

JOHN GOLDFRAP

THE MOTOR RANGERS'
WIRELESS STATION

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Marvin West

The Motor Rangers' Wireless Station

CHAPTER I.

THE WIRELESS ISLAND

The drowsy calm of a balmy afternoon at the Motor Rangers' wireless camp on Goat Island was abruptly shattered by a raucous, insistent clangor from the alarm-bell of the wireless outfit. Nat Trevor, Joe Hartley and Ding-dong Bell, who had been pretending to read but were in reality dozing on the porch of a small portable wood and canvas house, galvanized into the full tide of life and activity usually theirs.

"Something doing at last!" cried Nat. "It began to look as if there wouldn't be much for us on the island but a fine vacation, lots of sea-breeze and coats of tan like old russet shoes."

"I ter-told you there'd be ser-ser-something coming over the a-a-a-a-aerials before long," sputtered Ding-dong Bell triumphantly, athrill with excitement.

"What do you suppose it is?" queried Joe Hartley, his red, good-natured face aglow.

“Don’t go up in the air, Joe,” cautioned Nat, “it’s probably nothing more thrilling than a weather report from one of the chain of coast stations to another.”

“Get busy, Ding-dong, and find out,” urged Joe Hartley; “let’s see what sort of a message you can corral out of the air.”

But young Bell was already plodding across the sand toward a small timber structure about fifty yards distant from the Motor Rangers’ camp. Above the shack stretched, between two lofty poles, the antennæ of the wireless station. Against these the electric waves from out of space were beating and sounding the wireless “alarm-clock,” an invention of Ding-dong’s of which he was not a little proud.

Ding-dong had become inoculated with the wireless fever as a result of the trip east which the Motor Rangers had taken following their stirring adventures in the Bolivian Andes in Professor Grigg’s air-ship – which experiences were related in the fourth volume of this series, *The Motor Rangers’ Cloud Cruiser*. On their return to California – where all three boys lived, in the coast resort of Santa Barbara – nothing would suit Ding-dong but that they take a vacation on Goat Island and set up a wireless plant for experimental purposes.

“I want to try it and away from home where a bunch of fellows won’t be hanging about and joking me if I make a fizzle,” he explained.

As the lads while in the east had done a lot of business, some of it connected with Nat’s gold mine in Lower California and

some with interests of Professor Griggs, they decided that they were entitled to at least a short period of inactivity, and Ding-dong's idea was hailed as a good one. Goat Island, a rugged, isolated spot of land shaped like a splash of gravy on a plate, was selected as an ideal camping place. The wireless appliances, shipped from San Francisco, were conveyed to the island on board the Rangers' sturdy cabin cruiser *Nomad*, and three busy, happy weeks had been devoted to putting it in working order. Since the day that it had been declared "O. K." by Ding-dong, the lads had been crazy for the "wireless alarm" to ring in, and when it failed to do so Ding-dong came in for a lot of good-natured joshing.

For some further account of the three chums, we must refer our readers to the first volume of this series, *The Motor Rangers' Lost Mine*. This related how Nat, the son of a poor widow, unexpectedly came into his own and from an employé's position was raised to one of comparative affluence. For a holiday tour when they returned from Lower California, where Nat by accident had located his mine, the chums took an eventful trip through the Sierras. What befell them there, and how they combated unscrupulous enemies and had lots of jolly fun, was all set forth in the second volume devoted to their doings, *The Motor Rangers Through the Sierras*. Some sapphires found by them on this trip led to a strange series of incidents and adventures attendant on their efforts to restore them to their rightful owner. The precious stones were stolen, recovered, and lost again, only

to be delivered safely at last. These exciting times, passed by the lads on their cruiser, the *Nomad*, which took them half across the Pacific, were described in the third volume of the young rangers' doings, *The Motor Rangers on Blue Water*. Their voyage in Professor Grigg's wonderful air-ship, the *Discoverer*, has been already referred to. With this necessarily brief introduction to the young campers, let us return to Goat Island.

Directly Ding-dong reached the hut housing the apparatus, he flung himself down before the instruments and hastily jammed the head-piece, with its double "watch-case" receivers, over his ears. He picked up a pencil and placing it conveniently above a pad of paper that was always kept affixed to the table holding the sending and receiving appliances, he began to send a storm of dots and dashes winging out in reply to the wireless impulse that had set the gong sounding.

"*This is Goat Island!*" he banged out on the key, while the spark leaped and writhed in a "serpent" of steel-blue flame between the sparking points. It whined and squealed like an animal in pain as Ding-dong's trembling fingers alternately depressed and released the "brass."

"*Goat Island! Goat Island! Goat Island!*" he repeated monotonously, and then switched the current from the sending to the receiving instruments.

Against his ears came a tiny pattering so faint as to be hardly distinguishable. Yet the boy knew that the instruments must be "in tune," or nearly so, with whatever station was sending

wireless waves through space, else the "alarm" would not have been sprung.

He adjusted his instruments to take a longer "wave" than he had been using. Instantly the breaking of the "wireless surf" against the antennæ above the receiving shed became plainer.

"This is the steamer Iroquois, San Francisco, to Central American ports," was what Ding-dong's pencil rapidly transcribed on the pad, while the others leaned breathlessly over his shoulder and watched the flying lead. *"A passenger is dangerously hurt. We need assistance at once."*

The young operator thrilled. The first message that had come to the island was an urgent one.

"Where are you?" he flashed back.

"Thirty miles off the coast. Who are you?" came back the reply.

"Thirty miles off where?" whanged out Ding-dong's key, while he grumbled at the indefiniteness of the operator on the steamer.

"Off Santa Barbara. Who are you and can you send out a boat to take our injured passenger ashore? Hospital attention is necessary."

"Wait a minute," spelled out the young Motor Ranger's key.

He turned to the others.

"You see what I've got," he said indicating the pad and speaking perfectly plainly in his excitement; "what are we going to do about it?"

The lads exchanged glances. It was evident as their eyes met

what was in each one's mind. The *Nomad* lay snugly anchored in a cove on the shoreward side of the island. A run of thirty miles out to sea was nothing for the speedy, sturdy gasolene craft, and the call that had come winging through the air from the steamer was an appeal for aid that none of them felt like refusing to heed. It was clear that the case was urgent. A life, even, might be at stake. Each lad felt that a responsibility had been suddenly laid at their door that they could not afford to shirk.

“Well?” queried Ding-dong.

“*Well?*” reiterated Joe Hartley as they turned by common consent to Nat Trevor, the accepted leader of the Motor Rangers at all times.

