid of the Yankees, and he didn't act as though he was ashamed to confess it. Their cruisers are getting so thick along the coast that a sailing vessel stands no chance. I asked him if he was going to enlist and he thought not. He wants to do his fighting on the water."

"He wants to do his fighting with his mouth," was what Marcy said to himself. "He will neither enlist nor ship; but he will stay at home and try by all the mean arts that he is master of to keep mother and me in trouble." Then aloud he said: "I am glad he came home, for it lets me out of the service. I have no desire to face any more steam launches that carry howitzers."

"I suppose not," said the captain, giving Marcy's hand a hearty farewell shake. "The more I see of those people the less I like to face them in battle. I hope you will soon have the use of your arm again, and that I shall see you by my side fighting for the glorious cause of Southern independence. Good-by."

The two officers mounted and rode away, Marcy remained upon the gallery long enough to wave his hand to them as they passed through the gate, and then he went into the house and to the room in which he had left his mother.

"What did I tell you?" were the first words he uttered. "Didn't I say that Beardsley would not let harm come to us if he could help it? I tell you, mother, he is afraid of the men who carried Hanson away and ordered him to come home."

"Well, then, is he not aware that we are looking to those same men for protection?" inquired Mrs. Gray.

"If he doesn't know it he suspects it pretty strongly. Aleck Webster told me that Beardsley had been warned to cease persecuting Union people in this settlement. That includes you and me, for the minute Beardsley saw and recognized my schooner in Crooked Inlet, that very minute he knew where to place us. He knows where Jack is now as well as we know it ourselves."

"And will he not tell of it?"

"Of course, for it is to his interest to do so. If he has been home long enough to ride into Nashville, he has told Shelby and Dillon of it before this time. I wish I could see a copy of the letter that was sent to him by Aleck and his friends. I am sorry to lose all our best hands at the very time we need them most, but all the same I am glad those officers came here. They didn't say *money* once, and that proves that Beardsley could not have spoken of it in their hearing."

"O Marcy," exclaimed Mrs. Gray, rising from her chair and nervously pacing the room. "I little dreamed that that money would be the occasion of so much anxiety to all of us. I almost wish I had never seen it. I can't sleep of nights for thinking of it, and sometimes I imagine I hear someone moving about the cellar."

"I don't wish you had never heard of it," replied Marcy. "We can't tell how long it will be before a dollar or two of it may come handy to us. Say, mother," he added, stepping to her side and placing his arm about her waist, "do you think you would be any easier in your mind if you did not know just where that money was, so long as you knew it was safe?"

"I know I should," was the reply, given in cautious tones. "But, my son, you must not attempt to remove it to another hiding-place. There seem to be so many who are on the watch, that I am sure you would be detected at it. That would mean ruin for you and arrest and imprisonment for me."

Marcy Gray was surprised, frightened, and angered by the words – surprised to learn that his mother was tormented by the very fear that had been uppermost in the mind of the absent Jack; frightened when he reflected how very easy it would be for some of their secret enemies to bring evidence to prove that every dollar of the money that was concealed in the cellar-wall rightfully belonged to Northern men, and that Mrs. Gray was hoarding it for her own use in violation of the law in such cases made and provided; and angered when he thought of the many indignities that would be put upon his mother by the Confederate authorities, who had showed themselves to be brutally vindictive and merciless in dealing with those whose opinions differed from their own. He drew a long breath which was very like a sob, and led his mother back to her seat on the sofa.

"All right," said he, with an appearance of cheerfulness that he was far from feeling. "I thought it would be a load off your mind if you could say that there is no money about the house except the little you carry in your pocket."

Mrs. Gray noticed that the boy did not promise to let the money alone, but before she could call his attention to the fact Marcy faced about and went into the hall after his coat and cap.

"It is almost time for the hands to have their dinner," said he, "and when I get them together I will tell them the news. Of course they will be delighted with it."

"I am afraid they will put them under some old overseer who will abuse and drive them beyond their strength," observed Mrs. Gray.

"I think it likely that they will see the difference between working for you and working for somebody else," admitted Marcy. "But these are war times, and when we can't help ourselves we must do as we are told. Our darkies ought to be glad of an opportunity to labor for the government that is fighting to keep them slaves. I wonder how many Captain Beardsley will send!"

"You said a while ago that it would be to the captain's interest to tell of his meeting with you and Jack at Crooked Inlet," observed Mrs. Gray. "I didn't quite understand that."

