

SPINDRIFT

An Adventure of the Great Lakes

By HAROLD TITUS

INSTALLMENT 11.

The boats were changing their courses as they left the passage between the mainland and Little Summer Island, going out in a fan-shaped front by the arranged plan. The Three Hoppers swung a bit to the northward, the two steam tugs deployed to the southward, there to take their places, straighten out, and cruise due west again across the foot of Green Bay. The open boat was to proceed on its westerly course. Out somewhere beyond, in those twenty miles of restless water rolling between them and the other shore, two boys were clinging to a few slender posts—or the waters of the inland seas had claimed two more sacrifices.

The stress of the situation as the other searchers deployed was brought home to Goodheart, and he shook off the spell that the near presence of Janet Needham had put upon him.

"We'll pray for a break in the storm," he said to the girl.

"I have been, ever since we started," she answered, simply. "Daylight—hours of it—seems to be our only hope."

But there was no break in the heavens; there were only a few moments of precious time between them and blank darkness. Nor was their view great. Within ten minutes the Wanderer, which was to take the left flank of the searching squadron, was lost in the haze. The visible area of water was small indeed, and although John used the glass that Capt. Needham had thrust into his hands, the range of his vision was sadly limited.

He went aft and endeavored to wring more speed from the steady motor, but his efforts availed nothing, so he returned to the bow and took his stand beside the girl, straining his eyes as he searched the restless water.

Another burst of rain to hammer down the sea and shut them into a wall of gray; another cessation of the downpour and a fresh burst of weather to send the rollers mounting. In the distance, thunder muttered continuously and lightning cut through the murk at frequent intervals.

Staring out across that waste of water Goodheart felt a crawling in his vitals. Bad enough for men to be lost there, but the thought of children, little boys. . . . And he had a memory of Sam Texson's face and the break in his voice when he spoke the name of his Bobby.

Janet stamped her foot and he saw she was biting her lips.

"Darkness!" she said, chokingly. "Oh, darkness!"

And darkness came shutting down abruptly, almost vengefully, it seemed, but with it the lightning increased. However, protracted flickers from the clouds gave them nothing to see.

Rain came again, this time in a steady, fine downpour, flecking the water, hissing as it fell, gathering the play of lightning into a greenish, diffused light.

Janet watched to starboard as she held the wheel; John kept his eyes to port, and when the intervals of darkness endured for long he could hear the girl breathing sharply, as though in physical pain.

"There! Look!"

Her one hand gripped his arm and he turned at once, but as she lifted the other hand, releasing the wheel for the moment, the flickering light died, and had it not been for the faint glow from the bimini he could not have made out her white hand protruding from the yellow sleeve of her oilskin.

"I saw something—something awash!" she said, tensely. "Off there, half hidden by the rain."

She started to change the course and bear upon it but John said sharply:

"Don't do that!"

"But—"

"You're not sure enough."

He was gone, then, leaping for the motor, throwing out the clutch, reversing for a few turns that they might hold their position.

"Watch for it when lightning comes again!" he said, thickly.

He strained over the rail, hands outspread, and waited, while they rolled sluggishly in the sea-way.

It seemed to John that the heavens would never shoot their light over the lake again. His heart seemed to pound for ages as he strained, eyes held wide open, concentrating on keeping his lids from their natural blinking that he might lose no fractional instant when light did come.

Their exclamations came as one. "See? There!"

"Ay—perhaps!"

Perhaps it had been almost as nothing—a mere blotch in the rain-shrouded lake. It might have been the Three Hoppers; it might have been a drifting snag. But something was there, off to starboard, a cable's length away—more, possibly; the rain and the vagrant light were deceptive.

John bounded forward and took the wheel. He had not taken his eyes from the direction in which they had sighted whatever it was caught their vision.

"Start her forward, slow," he said. "Very slow."

Unconsciously and naturally he had taken command of their craft. Until then Janet had wheeled, until then any one able to hold a course could have wheeled. But now adroitness was needed and that sixth sense of the mariner which permits a master to calculate his drift in a gale, which enables him to fix on direction and distance with uncanny precision.

