

The Parkhurst Boys

1. On either side we could hear the deafening thunder of the surf as it dashed over the rocks.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Hall, "we must have got in between two reefs; perhaps we shall go aground on the sand!"

5. The next two minutes are past description. Hutton crawled down beside me where I sat, and I could feel his hand on my arm, but I had no eyes except for Charlie, who sat pale and motionless with Hall's arm round him.

"Now!" shouted Hall, abandoning the tiller, and tightening his hold on the boy.

There was a roar and a rush behind us, our boat swooped up with the wave, and hung for a moment trembling on its crest, then it fell, and in an instant we were in the water.

10. Hutton was beside me as the rush back of that huge wave swept us off our feet. I seized him by the arm, and next moment we were struggling to keep our heads up. Then came another monster, and lifted us like straws, flinging us before it on to the strand, and then rolling and foaming over us as we staggered to our feet.

Hutton, half stunned, had been swept from my hold, but mercifully was still within reach.

15. Clutching him by the hair, I dragged him with all my might towards the land, before the returning wave should once more sweep us back into the sea. By a merciful Providence, a solitary piece of rock was at hand to aid us; and clinging to this we managed to support that terrific rush, and with the next wave stagger on to solid ground.

20. But what of Charlie? Leaving my senseless companion, I rushed wildly back to the water's edge, and called, shouted, and even waded back into the merciless surf. But no answer: no sign. Who shall describe the anguish of the next half-hour? I was conscious of lights and voices; I had dim visions of people hurrying; I felt something poured down my throat, and someone was trying to lift me from where I sat. But no! I would not leave that spot till I knew what had become of Charlie, and in my almost madness I shrieked the boy's name till it
25. sounded even above the roaring waves.

Presently the lights moved all to one spot, and the people near me moved too. Weak as I was, I sprang to my feet and followed.

30. Good heavens! What did I see? Two sailors stooped over something that lay on the sand between them, What, who was it? I cried; and the crowd made way for me as I fought my way to the place.

Two figures lay there; the smaller locked in the arms of his protector! But dead or living? Oh, if I could but hear some voice say they were not dead! Another person was kneeling over them beside me. Even in that moment of confusion and terror I could recognise his voice as that of the Parkhurst doctor.

35. "Look after this one here," he said; "he has a broken arm. Carry up the little fellow to the cottage."

Then I knew Charlie was dead!