

Goldfrap John Henry

The Boy Aviators' Flight for a Fortune



John Goldfrap
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AËROPLANE

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CHAPTER I. – ON BRIG ISLAND

The sharp bow of Zenas Daniels' green and red dory grazed the yellow beach on the west shore of Brig Island, a wooded patch of land lying about a mile off the Maine Shore in the vicinity of Casco Bay. His son Zeb, a lumbering, uncouth-looking lad of about eighteen, with a pronounced squint, leaped from the craft as it was beached, and seized hold of the frayed painter preparatory to dragging her farther up the beach.

In the meantime Zenas himself, brown and hatchetlike of face, and lean of figure – with a tuft of gray whisker on his sharp chin, like an old-fashioned knocker on a mahogany door – gathered up a pile of lobster pots from the stern of the dory and shouldered them. A few lay loose, and those he flung out on the beach.

These last Zeb gathered up, and as his father stepped out of the dory the pair began trudging up the steeply sloping beach, toward the woods which rimmed the islet almost to the water's edge. All this, seemingly, in defiance of a staring sign which faced them, for on it was printed in letters visible quite a distance off:

PRIVATE PROPERTY

NO TRESPASSING!

Instead, however, of checking the fisherman, it caused old Zenas to break into a harsh laugh as his deep-set, wrinkle-surrounded eyes dwelt for an instant on the inscription. His jaw seemed to set with a snap, and his thin lips formed a narrow, hairlike line as a second later he saw something else. This was a stout wire fence, clearly of recent construction, which extended along the edge of the woods. Apparently it must have encircled the island, for it ran as far as eye could see in either direction.

“Waal, I’ll be dummed-gosh dummed!” snorted Zenas, his thin nostrils dilating angrily.

“Put up a fence now, have they?” he continued. “Waal, if thet ain’t ther beatingest! A passel of city kids ter come hyar and think they kin run things in Casco Bay!”

“I reckon thet fence ain’t goin’ ter hinder us powerful much, dad.”

“Waal, I swan *not*. Come on, Zeb, look lively with them pots; we’ve got ter git across ther island an’ back ez slippy ez we kin.”

But as father and son resumed their journey, the thick brush suddenly parted and down a narrow path a boyish figure came

suddenly into view. The newcomer was a tall, muscular youth, with a face tanned to a healthy brown by constant outdoor life. His clean-cut figure and frank, open countenance formed a striking contrast to Zenas' crabbed features and the shifty look of his son.

"Where do you intend going?" demanded the boy, as he halted a few paces on the opposite side of the fence.

"You know waal enough, Frank Chester, or whatever yer name is," growled out Zenas, "we're goin' across ther Island ter stow our lobster pots, just as we've bin a-doin' fer years."

"I'm very sorry. I don't want to seem unfair, but, as I explained to you the other day, this island is now private property. It was rented from Mr. Dunning of Portland on the express condition that we were not to be interfered with."

"Land o' Goshen! So ye think yer kin come hyar an' run things ter suit yerselves, do yer?"

"We rented the island for that purpose. As I said before, we are all very sorry if it interferes with your convenience; but there's Woody Island half a mile below, and closer in to Motthaven, too, why won't that suit you as well?"

"Cos it won't. That's why. Brig Island's bin here a sight longer than you er I, and it's goin' ter stay hyar arter we're gone, too."

"I don't quite see what that has to do with it."

"Waal, I do. We ain't used ter bein' dictated to by a passel of kids. I've bin usin' this island fer ten years or more. It suits me first rate, and I propose ter go on using it, and ther ain't no kids

kin stop me,” spoke Zenas stubbornly.

“Well, we shan’t keep you from it for more than a few weeks at most – at least I hope so,” rejoined Frank, with perfect good nature, “after that, although we have leased it for a year, we shall be glad to have you use it in any way you like.”

“I want ter use it right now, I tell yer.”

“Well, you can’t!”

Frank’s control of himself was beginning to ooze away in the face of such mule-like obstinacy.

“Kain’t, eh? We’ll see. You’re alone on the island ter-day, I seen ther other kids go ashore this mornin’. Come on, Zeb, climb over thet fence.”

“Thet’s right, dad,” applauded Zeb, “ef he gives yer any sass jes’ hit him a clip in ther jaw. Reckon that ’ull stop him fer a while.”

As his son spoke Zenas made as if to lay his hand on the top wire of the fence preparatory to scaling it. Frank Chester stepped hastily forward.

“Don’t try to climb that fence!” he warned. His tone was so earnest that, involuntarily, Zenas checked himself.

“Why not?” he demanded.

“Because if you do you are going to get hurt. I give you fair warning.”

“Shucks! ez if a kid could bother me. Come on, Zeb.”