"Well, you see Beardsley needs help to carry out his plans, and his game now is to do nothing that will cause Hanson's abductors to turn their attention to him and his buildings. He believes, and he has good reason to believe, that certain men around here have it in their power to damage him greatly; and if he can bring Shelby and Dillon and the rest of the gang to his way of thinking, they will be apt to let us alone. Now I will go out and make a detail of the men we need about the place, and tell the others that they must be ready to march at daylight in the morning. I am not going to send them off in this rain."

"The captain said nothing about picks and shovels," suggested Mrs. Gray.

"Perhaps it would be well – "

"Picks and shovels cost money," interrupted Marcy, "and we are not going to send any down there to be stolen. Let the Confederate government furnish its own tools. Now I am beaten again! Here are two more visitors, and this time they are Captain Beardsley and Colonel Shelby."

This very unwelcome announcement brought Mrs. Gray to her feet in a twinkling. "What do you think they can want here?" she almost gasped, with a good deal of emphasis on the pronoun.

"They are coming to make friends with you, so that you will not tell the Union men to destroy their property," replied Marcy.

"But, my son, I never would do anything of the kind. And besides, I do not know the Union men, or where to find them."

"No difference so long as they think you do. Now sit down and be as independent as you please, and I will let them in. Julius, stand by the front door to take those horses."

These men were admitted as the others were, but with very different feelings on the part of those they came to visit. Captain Porter and his lieutenant had donned uniforms and were ready to

risk their lives for the cause in which they honestly believed, but these two lacked the courage to do that. Beardsley was ready to do anything that would bring him a dollar, provided there was no danger in it, while Shelby would not have enlisted if he knew that he could thereby earn a right to the title that was now given him out of respect to his wealth. They were ready to urge or drive others into the army, but it hurt them to be obliged to send their negroes to work on the fortifications. Colonel Shelby entered the room and seated himself with an air of a gentleman, while Beardsley acted the boor, as he always did. He gave Marcy's well hand a tremendous grip and shake, and said, in the same voice he would have used if he had been hailing the masthead:

"Well, how do you find yourself by this time? Ain't you sorry now that you didn't take out a venture when I wanted you to, so that you might be shaking thousands in your pocket at this minute, when you've only got hunderds? My respects to you, Mrs. Gray; but when me and this boy of yourn get to talking we don't know when to stop. Hope you have been well since I saw you last, and that the carrying away of your overseer didn't scare you none."

Marcy was well enough acquainted with Captain Beardsley to know that he did not rattle on in this style for nothing. The man was excited and nervous, and tried to conceal his feelings under a cloak of hearty good nature and jollity that ill became him. Marcy sat down and looked at him in a way that made Captain Beardsley mutter to himself:

"I'd like the best in the world to wring that there brat's neck. He's got the upper hand of me and Shelby and all of us, and dog-gone the luck, he knows it. I'd give a dollar to know what he's got on his mind this very minute."

After a little talk on various subjects that were of no particular interest to anybody, Captain Beardsley introduced the subject of blockade running, and gave a glowing description of the manner in which he had hoodwinked the Yankee cruisers by dodging out of Ocracoke Inlet while they were busy fighting the forts at Hatteras. He seemed to look upon it as a very daring and skillful exploit, and yet it was nothing more than any alert shipmaster would have done under the same circumstances.

"After that we had fun alive," added the captain; and Marcy was surprised to see him put his hand into the pocket of his overcoat and bring out a good-sized canvas bag which was filled so full of something heavy that it would not hold any more. "All we had to do was to run down to Nassau, discharge our cargo, and load up and come back again; and all the while we was making money till I couldn't eat nor sleep on account of it, and the Yankees never showed up to bother us."

"You were fortunate," said Marcy, when Beardsley stopped and looked at him.

"That ain't no name for it. We had the best kind of luck. I kept a bright watch for that steam launch when we passed through Crooked Inlet, but she had got tired of waiting and went off somewheres. We seen one or two little blockade runners like ourselves, but no Yankees. Now there's your share of the profits, Marcy," said the captain, and he got up and placed the canvas bag upon the table. "We made two runs, and I promised you I would give you five hunderd dollars – "

"But, Captain," exclaimed Marcy, while Mrs. Gray looked troubled, "I have no right to take that money. I wasn't aboard the *Hattie* when she made those two runs."

