

## Chapter 5

### ALONG THE SHORES OF NEW ENGLAND

At the time when the newspapers were filled with these reports, I was again in Washington. On my return I had presented myself at my chief's office, but had been unable to see him. Family affairs had suddenly called him away, to be absent some weeks. Mr. Ward, however, undoubtedly knew of the failure of my mission. The newspapers, especially those of North Carolina, had given full details of our ascent of the Great Eyrie.

Naturally, I was much annoyed by this delay which further fretted my restless curiosity. I could turn to no other plans for the future. Could I give up the hope of learning the secret of the Great Eyrie? No! I would return to the attack a dozen times if necessary, and despite every failure.

Surely, the winning of access within those walls was not a task beyond human power. A scaffolding might be raised to the summit of the cliff; or a tunnel might be pierced through its depth. Our engineers met problems more difficult every day. But in this case it was necessary to consider the expense, which might easily grow out of proportion to the advantages to be gained. A tunnel would cost many thousand dollars, and what good would it accomplish beyond satisfying

the public curiosity and my own?

My personal resources were wholly insufficient for the achievement. Mr. Ward, who held the government's funds, was away. I even thought of trying to interest some millionaire. Oh, if I could but have promised one of them some gold or silver mines within the mountain! But such an hypothesis was not admissible. The chain of the Appalachians is not situated in a gold bearing region like that of the Pacific mountains, the Transvaal, or Australia.

It was not until the fifteenth of June that Mr. Ward returned to duty. Despite my lack of success he received me warmly. "Here is our poor Strock!" cried he, at my entrance. "Our poor Strock, who has failed!"

"No more, Mr. Ward, than if you had charged me to investigate the surface of the moon," answered I. "We found ourselves face to face with purely natural obstacles insurmountable with the forces then at our command."

"I do not doubt that, Strock, I do not doubt that in the least. Nevertheless, the fact remains that you have discovered nothing of what is going on within the Great Eyrie."

"Nothing, Mr. Ward."

"You saw no sign of fire?"

"None."

"And you heard no suspicious noises whatever?"

"None."

"Then it is still uncertain if there is really a volcano there?"

"Still uncertain, Mr. Ward. But if it is there, we have good reason to believe that it has sunk into a profound sleep."

"Still," returned Mr. Ward, "there is nothing to show that it will not wake up again any day, Strock. It is not enough that a volcano should sleep, it must be absolutely extinguished unless indeed all these threatening rumors have been born solely in the Carolinian imagination."

"That is not possible, sir," I said. "Both Mr. Smith, the mayor of Morganton and his friend the mayor of Pleasant Garden, are reliable men. And they speak from their own knowledge in this matter. Flames have certainly risen above the Great Eyrie. Strange noises have issued from it. There can be no doubt whatever of the reality of these phenomena."

"Granted," declared Mr. Ward. "I admit that the evidence is unassailable. So the deduction to be drawn is that the Great Eyrie has not yet given up its secret."

"If we are determined to know it, Mr. Ward, the solution is only a solution of expense. Pickaxes and dynamite would soon conquer those walls."

"No doubt," responded the chief, "but such an undertaking hardly seems justified, since the mountain is now quiet. We will wait awhile and perhaps nature herself will disclose her mystery."

"Mr. Ward, believe me that I regret deeply that I have been unable to solve the problem you entrusted to me," I said.

"Nonsense! Do not upset yourself, Strock. Take your defeat philosophically. We cannot always be successful, even in the police. How many criminals escape us! I believe we should never capture one of them, if they were a little more intelligent and less imprudent, and if they did not compromise themselves so stupidly. Nothing, it seems to me, would be easier than to plan a crime, a theft or an assassination, and to execute it without arousing any suspicions, or leaving any traces to be followed. You understand, Strock, I do not want to give our criminals lessons; I much prefer to have them remain as they are. Nevertheless there are many whom the police will never be able to track down."

