

LOUIS ARUNDEL

MOTOR BOAT BOYS
AMONG THE FLORIDA
KEYS; OR, THE
STRUGGLE FOR THE
LEADERSHIP

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**Motor Boat Boys Among
the Florida Keys; Or, The
Struggle for the Leadership**

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Motor Boat Boys Among the Florida Keys; Or, The Struggle for the Leadership

CHAPTER I. AT ANCHOR, INSIDE THE BAR

“Get busy here, Nick; now’s your chance to make a big score for a starter!”

“It’s awful kind of you, George, to let me out of my part of the work this afternoon, and that’s a fact. I appreciate it, too; because I just want to beat Jimmy out in this thing the worst kind.”

“Oh! shucks! don’t mention it, Nick. We’re all interested in your game, and you know it. Besides, there goes your rival, Jimmy, right now, in his little dinky boat, and with a wide grin on his face. Jack’s given him a holiday, to celebrate the opening of the great fishing contest. Get a move on, you slow-poke!”

“Gee! then he’ll get a start on me. I *must* hurry. Now, where in the dickens is that other oar, George? Oh! here she is, tucked away under the thwart. And can you tell me what I did with that mullet the cracker gentleman gave me, to use for bait? Please

help me get started, George. Seems like everything wants to go wrong at once!”

“Here you are, Nick. Got your tackle all right, have you; and sure that life preserver is in the boat? All ready? Then away you go; but keep clear of the inlet, if the tide changes, or you might get carried out to sea in that eight-foot dinky.”

Three minutes later, and Nick Longfellow – who belied his name dreadfully, in that he was short, and fat, and built pretty much after the style of a full meal bag – was rowing clumsily toward a likely spot, where he believed he might do some successful fishing.

A trio of motor boats were anchored just inside Mosquito Inlet, not far from the town of New Smyrna on the east coast of Florida, having come in that very afternoon, after making the outside passage from the mouth of the St. Johns River.

They might have entered at St. Augustine, and taken the inside passage down to this place, only that something was wrong with the connecting canal that led to the Halifax River, and it seemed unwise to take the chances of being held up.

The boat from which Nick had put out on his fishing excursion was a slender looking craft, and evidently capable of making high speed; but from the way she rolled whenever any one aboard moved, it could be seen that she must prove rather an uncomfortable home on which to spend very much time. The name painted in letters of gold on her bow was *Wireless*; and her skipper, George Rollins, took more or less pride in her

accomplishments; although, truth to tell, he spent much of his time tinkering with her high-power engine, that had a way of betraying his trust when conditions made it most exasperating.

The boat from which the said Jimmy had started was called the *Tramp*. Her lines were not so fine as those of the hurry boat; but, nevertheless, an experienced cruiser would have picked her out as an ideal craft for combined business and pleasure. Her skipper was Jack Stormways, really the commodore of the little fleet; and his crew consisted of Jimmy Brannigan, a boy who sported many freckles, a happy-go-lucky disposition, and a little of the Irish brogue whenever he happened to remember his descent from the old kings of Erin.

As to the third motor boat, it was a broad beamed affair, that really looked like a pumpkin seed on a large scale; or, as some of the boys often called it, a "tub." It was well named the *Comfort*, and its owner, Herbert Dickson, content to take things easy and let others do the hustling, never denied the claim George was fond of making, that he could draw circles around the "Ark" with his fast one. The engine of the *Comfort* had never failed to do its level best, which was limited to some nine miles an hour.

Herb also had an assistant, a tall, lanky lad, by name Josh Purdue. By rights he and Nick should have exchanged places; but Josh had had one experience on the dizzy speed boat, and absolutely refused to try it again.

These lads belonged in a town far up toward the sources of the mighty Mississippi River. They would have been attending high

school, only that a fire had almost demolished the buildings, and vacation season was enforced until after New Year's.

Owning these boats, and having had considerable experience in making long trips, the boys had, with the consent of their parents, shipped the craft east to Philadelphia, and some five weeks previously started down the coast by the inside route.

And now they were starting on the second half of the remarkable voyage, which they intended would take them around the end of the peninsula of Florida, among the keys that make this region the small boat cruiser's paradise, and finally land them at New Orleans in time to ship their boats north by steamboat.

Spending several days in Jacksonville, and taking aboard supplies, before making a start, Nick and Jimmy had fallen into quite a heated dispute as to which of them could be called the more expert fisherman.

Now, truth to tell, neither of the boys had had very much experience in this line; but, egged on by Josh and Herb, they had finally entered upon a contest which was to last until they reached New Orleans. Jack had solemnly entered the conditions in his log book; and the one who, during the duration of the cruise, could catch and land unassisted the heaviest fish of any description, was to be declared the champion.

Eager to accomplish wonderful "stunts," the two boys naturally seized upon this very first chance to get their lines overboard, in the hope of starting things moving by a weighty capture.

And the others, anticipating more or less fun out of the bitter rivalry, lost no opportunity to “sic” the contestants on. Just as a breeze fans a flame, so their frequent allusions as to the budding qualities of the rivals as fishermen kept Nick and Jimmy eager for the fray.

As might have been expected, when George secured a tender for his speed boat, while in Jacksonville, as they were told they would need such things right along, in order to make landings where the water was too shoal for the larger craft to get close to the shore, he selected a dumpy little flat-bottomed “dinky,” just about on a par with the *Wireless* when it came to eccentric qualities.

An expert with the oars or a paddle might manage the affair fairly well; but as Nick was as clumsy as he was fat, it seemed as though he would never get the hang of the squatty tender.

When he sat in the middle, one dip of an oar would cause the boat to spin wildly around as if on a pivot; and as to rowing in a straight course, the thing was utterly beyond Nick’s abilities. So, when he was aiming for a certain spot, he was wont to approach his intended goal by a series of eccentric angles.

The flood tide was still coming in lazily, for they had managed to hit the inlet when the bar was well covered, wishing to take no chances. So Nick, after managing to propel the “punkin seed” over to the spot near a bunch of mangroves, that he had selected as most promising, set to work.

He tied the boat, first of all, by a piece of cord, so that it would

not float away while he fished. Then he laboriously got his tackle in readiness.

Those on the motor boats had kept an eye on the actions of the two rivals, as if anticipating that sooner or later they might have something to laugh over; for Nick was forever tumbling into difficulties of some sort.