As he called to his son, Zenas clapped his hand on the top wire. Zeb, with a contemptuous grimace at Frank, did the same.

“We’ll show yer – ” Zeb was beginning, when a singular thing happened.

Zenas, with a yell, sprang into the air and, tripping as he came down, alighted in a sprawling heap among the freshly-tarred lobster pots. His gray goatee wagged savagely as he lay there impotently clenching his fists, alternating this performance by vigorously rubbing his elbows. In the meantime his son, giving vent to a no less piercing cry, had executed a backward bound from the fence with as much velocity as if he had been a rubber ball.

“Ouch! What in ther name of time hit us!” he demanded.

“Dear land o’ Goshen! What was that?” shouted his parent.

Frank had some difficulty in steadying his voice to reply. The sight of the two lately militant figures sprawling there on the beach was too much for his gravity.

“*That*,” he managed to gasp out at length, “that was a *mild* current of electricity running through those wires. You recollect I warned you not to touch them.”

“You – you – you young villain!” roared Zenas, springing to his feet with great agility for one of his years, “I’ll have ther law on yer!”

“Consarn you, yes!” echoed Zeb, “assault and battery!”

“No, not batteries – a dynamo,” Frank could not resist saying. “If you think of going to law over it,” he added, more seriously, “please recollect that I warned you not to touch those wires. Furthermore, you were defiantly trespassing on private property,

although you could see that sign from quite a distance out on the water.”

The elder Daniels' face was a study at this. But his son continued to bellow angrily.

“You may hev injured dad and me fer life!” he shouted.

“Oh, no; on the contrary, a mild shock of electricity is a fine thing for the system. But,” and Frank smiled, “don't take an overdose.”

“Oh, y'er laughin' at us, are yer? Waal, maybe ther laugh 'ull be on the other side of yer face nex' time we meet.”

All this time the elder Daniels had remained silent, gathering up his scattered lobster pots. Evidently he did not meditate a second assault on the fence. Now he turned the overboiling vials of his wrath on his son.

“Pick up them pots, consarn ye!” he rumbled throatily, “and git out 'er this.”

Zeb obeyed, and then, with what dignity they could muster, the two shuffled back down the beach to their dory. Then they shoved off and began pulling for Woody Island. Frank Chester watched them in silence. But they did not look his way once during the swift row. When they landed on the distant islet, he saw Zeb turn and shake his fist in the direction of Brig Island with vicious emphasis. The elder fisherman, however, simply strode off along the beach of the adjacent island without turning.

“Well, the fence certainly served its purpose,” said Frank to himself, as he turned away; “it proved as effectual as it did that

night we used the same sort of contrivance to put to rout the rascals who wanted to wreck the old Golden Eagle. Sorry I had to give those fellows such a severe lesson, though. They liked us little enough before. They'll have still less use for us now."

He was about to retrace his steps up the path when his attention was arrested by a sudden sound – the sharp "put-put-put!" of a motor boat.

"I'll bet that's Harry, Billy and Pudge coming now!" he exclaimed. "I'll go round to the hulk and meet them."

So saying, he started off along the beach. In a few seconds he rounded a wooded promontory and passed out of sight. Right here, perhaps, is a good place to give those readers who have not already formed their acquaintance, some further idea of who Frank Chester and his companions are, and how the quartet came to be on Brig Island, off the coast of Maine, in the island-dotted Casco Bay region.

The first volume of this series related the adventures of Frank and Harry Chester, two bright, inventive New York lads of seventeen and sixteen, in the turbulent Central American Republic of Nicaragua. In this book was set down the part that their aëroplane, *The Golden Eagle*, played in the drama of revolution, and followed also the tempestuous career of their chum Billy Barnes, a young reporter whom they met in the tropics. Mr. Chester, a New York man of affairs, owned a plantation in Nicaragua, and the boys and their aëroplane were the means of saving this from the depredations of the

revolutionaries. But in an electric storm in which she was driven out to sea the *Golden Eagle* was lost. By means of the wireless apparatus with which she was equipped, the lads, however, managed to communicate with a steamer which picked them up and saved their lives.

In *The Boy Aviators on Secret Service*, the second volume of the *Boy Aviators'* series, we find them in the mysterious region of the Everglades. Once again they demonstrated – this time for Uncle Sam – the almost limitless possibilities of the two greatest inventions of modern times – the aëroplane and wireless telegraphy. In this book we related how the secret explosive factory was located and put out of commission, and what dangers and difficulties surrounded the boys during the process.

Not long after this a strange combination of circumstances resulted in the boys taking a voyage to Africa. In *The Boy Aviators In Africa* you may read how they discovered the ivory hoard in the Moon Mountains, and how the Arab slave trader, who had cause to fear them, made all sorts of trouble for them. The first aëroplane to soar above the trackless forests of the Dark Continent conveyed them safely out of their dilemmas, and indirectly was the cause of their being able to voyage back to America on a fine yacht.