On this matter I shared absolutely the opinion of my chief. It is among rascals that one finds the most fools. For this very reason I had been much surprised that none of the authorities had been able to throw any light upon the recent performances of the "demon automobile." And when Mr. Ward brought up this subject, I did not conceal from him my astonishment.

He pointed out that the vehicle was practically unpursuable; that in its earlier appearances, it had apparently vanished from all roads even before a telephone message could be sent ahead. Active and numerous police agents had been spread throughout the country, but no one of them had encountered the delinquent. He did not move continuously from place to place, even at his amazing speed, but seemed to appear only for a moment and then to vanish into thin air. True, he had at length remained visible along the entire route from Prairie-du-Chien to Milwaukee, and he had covered in less than an hour and a half this track of two hundred miles.

But since then, there had been no news whatever of the machine. Arrived at the end of the route, driven onward by its own impetus, unable to stop, had it indeed been engulfed within the waters of Lake Michigan? Must we conclude that the machine and its driver had both perished, that there was no longer any danger to be feared from either? The great majority of the public refused to accept this conclusion. They fully expected the machine to reappear.

Mr. Ward frankly admitted that the whole matter seemed to him most extraordinary; and I shared his view. Assuredly if this infernal chauffeur did not return, his apparition would have to be placed among those superhuman mysteries which it is not given to man to understand.

We had fully discussed this affair, the chief and I; and I thought that our interview was at an end, when, after pacing the room for a few moments, he said abruptly, "Yes, what happened there at Milwaukee was very strange. But here is something no less so!"

With this he handed me a report which he had received from Boston, on a subject of which the evening papers had just begun to apprise their readers. While I read it, Mr. Ward was summoned from the room. I seated myself by the window and studied with extreme attention the matter of the report.

For some days the waters along the coast of Maine, Connecticut, and Massachusetts had been the scene of an appearance which no one could exactly describe. A moving body would appear amid the waters, some two or three miles off shore, and go through rapid evolutions. It would flash for a while back and forth among the waves and then dart out of sight.

The body moved with such lightning speed that the best telescopes

could hardly follow it. Its length did not seem to exceed thirty feet. Its cigar-shaped form and greenish color, made it difficult to distinguish against the background of the ocean. It had been most frequently observed along the coast between Cape Cod and Nova Scotia. From Providence, from Boston, from Portsmouth, and from Portland motor boats and steam launches had repeatedly attempted to approach this moving body and even to give it chase. They could not get anywhere near it. Pursuit seemed useless. It darted like an arrow beyond the range of view.

Naturally, widely differing opinions were held as to the nature of this object. But no hypothesis rested on any secure basis. Seamen were as much at a loss as others. At first sailors thought it must be some great fish, like a whale. But it is well known that all these animals come to the surface with a certain regularity to breathe, and spout up columns of mingled air and water. Now, this strange animal, if it was an animal, had never "blown" as the whalers say; nor, had it ever made any noises of breathing. Yet if it were not one of these huge marine mammals, how was this unknown monster to be classed? Did it belong among the legendary dwellers in the deep, the krakens, the octopuses, the leviathans, the famous sea-serpents?

At any rate, since this monster, whatever it was, had appeared along the New England shores, the little fishing-smacks and pleasure boats dared not venture forth. Wherever it appeared the boats fled to the nearest harbor, as was but prudent. If the animal was of a ferocious

character, none cared to await its attack.

As to the large ships and coast steamers, they had nothing to fear from any monster, whale or otherwise. Several of them had seen this creature at a distance of some miles. But when they attempted to approach, it fled rapidly away. One day, even, a fast United States gun boat went out from Boston, if not to pursue the monster, at least to send after it a few cannon shot. Almost instantly the animal disappeared, and the attempt was vain. As yet, however, the monster had shown no intention of attacking either boats or people.