“I don’t believe Nick will ever get the hang of that dinky, George,” remarked Jack, as he leaned over the side of the *Tramp*, peeling some potatoes which they intended having for supper; and, as there did not seem to be any decent chance to cook this ashore, the voyagers would have to do as they had often done before, use their little kerosene gas stoves aboard the several boats.

“It takes an expert to run that cut-off runt properly,” said Herb, who was also engaged, wiping his engine, while Josh started operations looking to the evening meal, the lanky boy being by all odds the best cook in the party.

“Thank you for the compliment, Herb,” laughed George. “It happens that I’ve always been at home in small boats. And there was something about that stumpy little affair that made me take a fancy to her. Nick will do better after he learns the ropes. And he generally manages to get there, even if he does cover twice as much distance as I might. Look at Jimmy, fellows!”

“He’s got something, for a fact!” exclaimed Herb; “and Nick is excited over it. See him wiggle around to watch, just as if he feared the game was going to be settled right in the start. Hi!

sit down, Nick! Want to upset that cranky thing, do you? Well, it's good you've got your air bag fastened on; for without a life preserver you'd drown in this tideway, if ever you fell over."

"Watch Jimmy, will you, boys?" chuckled Jack. "Look at the grin on his face as he pulls his line in. You can see that half his fun is in keeping an eye on Nick, to enjoy his confusion and disappointment."

"Wow! why, the fish is pulling his boat around, do you notice?" demanded George.

"That looks as if it might be a good one. There, I thought Jimmy couldn't keep still much longer. Listen to him yap, would you?" Herb called out.

Jimmy had started to crow over his rival, as any ordinary boy would be apt to do under similar conditions.

"Don't be after gettin' downhearted too soon, Nick, me bhoy!" he shouted. "Sure, this is only a little one for a stharter, so it is. Wait till I get going, and I'll open your eyes good and sthrong. Och! how he pulls! If only ye were a bit closer now, I'd let ye fale of the line, to know the sensation. Come in, ye darlint, and let's have a look at ye. Whirra! but he's bigger than I thought; and it's me as hopes he won't upset the boat when I pull him over the side!"

Of course much of this talk was for the purpose of making his rival squirm with envy; though the captive did show signs of being a strong fighter.

After about five minutes of apparently strenuous effort,

Jimmy concluded that it would be unwise to risk losing his prisoner by playing it longer; so he dragged the hooked fish over the side. There was a flash of bronze and white that told Jack the story.

“A channel bass, and something like fifteen pounds in weight, too. We’re sure of fish on this trip, anyway, with the two of them bending every energy to the winning of the medal!” he exclaimed.

“There goes Nick back to his work,” said George. “If there are fish here, he hopes to get his share. But ten to one he’s nearly choking with envy right now, because Jimmy drew the first blood. It’s an uphill game for poor old Nick.”

“Well,” Herb went on to remark, “the game will last a whole month, and more; so nobody can tell how the finish may turn out. Nick might get hold of a bigger fish any minute. But it’s up to us to encourage ’em right along. We’ll never want for a fish diet if we do, for they’ll stay up nights to keep at it.”

“There, I declare, if Nick didn’t have a jerk at his line then; but he failed to hook the rascal!” Jack exclaimed.

“And came near upsetting the boat in his excitement, too,” complained George. “If he does, I can see the finish of my oars, which will go out of the inlet with the ebb tide.”

“But what about Nick; you don’t seem to worry about how he’ll act?” laughed Herb.

“Oh! he’ll just float around, with that life preserver holding him up, till one of us pushes out and tows him ashore. Whatever

is he doing now, do you suppose?" George demanded.

"Throwing out that shark hook of his, with the clothes line attached," Jack explained. "You see, Nick has evidently made up his mind to go in for something worth while. He wants to knock the spots out of Jimmy's hopes right in the start."

"But, my stars! if he hooks a big shark while he's sitting in that punkin seed of a boat, there's bound to be a warm old circus!" Herb declared.

Some little time passed, and those aboard the anchored motor boats, busily engaged in their various occupations, had almost forgotten about the bitter rivalry going on so near by, when suddenly they were startled by a great shout.

"It's Nick, this time!" exclaimed Jack, as he jumped to the side of the *Tramp* to observe what was taking place.

"And say, he's fast to a whopper, as sure as you live!" cried Herb.

George added his contribution on the heels of the rest.

"That string's broke away, just as I expected, and there goes Nick and the punkin seed, full tilt for the inlet! By all that's out, fellows, he must have caught a whale that time, fresh run from the sea. Hi! hold on there, Nick, that's my boat!"

CHAPTER II.

THE WARNING RATTLE

Jack Stormways was a quick-witted lad. He had proved this fact on numerous occasions in the past, within the memory of his chums.

When anything sudden happened, while others might appear to be spellbound, and waste precious seconds in staring, Jack was very apt to be on the jump, and *doing*.

So in the present instance, while it might appear more or less comical, seeing the fat boy crouched in that silly little boat belonging to the *Wireless*, and being dragged through the water at a most rapid rate by the shark he had hooked, there was always an element of danger connected with the affair.

And so Jack, after taking that one look out over the water, sprang forward, and started dragging his anchor aboard with all possible speed. That done, he next applied himself to getting power on the boat, which fortunately could be done with a simple turning over of the engine.

“Hello! are you going to chase the runaway with the *Tramp*?” cried Herb, who was in the act of climbing over the side into his tender, as though meaning to put out in pursuit himself.

“Yes; jump aboard here, Herb; I might need help!” came the answer; and, accustomed to respecting Jack’s judgment, the one

addressed managed to clamber over the side of the *Tramp* just as that craft started off.

Meanwhile Nick was going at a great rate, not in a direct line for the inlet, but following jerky, eccentric angles, as though the shark hardly knew what to do, on feeling the contact with the point of the big hook at the end of the chain.

Several times the fat boy seemed on the point of creeping forward to get at the rope that was fastened to a cleat in the bow of the dinky. It was George who roared at him on such occasions.

“Keep still, Nick; sit down, can’t you? You’ll upset sure, if you don’t lie flat! Jack’s coming out after you on the jump! Hey, look out there, Jimmy, or you’ll get foul, too! Whew! what a race horse you’ve got fast to, Nick. If only you could land him, Jimmy’s name would be Mud. There he goes again, heading for the bar! Look at the water shooting up on either side of that dandy little boat, would you? And ain’t Nick having the ride of his life, though? There he goes, crawling along up to the bow again. Perhaps he wants to cut loose; small blame to him if he does!”

Everybody was either laughing, or shouting advice to Nick, while this exciting little drama was taking place.