The boys had figured on resting up after this, but the love of adventure that stirred in their blood, as well as their warm friendship for Billy Barnes, prompted them to take part in a cross-continent flight against great odds. The story of the contest,

The Boy Aviators in Record Flight, related stirring incidents from coast to coast. Readers of that volume will readily summon to mind the ruse by which the lads escaped the cowboys and baffled some renegade Indians and, finally, their fearful battle in midair with the sand storm.

The story of an old Spanish galleon enthralled in the deadly grip of the Sargasso Sea furnished the inspiration for the tale of the Boy Aviators' Treasure Quest. But they were not alone on their hunt for the long-lost treasure trove. Luther Barr, a bad old man who had caused them much trouble before, fitted out a rival expedition. High above the vast ocean of Sargasso weed the boys had to fight for their lives with a crew of desperate men in a powerful dirigible craft. How they won out, and through what other adventures they passed – including the surprising one of the “rat ship,” – you must read the volume to discover, as we have not space to detail all that befell them on that voyage.

Then came what was, in many respects, their queerest voyage of all – the flight above the Antarctic fields of eternal ice, in search of the goal of discoverers of half a dozen nationalities, the South Pole. The Boy Aviators' Polar Dash was a volume full of swift action and enterprise. Many hardships were endured and dangers faced, but the boys did not flinch when duty required their best of them. They emerged from the frozen regions having achieved a signal triumph, but one which would not have been possible of accomplishment without their aëroplane.

Having thus briefly sketched the previous careers of the Boy

Aviators, we shall give a short account of how they came to be on Brig Island, and then press on with our story. About a month before the present story opens then, a scientific friend of Mr. Chester's, Dr. Maxim Perkins, had called on the Boy Aviators' father and requested the aid of the young aërial inventors in some problems that were bothering him. Dr. Perkins was already an aviator of some note, but his achievements had not found their way into the newspapers as, like most scientific men, he did not care for publicity in connection with his experiments.

In common with the rest of the civilized world Dr. Perkins – horrified at a mid-ocean tragedy in which hundreds of lives were sacrificed – had set his wits to work to devise some means of life saving – in addition to the regular boat equipment – which might be easily carried by ocean liners. He was convinced that it would be feasible for vessels of that description to carry an auxiliary fleet of what he termed “dirigible-hydro-aëroplanes.” By this rather clumsy name he meant a combination of the hydroplane, dirigible and aëroplane. But although his ideas on the subject were clear enough in theory, he was rather hazy about the practical side of the matter, and this was the object of his call on Mr. Chester – to ask the aid of the Boy Aviators in carrying out his experiments.

To make a long story short, arrangements were finally completed by which the doctor had leased Brig Island, and had set up on it such sheds and appliances as would be needed by the boys in their work. These included a wireless, by means of

which communication with the mainland might be kept up – via Portland – and also a unique piece of apparatus (if such it could be called) of which we shall learn in the next chapter.

The boys had now spent two busy weeks on the island, and the work that they had mapped out for themselves was so nearly completed that they had felt justified that morning in wirelessly Dr. Perkins to come and see how things were going on. As we have seen, their stay on the island had not been altogether tranquil. The spot had been used for years by the fishermen as a sort of stowage place for their apparatus, and also, sometimes, as a summer residence. With the coming of the boys and their necessarily private work, all this had been changed, and the resentment of the fishermen had been bitter. Of all the complainers, Zenas and his son were the most aggressive, however, and had openly threatened to drive the boys off the island.

To avoid being taken by surprise the lads had rigged up the electric fence, which device, as readers of *The Boy Aviators on Secret Service* will recall, had been used by them before with success to repel unwelcome visitors.

Let us now rejoin Frank Chester as he goes to meet the approaching motor boat on which his brother Harry, Billy Barnes and Pudge Perkins, the doctor's son, had visited the mainland for provisions and mail that morning.

CHAPTER II. – THE WIRELESS

As Frank rounded the point, the waves almost lapping his feet as he edged along the rocky promontory, he came into full view of the adjunct to the little settlement which was mentioned in the preceding chapter. This was nothing more nor less than the hulk of what had once been a fair-sized schooner. But her masts had vanished, and on her decks nothing now rose above the bulwarks but a towering structure of sufficiently odd form to have set the wits of every man in Motthaven who had seen it at their keenest edge.