Janet realized that she protested, but she felt plighted, had she been annoyed, it would have made no difference. This man was a born commander; he had said what he would obey, as another woman or any other man would have obeyed his terse, imperative directions.

The clutch took hold, the motor slowed as they went forward again.

John put the wheel over and the boat turned there in the darkness, swung to starboard a point, then three-hundredths of a point, a fraction of a point, and crawled on, rolling in the trough.

Again that interminable wait for light, each rigid, each waiting, each forward. The rain increased, drumming on John's sou'-wester, hissing more loudly as it met the lake and thunder crashed close above them to liberate more rain.

But with the thunder came light, a blinking second of it, and against the boom from the heavens their voices rose again.

"Full speed!"

The half-drowned bang of the exhaust picked up, the boat lurched

forward; this time there had been no mistake! Something floated ahead of them, a low blotch on the water, and some part of it or something buoyed up by it moved—moved! Goodheart's hands were gripping the small spokes of the wheel until they pained him—as his racing heart so lightly to port; he guessed at the distance travelled.

"Good! Stop!"

His voice had bite to it, and again the reversed propeller churned at the waters to settle the bow and check progress.

High above them a vein of white fire opened in the heavens. It shot forward and turned and branched, and the branches, like veins in a leaf, rent the murk and divided themselves until, their course run, they ended in the blankness from which they had originated.

But they served! They sent, first, a low flicker down upon the lake, the boat, and the object floating there not three lengths from it; the flicker grew to a sustained glare; it wavered and faltered and rose to its intense brilliance again. . . . And in that blessed interval John Goodheart saw!

The thing beyond him was a raft, or what had been a raft. Beside it was one stick, just liberated, and the posts which had been so unskillfully nailed to the heavier timbers were at all angles.

Across three of these lay a slender figure, its face lifted toward the oncoming boat with an expression that was to live for ever in the memories of the two who beheld it. Hope was there, but with it the great fear of death; even as he looked up they saw him strain outward, holding to his raft with one arm crooked around a post, and grapple with the other for something below the surface. . . .

That other something came above the water, thrust upward, and John heard Janet moan lowly. She did not scream. The moan was more like that of a man than the dismay of a woman, more like that which rumbled from his own deep chest as he saw that the thing which came above the surface and for which the little boy grappled was a hand—a white child's hand, with its thin wrist and white forearm. It held there a moment, fingers stretched outward stiffly, in a tense posture of desperation. . . . and then the darkness came.

The girl at the motor needed no more of command, then. She knew the way forward, and her clear voice called out steadily:

"Hang on, Ted! You're safe now!"

No order was needed either, when they felt rather than heard the gentle impact of the launch against an obstruction. The propeller ceased churning. John let go the wheel. He thrust one leg over the rail and leaped low.

A frantic, feeble sobbing came to him, along with the hiss of falling rain, with the moan of the wind in his ears. He groped widely. His fingers touched cold flesh and closed on a fragile wrist. He was scarcely conscious that Janet had stumbled forward and thrown her weight against his thigh which remained inboard.

"Up you come, son!" he said, steadily. "All right; hang on!"—as clawing fingers gripped his arm.

He swung up, dragging the lad with him, hoisting him over the rail and into the boat with a show of his splendid strength.

The boy dropped at Janet's feet and his plaintive voice, hoarse from hours of futile shouting, lifted again: "Get Bobby!" he cried. "Oh, get Bobby! I hung on to him as long—I hung on as long as I could. . . . Oh, please, get Bobby!"

If nothing else had impelled Goodheart to action the appeal in that voice would have started him. But he did not need words—did not need to be asked. His sou'-wester went overboard as he brushed it from his head. His oilskin rattled stiffly as he shed it and he broke the laces of his shoes rather than stop to untie the knots.

He stood there, poised on the wide thwart, one foot on the rail, when the next lightning flash let him see. . . .