Indeed, Nick himself seemed to be the only one who was not getting some measure of fun out of the affair. His usually red face looked pale, as he managed to reach the squatty bow of the little boat. But when he found that it was dragged down by the action of the fish, as well as his own weight, he drew back again

in alarm, for water had come rushing aboard.

Once the motor boat got started, of course it speedily came up with the runaway. Jack had given the wheel into the charge of Herb, who was fully competent to run things. This allowed the other an opportunity to do anything that offered, looking to the rescue of poor frightened Nick.

“Get me out of this, won’t you, Jack? I don’t like it one little bit,” pleaded the fat boy; and then, as some new freak on the part of the shark caused the dinky to lunge sideways in a fearful manner, he shouted in new alarm: “Quit it, you ugly beast! Who wants to nab you now? I pass, I tell you! Let go, and get out of this! Wow! look at him splash the water, Jack, would you?”

“He wanted to take a look at you, that’s all,” Jack called out. “Don’t you think you’d better cut loose, and let your hook go, Nick?”

“I ain’t got any knife; it went overboard the first thing. Besides,” added the occupant of the dinky, who was now once more crouching in the stern, “if I go up there, the water just pours in. I’m sitting in it right now. Jack, can’t you think of some way to make him leave me alone?”

“Perhaps I might,” came the reply, as the skipper of the *Tramp* dodged back into the hunting cabin of his boat.

He almost immediately reappeared again, holding a rope in his hands. This he made fast to a cleat at the bow; and then, turning to Herb, asked him to bring the motor boat as close to the fleeing dinky as possible.

Leaning down, Jack managed to get a peculiar sort of hitch around the taut line; and a quick jerk seemed to secure his own rope, so that it would not slip. His next action was to take a keen knife, and lay its edge upon the line, close to the spot where it was fastened to the wobbling dinky.

Of course it instantly parted.

“Oh! that’s too bad! Now I’ve lost my tackle!” cried Nick; although he looked vastly relieved at finding that he was no longer fast to the queer sea horse.

Jack paid no further attention to the rescued chum. The fight was now to be all between himself and the shark.

Quickly the line paid out, until there came a heavy jerk, and then once more it became taut.

“Bully! it’s holding fine, Jack!” shouted Herb, who had watched to see the result; for he doubted whether the connection, brought about under such difficulties, would be maintained.

“Now, gradually bring the boat to a full stop,” said Jack, as he again reached back into the cabin, and drew out a rifle. “As soon as you’ve got him halted, begin to back up. That will drag him to the top, you understand; and I’ll have a chance to pot the rascal.”

“That’s right,” declared Herb, who could grasp a thing readily enough, even if slow to originate clever schemes himself.

Just as Jack had said, when the pull was being exerted in the other direction, the struggling monster was presently seen splashing at a tremendous rate, though unable to resist the drawing powers of the ten-horsepower engine.

Jack, crouching there, with one elbow resting on his knee, took as good an aim as the conditions allowed. Then came the sharp report of the gun.

“Whoop! you hit him all right, that time, Jack!” shouted Herb; as there ensued a tremendous floundering at the end of the rope. “But he ain’t knocked out yet. Give him another dose of the same sort!”

Across the water came the cries of the others who were watching this exciting scene. And loudest of all could be heard the voice of Nick, now once more in possession of his nerve.

“Give it to him, Jack! Pound the measly old pirate good and hard! He won’t try that game again in a hurry, I tell you! Hey! Jimmy, you ain’t in it this time, with that little minnow of yours. Hurrah! that’s the time you poked him in the slats, Jack! Trust you for knowing how! I guess he’s a sure goner after that meal of cold lead.”

Jack had fired a second time; and, just as the wildly excited Nick said, he seemed to have met with better success than on the former occasion. The trapped sea monster thrashed the water still, but not in the same violent manner as before; and his fury seemed to be rapidly diminishing as the result of his wounds began to be felt.

“Now, stop her, Herb, and start ahead slowly!” Jack called out, hovering over the spot where the line was fast to the cleat.

The boy at the wheel did as he was directed; and as the line became slack Jack took it in, ready to hastily secure the

same about another cleat in case the dying shark developed a disposition to make a last mad dash.

But evidently the big fish was “all in,” and when they reached a point nearly over where he lay, there were seen only a few spasmodic movements to his body.

“Let’s drag him near the other boats, so we can pull the old fellow up on that little beach,” Jack suggested.

Ten minutes later, and the six boys were all ashore, laying hold of the rope in order to drag the captured fish out.

“Say, he’s some whopper, let me tell you!” exclaimed George, as, having drawn the shark high and dry, they all hastened to examine the capture.

Nick was dancing with joy, and his eyes fairly beamed as he stood beside the great bulk, putting one foot up on it after the manner in which he had seen noted hunters do, in pictures that told of their exploits when hunting big game.

“Now, how about it, Jimmy?” he demanded, as Jack was cutting the stout hook from the jaw of the monster. “Think this is some punkins, don’t you, now. Three hundred pounds, if it weighs an ounce. Have to hustle some, let me tell you, my boy, if you ever expect to go a notch higher than this.”

“Arrah, come off, would you!” indignantly cried Jimmy. “Sure, ye wouldn’t be claiming that ye took this same ould sea wolf, and inter it in the competition. I do be laving it to Jack here, if that’s fair?”

“But I hooked it, you all saw that?” expostulated Nick.

"I don't know," remarked Herb, looking very serious; "I was under the impression that the shark had got you, up to the time Jack came along with his little gun, and tapped him on the head. How about it, Commodore? Can Nick enter any claim to having caught this prize?"

"Wait," said Jack, smiling; "let me read out the exact words of the wager. I've got a copy right here in my note book. Listen now, both of you. It reads like this: 'Each contestant shall have the liberty of fishing as often as he pleases, and the fish may be taken in any sort of manner; the one stipulation being that the capture shall be undertaken by the contestant, *alone and unaided*; and that he must have possession of the fish long enough to show the same, and have its weight either estimated or proven.'"

"That settles your goose, me bhoys!" croaked Jimmy, gleefully; "and I'm top notch in the game up to the present moment. Do we get busy again, Nick, I say; or are ye satisfied to lit me claim first blood?"

"Well, it seems mighty small, that after grabbing that nice fellow, I've got to let the honors go for the day," remarked the fat boy. "And I guess I've had quite enough excitement for once. I'm all soaked in the bargain; and it feels kind of cool, you see. So I won't fish any more right now. But next time, just you look out for yourself, Jimmy. I'm after you like hot cakes. Say, ain't we going to have that fish for supper, boys?"