“You'd better tell the man on that ship that we'll be alongside within two hours,” said Nat quietly; and that was all; Ding-dong, without comment, swung around to his key again. Like Joe, he had known what Nat's decision would be almost before he gave it. Nat was not the lad to turn down an appeal like the one sent out from the *Iroquois*. The sea was smooth, the weather fair, but even had it been blowing half a gale it is doubtful if Nat would have hesitated a jiffy under the circumstances to perform what he adjudged to be a duty.

Ding-dong speedily raised the *Iroquois*.

“*We'll take your injured man ashore,*” he flashed out. “*Lay to where you are and we'll pick you up without trouble. Expect us in about two hours.*”

“*Bully for you, Goat Island,*” came the rejoinder, which

Ding-dong hardly waited to hear before he disconnected his instruments and “grounded” them.

“Now for the *Nomad*,” cried Nat. “Hooray, boys! It’s good to have something come along to relieve the monotony.”

“Di-di-didn’t I ter-ter-tell you so!” puffed Ding-dong triumphantly, as the three lads set out at top speed for their hut to obtain some necessary clothing and a few provisions for their run to the vessel that had sent out the wireless appeal for help.

CHAPTER II.

A PASSENGER FOR THE SHORE

“All right below, Ding-dong?” hailed Nat, as he took his place on the little bridge of the *Nomad* with Joe by his side. The anchor was up, and astern towed the dinghy, which had been hastily shoved off the beach when the boys embarked.

Through the speaking tube came up the young engineer’s answer, “All ready when you are, captain.”

Nat jerked the engine room bell twice. A tremor ran through the sturdy sixty-foot craft. Her fifty-horse-power, eight-cylindered motor began to revolve, and with a “bone in her teeth” she ran swiftly out of the cove, headed around the southernmost point of the island and was steered by Nat due westward to intercept the steamer that had flashed the urgent wireless.

As the long Pacific swell was encountered, the *Nomad* rose to it like a race-horse that after long idleness feels the track under his hoofs once more. Her sharp bow cut the water like a knife, but from time to time, as an extra heavy roller was encountered, she flung the water back over her forward parts in a shower of glistening, prismatic spray. It was a day and an errand to thrill the most phlegmatic person that ever lived, and, as we know, the Motor Rangers were assuredly not in this category. Their blood glowed as their fast craft rushed onward on her errand of mercy

at fifteen miles, or better, an hour.

Nat, his cheeks glowing and his eyes shining, held the wheel in a firm grip, his crisp black hair waved in the breeze and his very poise showed that he was in his element. Joe, clutching the rail beside him, was possessed of an equal fervor of excitement. The Motor Rangers all felt that they were on the threshold of an adventure; but into what devious paths and perils that wireless message for aid was to lead them, not one of them guessed. Yet even had they been able to see into the future and its dangers and difficulties, it is almost certain that they would have voted unanimously to "keep on going."

"What a fine little craft she is," declared Nat, as the *Nomad* sped along.

"She's a beauty," fervently agreed Joe, with equal enthusiasm; "and what we've been through on board her, Nat!"

"I should say so. Remember the Magnetic Islands, and the Boiling Sea, and the time you were lost overboard?"

Chatting thus of the many adventures and perils successfully met that their conversation recalled to their minds, the two young Motor Rangers on the bridge of the speeding motor craft kept a bright lookout for some sign of the vessel that had sent the wireless appeal into space.

Nat was the first to catch sight of a smudge of smoke on the horizon. "That must be the steamer! There, dead ahead!"

"Reckon you're right, Nat," agreed Joe. "The smoke seems stationary, too. That's the *Iroquois* beyond a doubt."

Nat sent a signal below, to apply every ounce of speed that the engines were capable of giving. The *Nomad*, going at a fast clip before, fairly began to rush ahead. In a few minutes they could see the masts of the steamer, and her black hull and yellow funnel rapidly arose above the horizon as they neared her.

At close range the Motor Rangers could see that the white upper works were lined with passengers, all gazing curiously at the speedy *Nomad* as she came on. As they ranged in alongside, the gangway was lowered and Nat was hailed from the bridge by a stalwart, bearded man in uniform.

“Motor boat, ahoy!” he cried, placing his hands funnel-wise to his mouth, “did you come off in response to our wireless?”

“We did, sir,” was Nat’s rejoinder. “What is the trouble?”

“A job with a good lot of money in it for you fellows,” was the response. “Range in alongside the gangway and Dr. Adams, the ship’s surgeon, will explain to you what has happened.”

Nat maneuvered the *Nomad* up to the lower platform of the gangway and Joe nimbly sprang off and made the little craft fast. She looked as tiny as a rowboat lying alongside the big black steamer, whose steel sides towered above her like the walls of a lofty building.

The vessel’s surgeon, a spectacled, solemn-looking young man, came down the gangway stairs.

“This is a matter requiring the utmost haste,” he said; “the man who has been injured must be taken to a shore hospital at once.”

“We’ll take the job. That’s what we came out here for,”

rejoined Nat briskly. "Who is your man and how was he hurt?"

"His name is Jonas Jenkins of San Francisco. As I understand it, he is a wealthy man with big interests in Mexico. He booked passage for Mazatlan. Early to-day he was found at the foot of a stairway with what I fear is a fracture of the skull."

"It was an accident?" asked Nat, for somehow there was something in the voice of the ship's doctor which appeared to indicate that he was not altogether satisfied that Jonas Jenkins' injury was unavoidable.

The doctor hesitated a minute before replying. Then he spoke in a low voice:

"I have no right to express any opinion about the matter," he said, "but certain things about the case impressed me as being curious."

"For instance?"

The question was Nat's.

"The fact that Mr. Jenkins' coat was cut and torn as if some one had ripped it up to obtain from it something of value or importance."

"You mean that you think Mr. Jenkins was pushed down the flight of stairs and met his injury in that way?"

"That's my theory, but I have nothing but the tear in the coat to base it on."

The surgeon was interrupted at this point by the appearance at the top of the gangway of a singular-looking individual. He was tall, skinny as an ostrich and had a peculiar piercing expression

of countenance. His rather swarthy features were obscured on the lower part of his face by a bristly black beard.

“Are these young men going to take Mr. Jenkins ashore?” he asked in a dictatorial sort of tone.

“That is our intention,” was Nat’s rejoinder.

“Where are you going to land him?”

The words were ripped out more like an order than a civil inquiry. Nat felt a vague resentment. Evidently the black-bearded man looked upon the Motor Rangers as boys who could be ordered about at will.