"That's the gospel truth; but didn't I say I would keep your place open for you while you was laid up in ordinary with your broken arm? I did for a fact, and I always stand to what I say."

"But I haven't done the first thing to earn that thousand dollars, and I hope you will believe that I am in dead earnest when I assure you that I'll not touch it," replied Marcy.

There was no doubt about his earnestness, and the captain looked disappointed. He settled back in his chair and nodded at Shelby, and that was a bad thing for him to do. It told Marcy as plainly as words what their object was in coming there to call upon him and his mother.

"Even if you were not on board the *Hattie* when she made those successful trips, you belonged to her, and have a right to demand pay according to contract," said the colonel.

"And while I belonged to her I took pay according to contract," said Marcy quickly. "I was paid by the run and not by the month."

"I have never heard that the pay of an enlisted man ceases the moment he is injured," added the colonel.

"Nor I either; but I am not an enlisted man, and what's more, I do not intend to be."

"Well, if you won't take the money, you will acknowledge that I tried to do the fair thing by you? 'said Beardsley.

"I am willing to say that you offered me some money and that I declined to take it," answered the boy, who knew very well that Beardsley was not trying to do the fair thing by him. "As it is nobody's business, I never expect to be questioned about it."

The captain took little share in the conversation that followed. He put the canvas bag into his pocket, folded his arms and went into the dumps, where he remained until the name of the missing overseer was mentioned, and then he brightened up to say:

"That there was a little the strangest thing I ever heard tell of.

What's went with Hanson, do you reckon?"

"I haven't the least idea where he is," was Marcy's answer.

"I know you wasn't to home when he was took off – leastwise I have been told so," said Beardsley, "but I didn't know but mebbe you and your maw might suspicion somebody. Now what you going to do for an overseer? There's that renter of mine, Kelsey his name is. I know you don't collogue with no such, but mebbe you know who he is."

Marcy started, and looked first at his mother and then at Captain Beardsley. The latter sat with his bearded chin on his breast, regarding Marcy through his half-closed eyelids, and there was an expression on his face that had a volume of meaning in it. Taken by surprise at last, the usually sharp-witted boy had betrayed the secret he was most anxious to keep from the knowledge of everybody.

CHAPTER V.
MARCY'S RASH WISH

"I know mighty well that Kelsey is trifling and lazy when he ain't got nothing much to occupy his mind," said Beardsley, who was not slow to catch the meaning of the frightened glances which mother and son so quickly exchanged, "but when he was working on my place and bossing my hands, I found him – "

"Are you in earnest in proposing him for my mother's overseer?" cried Marcy, as soon as he could speak. "Our fields can grow up to briars first."

"But really, he wants work," began the colonel.

"Then let him go down to the Island and work in the trenches," replied Marcy. "He can't come here."

"But Kelsey is the only support of his family," the colonel remarked. "He is loyal to our cause, and would enlist in a minute if he had enough ahead to support his wife and children during his absence; but he hasn't got it."

"They will fare just as well without him as they do with him. If they get hungry, my mother will no doubt feed them as she has done a hundred times before; but Kelsey can't come on this place to work. There isn't money enough in the State to induce us to agree to that."

"But what you uns going to do for an overseer?" said Beardsley again.

"You'll need one if you intend to run the place."

"Not until the hands return from the Island," replied Marcy, "and then I shall take hold myself."

Having done all they intended to do when they came there the visitors were ready to leave, and Colonel Shelby gave the signal by arising from his chair and pulling his collar up about his ears.

"I still think, Mrs. Gray, that Marcy ought to take this money," said he. "The captain does not offer it to him as a gift but as his due."

"We perfectly understand the object he had in mind," answered the lady; whereupon the colonel opened his eyes and looked at her very hard. "But if Marcy thinks he ought not to receive it I have nothing to say."

"I hope you will not regret it," said the colonel. "Some people seem to think that we are about entering upon a long conflict, and that money will be a necessary thing to have after a while."

"But if you get hard up, which I hope you won't, don't forget that this thousand dollars is all yourn, Marcy," exclaimed the captain.

Marcy assured him that he would bear it in mind. If Beardsley hoped to hear him declare that his mother had more money in the house than she was likely to need, he was disappointed.

"And don't forget either, that if at any time you stand in need of such assistance as the captain and I can give, you must not hesitate to say so," continued the colonel, as he bowed to Mrs. Gray and followed Marcy to the door. "Our little settlement, I am sorry to say, is full of the meanest of traitors, and it may comfort you to know that there are a few persons in it to whom you can speak freely."