Nick was a voracious eater. He liked nothing in the world so much as to enjoy a glorious meal; and long after his chums were

through, he often sat there, finishing the dishes. On the other hand, lean, lanky Josh, while possessed of a knack for cooking all sorts of good things, had a poor appetite, and often merely nibbled at his food, to the wonderment and disgust of the fat boy.

“If you get to work and clean it,” said Jack, “I think there ought to be plenty to go around. But you’ll find that one-third of a channel bass is the head. As we had one before, we know it’s worth eating, so pitch in, Nick. Since you lost your knife overboard, take mine here, and get busy.”

It pleased Jimmy to strut around near where his rival was occupied with his menial task, and make occasional remarks about “his prize,” calculated to rub salt in Nick’s wounds. But after all, the fat boy was good-natured, and took things in a matter-of-fact way. Besides, he was grimly resolved that sooner or later, by hook or by crook, even if it were a fish-hook, he would overcome this strong lead of his rival in the race for high honors.

As more or less fuel had been found ashore, and Josh expressed his desire to manage the supper, as head chef, it was found advisable to change their plans. And so, assisted by many willing workers, the lanky wonder started operations.

He was soon bustling around, looking very consequential. Nick had made him a *chef’s* cap out of a piece of white muslin, which he was requested to wear on all such occasions as this, when in charge of affairs about the cooking fire.

Nick himself was busy trying to mend some little contraption,

purchased on the street in Jacksonville, and which he had broken before he could have any fun with the same as originally intended.

Jack, stepping off from the *Tramp*, where he had gone to get some of the tinware needed for coffee and substantial food, was electrified to hear Josh give a whoop; and at the same instant his ears were assailed by a dreadful rattling noise that sounded for all the world like the angry buzz of a diamond-back rattlesnake.

“Thunder and Mars! Great Jerusalem! I’m struck in the leg!” bellowed the lengthy Josh, as he came tumbling back from the edge of the bushes, grabbing at his shin in a frantic manner.

CHAPTER III.

DOWN THE INDIAN RIVER

“Now, what d’ye know about that?” exclaimed Nick, scrambling to his feet after his usual clumsy way; for when the fat boy happened to become excited he generally “fell all over himself,” as Josh put it.

“What ails you, Josh?” demanded Herb.

No sooner had the lengthy one reached a spot near the fire than he threw himself down, and commenced frantically to pull up the left leg of his trousers.

“Gosh! looky there, will you, fellers?” he bellowed, as if in a panic. “He sure got me that time; I guess I’m a goner. Won’t one of you get down and suck the poison out for me? You know, I’d do it in your case. Oh! please hurry up. My leg’s beginning to swell right now, and in a few minutes it’ll be too late!”

“Poison!” echoed Herb, who seemed to be in utter ignorance of the entire matter, and could only stare at the little speck of blood showing on the white skin as if horribly fascinated.

“Yes, oh! didn’t you hear the terrible buzz he gave when he stuck his fangs in me?” groaned poor Josh.

Jack had thrown himself down alongside the wounded one, and was minutely examining the hurt. He looked up at this juncture, and to the astonishment of Herb and George, was

apparently grinning.

“Brace up, Josh,” he said, cheerfully; “you’re not going to kick the bucket yet awhile, I reckon.”

“Oh! how kind of you to tell me so, Jack; but how do you know? Please tell me why you say that,” pleaded the cook, beginning to look relieved; for he had fallen long ago into placing the utmost confidence in whatever Jack believed.

“Well, in the first place, there’s only one tiny puncture, you see; and if this was a snake bite there’d be the plain marks of *two* fangs,” Jack announced.

“Sounds all right, Jack; but perhaps this critter only had one fang. Didn’t you hear the angry shake of his old rattle-box when he struck? It gave me a cold chill, because, right at the same second, I felt something stick me. I’ll never forget the awful sensation, even if I do live through it,” and Josh rubbed his leg vigorously, as though hoping that by inducing a circulation he might avert the threatened dire catastrophe.

“Well, if you only look around right now, perhaps you’ll discover the source of that same buzz,” Jack went on, soberly.

“Why, whatever can you mean?” Josh stammered, staring his amazement.

“Notice how Nick, for instance, is trying the best he knows how to keep his face straight, even while he’s just shaking all over with the laugh that’s in him. Stand up, Nick; and hold out that hand you’ve got behind your back.”

Jack pointed rather sternly at the culprit while speaking.

“Oh, well, I s’pose I’ll have to ’fess,” mumbled the fat boy, as he whipped the hand in question around, so that all could see what he was holding.

“Why, it’s that boozy little rattle he picked up in Jacksonville, and broke on the first trial!” exclaimed George. “He’s been dabbling at it ever since, trying to mend the old thing.”

“Yes,” said Jack, “and just succeeded in getting it to working. Here, give it to me, Nick, and I’ll show them how it whirrs when you turn it around rapidly.”

Taking the little wooden contrivance, Jack gave it a series of quick turns, with the result that a loud angry buzzing was produced, not unlike the warning rattle of an enraged snake.

“Oh! that was it, Jack!” cried the relieved Josh. “Thank you for showing me, too. It sure takes a big load off my mind, because you’ll never know what a nasty feeling I had at the time. It was a mean dodge, Nick, and I can’t forget it in a hurry, either. But Jack, that don’t explain everything.”

“Now you’re thinking of that sudden little pain you had in the leg?” suggested the other, nodding his head understandingly.

“You bet I am!” Josh declared. “It took me at the identical second I heard that whirr. If it wasn’t a snake bit me, what did, Jack?”

“Let’s find out right away, so’s to relieve your mind,” Jack went on. “Lead the way to the very spot where you were when you heard the sound, and felt that sudden pain.”

“That’s dead easy,” remarked the tall boy; and as he said this

he scrambled to his feet, his trousers still rolled up to his knee, and limped across the camp.

Jack noticed, however, that he approached the place cautiously, as though not yet wholly convinced that there might not be a dreadful diamond-back rattler lying in ambush, waiting for another chance to puncture him.

“There it is, right in front of you, Jack!” Josh cried, pointing; “I happened to want a handful of dry timber to hurry up the fire, and stepped over here, because I’d noticed just the thing under this lone palmetto. Just as I banged into that little bunch of brush it happened.”

Jack laughed.