“We are going to run into Santa Barbara as fast as our boat will take us there,” was Nat’s reply.

“I want to go ashore with you,” declared the stranger. “I received word early to-day by wireless that makes it imperative that I should return to San Francisco at once. Land me at Santa Barbara and name your own price.”

“This isn’t a passenger boat,” shot out Joe.

“We only came out here as an accommodation and as an act of humanity,” supplemented Nat. His intuitive feeling of dislike for the dictatorial stranger was growing every minute.

Perhaps the other noticed this, for he descended the gangway and took his place beside the ship’s doctor on the lower platform of the gangway.

“You must pardon me if my tone was abrupt,” he said in conciliatory tones; “the fact of the matter is, that I must return as soon as possible to San Francisco for many reasons, and this

ship does not stop till she reaches Mazatlan. It was my eagerness that made me sound abrupt.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” rejoined Nat, liking the cringing tone of the man even less than he had his former manner, “I guess we can put you ashore.”

The man reached into his pocket and produced a wallet. He drew several bills from it.

“And here’s something to pay for my passage,” he said eagerly.

“Never mind that,” said Nat, waving the proffered money aside. “As I told you, we are not running a passenger boat. If we land you in Santa Barbara it will be simply as an accommodation.”

“And one for which I will be grateful,” was the reply. “I’ll have a steward put my baggage on board your boat at once. I may be of aid to you in caring for Mr. Jenkins, too, for I am a physician.”

“Yes, this is Dr. Sartorius of San Francisco,” rejoined Dr. Adams, as the other ascended the gang plank with long, swift strides and was heard above giving orders for the transfer of his belongings.

“You know him, then?” asked Nat of the ship’s doctor.

“Well, that is, he is registered with the purser under that name,” was the reply, “and I have had some conversation on medical subjects with him. As a matter of fact, I think it is an excellent thing that he wishes to go ashore, for Mr. Jenkins is in a serious way and really needs the constant watching of a physician.”

“In that case, I am glad things have come out as they have,” rejoined Nat. “Joe, will you go below and fix up the cabin for the injured man’s use, and then, doctor, if you will have him brought on board I’ll be getting under way again.”

Dr. Adams reascended the gangway and in a few minutes two sailors appeared carrying between them a limp form. The head was heavily bandaged, rendering a good look at the man’s features impossible. But Nat judged that he was of powerful build and past middle age. He descended into the cabin with Dr. Adams, and under the surgeon’s directions Mr. Jenkins was made as comfortable as possible. His baggage, as well as that of Dr. Sartorius, was brought below, and then everything was ready for a start.

Dr. Sartorius bent over the injured man and appeared really to take a deep and intelligent interest in the case. The ship’s doctor indorsed one or two suggestions that he made and the boys, for Ding-dong had joined the party, began to think that they might have been mistaken in their first estimate of the doctor’s character.

“After all,” Nat thought, “clever men are often eccentric, and this black-whiskered doctor may be just crusty and unattractive without realizing it.”

When everything had been settled, Nat and Joe made their way to the bridge and bade farewell to the doctor. The two sailors who had carried Mr. Jenkins on board cast off the *Nomad’s* lines, and the steamer’s siren gave a deep booming note of thanks for

their act.

“You’d better lose no time in getting ashore,” hailed the captain, after he had thanked the boys for their timely aid.

“We shan’t, you may depend on that,” cheerily called back Nat, as the *Nomad’s* engines began to revolve and the big *Iroquois* commenced to churn the water.

“We’re in for a sharp blow of wind, or I’m mistaken,” came booming toward them through the captain’s megaphone, for the two craft were by this time some little distance apart.

Nat looked seaward. Dark, streaky clouds were beginning to overcast the sky. The sea had turned dull and leaden, while a hazy sort of veil obscured the sun. He turned to Joe.

“Hustle below and tell Ding-dong to get all he can out of the engines, and then see that all is snug in the cabin.”

“You think we’re in for a blow?”

“I certainly do; and I’m afraid that it’s going to hit us before we can get ashore. It is going to be a hummer, too, from the looks of things, right out of the nor’west.”

“But we’re all right?”

“Oh, sure! The *Nomad* can stand up where a bigger craft might get into trouble.”

Nat’s tone was confident, but as Joe dived below on his errand he glanced behind him at the purplish-black clouds that were racing across the sky toward them. The sea began to rise and there was an odd sort of moaning sound in the air, like the throbbing of the bass string of a titanic viol.

“This is going to be a rip snorter,” he said in an undertone.
“I’ll bet the bottom’s tumbled out of the barometer.”

CHAPTER III.

IN THE GRIP OF THE STORM

“Phew! Hold tight, Joe; here she comes!”

Under the dark canopy of lowering clouds the leaden sea about the *Nomad* began to smoke and whip up till the white horses champed and careered, tossing their heads heavenward under the terrific onslaught of the wind.

“Some storm, Nat,” gasped Joe, clutching the rail tightly with both hands as the *Nomad* began to pitch and toss like a bucking bronco.

“About as bad a blow as we’ve had on this coast in a long time,” agreed Nat, raising his voice to be heard above the shrieking tumult of wind and sea.

“I’ll go below and get the oilskins, Nat,” volunteered Joe.

“You’d better; this will get worse before it’s better.”

Grabbing at any hand-hold to prevent himself being thrown violently on his back, Joe made his way below once more.

“Goodness, this is fierce,” he muttered, as he went down the companionway and entered the cabin. Ding-dong had switched on the current from the dynamo in the engine-room and the place was flooded with light.

The injured man lay on the lounge where he had been placed and was breathing heavily. At the table sat Dr. Sartorius. He was

bending over a bundle of papers and perusing them so intently that, above all the disturbance of the elements without, he did not hear Joe enter the cabin. He looked up as the boy's shadow fell across the papers. Startled by some emotion for which Joe could not account, he jumped to his feet, at the same time thrusting the papers into an inner pocket.

"What do you want?" he breathed angrily, glaring at the boy with fury in his dark eyes.

"Why, I came below for the oilskins. What's the matter, did I startle you?" asked Joe, regarding the man curiously. On his face was an odd blend of alarm and ferocity.

"Yes, – that is, no. I am very nervous. You must forgive me. I – there is bad weather outside?" he broke off abruptly.

"It's blowing pretty hard," Joe informed him, while he still noted the man's odd manner.

"It will delay us in reaching shore?" demanded the other, sinking back into his chair and staring at the heavily breathing form of Mr. Jenkins.