"We know that, and it certainly is a very great comfort to us," replied Marcy, thinking of Aleck Webster. "It will take more than a thousand dollars to keep roofs over your heads if anything comes of this day's work," was what he added to himself when he had seen the men ride out of the yard. "I saw through your little game from the first, and yet I went and gave myself away. That was about the biggest piece of foolishness I was ever guilty of; but I suppose it was to be so. I was all in the dark before, but I know what I am going to do now."

In order that we may know whether or not Marcy's fears were well founded, let us ride with Beardsley and his companion long enough to overhear a few words of their conversation. The moment they rode out of the gate, and were concealed from the house by the thick shrubbery and trees that

surrounded it, Beardsley threw back the collar of his coat, giving the cold rain and sleet a fair chance at him, and almost reeled in his saddle, so convulsed was he with the merriment that could no longer be restrained.

"I done it, by gum!" he exclaimed, shaking his head and flourishing his riding-whip in the air. "I done it, didn't I?"

"You did not purchase his good-will, if that is what you mean," answered his companion. "He wouldn't touch your gold. He knew why you offered it as well as I did, and I was satisfied from the start that you would not catch him that way. He will put those Union men on you if you so much as crook your finger."

"But I aint a-going to crook no fingers," said Beardsley, with a hoarse laugh. "Let him sick 'em on if he wants to, but he'd best watch out that I don't get there first. Say, colonel, that there money is in the house all right, just as we uns thought it was."

"How do you know?" exclaimed his companion. The colonel had not noticed the frightened glances that Marcy and his mother exchanged when Kelsey's name was mentioned, and he was surprised to hear Beardsley speak so positively.

"Say!" answered the captain. "You aint forgot how you sent Kelsey up to Mrs. Gray's, while I was at sea, to make some inquiries about the money she was thought to have stowed away, have you? Well, Marcy and his mother aint forgot it nuther; and when I spoke Kelsey's name, and said mebbe he would be a good one to take Hanson's place, Marcy jumped like I had stuck a pin in him."

"Well, what of it?"

"What of it? Marcy knowed in a minute that I wanted to have that man took on the plantation for to snoop around of nights and find out all about that money. But I aint a caring. I know the money is there, and that's all I wanted to find out. The ways I have talked and schemed and planned to make that there boy say that him and his maw had as much as they wanted to tide them through the war that's coming, is just amazing, now that I think of it; but not a word could I get out of him. He was too smart to be ketched; but all on a sudden he gives out the secret as easy as falling off a log. The money is there, I tell you."

"And you intend to get it, I suppose?" added the colonel. "Well, now, look here, Beardsley; don't say a word to me about it."

"All right, Colonel," said Beardsley, who could scarcely have been happier if he had had the whole of Mrs. Gray's thirty thousand dollars where he could put his hand upon it at any time he pleased. "I know what you mean by them words. Of course you are too big a man and too rich to go into business with me, but I know some who aint. I'll show them Grays that they aint so great as they think for."

"Have you so soon forgotten what that letter said?" inquired the colonel. "If anything happens to Marcy's mother or her property some of us will be sure to suffer for it, unless you are sharp enough to lay the blame upon some one else."

"Say!" replied Beardsley, in a whisper. "That's what I'm thinking of doing. Your time's your own, I reckon, aint it? and you don't mind a little mite of rain, do you? Then come with me and see how I am going to work it."

So saying the captain urged his horse into a lope, and Colonel Shelby followed his example. After a while they turned into one of the narrow lanes that ran through Beardsley's cultivated fields to the woods that lay behind them, galloped past Mrs. Brown's cheerless cabin, and at last drew rein before the door of one that was still more cheerless and dilapidated. It stood in one corner of a little patch of ground that had been planted to corn and potatoes, and which had received such slight care and attention of late years that the blackberry briars were beginning to take possession of it. A small pack of lean and hungry coon dogs greeted the visitors as they stopped in front of the cabin, and their yelping soon brought their master to the door. He was the same lazy Kelsey we once saw sitting on

the front porch of Mrs. Gray's house, only his hair was longer, his whiskers more tangled and matted, and his clothes worse for wear.

"Alight and hitch," was the way in which he welcomed Captain Beardsley and his companion. "Git out, ye whelps!"