“Look here, fellows, and you’ll see what he ran against!” he announced, taking hold of the long, narrow, dark green leaf of a plant that was growing there.

“What is it?” asked George.

“A plant they call Spanish Bayonet,” replied Jack, seriously now. “You see, like lots of semi-tropical plants, such as the yucca, century plant or Mexican aloe, and others, it’s got a sharp point, almost like a needle. Well, just as luck would have it, Josh banged into one of these leaves at the very second Nick began to rattle his alarm box. No wonder he got a shock! It was enough to stagger the bravest.”

“Then it was what you might call a coincidence?” suggested Herb.

“Huh! a mighty tough one, too,” grunted Josh, as he rubbed

his injured limb ere turning down his trouser leg.

“But see here, fellows, are we going to let our funny man try that stunt every little while?” demanded George, frowning at his shipmate.

“I vote for one against such a thing,” declared Herb. “That nasty little box has too suggestive a rattle to please me. If I was going through the saw palmetto scrub, and he happened to amuse himself with it, I just know I’d jump ten feet. It would make life miserable for me right along.”

“Jimmy, what do you say?” demanded Jack.

“Me too!” piped up the Irish lad. “Sure it do be giving me the crapes just to listen to that thing go whirring around.”

“You hear the verdict, Nick?” said Jack, pretending to assume the air of a judge addressing the prisoner in the dock.

“Oh! I ain’t saying a word,” Nick replied, with a shrug of his fat shoulders. “I c’n see myself that it would be a mean trick to play. Never thought much about it that way. Give her a toss, Jack. And Josh, I hope you won’t hold it against me too hard. You know, you’re top-notch yet in that bully contest of ours.”

In this way did the contrite joker attempt to buy peace in the camp; and that he was fairly successful might be judged from the grin that slowly began to spread over the thin face of the cook.

“That’s all right, Nick; so long as it don’t happen again I ain’t goin’ to think too much about it. Fact is, it’s goin’ to give me a cold shiver every time I hear anything like that rattle. And now I’ll be getting back to my work.”

“Then you don’t want anybody to suck the poison out?” asked Nick.

“Let up on that, now, will you? I guess I’m able to hobble around yet,” and bending down, Josh gathered some of the dry trash that he wanted, to hurry the fire on with.

Jack had tossed the little rattle-box contrivance into the fire, where it was soon entirely consumed.

Although they ate supper ashore, it was considered wise to sleep aboard. The only one who grumbled at this decision was poor Nick. He had a hard lot to follow, for the narrow speed boat offered but poor sleeping accommodations for two, and many a time the stout youth was wont to bemoan his sad fate as he rubbed his aching sides in the morning.

They left the camp at Mosquito Inlet an hour after sunrise on the following morning, and started down past New Smyrna, heading for the Haulover Canal that connects Mosquito Lagoon with the famous Indian River.

Under Jack’s wise guidance they found little trouble in navigating the broad or narrow waters of the various channels. As steamboats passed through daily in the season, there were plenty of “targets” pointing out the deeper waters; and where the lagoon happened to be very shallow, canals had been dredged.

Taking it leisurely, they arrived at Titusville about two in the afternoon. Here one of the boys went for the mail, and also to pick up the few things they had on the list of “necessities wanted.”

As the western shore of the river is pretty thickly settled now,

it was decided to cross over, and skirt along Merritt's Island until near its foot, where they could probably find a spot free from civilization's touch; and this was what appealed to the motor boat boys at all times – wild solitude.

Long before evening overtook them they had come to a halt, and anchored the boats close to the eastern shore, just beyond a point that would protect them from any wild norther that might chance to spring up. All of them had heard so much about these dreaded storms that swoop down upon the pilgrims in small boats when navigating Florida waters that they were always on the watch for their coming.

"I say, Jack!" exclaimed George, as they landed in their small dinkies, intending to again have a fire, and be congenial; "look out yonder on the river, and tell me if that ain't the same strange launch we saw twice before above."

"You're right, George, that's what," replied the other, as he whirled around, to shade his eyes with one hand in order to see the better; for the sun was just going down beyond the wide river, Rockledge way, and shone fiercely.

"If I had the glasses now, I'd like to see who they are," George went on. "Seems to me the parties on that boat act queer. They dodge out of sight whenever they think we're watching. I don't just like the way they act, Jack, do you?"

"Oh! I don't know," replied the other. "That may be only imagination with you, George. The only thing that strikes me as queer is that the boat seems to be as near a ringer for the *Tramp*

as anything I ever struck.”

“Wow! you’re on the job now, when you say that, and funny I hadn’t noticed it before, Jack,” George declared. “Now that you mention it, I declare if it isn’t just remarkable. I suppose all of our boats have doubles, somewhere in the country; for the makers have a model they follow out heaps of times in a season; but all the same, it strikes a fellow as queer to run across a duplicate of the boat he’s kind of looked on as his own especial property.”

“Well,” grunted Nick, who had been near enough to overhear this talk, “I’m right sorry for somebody then, if there’s a ringer for the *Wireless*. They have my sympathy, I tell you that right now.”

But George only sniffed, and disdained to notice the slur cast upon his pet. It seemed that the more the others found fault with the actions of the *Wireless*, the greater became his attachment for the erratic boat.

“Well, they’re ahead of us again, for one thing,” he remarked. “It looks like a game of tag, right along; now we’re leading, and then they forge ahead. I’m just going to keep tabs on that boat, for fun; and some fine day perhaps I’ll have my curiosity satisfied. I’d give something to know who they are, and why they act like they do.”

“Oh! they won’t keep me awake much, I tell you that,” said Nick, loftily. “When I bother my head it’s going to be about something worth while – understand?”

“Sure,” remarked George, quickly. “Something that threatens a calamity in the feeding line, for instance; a running short of

supplies. That's the subject Nick worries about most."

"Well, is there any more important business known than supplying the human engine with plenty of fuel?" demanded the other, sturdily. "Perhaps the engineer may be the more important fellow of the two; but the stoker is just as necessary, if the machine is to be kept going. But there's Josh calling me to help him. I'm always Johnny-on-the-spot when it comes to helping Josh get grub ready" – and he waddled off serenely; for Nick was so happily constituted that no matter what jabs he received from his chums, they seemed to roll from him like water from a duck's back.

"Hear the mullet jump?" remarked Jack, as they ate supper after night had set in. "D'ye know, fellows, this ought to be a good time to try that fish spear? – for we'll have an hour of dark before the old moon peeps up, and there isn't a breath of wind to ruffle the water. Jimmy, I appoint you to push me around a bit, and see what we can do, though I wouldn't count too much on any big score."