This structure began about amidships, where it attained a height of some thirty feet. From thence its skeleton form sloped sharply down toward the stern of the dismantled hulk, much in the manner of the “Chute the Chutes” familiar to most lads throughout the land from their having seen them at amusement resorts. The old schooner – formerly rejoicing in the name of *Betsy Jane* – had been picked up for a song in Portland by the Boy Aviators, who saw in it exactly what they needed for a bit of experimental apparatus. At their orders the inclined “slide” had been built, and when this was accomplished the craft had been towed into the cove, where it now lay anchored by a stout line, about 200 yards off shore.

As Frank came into view of the black old hull, swinging on her mooring line on the turning tide, a “Hampton” motor boat

came chugging round the *Betsy Jane's* stern. In it were three lads. The one in the bow handling the wheel is already familiar to our readers, who will at once recognize the cherubic, smiling features of the spectacled Billy Barnes. In the stern, tending to the engine – a five horse power one of the make-and-break type – was Harry Chester, Frank's younger brother, and standing amidships, waving cheerfully to Frank, was a youth best described as being “tubby” of build, with round rosy cheeks and a most good-natured expression of countenance.

This last lad was Ulysses – otherwise “Pudge” Perkins, the son of the aërial scientist who had sent the lads on their strange mission.

“Batter and butterflies!” he shouted, as the boat drew closer and he spied Frank, “how are you, Frank? Get lonely without your chums?”

“No; I rather enjoyed myself,” laughed back Frank, shouting his words across the water; “you see, while you were away I had some quiet, and a chance to work out a few problems.”

“Mumps and mathematics!” sputtered Pudge amiably, “you don't mean to say I worry you, Frank?”

By this time the motor boat had approached close to her mooring, at which swung a small boat of the dory type. The motor boat was speedily made fast, and the boyish occupants tumbled into the small boat and Harry rapidly sculled them ashore. Before leaving the motor boat some sacks of supplies had been thrown in, and the small craft was so heavily laden that

Pudge had to be sternly warned to keep still on peril of swamping it.

“Dories and dingbats! as if my sylphlike form could bother this staunch craft! Yo-ho! my lads, yo-ho! pull for the shore and don’t bother about me.”

The beach was reached without catastrophe, and while Frank helped the others unload the supplies he told them of what had occurred during their absence.

“After you left,” he said, “I got busy figuring on that plane problem. All at once I heard voices, and by listening I soon recognized them as Zenas Daniels and that precious son of his. As I knew what ugly customers they were I turned the current into the fence and sauntered down toward the shore. Sure enough it was Zenas and Zeb and they tried to rush the fence.”

Frank then went on to tell of what had happened. Shouts of laughter greeted his narrative.

“Sugar and somersaults! But I’d have liked to see those chaps do a flip-flap,” chuckled the rotund Pudge, hugging himself in his joy.

“I guess Zenas must have learned that electricity is good for the rheumatiz,” laughed Billy Barnes gleefully; “I’d like to have had a picture of them when they hit the wire,” he added, swinging his inevitable camera at the end of its carrying straps.

“It would have been worth while,” laughed Harry; “but come on, boys, let’s get this stuff up to the hut. Anything to eat, Frank? I’m hungry enough to swallow one of old Zenas’ lobster pots.”

“Sandwiches and sauerkraut! So am I,” chimed in Pudge.

“Great Scott!” cried Billy Barnes, “as if we didn’t know that. If you told us you *weren’t* hungry it would be something new.”

“Well, I don’t see where I’ve got anything on you when it comes to meal times,” retorted the fat youth.

“Only about six inches more around the waist line,” grinned Billy, dodging a blow from the fleshy youth’s fat but muscular arm.

Shouldering the supplies, which consisted of such staples as bacon, flour, sugar, rice and so forth, the lads made their way up the beach, having first carried the dory’s anchor far up above highwater mark. They took their way along the electrically-charged fence till they came to a spot where there was a gate and a switch to break the connection. Frank turned off the switch, grounded the current, and opened the gate, through which they passed, and entered on a narrow path winding up among the rocks. When they had all gone through, Frank closed the gate, snapped on the switch again and the fence became as mischievous as before.

In single file, headed by Harry, for Frank had now taken a rear place, they toiled up the steep path until, at the summit of the rocky little cliff, it plunged into the woods. Traversing these for a short distance, and always climbing upward, for the island converged to a point in the middle, they at length emerged on a clearing, evidently of nature’s workmanship, for there was no trace of recently felled trees or other human work.

The floor of this clearing was of rock, and off at one side a clear spring bubbled cheerfully over into a barrel set so as to catch the overflow. In the center of the open space stood a small but substantially-built portable house – one of the sectional kind. This formed the living quarters of the young island dwellers. Above it rose, like gaunt, leafless trees, two iron poles set thirty feet apart and stayed by stout guy wires. Between those two poles were suspended, by block and tackle, the aërials, or antennæ, by which messages were caught and sent. Within the hut was the rest of the wireless apparatus, which, with the exception of some improvements of Frank's devising, was of the portable kind – the same in fact that they had used in Florida. Outside the hut was a small shelter covering a four horse-power gasolene engine, which generated the power for the station.