"I'm afraid so. If the weather gets any worse we shall have to slow down. It's too bad, for it is important that we get Mr. Jenkins to the hospital as quickly as possible. He needs immediate medical aid."

Dr. Sartorius ignored this remark. Instead he fixed his queer eyes on Mr. Jenkins.

"How much shall we be delayed?" he asked eagerly the next minute.

“Impossible to say,” rejoined Joe; and then he added, with his accustomed frank bluntness, “You don’t speak as if you were in any particular hurry about landing.”

“It’s Jenkins yonder I’m thinking of,” was the reply in a semi-musing tone. “He may die if we are delayed, and you say that the storm is a severe one?”

“We’ll have to slow down, I guess,” rejoined Joe, and then, as the gong in the engine-room rang for reduced speed, he nodded his head. “There’s the slow-up signal now. It must be getting worse. I’ve got to get on deck.”

So saying, he rummaged two suits of oilskins out of a locker and hastened on deck. Spume and smoky spray were flying over the *Nomad* in clouds. The craft looked like an eggshell amidst the ranges of watery hills. Joe slipped into his oilskins and then took the wheel while Nat donned his foul-weather rig.

Presently Ding-dong, grimy from his engines, joined them.

“How is everything running below, Joe?” asked Nat, as the figure of the young engineer appeared.

“Fur-fur-fine as a h-h-h-hundred dollar war-watch,” sputtered Ding-dong; “ber-ber-but I’ve got her slowed down to ten knots. How about the sick man?”

“That can’t be helped,” declared Nat. “If I were to make any more speed in this sea, we’d all be bound for Davy Jones’ locker before many minutes had passed.”

“Hum! That is certainly a fact,” assented Joe, as a big green sea rose ahead of them like a watery hillock and the *Nomad* drove

her flaring bow into it. The water crashed down about them and thundered on the deck.

“There’s a sample copy,” sputtered Joe, dashing the water from his eyes and giving a grin; but, despite his attempt to make light of the matter, he grew very sober immediately afterward. Stout craft as the *Nomad* was, she was being called upon to face about as bad a specimen of weather as the Motor Rangers had ever encountered. What made matters worse, they had a badly – perhaps mortally – injured man on their hands. Delay in reaching harbor might result fatally. They all began to look worried.

Ding-dong dared to spend no more time on deck away from his engines. If anything happened to the motor, things would be serious indeed. He dived below and oiled the laboring motor most assiduously. Every now and then the propeller of the storm-tossed *Nomad* would lift out of the water, and then the engine raced till Ding-dong feared it would actually rack itself to pieces. But there was no help for it; they must keep on now at whatever cost.

For an hour or more the wind continued to blow a screaming gale, and then it suddenly increased in fury to such a degree that Nat and Joe, who were taking turns relieving each other at the wheel, could feel it pressing and tearing against them like some solid thing. Their voices were blown back down their throats when they tried to talk. Their garments were blown out stiff as boiler iron.

“How much longer can we stand this – ” Joe was beginning,

shouting the words into Nat's ears, when suddenly there was a jarring quiver throughout the fabric of the motor craft and the familiar vibration of the engines ceased. Simultaneously the *Nomad* was lifted on the back of a giant comber and hurled into a valley of green water, from which it seemed impossible that she could ever climb again. But valiantly she made the ascent in safety, only to go reeling and wallowing down the other side in a condition of terrifying helplessness.

"Get below and see what's happened," bawled Nat at Joe.

The other hastened off on his errand, clinging with might and main to whatever projection offered. He had just reached the engine room when he saw something that made him utter a cry of astonishment.

Slipping from behind a door which communicated with the cabin beyond was Dr. Sartorius. In his hand he had a monkey wrench. As for Ding-dong Bell, he was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN THE ENGINE FAILED

Joe Hartley's mind, while not as active as Nat's, worked quickly, and he sensed instantly a connection between the presence in the engine room of Sartorius and the stoppage of the motor. And this, although he could not imagine what possible purpose the man could have in such actions. Sartorius had tiptoed back into the cabin, where lay Mr. Jenkins, without casting a glance behind him. Joe crept forward with the same caution till he gained a point of vantage from which he could see into the lighted cabin.

Lounging back in a swivel chair with a magazine in his hand and a cigar in his mouth was the black-bearded doctor. On his face was a look of content and repose. Apparently he was utterly oblivious to the wild tossing of the *Nomad* in the rough sea, and had not Joe been certain that it was their more or less unwelcome guest whom he had seen sneak out of the engine room, he would have been inclined to doubt his own eyesight.

Ding-dong's sudden reappearance chased these thoughts swiftly out of his mind.

"Where on earth have you been?" he demanded, staring open-mouthed at Ding-dong as if he had been a ghost.

"Wer-wer-what's happened to the engines?" sputtered Ding-

dong anxiously.

Joe drew him aside.

“I came down here the instant they stopped,” he said. “I caught our black-whiskered friend sneaking out of the engine room into the cabin with a monkey wrench in his hand. I’m sure he tampered with the engine.”

“Phew! That’s rer-er-right in line with what I went on deck to tell Nat about.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just this. Happening to pe-pe-peek into the c-c-c-cabin a while back, I sus-sus-saw Wer-Wer-Whiskers kneeling in front of one of Jer-Jer-Jenkins’ trunks. He couldn’t get it open, and then I saw him tip-toe over to Jer-Jenkins and start to go through his pockets. I ber-ber-beat it up on deck to tell Nat.”

“Then you must have been going up the port companionway while I was coming down the starboard, and that’s how we missed running into each other.”

“Ther-ther-that’s about it.”

“What did Nat say?”

“To ger-ger-get the engines going and not mind anything else just now.”

“That’s right; we’re in a bad fix. I’ll stay down here and help you go over the motor. I can be of more use down here than up on deck.”

While the *Nomad* took sickening swings and plunges, at times rolling over on her beam ends, the two lads went over the motor

painstakingly. It was no light task in that turmoil and fury of wind and wave. Every once in a while, when the little craft took an exceptionally bad plunge, they exchanged glances which plainly said:

“Are we going to get out of this alive?”

Once in a while Joe stole away to take a look at the doctor, whom he suspected of tampering with the motor. Each time he discovered no difference in the man’s strange repose. He might have been taking his ease on a Pullman drawing-room car instead of being on board a craft with which the elements were playing battledore and shuttlecock, for all the signs he showed of uneasiness. Joe did notice, though, that from time to time he cast glances from the magazine in which he appeared so much interested toward the lounge on which lay extended Mr. Jenkins’ senseless form.