"I'm on, Jack, darlint," Jimmy immediately responded; "and it's ready I am now."

CHAPTER IV. THAT SAME OLD UNLUCKY WIRELESS

Moving about in the steadiest of the little tenders, with a flare in the bow, and Jimmy to gently push in the stern, Jack sought to strike some game fish. His success was not very flattering, though he certainly did enjoy the experience. It was really worth while to peer down into the shallow depths, and see what lay there.

Several times he caught glimpses of channel bass, sheepshead, or sea trout, which last is only another name for the weak fish of the North; but as a rule they flashed away before he could strike.

He did succeed in spearing one trout of about three pounds, much to Jimmy's delight. And later on, he struck a nasty creature with what seemed to be a barb on the top of his tail, which he thrust around in a savage manner as Jack held him up on the end of his pole.

"Look out, and don't get too close to him, Jimmy," Jack warned.

"Sure now and I won't," replied the other, "for, to till the truth, it's me as don't like the looks of that little fixin' on the ind of his tail."

"It must be what they call a stingaree or stingray," Jack went on. "I never saw one before, but I've read a lot about 'em. They

say he can poison you, if ever he hits with that barb. You know what a mudcat can do, out on the Mississippi; well, this is the same thing, only a whole lot worse.”

“Drop the squirmin’ bog-trotter back into the wather, Jack, me boy; for ’tis us as don’t want too close an acquaintance with him. He’d make it too warm for us, by the same token,” Jimmy declared; and Jack complied only too willingly.

“I guess we’ve had about enough of this, so let’s go ashore,” he suggested.

Nick awaited them, eager to ascertain the amount of their captures. He whiffed on discovering only one fish aboard the dinky.

“Huh! could eat that all by myself, and then not half try,” he remarked.

“All right, then; if you do the needful to it, you’re welcome, Nick,” laughed the one who had captured the sea trout.

Of course, Nick became suddenly suspicious.

“You wouldn’t play any trick on me, now, I hope, Jack, and get me to eat a fish that wasn’t fit for the human stomach?” he questioned, uneasily.

“That’s what they call a sea trout down here; but up North it’s the weakfish, and said to be as toothsome as almost anything that swims,” Jack remarked.

“Oh! all right, then I accept your kind offer. I’ll get busy right now, and have him ready for the morning. Wish you had got one apiece, I hate to seem greedy, you know, fellows,” he went on to

say, as if thinking he ought to excuse himself.

When the morning came Nick was astir before anybody else, for he had a duty on his mind. He bothered Josh so much that finally the cook made him start a blaze of his own, over which he could prepare his breakfast; and Nick managed pretty well, considering that he had never made a study of the art of cookery.

They started off at a booming pace. The run down Indian River that day would always remain a pleasant memory with the young cruisers. Fort Pierce was reached on schedule time, after passing through the Narrows, and securing a mess of oysters from a boat engaged in dredging there.

Again one of the voyagers went after mail and supplies. There was always something lacking, besides the necessary gasoline. Six growing boys can develop enormous appetites when living a life in the open, and upon salt water. Besides, there was Nick, capable of downing any two of his chums when it came to devouring stuff. No wonder, then, that the question of supplies was always uppermost on their minds.

Once more they headed across to the eastern shore, where they would be more apt to find a quiet nook for the next night's camp. One more day's run, if all went well, would take them to Lake Worth; and after serious consultation it had been decided that they would, when the right chance came, put to sea through that inlet, to make the run south to Miami.

Once again had both Nick and Jimmy been seized with the fever of rivalry. During the day they had been busily engaged

preparing set lines, which they expected to put out over night, in the hope of making a big haul.

Nick had bought a lot of material in Jacksonville. This in the main consisted of large hooks, with snells made of brass wire, which latter he manufactured himself, Jack having shown him how; and a large swivel at the end of the foot length. Then he had secured a large quantity of very strong cotton cord, made waterproof by some tarring process, after the manner of the rigging aboard sailing vessels.

One thing Jack had bought in Fort Pierce, which they understood would be pretty much of a necessity during the many weeks they expected to spend among the keys that dotted the whole coast line of Florida.

This was called a cast-net, and was some eight feet in length, though when fully extended it would cover a circle twice that in diameter.

There were leads along the outer edges, and a series of drawing strings running up through a ring in the center.

“You see,” said Jack, that evening, when they were ashore, “I watched a fellow use one up above, and even took a few lessons, so I’ve kind of got the hang on it.”

“Then please show us?” asked Nick, eagerly.

“Listen to him, would you?” exclaimed Herb; “to hear him talk you’d think Nick had a sneaking idea he might some day haul in a big giant of a fish in this flimsy net.”

“No, but it’s good to get mullet for bait,” the fat boy

remonstrated; “and as I expect to do lots of fishing on this trip – and it may not always be convenient for Jack to haul the net – why, I thought I had ought to know the ropes.”

“Good boy, Nick!” laughed Jack; “and I’ll be only too glad to show every fellow all I know, which isn’t any too much. Now, here’s the way you gather up the line, so as to let go suddenly. Then you hold the net like this.”

“Sure do ye ate some of the leads?” questioned Jimmy, seeing Jack take several between his teeth.

“Oh! not any! but this is one of the times when a fellow wishes he had been born with three hands. As I haven’t, I must hold these leads by my teeth. The next thing is to swing the whole net around this way, and let fly with a rotary motion, at the same time letting go with your teeth. That is a very important thing to remember, for you might stand to lose a few out of your jaw if you held on.”

“Oh, I see!” remarked George; “and the net flings open as it whirls through the air, falling on the water that way?”

“Just so, with the leads taking the outer edge rapidly down. Then, by pulling at the line, which is tied, you see, to all these strings, the net is drawn shut like a big purse, enclosing anything that was under it when it struck the water.”

One by one they made trials with the net, but all of them proved pretty clumsy. Jimmy was nearly dragged into the shallow water when he made his first attempt.

“Glory be!” he howled, as he put his hand quickly to his

mouth; "if I didn't have the teeth of a horse I do believe I'd have lost the whole set thin. But once bit, twict shy. Nixt toime I'll let go, rest easy on that. And I'm going to get the hang of that Spanish cast-net, if it takes ivery tooth in me head, so I am."

"And you'll do it, Jimmy, never fear," laughed Jack. "That do-or-die spirit is going to win the day. Here, Nick, try it again. You seem to have got the knack of it pretty well, only you want to throw harder, or the mullet will get away before the net falls on the water."