As most boys are familiar nowadays with the rudiments of wireless telegraphy we are not going into technical details concerning the plant. Suffice it to say that the boys were able to converse with Portland, under favorable conditions, and judged that, in suitable weather, they had a radius of some two hundred and fifty miles.

But it was off to one side of the clearing, the side nearest to the cove, that the most interesting structure on the island was situated. This was more of a covering than a shed, for it consisted merely of a roof supported with uprights; but in bad weather canvas curtains could be drawn so as to make its interior stormproof.

This shed was now open, and under the roof could be seen what was perhaps at the moment the most unique machine of its kind in the world. Looking into that shed you would have said at first that it housed a boat. For the first object that struck your eye was a double-ended, flat-bottomed craft of shimmering aluminum metal, about thirty feet in length and built on the general lines of one of our life-saving craft. That is to say, with “whalebacks” at each end containing air chambers, and plenty of beam and room within the cockpit. A peculiar feature, however, was the addition of four wheels.

But the boat theory would have had to be abandoned the next moment, for above the hull of the whaleboat-shaped craft was what appeared to be the understructure of an aëroplane. But the planes – the broad wings – themselves were lacking. The twin propellers connected to a motor within the boat were, however, in place. Apparently they were driven by chains, similar to, but stouter than, the ordinary bicycle variety.

All about was a litter of tools and implements of all kinds. Several large frames leaning against one side of the shed appeared to be the skeleton forms of the wings which were soon to be added to the superstructure.

“Tamales and terrapins!” cried Pudge admiringly, as he gazed at the uncompleted craft, “but she begins to look like something, eh, Frank?”

“Yes,” nodded the young aviator, “but until your father arrives we cannot adjust the wings. There is a lot of theoretical work

connected with them that he will have to do. By the way, I wonder if Portland's got any answer to our message yet?"

Followed by the others, Frank entered the living hut, which proved to be a snug, neat compartment about fifteen feet in length, by ten in width. It had four windows, two on a side, and a door at one end. At the other end was the wireless apparatus, with its glittering bright metal parts, and businesslike-looking condensers and tuning coils. Along the walls were four bunks, two on a side, one above the other. In the center were a table and camp chairs, and from the ceiling hung a large oil lamp.

A shelf held a good collection of books on aëro and wireless subjects, and at one side of the door was a blue-flame kerosene stove. On the other side of the door was a cupboard containing crockery, knives, forks and cooking utensils. Altogether, if the boys had not been there for a more serious purpose, the place might have been said to form an almost ideal camp for four healthy, active lads.

"Start up the motor, Harry," said Frank, as soon as they had deposited their burdens, "and we'll try and get some track of Dr. Perkins. His answer to our message ought to be in Portland by now."

The younger Chester lad hastened outside, and soon the popping of the motor announced that it was running. Frank sat down at the key and, depressing it, sent a blue-white flame crackling across the spark gap. Out into space, from the aërials stretched above, the message went volleying. It was the call

of the Portland station that Frank was sending. He flashed it out three times, as is customary, and then signed it F-C., the latter being Brigg Island's agreed-upon signature. Then, while the others gathered round, Frank adjusted the "phones," the delicate receivers that clamp over the ear and through which, by way of the detector, any message vibrating in the air may be caught as it encounters the antenna.

Frank listened some time but – save for the conversation of two wireless operators far out at sea – he could hear nothing. With a gesture of impatience Frank began adjusting his tuning coil. All at once he broke into a smile of satisfaction. At last Portland was answering:

“F – C! F – C! F – C!”

“All right,” rejoined Frank, sending a volley of sparks crashing and flashing across the gap as soon as he could break in, “is there any answer to my message?”

“Yes. Perkins will be at Motthaven to-morrow night. He wants you to meet him,” came back the answer, winging its way over the intervening miles of space.

“Is that all?”

“That's all.”

Frank removed the “phones,” grounded his key and told Harry he could stop the motor.

“I'll be glad when the doctor does get here,” he confided to the others, after he had communicated the message, “for I'm beginning to think that we are in for some sort of trouble. Those

two Daniels are pretty influential in the village, and it only needs a word from them to turn the whole crowd against us.”

“We could stand ’em off,” bragged Pudge grandiloquently, “lassoes and lobsters, we could stand ’em off. I half wish they would come – buttons and buttercakes, but I do!” and Pudge doubled up his fists and looked fierce.