It was on his return from one of these excursions that Joe was hailed by Ding-dong in an excited voice. Above the racket of the storm and the shouting of the voice of the wind there was not much danger of their being heard in the cabin.

“Lul-lul-look here, Joe; the pur-pur-precious rascal!”

The young engineer pointed to the carburetor of the two forward cylinders.

“What’s the matter with them?”

“The auk-auk-auk-auxiliary air valves have been tampered with, that’s what, and lul-lul-look on the stern cylinders; the spark plugs have been tightened on till the porcelain cracked. No

wonder she went out of business.”

“Crackers! The fellow who did that was no greenhorn round an engine.”

“Well, I gug-guess not. Just watch me get busy. We’ll attend to his nu-nu-nibs later on.”

Joe got fresh spark plugs from the locker where the extra parts were kept, and, while Ding-dong fitted them, he started adjusting the carburetor which had been so skillfully tampered with. They were in the midst of this work when the tall form of Dr. Sartorius appeared in the doorway between the cabin and the engine room.

“What is the matter? What has happened?” he asked, as if noticing for the first time the stoppage of the engines.

“The motor stopped, that’s all,” spoke up Joe sarcastically.

“Dear me, in this storm that might have been serious,” said the doctor, holding on to the casement of the doorway to steady himself.

“I guess the fellow that did it didn’t know that we might all have gone to the bottom, or maybe he’d have thought a second time,” sputtered Joe, red-hot with indignation and not caring a snap if he showed it. He stared straight at the other as he spoke, and he could have sworn that under his steady, accusing gaze the doctor paled and averted his eyes.

“But you have it fixed now?” inquired the doctor after a second, ignoring Joe’s peppery remark.

“Oh, yes, we’ve got it fixed all right, and we’ll take precious good care it doesn’t get out of order again for *any* cause,”

exploded Joe; “and another thing, doctor, we boys regard this engine room as private property. Will you please retire to the cabin?”

With a shrug of his shoulders, the doctor turned, and Joe shut and locked the door behind him.

“We’ll have no more meddling on board here,” he muttered.

In a few minutes Ding-dong announced that all was ready to try the motor once more. Joe switched on the electric self-starting appliance and the cylinders began to cough and chug welcomingly. But it took some time longer to get them properly adjusted. At last the task was completed, however, and once more the *Nomad* was able to battle for life. No longer a helpless plaything of the giant rollers, she fought them gallantly, with her heart beating strong and true again.

Joe brewed coffee and got cold meat and bread from a locker, and the boys took turns relieving each other at wheel and engine. In the driving spume and under the dark clouds that went whistling by above their heads it was impossible to see more than a few yards before them. They had not the slightest idea how far they might be off the coast.

In the middle of all this anxiety and turmoil, Joe got the fright of his life. He was on the bridge, holding the *Nomad* to her course as well as he could – considering the drift she had made when the motor was idle – when, out of the storm, terror, real and thrilling, swept down upon him. Above the crest of a big wave there suddenly appeared the wallowing hull of another

motor boat! She was smaller than the *Nomad* and was making dangerously bad weather of it.

Joe had hardly time to see the other craft before she was flung toward the *Nomad* like a stone out of a catapult. Joe spun the spokes of the *Nomad's* wheel furiously, but with her rudder clear out of the water half the time the motor craft did not respond as obediently to her wheel as usual.

“Look out! You’ll run us down!” bawled Joe to a figure he saw crouching behind the cabin of the other boat.

“Our engine’s broken down!” came the answer, flung toward the young helmsman by the wind. “Help us!”

Above the bulwarks of the other boat, as the two small craft swept by in the storm rack within a few inches of each other, appeared two other heads. Joe caught their shouts for aid and frantically rang the signal bell to summon the others on deck. Nat and Ding-dong came tumbling up to ascertain what fresh accident had happened. They arrived just in time to see the other motor boat, a white-painted, dainty-looking craft, swept onward amid the towering seas.

“They’ve broken down – need help – what can we do?” bawled Joe into Nat’s ear.

The leader of the Motor Rangers looked troubled. The other craft was by this time wind-driven some distance from them. To try to overtake her would be a most risky maneuver. Nat saw in his first glance at the other boat that she was not fitted at all for outside work. She was evidently a mere pleasure craft which had

probably been overtaken unexpectedly by the northwester before she had had time to make port.

It was a trying dilemma that faced those on the *Nomad*. Below, they had what was in all probability a dying man. At any rate, his life depended upon the speed with which they could make port. On the other hand, three human beings equally doomed to destruction, if help did not speedily reach them, had just been driven by, the helpless victims of the storm.

Nat and his chums found themselves facing a question which comes to few men, and assuredly to still fewer lads of their ages. As usual, the others looked to Nat for a decision. But it was longer than usual in coming. Young Trevor felt to the full the heavy responsibility that lay upon him in this crisis. If he took after the storm-wracked pleasure craft with its human cargo, he was running a grave risk of losing all their lives without saving the others. On the other hand, the appeal for help from the powerless victims of the storm had struck a chord in Nat's heart which was never unresponsive. In the course of their adventurous careers the Motor Rangers had aided and benefited many a human being, but never before had they encountered any in such urgent need of succor as those who had just flung their prayer for aid broadcast on the wings of the wind.

"Well, what's the decision?" shouted Joe, as the three lads stood side by side on the wildly swaying bridge.

"To put her about. We'll go after them," was Nat's response, as with firm hands on the wheel he swung the *Nomad* full into

the teeth of the gale.

CHAPTER V.

NAT TO THE RESCUE

There followed moments of the most intense and thrilling anxiety. Clouds of salt water broke thunderously over the plucky little *Nomad* as she battled her way on the path of rescue. Her framework quivered and groaned, and she was flung upward on mountains of water and dashed into liquid abysses till the boys' heads began to swim. But still Nat, with cool, steady eyes, gazing straight ahead through all the wildly flying smother, held her toward the spot where an occasional high-leaping wave surged and showed the little craft that they were following. Down below Ding-dong had returned to his engines and was urging them to their best efforts.

Bit by bit they overhauled the other motor boat, but it was killing work. Time and again it seemed that they would have to give it up, but each time the *Nomad* drove on, and at last they were close to the other boat. She was a pitiful sight. From the water-logged way in which she behaved, it was clear that she was half full of water and utterly unable to keep up the fight any longer.

Nat crept up to windward of her and then shouted that he would stand by. The wind hurled away any reply that might have come, but Nat was pretty sure that the men on the other boat

could hear him, which was all that he wanted.