Finally the boys tired of the strenuous exertion, and as Josh announced supper ready, they turned their attention to more pleasant duties.

"This is something in which I can shine, anyhow," chuckled Nick, as he sat there, with a pannikin cram-full of various good things, and a cup of steaming coffee on the ground close beside him.

No one disputed the assertion; in fact, there was a general grin, and a series of nods around the circle, to prove that for once their opinions were unanimous.

Frolicsome 'coons seemed numerous at this camp on Hutchinson's Island. They attempted to pillage, after the boys had settled down to sleep. Twice was the quiet of the camp disturbed by the rattle of tin pans, and upon investigation it was found that some prowling little animal had endeavored to devour the hominy Josh had cooked, intending to fry slices of the same for breakfast.

Nick made out to believe that it might have been a wildcat, or possibly a bear, until Jack showed him the plain tracks of long slender feet close to the receptacle of the hominy, and explained that only a raccoon could have made these.

When the morning came, an early start was made, for they had quite a little run down the river, through Jupiter Narrows, and then by means of the canal into Lake Worth.

Arriving at this latter place early in the afternoon, they spent some time looking about – although it was out of the season for the fashionable crowd that flock to Palm Beach during February and March.

Jack had studied his coast charts most carefully. He knew they would have a dangerous outside passage to Miami, that must consume some seven hours, because of the *Comfort's* slowness; and as they could not afford to take any chances, it became absolutely necessary that they wait until the weather gave positive signs of remaining fairly decent during the day.

As this meant a combination of favoring breezes and calm waters, it was impossible to tell how long they might have to wait. It might mean one day, and then again they could be kept here at Lake Worth a week.

“You’re wondering why I’m so particular, fellows,” Jack had remarked, when they talked over the matter among themselves, “especially when we made a heap of outside runs coming down the coast. But this is really the worst of the bunch, and I reckon much more dangerous than any we’ve got ahead of us. For

seventy miles here there isn't really a decent harbor where a small boat could put in to escape a sudden change in weather. And when things do go crooked down here they beat the band. The nearer you get to the tropics the harder the winds can howl when they want to show their teeth."

"That's all right, Jack," remarked Herb; "we depend on you to use good judgment in all such matters. And you can see how much we rely on what you decide, when we're ready to follow you like sheep do the bellwether."

"I wonder, now," remarked George, "if that bally little boat that's a ringer for the *Tramp* has gone further south?"

"What makes you ask that?" Jack inquired.

"Well, ever since she passed us that evening across from Rockledge I haven't seen hide nor hair of the mystery. So somehow I reckon she must either be further down the lake, or else gone to Miami by the outside route, like we intend to do."

"That don't necessarily follow," Jack laughed, for he saw that George actually had the subject on his mind, and was deeply interested. "The boat might have been in any one of twenty little coves we passed on the way down. Or, again, she could have been prowling in some of the many passages about the Narrows."

"All right," George declared, stubbornly, as though his mind were set, and nothing could move him; "you mark my word, Jack, we'll set eyes on that sneaker again, before we're done with this trip."

"Oh, perhaps!" said Jack, turning away, as though the subject

did not interest him to any great extent; for he did not happen to be built on the same lines as his chum, who had a little more than his share both of suspicion and also curiosity.

The next day they anxiously waited for Jack's decision; but the wind was much too strong, and from a quarter that caused whitecaps to appear out on the ocean.

So the start had to be postponed, much to the regret of the entire six, all of whom wished to get the dangerous run over with as speedily as possible.

"Better luck tomorrow, fellows," said Jack, who had made it a point to look at things in the light that it was foolish to worry over what could not be altered.

"Then here's to put in a whole day, fishing over on that pier at the beach," declared Nick, making a run for the place where the three motor boats were at anchor.

"Whirra! now, if ye do be afther thinking ye're going to get me goat, it's another guess ye do be having, I'm telling ye, Nick, me bhoy!" remarked Jimmy, as he also hastened away.

And they kept diligently at it through the better part of the entire day, though with indifferent success. Either the fish were shy, knowing the grim determination of the two patient anglers, or else it was a poor day for the sport.

When they mutually agreed to give it up, while they had a mess that would do for supper, neither of them had added any notch to his record for big fish.

As October is possibly the best time of the year to expect

quiet weather along the South Atlantic coast, Jack had high hopes that the morrow would see them on their way toward Miami. Nor were his expectations doomed to disappointment, for in the morning there seemed to be not the slightest reason for further postponing the run.

Accordingly hurried preparations for breakfast were made, in order to take full advantage of the opportunity.

All of them were glad when they made the dash over the Lake Worth bar in good order, and found themselves on the heaving bosom of the mighty sea, with their motor boats pointing to the south.

Steadily they kept on, as the hours passed, and the sun mounted in the sky. Jack was ever on the watch for any sign of a change, knowing what such might mean to cruisers in small boats caught far from a harbor.

Jimmy was watching his face, under the belief that he could tell in that way if any trouble threatened. When he saw how the skipper of the *Tramp* turned his glasses frequently toward the southwest, he took a look in that quarter himself.

“And is it the clouds that do be paping up along beyant the shore line giving ye concern, Jack?” he asked, a bit anxiously.

“Well, I don’t know as they mean much, but all the same I think I’d feel better if we were swinging to our mudhooks back of Key Biscayne,” Jack replied.

“About how far do we chanst to be away, this minute?” the other continued.

“All of ten miles, which would mean an hour’s run for the *Comfort*. This is the time when she drags us back. George and myself could have made shelter an hour ago, if we had wanted to put on all speed. And I just know George is growling to himself right now, because he has to check his love for racing along.”

Jack had hardly said these words when Jimmy broke out into a laugh.

“Now, that do be a toime when ye are away off, me bhoy,” he remarked.

“In what way, Jimmy?” demanded the skipper, laying his glasses aside, and taking the wheel from the hands of his helper.

“If so ye take a look over to the blissed ould *Wireless*, upon me wordd ye’ll discover that the bally boat has stopped short. Like enough that ingine has gone back on poor George again, just as it always does when we get in a place where it counts. Yes, he’s beckoning for us to come close. That’s what it must mean, Jack.”

“Whew! that would be tough luck!” muttered Jack, as he changed the course of the little *Tramp*, and again cast an uneasy look in the direction where those suspicious and dark clouds were shoving their heads above the horizon.