“You forget, Pudge,” said Frank, “that we are here in positions of responsibility. All this property is your father’s. It is our duty to see that no harm comes to it. A bunch of those fishermen inflamed by anger might be able to do more harm here in an hour than could be repaired in months, not to mention the cost.”

“Surely you don’t think they’d come down to actual violence, Frank?” inquired Harry.

“I don’t know. The two Daniels looked mighty savage to-day, I can tell you. If it hadn’t been for the electric fence they might have made trouble. At all events I’ll be glad to have some advice.”

CHAPTER III. – A NIGHT ALARM

After supper that night, a meal consisting of fried salt pork, boiled potatoes and some fresh fish which Frank had caught earlier in the day, the elder of the Chester lads called what he termed “a conference,” although Billy Barnes declared it was more in the nature of a “council of war.”

We are not going to detail here all that was said as it would make wearisome reading; but, after an hour or more of talk, Frank spoke his mind.

“It may be all foolishness, of course,” he said, “but I think that we ought not to leave the island unguarded to-night. Daniels and his son have had a taste of that wire fence and they may have figured out some way to get around it – it would be a simple enough matter to do, after all.”

“Well, what’s your proposal?” inquired Billy Barnes.

“To patrol the island all night, taking turns on watch. It’s not more than a mile or so all round it, and it ought to be an easy matter to keep the ground thoroughly covered.”

“Rifles and rattlesnakes!” burst out Pudge, “I thought this was to be a sort of working vacation and not a civil war.”

Frank smiled, and then assumed a graver expression as he went on:

“There is so much valuable property here which it would be easy for malicious people to injure that I wouldn’t feel justified

in leaving the island unguarded all night. What do the rest of you think?”

“Just as you do, Frank,” rejoined Harry heartily, while Billy and Pudge nodded vigorously; “we’ve got to keep a sharp lookout. I nominate myself and Pudge for the first watch – say from eight to twelve. You and Billy can go on duty from midnight till daylight.”

After some discussion this order of procedure was adopted. Promptly at eight o’clock Harry and Pudge Perkins went “on duty,” while Frank and Billy turned in to get what sleep they could. As a matter of precaution, when they came to the island, the boys had brought along a revolver, and Harry was armed with this when he went on duty. He was not, of course, to use it as a weapon of offence, but it was agreed that, in case there was any alarm during his watch, he was to fire it three times, when the others would come to his assistance.

Harry and Pudge accompanied each other as far as the gate, and then threaded their way down the path among the rocks toward the beach. A mild current had been turned on in the fence, enough to give an uncomfortable shock to any one tampering with it, but not enough to exhaust the storage batteries which supplied it.

When they reached the beach, Harry paused.

“We’d better start this patrol in opposite directions,” he said, “and then we can meet each other once on every circuit.”

“All right,” agreed Pudge, “but – pirates and parachutes –

keep a good eye open.”

“Don’t worry about me,” rejoined Harry; “so long!”

As he spoke each boy stepped off into the darkness to begin the patrol. As Harry trudged along the beach his mind was full of the events of which Frank had spoken that afternoon. Up in the lighted hut, with his companions around him, it had seemed a very remote possibility to the boy that any attack should be made on the island. But pacing along under the stars, with only the sound of his own footsteps for company, placed a very different light on the matter. What if the disgruntled fishermen should make a night descent on the island?

“This won’t do,” exclaimed Harry to himself, coming to a sudden halt in the cove opposite to which the motor boat was moored, and where a blacker patch on the dark sand showed him the beached dinghy, “it’s no use getting shivery and scared just because a couple of cranky fishermen are so sore at us. I’ve got to brace up, that’s all there is to it.”

His surroundings, however, were not calculated to soothe the nervous suspense of the lad. Except for the stars glittering like steel points in the night sky there was no light. The night was so pitchy dark, on the beach under the shadow of the trees, that he could hardly see with certainty a yard ahead of him. The surf roared hoarsely against the rocks at the point – for the tide was full, and the night wind moaned in the trees like a note of warning.

With an idea of carrying out his patrol properly, Harry went

toward the darker patch amid the gloom which showed him where the beached dinghy lay. He examined it as well as he could, and made sure that it was well above tide water. Having completed this, he paced on, and in due time heard footsteps approaching him which he knew must be those of Pudge Perkins. A minute later the two young sentinels met and exchanged greetings. Pudge had nothing to report, except that it was what he called a “creepy” job. However, he pluckily averred: “Ghosts and gibberish, Harry, I’m going to stick it out.”

“That’s right,” approved Harry, and after a few words both boys once more started out on their lonesome tours of duty.

In due course Harry again reached the cove opposite the schooner hulk, and this time, being rather tired, he decided to sit down on the beached dinghy and take a rest. But, to his astonishment, it didn’t seem to be in the place where it should have been.