“We dare come no closer,” he bellowed, “but we’ll chuck you a life-ring on the end of a rope. Jump overboard and grab it, and we’ll haul you aboard!”

A wave of the arm from one of the three figures crouched under the bulwarks of the other boat for protection against the breaking seas showed him that his message had been heard and understood. On the bridge rail of the *Nomad* were three life-rings, with plenty of light, strong rope attached. Nat ordered all three of these cut loose and flung toward the other boat.

Joe worked like a beaver getting them loose and chucking them out toward the storm-battered crew. They were heavy, but the wind helped in propelling them, and they drifted down in the right direction.

“Now!” yelled Nat, as the first of them came close alongside the distressed launch. Without hesitation, except to shake his comrades’ hands, one of the men mounted the bulwarks and dropped into the boiling sea.

He fought for a few seconds and finally succeeded in reaching the bobbing, dancing life-ring. The way in which he got into it, by pressing on one edge and then tipping it till it encircled his head, showed that he was familiar with the trick of getting into a life-ring so as to make it most efficient.

Joe began hauling in with might and main. Nat, one hand on the wheel, helped him. Slowly but surely in the teeth of the storm they drew the rescued man toward them. When he was alongside

and in the comparatively smooth water of the *Nomad's* lee, Joe sent the bridge "Jacob's ladder" snaking down; and in a few seconds more the man, a stalwart-looking young fellow in a blue sweater and rough serge trousers, stood dripping beside them. There was no time to ask questions, for by this time another of the distressed party had plunged into the sea. Like his predecessor, he, too, grasped a life-ring, and, with the added strength of the rescued sailor (for such appeared to be the rank of the first man saved), the boys made good time getting him on board.

"For heaven's sake," he panted, as he was hauled to safety on the *Nomad's* bridge, "lose no time in getting Doc Chalmers off. Nate," he added excitedly, turning to the roughly dressed young fellow, "the gasolene tank is leaking. The whole boat reeks of the stuff."

"Good land o' Goshen, and that lantern in the cabin be alight!" cried the other, an expression of alarm coming over his sunburned, weather-beaten face.

"Look, he's on the rail now!" cried Joe, as the third figure, the one of the man still remaining on the launch, was seen to mount the coamings.

There was a sudden flash of flame and the roar of an explosion. Flames shot up from the launch and the lead-colored waters grew crimson under the angry glare.

"The doctor! Nate, do you see the doctor?" asked the other survivor of the sailor.

"No, sir, Mr. Anderson! Land o' Beulah, I don't!" wailed the

other.

“There he is! Look! Off there!” cried Joe suddenly.

He pointed to a black speck, the head of a human being, in the midst of the blood-red waves.

“He’s missed the life-ring!” groaned the man who had been addressed by the sailor as Mr. Anderson.

“Is he a good swimmer?” demanded Nat anxiously.

“No, he can only handle himself in the water a little,” was the reply.

They all gazed as if fascinated at the struggle on the flame-lit waters surrounding the blazing launch. The face of the castaway was toward them now and they could see his agonized features as he struggled amidst the surges.

“Joe, take the wheel. One of you throw another life-ring after me!” came suddenly in Nat’s voice. “Bear down after me, Joe, and look lively to chuck the second ring if I miss the first!”

Before they could lay hands on him or utter one word of remonstrance, Nat was overboard. On the bridge lay his oilskins, shoes and outer garments. While they had been gazing, horror-stricken, at the struggle for life going on apparently beyond the power of human aid, Nat had acted. But it was a chance so desperate as to seem suicidal.

“Nat! Nat! Come back!” shouted Joe, but it was too late. Nat was already struggling in the towering seas, fighting his way toward the hapless man. The next instant Joe flew to the wheel. In the moment that it had been neglected the *Nomad* had yawed

badly. He signaled Ding-dong to come ahead slowly, and as well as he was able he kept after Nat, in a tremble of fear lest by over-eagerness he might run him down.

“Stand by with those life-rings!” he ordered curtly to the two men already rescued, who did not appear to be so much the worse for their immersion. The sailor and the man addressed as Anderson each picked up a life-ring, and, leaning over the starboard rail, eagerly scanned the water for the moment when they were to fling them out.

“Whatever made Nat take such a mad chance?” groaned Joe to himself as he steadied the *Nomad* as best he could. “But it was like him, though,” he added, with a quick glow of admiration for his young leader. “He’s the stuff real heroes are made of, is Nat.”

Suddenly the man who had been battling for life in the glare of the burning launch was seen to throw up his hands, and, with a wild cry of despair on his lips, which was echoed by his friends on the *Nomad*, he vanished.

“Good heavens!” cried Joe in an agonized voice. “Has Nat sacrificed his life in vain?”

He scanned the waters for a glimpse of his chum, but not a sign of the plucky young leader of the Motor Rangers rewarded him.

Like the man he had set out to save, Nat Trevor, too, was apparently engulfed by the seething waters.

CHAPTER VI.

SAVED FROM THE SEA

Joe, till the last day of his life, never forgot the ensuing period of time. It appeared to be years that he stood there amidst the pandemonium of the storm, with his nerves on blade edge and his heart beating suffocatingly with anxiety. The *Nomad* struggled and plunged like a wild horse, and it required all his muscular strength to hold her within control.

A sudden shout from Nate caused him to look up hopefully. "There! There they both are!" yelled the sailor excitedly.

The next instant Joe, too, saw them. Right ahead of the *Nomad* was Nat, apparently buoying up the limp form of Dr. Chalmers on the life-ring which the latter had missed, but which a lucky accident had brought within Nat's grasp at the very instant almost that Dr. Chalmers sank. Nat had seen that the only chance of saving him was to dive swiftly after him and trust to luck. He had done so, and on coming to the surface had managed to grasp the life-ring. All this, however, they did not know till afterward.

From the bridge of the *Nomad* the two spare life-rings were flung with right good will, and Nat encased himself in one of the hooplike devices. But it was not till he and his dripping companion were hauled to the *Nomad* and were safe on board that they realized how great the strain on muscle and nerve had

been. Nat swayed and would have reeled against the rail but for the young sailor from the boat, who caught him. As for the man Nat had saved, he lay exhausted on the bridge while his friend bent over him.

Luckily, Nat's youthful, strong frame was as elastic as a chilled steel spring, and, after boiling hot coffee had been poured into him till he laughingly protested that he was "a regular three-alarm fire," he was almost as spry and active as usual. Dr. Chalmers, a man of middle age, did not rally from his immersion so quickly, however. He had swallowed quantities of salt water and had had a narrow escape of being overcome altogether.