A storm, and the *Wireless* helpless – the prospect was surely anything but pleasant.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERIOUS POWER BOAT

“Jerusalem! if I owned that engine, George, do you know what I’d do with it?” Nick was heard to say, as the others drew near. “Why, I’d take the first chance, when in touch with a town, and sink her miles deep. Hang it, I’d be willing to contribute half the money I’ve got saved, to help get a new engine for the old shaker.”

“All right, I take you up on that offer, Nick,” George made answer, as quick as a flash; “because, to tell the honest truth, I’m getting weary of the cranky thing myself. But that isn’t going to help us any now. Lend a hand here, and let’s see what we can do to mend matters.”

“Hold on there, fellows,” called out Jack.

“Hello! here’s the commodore arrived,” George sang out, with a nervous little laugh. “Same old story, Jack; and blessed if I can say how long it’ll take to fix her up again, so she’ll do business. Might be ten minutes; and again I’m afraid it may be something serious this time, that will keep me busy hours.”

“Well, we can’t stay out here all that time, with a storm in prospect,” said Jack.

“Thunder! what’s that you say?” broke from the perspiring skipper of the stalled *Wireless*, as his head again bobbed up into view, and he swept an anxious look in all quarters.

“There’s a bank of clouds poking up over yonder that may mean trouble,” Jack went on to say. “So just get your stoutest cable hitched to a cleat forward, and pass me the other end.”

“What for?” asked George.

“I’m going to tow you, that’s all,” Jack replied.

“Shucks! is that necessary?” demanded the proud George, with a slight frown.

“It sure is, for every furlong we cover now brings us that much nearer a safe harbor; and if those clouds are out for business, we’ll need all we can gain,” Jack went on to insist.

“Then I suppose I’ll just have to,” the other continued; “here, Nick, get out the hawser, and I’ll clamp it on to this cleat. But see here, Jack, after you get started, Nick can keep watch while I work at the engine, can’t he?”

“Nothing for him to do but hold the wheel and keep straight after me. Perhaps when the little *Tramp* does her prettiest, the two of us can keep going as fast as the *Comfort* goes; and so nothing will have been lost after all, George.”

“That’s true; only I don’t like it one little bit,” grunted George, as he commenced to fasten one end of the hawser to the stout little cleat – for, to tell the truth, George was a mighty poor loser.

Once Jack had the other end of the line, he made it secure to the stern of his own staunch boat.

“Here goes now; look out!” he warned, as he started forward once more.

The three boats had been wallowing on the heaving seas while

power was shut off; but no sooner did they pick up their course again, than this sickening motion gave way to that of progress.

George took off his coat, and got busy. He was considerable of a mechanic, and at least possessed the commendable trait of persistence. Once he had started to do a thing he never rested satisfied until it was accomplished.

“Seems like you’re doing just as well pulling that wreck as we are alone!” called Herb from the *Comfort*, which was not more than fifty feet away.

George’s head came into view above the gunwale of the speed boat, but somehow this time he was feeling quite too bad to take up cudgels in defense of his craft. Besides, there was truth in calling her a wreck just then. So he ducked down once more and pretended not to have heard the sarcastic allusion.

“Just what I expected when I proposed to tow George,” Jack answered; and then he turned the glasses ahead to a point that seemed to interest him considerably.

“Think that can be the place?” asked Herb, still watching him closely.

“I believe it is, yes, and hope so, too,” came the reply, together with a significant glance upward to where the clouds were beginning to shut out the sun, now on its way down the western sky.

“I see you’re edging in more?” Herb continued.

“That’s right,” answered Jack; “we’d better be as near land as we dare go. It may mean a heap to us sooner or later.”

They went on for some time, with things seeming to be no different, only the clouds kept covering the sky, making the water look dark and forbidding. Indeed, all of the boys were now considerably alarmed. The storm seemed to be getting closer, and their haven had not as yet hove in sight.

“That’s because we’re coming down from the north,” explained Jack, when Nick called out to mention this distressing fact. “You see, the trees all run together, and it’s next to impossible to tell where the mainland ends off and the key begins. But I think I get the dividing line through the glasses. Anyhow, I’m heading straight for it right now.”

Ten minutes later and Josh called out, to say that he could see the opening all right; and the others added their evidence to what he said.

“There’s the new breeze coming, Jack!” called Herb.

“Yes, and the harbor is so close too,” George put in, as he arose from his lowly position. “But I reckon my engine will go now, Jack. If you hear her crackle, please cast off that hawser, will you?”

“Sure!” sang out Jimmy, as he climbed forward, Jack having taken the wheel himself some little time previous, so as to be prepared for any emergency that might arise.

A moment later and there was a merry popping from the mended motor of the *Wireless*, and immediately Jimmy heard this he cast the rope loose.

“Better make a plunge for it, George; I’ll stand by Herb!” sang

out Jack.

“But that wouldn’t look right,” objected George, though doubtless he would feel better satisfied if given a chance to make use of the great speed his boat could show under special conditions, in order to get in a harbor before the blow struck them.

“Rats! get along with you. We understand what your feelings are; but we also know what a cranky boat you’ve got. Hit her up now, and skedaddle!” called Jack.

“Are you saying that as a chum, or as the commodore of the fleet?” asked George.

“As the commodore; and see to it that you obey orders,” answered the other.

Accordingly, George did put his motor to its best speed, and rapidly left them in the lurch. Jack would never desert the steady going old *Comfort*, and that wide-beamed craft was already working her full limit of nine miles to the hour, so nothing could be done but keep moving, and hope for the best.

The wind increased. Luckily it was dead ahead; and while it might retard their progress to some extent, at the same time it did not kick up half the tremendous sea that would have been the case had it come from the wide ocean at their back, or the port side.

“Do ye be thinking we can make it?” asked Jimmy, who looked a little peaked as he squatted there, watching the tumbling waves, and eying wistfully the shores now close at hand, where

houses were to be seen.

“I don’t doubt it for a minute,” answered the resolute skipper of the *Tramp*, who always refused to be downcast when face to face with danger. “We’re hitting up a pretty fair pace, and if nothing happens to prevent, in ten minutes we’ll begin to get the benefit of the shelter of the land.”

“Anyhow, George has gone through the opening,” declared Jimmy, hopefully.

“Why, yes, there he is beyant, and in calm water; I do believe he’s waiting for us right now. Bully for George! And we ought to be with him soon.”

Although the storm increased, they were by now so well in that it had little terror for them. And presently they ran into calmer waters, where the other boat waited for their coming.

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