At this moment Mr. Ward returned and I interrupted my reading to say, "There seems as yet no reason to complain of this sea-serpent. It flees before big ships. It does not pursue little ones. Feeling and intelligence are not very strong in fishes."

"Yet their emotions exist, Strock, and if strongly aroused--"

"But, Mr. Ward, the beast seems not at all dangerous. One of two things will happen. Either it will presently quit these coasts, or finally it will be captured and we shall be able to study it at our leisure here in the museum of Washington."

"And if it is not a marine animal?" asked Mr. Ward.

"What else can it be?" I protested in surprise.



"Finish your reading," said Mr. Ward.

I did so; and found that in the second part of the report, my chief had underlined some passages in red pencil.

For some time no one had doubted that this was an animal; and that, if it were vigorously pursued, it would at last be driven from our shores. But a change of opinion had come about. People began to ask if, instead of a fish, this were not some new and remarkable kind of boat.

Certainly in that case its engine must be one of amazing power. Perhaps the inventor before selling the secret of his invention, sought to attract public attention and to astound the maritime world. Such surety in the movements of his boat, grace in its every evolution, such ease in defying pursuit by its arrow-like speed, surely, these were enough to arouse world-wide curiosity!

At that time great progress had been made in the manufacture of marine engines. Huge transatlantic steamers completed the ocean passage in five days. And the engineers had not yet spoken their last word. Neither were the navies of the world behind. The cruisers, the torpedo boats, the torpedo-destroyers, could match the swiftest steamers of the Atlantic and Pacific, or of the Indian trade.

If, however, this were a boat of some new design, there had as yet been no opportunity to observe its form. As to the engines which drove it, they must be of a power far beyond the fastest known. By what force they worked, was equally a problem. Since the boat had no sails, it was not driven by the wind; and since it had no smoke-stack, it was not driven by steam.

At this point in the report, I again paused in my reading and considered the comment I wished to make.

"What are you puzzling over, Strock?" demanded my chief.

"It is this, Mr. Ward; the motive power of this so-called boat must be as tremendous and as unknown as that of the remarkable automobile which has so amazed us all."

"So that is your idea, is it, Strock?"

"Yes, Mr. Ward."

There was but one conclusion to be drawn. If the mysterious chauffeur had disappeared, if he had perished with his machine in Lake Michigan, it was equally important now to win the secret of this no less mysterious navigator. And it must be won before he in his turn plunged into the abyss of the ocean. Was it not the interest of the inventor to disclose his invention? Would not the American government

or any other give him any price he chose to ask?

Yet unfortunately, since the inventor of the terrestrial apparition had persisted in preserving his incognito, was it not to be feared that the inventor of the marine apparition would equally preserve his? Even if the first machine still existed, it was no longer heard from; and would not the second, in the same way, after having disclosed its powers, disappear in its turn, without a single trace?

What gave weight to this probability was that since the arrival of this report at Washington twenty-four hours before, the presence of the extraordinary boat hadn't been announced from anywhere along the shore. Neither had it been seen on any other coast. Though, of course, the assertion that it would not reappear at all would have been hazardous, to say the least.

I noted another interesting and possibly important point. It was a singular coincidence which indeed Mr. Ward suggested to me, at the same moment that I was considering it. This was that only after the disappearance of the wonderful automobile had the no less wonderful boat come into view. Moreover, their engines both possessed a most dangerous power of locomotion. If both should go rushing at the same time over the face of the world, the same danger would threaten mankind everywhere, in boats, in vehicles, and on foot. Therefore it was absolutely necessary that the police should in some manner interfere to protect the public ways of travel.

That is what Mr. Ward pointed out to me; and our duty was obvious. But how could we accomplish this task? We discussed the matter for some time; and I was just about to leave when Mr. Ward made one last suggestion.

"Have you not observed, Strock," said he, "that there is a sort of fantastic resemblance between the general appearance of this boat and this automobile?"

"There is something of the sort, Mr. Ward."

"Well, is it not possible that the two are one?"