Ding-dong was summoned from his engines to look after the rescued ones as soon as Nat was ready to "trick" Joe at the wheel, and the latter, in his turn, relieved Ding-dong. Dr. Sartorius held aloof while the stuttering boy explained to his interested auditors the day's adventures and learned how they came to be in such a fix. Dr. Chalmers, who, it appeared, was an Eastern physician of note spending a short vacation at Santa Barbara, had gone out fishing earlier that afternoon in Nate Spencer's boat, the *Albicore*. His friend, Rufus Anderson, an engineer connected with the Government, had accompanied him. Time passed so pleasantly, with the fish biting their heads off, that all thought of time and distance from shore had been lost. It was not till the sun was obscured that any of the party gave heed to the weather, and then it was too late.

"We owe our lives to you boys," declared the doctor gratefully,

“and we can never repay you for what you have done.”

Rufus Anderson warmly echoed the doctor's praise, and Nate, the sailor, shyly seconded the gratitude. Dr. Chalmers had already agreed to help Nate purchase another boat in place of the *Albicore*, and so the fisherman felt happier than he might have done at the thought of his trim craft lying a blackened shell in the Pacific.

The doctor expressed great interest in Mr. Jenkins' case, and, after examining him, declared that in his opinion the surgeon of the *Iroquois* had exaggerated the nature of his injuries. In his estimation, he said, Mr. Jenkins would pull through all right. Ding-dong stole a look at Dr. Sartorius as his brother physician announced this opinion, and detected an expression of hawklike eagerness on the black-bearded man's features. He showed an interest beyond that of a perfect stranger in Dr. Chalmers' opinion.

“Then he will not die, after all?” he asked in his raspy voice, coming forward to the other physician's side.

Dr. Chalmers turned and scrutinized him quickly.

“Dr. Sartorius,” explained the other, introducing himself. “I have a professional interest in the case. You think this man will live?”

“I do, unquestionably,” was the reply of Dr. Chalmers. Ding-dong saw his eyebrows lift in astonishment at the other's tone. It was plain that he liked the black-bearded man no better than did the boys.

When Ding-dong, shortly afterward, poked his head above the companionway for a breath of air, he found that the storm was rapidly abating. In fact in the cabin it had been apparent that the movements of the *Nomad* were becoming less and less erratic and violent. He told Nat of what had occurred below, and Nat, after a moment's thought, replied:

"There's something about all this that I can't fathom, Ding-dong. In fact, things have been moving so swiftly since we left the *Iroquois* that I haven't had time to think. Of two things I'm pretty sure, though, and one of them is that Dr. Sartorius came aboard us because he didn't want Mr. Jenkins out of his sight; and the other is that he had a good reason for wanting to delay the *Nomad's* reaching port when he tampered with the engines."

"Y-y-y-you think he der-der-did it, then?" asked Ding-dong.

"Who else could have? I didn't, you didn't, and Joe didn't. The injured man certainly didn't; and, besides that, didn't Joe see his Whiskers coming out of the engine room with a monkey wrench? What was he doing in there at all if he hadn't been tinkering with the motor?"

"Ther-ther-that's so," assented the other. "It's all like a Cher-cher-Chinese puzzle. What are you going to do about it, Nat?"

"If suspicions were legal evidence, I'd hand this fellow over to the authorities as soon as we landed; but I can't do that very well. They would only laugh at us. Recollect, we've got nothing tangible to bring against the man – Hullo, Joe, what's up now?"

Nat turned quickly as Joe came on deck. His face was troubled.

“The engines are acting awfully queerly again,” he said seriously; “I can’t make out what ails them. Everything appears to be all right, but still they’re not running as they ought.”

“Guess you’d better skip below and look at them, Ding-dong,” said Nat. “No offence meant, Joe, but Ding-dong is the mechanical crank of this outfit.”

Joe and Ding-dong were below some time, during which period the black squall about blew itself out, leaving only a heavy, blind swell to tell of its passing.

When the two lads came on deck again Nat saw at once that they had bad news.

“We’re pretty nearly out of gasolene, Nat,” announced Joe ruefully; “none of us thought to look at the main tank before we started out, and now we’ve only a few gallons left. We’ve pumped that into the auxiliary, and I guess we can limp along a few knots on it.”

“Great mackerel! That’s nice!” exclaimed Nat, shoving back his cap and scratching his curly forelock, a way he had when perplexed. “This is sure our day for troubles,” he added with a grin.

“Well, gee-whillakers, I don’t see what else can happen right off,” declared Joe.

“Unless we bub-bub-blow up,” said Ding-dong ominously.

“Shucks, we haven’t gasolene enough even for that!”

“And there’s none nearer than the island,” put in Nat. “Tell you what, boys, it’s tough on Mr. Jenkins, but there’s no help for it. We’ll have to try and reach the island and then see what is best to be done.”

“Well, there’s one good thing – we have a reputable physician on board now instead of that old Sartorius.”

“Gug-gug-glory! I dur-dur-don’t believe he’s a dur-dur-doctor at all,” snorted Ding-dong.

“Unless he’s a horse doctor,” quoth Joe, “and then any self-respecting steed would kick those whiskers off him.”

“All of which doesn’t help us in solving our problem,” struck in Nat. “We’re a good long distance from the island, but at that it’s nearer than any other place where we could get gas, by my calculations. Can we make it on what we’ve got in the tank?”

“We’ve gug-gug-got to,” rejoined the *Nomad’s* engineer with conviction.

CHAPTER VII. ON "WIRELESS ISLAND."

The rugged outlines of Goat Island loomed over the *Nomad's* bow an hour or more after the conversation just recorded. But the pace of the stalwart craft was pitifully slow compared to her usual rapid mode of progression. The entire ship's company, some of them recruited under such strange circumstances, were on deck, with the exception, of course, of Mr. Jenkins and Dr. Sartorius. The latter had elected to remain below, but you may be sure that he was closely watched.

It was growing rapidly dusk. Nat noted with increasing uneasiness the slow gait of the *Nomad* and the still considerable distance to be covered by her before she reached her haven.

"I'll tell you," he said to Joe, who stood beside him, "we'll put a wireless plant on the *Nomad*, and then in future if we get stuck we can at least flash word of our plight and get aid from some source or other."

"That's a good idea," agreed Joe; "if only we had such a plant on board now we could send out a message for the gasolene boat that supplies the fishing fleet and be all right in a jiffy."

But, fortunately for the boys, their troubles for the day at least appeared now to be over. The *Nomad* made her cove without further difficulty, although, as Joe remarked, "there was hardly

another turn left in her.”