“I could have sworn it was right here,” said Harry to himself, as he trudged about on his quest, “it must be close at hand. Guess I’ll fall over it and hurt my shins in a minute.”

But although he reassured himself, the boy felt far from secure in his belief. After a further painstaking search he was fain to confess – what he really believed from the first – that the dinghy which had lain there a short time before had mysteriously vanished!

“Can it be those miserable Daniels?” gasped Harry to himself. “Yes, it must be,” he went on, answering his own questions, “who

else would have done it, unless it drifted off.”

He was moving about as he spoke, and as he uttered the last words he stumbled across something that showed him very plainly that the dinghy could not have drifted away from the beach. What he had fallen over was the anchor firmly embedded in the sand, with a length of rope still attached to it.

Harry felt along the bit of rope in the darkness till he reached the end of it. Then he struck a match. In the flicker of light which followed he saw plainly enough what had occurred – the rope had been slashed through. The boy had just made this discovery when from the water he heard something that caused him to listen acutely, bending every sense to the operation.

What he had heard was the splash of an oar, and a quick exclamation of impatience, as if the rower, whoever he was, had blamed his involuntary misstroke.

“Some one’s out there, and they’re aboard the schooner, too; or I’m very much mistaken,” exclaimed Harry to himself, as, listening acutely, he caught the sound of footsteps proceeding, seemingly, by their hollow ring, from the decks of the dismantled hulk; “what will I do? If I fire the pistol I’ll scare them off, and if I don’t – ”

He stopped short. A sudden daring idea had flashed into his mind. The boy hastily slipped off his shoes and divested himself of all but his undergarments. Then, leaving his pistol on the beach, he slipped noiselessly into the bay and struck out in the direction of the schooner. The water was bitterly cold, as it

always is off the Maine coast, even in the height of summer, but Harry kept dauntlessly on, determined to brave anything in the execution of his purpose.

The hulk lay only about a hundred yards off the shore, and before long he could see her dark outlines looming up against the lighter darkness of the sky on the horizon. He fancied, but could not be certain that it was not an illusion, that for an instant he could see two forms creeping along the decks. The next moment something showed up ahead of him with which he almost collided.

Harry, with a gasp of gratitude, for the water had chilled him to the bone, recognized it as the motor boat. As silently as he could he drew himself up into it, and then, casting himself flat in the cockpit, he listened with all his might for further sounds from the schooner.

CHAPTER IV. – CUT ADRIPT

He did not have long to wait. Seemingly, whoever the marauders were – and as to their identity the lad could hazard a pretty good guess – they did not bother much about lowering their voices.

“By the jumping crickey!” he heard coming over the water from the schooner, “jiggered if I kin make out what they cal’kelated ter use this hulk fer.”

“Hush! Not so loud, pop. Ther sound carries tur’rble fur over ther water.”

“As if I didn’t know that, Zeb, but what do we care? Them kids is fast asleep, and anyhow, we cut the dinghy adrift so they couldn’t do us any harm ef they wanted to.”

“That’s right, too; but some of ’em might be prowling about. They’re up ter all sorts uv tricks. I ain’t forgot that thar fence, I kin tell yer. My arm’s a-tingling yet whar that electricity hit me.”

Soaked through as he was, and chilly into the bargain, Harry couldn’t help smiling as he heard this eloquent testimonial to the efficacy of the “charged” fence. He had caught the name of “Zeb,” too, which speedily removed all doubt from his mind as to the identity of the marauders.

“The precious rascals,” he thought, while his teeth chattered with cold, “I’m mighty glad I did swim out here, even if I am almost frozen to death. If they aren’t under arrest to-morrow it

won't be my fault.”

Little more was heard from the schooner, but from what he could catch he surmised that the two fishers were completely mystified by the craft. Presently he heard their footsteps descending the gangway and then came the splash of oars. They were dipped silently no longer, a pretty sure sign that the two rascals didn't much care if they were heard or not. After a moment the splashing sound grew more remote, and Harry knew that the two prowlers had taken their departure.

There was a scull in the motor boat and as soon as he was sure that the Daniels were out of earshot, Harry up anchored and began sculling the motor boat toward the hulk. The distance was so short that he did not want to bother to start the engine, and in a few seconds he was alongside the dark hulk. He shoved along the side till the motor boat grated against the gangway, and then, not forgetting to make the motor craft fast, he leaped up the steps, with the purpose of discovering what harm, if any, had been wrought aboard the *Betsy Jane*.