It let him see rolling water, let him see the ruined raft drifting away and nothing else!

"Stand by!" he said, sharply, and dived.

He plunged into thick darkness that made the gloom above the surface seem as daylight. He swam vigorously toward a point beneath the spot which he had placed in his mind as that from which that hopelessly grasping hand had disappeared.

He groped about when he believed he had gone far enough. He turned and circled and drove his body downward to greater depths. His ear drums rang with the pressure, his lungs seemed about to burst. He let part of the breath he held slip out in little spurts, fighting valiantly for time, and when he did shoot to the surface he sucked in the air with a gasp of rage against the weakness of his best strength.

Again the heavens blazed and his voice lifted in a sharp cry. He should have been down there then! He should have had that flash of light to aid him. His body curled and his feet churned the surface as he forced himself downward again.

Down and down he went until his lungs ached with the struggle. His lungs were flat to let him attain buoyancy from air he carried in his chest. With no air in his chest it was a fight to reach the surface. He did not swim up directly. He circled, as he fought his way upward, circled shortly at first and then more widely and he both hands and feet to swim, but it profited him nothing. His limbs encountered no submerged object.

He broke through the surface and gulped for air. His lungs cried out for more and more, but he denied them respite, and after the third quick breath he curled downward, praying for lightning to help him.

Once again he went down until it seemed as though the lake would burst his skull and flood his brain, and again he called as he roared and broke through the surface with no reward.

The strain was telling. He came up close beside the boat, but he had a vague idea that Janet Needham was leaning over the rail, crying encouragement, but he could spare no strength to think of that. He rested

a moment on his back, breathing swiftly, a trifle dizzy with the rush of fresh air to his lungs.

And again he went downward and scarcely beneath the waves, he saw the blackness about him glow with a phosphorescent light. It was only a feeble glimmer that penetrated the depths, but still it had the weird effect of blinding him, so great was its contrast to the Stygian blackness. He strained to see and threatened himself about to look in all directions for air. His lungs cried out for more and more, but he denied them respite, and after the third quick breath he curled downward, praying for lightning to help him.

Once again he went down until it seemed as though the lake would burst his skull and flood his brain, and again he called as he roared and broke through the surface with no reward.

The strain was telling. He came up close beside the boat, but he had a vague idea that Janet Needham was leaning over the rail, crying encouragement, but he could spare no strength to think of that. He rested

his will forced it on, drove it, goaded it; he swore aloud at the beging of his lungs for air, because taking air took time, and any instant the heavens might flare again, and he would be dead.

They did, just as he ducked, and he entered a world of pallid green in which his hands moved before him grotesquely. He twisted about deftly to see in the direction he had tried and failed to see before. Nothing!

Blood roared in his ears like catarracts. His heart seemed to be flailing his ribs, beating him upward when he wanted to go down—down! His body begged for mercy, cried out to his mind for relief for air, for relaxation, but he denied it until not a shred of will was left.

He swallowed water when he rose that time and gasped for air. He choked and shook his head by a great effort. He seemed not to have strength enough to open his eyes and did not try until the glare of lightning penetrated his life.

He opened them then, and tensed himself for another plunge downward, but Janet's voice, clear and high, checked him.

He looked over his shoulder. She was standing at the rail, little Ted's arms about her thighs, his head close against her body, her one arm outstretched, and the other uplifted, pointing.

"There, John!" she cried. "There! There! Sixty feet. . . . Oh, he's gone!"

Gone was the blessed light as well. Goodheart could not have seen the patch of white shirt revealed to the girl as it rose elegantly and settled again. But he did have his direction, her guess as to distance, and he was boiling through the water, forcing his body to do the thing that was now all but impossible.

He swam with a crawl stroke, a great lunging of shoulder, a frantic, powerful movement of legs, a determined kick. . . . Two strokes. . . . four. . . . six. . . . a dozen. . . .

"Now!"

He cried out the word as he lifted his face and breathing deeply, dived again.