The party landed in the dinghy which had been towed safely by its stout hawser. Mr. Jenkins, thanks to the care of Dr. Chalmers, showed signs of rallying, and not long after he had been comfortably bestowed on a cot in the Motor Rangers' hut he regained consciousness. Although the boys were burning to ask questions which would aid in elucidating the puzzling problem into which they had blundered, they were warned by Dr. Chalmers not to do so at the time.

“Let us give him time to collect his thoughts and not pester him by talking now,” he said. “Since I have heard your stories, I am just as curious as you are to find out the truth of the matter, and just where this Dr. Sartorius fits into the puzzle; for I am sure that he is a factor, and no beneficent one, in the case.”

A little later Dr. Chalmers decided that it would not be necessary to remove the injured man to the mainland that night. In fact, he was inclined to think that such a course might prove harmful. They all, therefore, determined to remain on the island all night. The boys were perfectly willing to adopt this course. They were all dog tired by the strenuous day which they had passed through, as were, indeed, all of the party. Dr. Sartorius sat sullenly in one corner of the shanty all the evening, only speaking in monosyllables, but the boys did not trouble themselves about him. After a hearty supper, all hands turned in and slept the sleep of the exhausted till morning.

The first thing when he awoke Nat looked around for their

queer guest. He was not in the shanty, and, leaving the others still asleep, Nat set out on a tour of investigation. Somehow he deeply mistrusted and suspected this black-bearded stranger, and when he found him missing he at once surmised that all was not well. He bitterly regretted that they had not openly voiced their suspicions the night before, or at least kept a watch on the man. But it was too late now.

Full of apprehension, but of what he did not know, Nat hastened to the cove. The boat in which they had come ashore was gone, and, worse still, the *Nomad* was missing from her moorings!

“The scoundrel!” cried Nat indignantly. “This is some of his work, I’ll bet a dollar. Oh, what wouldn’t I give to get my hands on him! But what are we going to do now? Here we are practically marooned on this island. Thank goodness we have the wireless; otherwise we’d be in a bad fix. Nobody comes near this place but fishermen, and they don’t put in frequent appearances.”

As he hurried back to the hut, burning with indignation, Nat formed a theory concerning the disappearance of the small boat and the larger craft. It was plain that Sartorius wished to get ashore without landing with the party. Nat believed, in the light of recent events, that the man had a notion that the boys meant to communicate their suspicions to the authorities. But how he had succeeded in running the *Nomad* alone and single-handed was a mystery which was not solved till later.

When he burst into the hut, full of the story of the vanishing of

the two boats, Nat found Dr. Chalmers bandaging Mr. Jenkins' head and placing fresh dressings upon it. The bandages had been extemporized from a stock of clean linen the boys had along with them. The group within the hut was listening eagerly to something that the injured man was saying; but Nat's news, which he blurted out as soon as he entered, quite drew away attention from their wounded guest, whose hurt, it transpired, was nothing more than a bad scalp wound.

"Boys, the boats have gone!" was the way Nat announced his news.

The others stared at him only half understandingly.

"Gone!" echoed Joe, the first to find his voice.

"Gug-gug-gone!" sputtered Ding-dong.

"Do you mean they have been stolen?" demanded Dr. Chalmers.

"That's just what I do mean, sir." And Nat proceeded to impart all that had occurred, not forgetting, of course, the disappearance of Dr. Sartorius.

"Well, this is a nice kettle of fish," blurted out Joe angrily. "Oh, but weren't we the chumps to take that fellow on board! I wish we'd left him to continue his way to Mexico, and let it go at that!"

"Too late now to cry over spilt milk," declared Nat. He was going to say more when Mr. Jenkins, who had been listening to their talk, interrupted.

"Did I hear you mention the name of Sartorius?" he inquired

in a feeble voice, although one that vibrated with a keen interest.

“Yes,” said Nat, and rapidly told how they came to include the name of the black-bearded man in their conversation.

“And he was here and is gone?” demanded Mr. Jenkins so excitedly that Dr. Chalmers had to beg him to calm himself.

The others stared at Mr. Jenkins. His hands clenched and unclenched.

“Oh, the precious scoundrel!” he choked out; and then added quickly, “Look in my coat and see if you can find some papers, a thick bundle held together with an india rubber band!”

Then, and not till then, did the Motor Rangers recall what the ship’s doctor had told them about a slashed coat. In the rush of events following the start of the return run, this fact had completely slipped their minds. A glance at the coat showed a slash over the breast pocket. Inside there were no such papers as the injured man described. The pocket was empty, in fact.

Mr. Jenkins groaned when he heard this.

“Oh, why didn’t I recover consciousness sooner?” he exclaimed, lying back weakly. “That rascal has taken the result of years of work and thought with him. I am ruined!”

Dr. Chalmers happened to have with him, in a sort of pocket emergency case, some soothing tablets. He crushed one of these in a tin cup of water and gave it to Mr. Jenkins. In a few seconds he spoke to him in a quiet tone:

“Suppose you tell us what you know about this man Sartorius, and how you came to be on the same ship, and also how you met

with your accident – if it was an accident.”

“It was not an accident,” rejoined Mr. Jenkins emphatically, “the man Sartorius – who is not a doctor, but only styles himself such – came behind me on the companionway and shoved me so suddenly that I lost my balance and fell headlong. I turned in time to see him, but not to save myself. I had been on guard against attack, but not against such an attack as that. Then, having rendered me unconscious by the fall, he robbed me of the papers I have mentioned, for which he had tracked me across the continent.”

“Did you know that he was on board the *Iroquois*?” asked Nat, while the others formed an interested circle.

“Not till the ship had sailed. Then I encountered him suddenly in a passageway. From that moment I was on my guard, but, as you know, I did not succeed in warding off the attack I apprehended. In fact, I never dreamed that it would come in that way.”

“What were these papers he was so anxious to get hold of?” asked the doctor; and then, as the other hesitated, “You may speak with confidence. I am sure that no one here will disclose anything confidential you may tell us.”

Mr. Jenkins scanned all their faces eagerly. It seemed as if he wanted to satisfy himself that what the doctor had said was right, that he could rely on them to retain his secret.

“Gentlemen,” he said in low tones, “those papers were the plans of an invention which I had just brought to perfection after

years of labor and research. You have heard, of course, of the reward offered by the Government to the man who could perfect a dirigible torpedo? That is to say, a torpedo that would be under the control of the operator who sent it on its death mission, from the moment it left the side of the ship that launched it to the instant that it exploded.”

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