"Can't stop so long," replied the captain. "Been over to Mrs. Gray's to see how my pilot was getting on, and tried to scare up a job for you at overseering, in the place of that chap who was took off in the night time."

"I dunno's I am a-caring for a job of that sort," answered Kelsey. "I've got a sight of work of my own that had oughter be did."

"That's so," said Beardsley, glancing at the broken fences, the bare wood-yard and the briars that were encroaching upon the borders of the little field. "But there's no ready money in your work, while there is a sight of it up to the Grays."

"I won't work for no sich," declared Kelsey. "They think too much of their niggers."

"They set a heap more store by them nor they do by such poor folks as you be. But you needn't bother. They won't take you and give you a chance to keep your head above water, and put a bite of grub into the mouths of your family and a few duds on their backs. They allowed that they wouldn't have no such trifling hound as you on their place."

"Did Mrs. Gray use them words about me?" exclaimed Kelsey, growing excited on the instant.

"I heard somebody say them very words, but I aint naming no names; nor I aint been nowheres except up to Mrs. Gray's to-day. One of 'em allowed that if you wasn't too doggone useless to live, you'd go and 'list on the Island."

"I'm jest as good as they be," said the man, who by this time was looking as though he felt very ugly.

"That's so. And some of 'em likewise said that a man who was too lazy to keep a tight roof over his own head, when he could have nails and boards by asking for 'em, wouldn't do no good as an overseer," added Beardsley, counting the holes in the top of the cabin through which the rafters could be seen, and glancing at the stick chimney, which leaned away from the wall as if it were about to topple over. "But that aint what I come here for, to carry tales about my neighbors. I want to say I'm glad to see you doing so well, and that if you are needing a small side of meat and a little meal, you know where to get 'em."

"Sarvant, sah," replied Kelsey. "That there is more neighbor-like than demeaning a man for a trifling hound because he is pore, and I'll bear it in mind, I bet you. As for my roof, it's a heap better'n the one them Grays will have to cover them in a week from now; you hear me? That big house of theirn will burn like a bresh-heap."

"Well, take care of yourself," answered the captain. "But if I'd suspicioned you was going to fly mad about it, I wouldn't 'a' spoke a word to you."

"Kelsey will never carry out his threat," said Colonel Shelby, as the two rode away from the cabin. "He is too big a coward."

"I know that mighty well, but you can say that you heard him speak them very words, can't you?"

Captain Beardsley was very lively and talkative after that, and plumed himself on having done a neat stroke of work that would turn suspicion from himself, when the results of a certain other plan he had in his head should become known in the settlement. But perhaps we shall see that he forgot one very important thing. As to the colonel, although he approved the work that was to be done, he had the profoundest contempt for the man who could deliberately plan and carry it out. He had little to say, and was glad when his horse brought him to a bridle-path that would take him away from Beardsley and toward his own home.

Meanwhile Marcy Gray was in a most uncomfortable frame of mind. When he saw the visitors ride out of the gate, he closed the door and went back to his mother. "The captain never spoke of meeting you and Jack at Crooked Inlet," were the first words she uttered.

"Of course not," replied Marcy. "You did not expect him to, did you? But I rather looked for him to give some reason for coming home, and to hear him say that he would have no further occasion for my services; but he was so disappointed because I would not take that hush-money – "

"O Marcy!" exclaimed his mother. "I was afraid that that was what the money was intended for."

"That was just it, and how the colonel stared when you said you understood the object Beardsley had in view in offering it. Those men think we can destroy their buildings or protect them, just as we please."

"But, Marcy, we cannot do it."

"Let them keep on thinking so if they want to. And another reason Beardsley didn't say all he meant to was because I was foolish enough to give him something else to think about. I was frightened when he mentioned Kelsey's name, for I knew in an instant what he wanted the man on the place for, and I showed that I was frightened."

"So did I, Marcy," groaned Mrs. Gray. "So did I."

"Well, it can't be expected that a woman will be on the watch all the time, but I ought to have had better sense. I gave Beardsley good reason for thinking that there is something on or about the place that we don't want a stranger to know anything about, and of course he believes it is money. But don't you worry. We'll come out all right in the end."

So saying Marcy put on his coat and cap, kissed his mother, and left the house to tell one of the hands to put the saddle on his horse. At the door he met old Morris, who was just coming in with the mail. He saw at a glance that the darky was frightened.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.