He would stay down now! He would see! He gitted his teeth as he promised himself this. He would

stay down until the heavens lighted the depths again.

He lived a lifetime waiting for that. He sent himself low and power, each foot gained downward making the next instant.

His head throbbed smartly; his ears buzzed. He "sit dizzy," but he would not stop, would not let go! It was all black, all hopeless. . . . Hopeless? Not hopeless in the next instant.

There, beyond him and to the left, a blob of darkness appeared through the greenish glimmer. It was only slightly above but it seemed to be far away and his body would rise. Changing direction sent him shooting upward he felt, and he fought against his own buoyancy with all the spirit left in him. He tried to angle downward as he went on, in blackness now. He could not judge the distance; he could only grope and reach and keep his breath back and fight. Ah, he fought, then, against bursting chest and outraged heart, and a sudden nausea that came upon him.

He felt his body tilting as his head spun. He was off balance, his machine was out of control! Air was slipping from his lungs against his will; his arms were losing their precision of stroke, the power was ebbing from his leg muscles. He was through, when he was most needed. But he was not through.

Something brushed his hip. He turned, groping with one foot as he worked about. The something touched his shin, slipped away, sinking. He threw himself over and downward, swept his legs together. . . . He was shooting upward and in his arms clasped to his breast, was the cold limp body of a boy!

(CONTINUED TOMORROW.)

WEINER ROAST.

An enjoyable evening was spent on Monday night when Howard Obeys' class of boys of Dundas center United church held a weiner roast at Springbank park. Weinners were served around a huge bonfire and a jolly time was spent in telling stories.

"Why I Should Vote Conservative"

Bring Our Boys and Girls Back Home

Give them work in Canada

THE CREAM of our youth, fresh from our schools and colleges, are leaving the homes that have raised them, are forsaking the country that has educated them, and are throwing in their lot with Canada's greatest rival.

Canada educates these young men and young women at the public expense—brings along a new lot of them every year—for what? For Uncle Sam to take his pick! And the irony of it is that when he gets them, he frequently employs them at tasks that result in loss of business, loss of employment, to people in the country of their birth.

Our boys and girls should have the opportunity of getting work and of making careers for themselves in Canada. The breaking up of families and the loss of our best blood to the United States must stop.

Embrace Protection and Stop the Exodus!

VOTE CONSERVATIVE

FOR HIGHER TARIFF AND FOR LOWER TAXATION

Liberal-Conservative Victory Committee, 330 Bay Street, Toronto 5



going more difficult. He wrinkled his face in an ecstasy of effort and held to the breath in his lungs jealously, for if he found that which he sought, he would need it to help him rise.

His head throbbed smartly; his ears buzzed. He "sit dizzy," but he would not stop, would not let go! It was all black, all hopeless. . . . Hopeless? Not hopeless in the next instant.

There, beyond him and to the left, a blob of darkness appeared through the greenish glimmer. It was only slightly above but it seemed to be far away and his body would rise. Changing direction sent him shooting upward he felt, and he fought against his own buoyancy with all the spirit left in him. He tried to angle downward as he went on, in blackness now. He could not judge the distance; he could only grope and reach and keep his breath back and fight. Ah, he fought, then, against bursting chest and outraged heart, and a sudden nausea that came upon him.

He felt his body tilting as his head spun. He was off balance, his machine was out of control! Air was slipping from his lungs against his will; his arms were losing their precision of stroke, the power was ebbing from his leg muscles. He was through, when he was most needed. But he was not through.

Something brushed his hip. He turned, groping with one foot as he worked about. The something touched his shin, slipped away, sinking. He threw himself over and downward, swept his legs together. . . . He was shooting upward and in his arms clasped to his breast, was the cold limp body of a boy!

(CONTINUED TOMORROW.)

WEINER ROAST.

An enjoyable evening was spent on Monday night when Howard Obeys' class of boys of Dundas center United church held a weiner roast at Springbank park. Weinners were served around a huge bonfire and a jolly time was spent in telling stories.