Harry knew where a lantern was kept, and descending into what had once been the cabin he began rummaging about for it. In the pitchy blackness the task took him longer than he had anticipated, but at last he found the lantern and the matches which lay beside it. Hastily striking a light he soon had the bare cabin filled with the yellow rays of the lamp. As has been explained, the *Betsy Jane* had been purchased as a sort of “trying-out” appliance for the inventions of Dr. Perkins, and therefore

the cabin contained nothing in the way of furniture. The lamp, in fact, had only been placed on board as a precaution in case a riding light was ever needed on the anchored hulk. But as she had remained at her moorings in the isolated cove this was not, of course, necessary.

A brief look about the cabin showed Harry that nothing had been molested there. In fact, as has been said, there was nothing to molest. A door in the forward bulkhead led into the empty hold, and the boy next made his way there, the lamp casting weird shadows on the timbers as he went. His steps rang hollowly through the deserted ship, and he could hardly repress a shudder as he threaded his way among the stanchions, which, like the pillars in a church, upheld the deck above his head.

Reaching what had been the forecastle of the *Betsy Jane*, Harry came to the conclusion that nothing had been damaged below. His next task was to go up on deck. His examination below decks had been painstaking, and had occupied him some time, but he was determined to make it a thorough one. The fact is that an ugly suspicion had crept into Harry's mind as he lay in the bottom of the motor boat listening to the two Daniels on board the schooner. This was nothing more nor less than a dread that they might have "scuttled" the craft. From what he knew of them the two were capable of anything, and he thought that in their rage at finding nothing on board that they could damage they might have bored holes in the schooner in order to sink her. His investigation of the hold, however, had shown him – to his great

relief – that nothing of the sort had occurred.

Coming on deck Harry made as careful a search for damage as he had done in the hold. But the inclined superstructure remained intact, and nothing indicated that the Daniels had done anything more than stroll about, trying to discover what the object of the schooner was.

So intent had Harry been on his task that he had, for the time being, completely forgotten that Pudge must be anxiously looking for him. Going into the eyes of the craft he sent a hearty hail ashore:

“Pudge ahoy! Oh-h-h-h, Pu-d-g-e!”

Then he stopped to listen intently. But no reply came to his hail. He tried it again and again, without success. Then he determined as a last resort to fire the agreed-upon three shots. He did not want to alarm his companions unnecessarily, but surely, he thought, it would be a good idea to arouse them and communicate what had occurred since he left the hut.

Up to that moment the boy had completely forgotten that he had left the pistol on the beach. He felt compelled to laugh at himself for his absentmindedness, but while the laugh was still on his lips something happened that caused it to freeze there.

A mass of cold spray was suddenly projected over the bow. At the same instant the old hulk quivered at the smart “slap” of a wave.

“Gracious!” thought Harry to himself, “the sea must be getting up. I reckon I’d best be going back ashore.”

As he made his way aft toward the gangway he found that the sea must indeed have risen since he came on board. The old hulk was rolling about like a bottle, and he had to hold on to the rail as he made his way along the decks. Getting into the motor boat under these conditions was no easy task. But it was accomplished at last.

“I guess I’ll start the engine before I cut adrift,” said Harry to himself.

Later on he was to be very thankful he did. Turning on the switch and gasolene he began to “spin” the fly wheel; but beyond a wheezy cough the motor gave no sign of responding. For more than half an hour the boy worked with might and main over the refractory bit of machinery, but to no effect. The engine was absolutely “dead.”

“What can be the matter with it?” thought Harry to himself. “It’s never acted this way before.”

He stood up, too engrossed in his problem to realize what a sea was running. Before he could recover his balance the pitching craft almost bucked him overboard.

“Gracious! the waves are getting up with a vengeance,” exclaimed the boy to himself; “I can never scull ashore in this sea. Queer, too, there, doesn’t seem to be any more wind than when I left shore. Certainly I’ve never seen the sea as rough as this in the inlet before.”

With the object of finding out what ailed the obstinate motor, he returned to the deck of the schooner where he had left the

lamp. Getting into the motor boat with it once more, by dint of much balancing and holding on he cast its rays on the single cylinder. Almost simultaneously he saw what had happened. Somebody, he had no difficulty in guessing who, had removed the sparking points. No wonder that no explosion had followed his efforts to get the craft under way.

“Well, here’s a fine fix,” thought Harry; “even if I could attract their attention ashore I’ve got no means of getting there. Oh, if I won’t get even with those Daniels as soon as I get a chance! Wonder what I’d better do?”

His first move was to clamber back on board the schooner, for the wild rolling of the motor boat, as she plunged about at the foot of the gangway, was not helpful to thought. Gaining the deck once more Harry sought out the cabin and seated himself on the edge of one of the empty bunks which ranged its sides.

Suddenly it occurred to him that he was uncommonly sleepy, and at the same time he thought that possibly it would be a good idea to pass the rest of the night in slumber. He had no watch, but he imagined that it could not be so very far to daylight. With this object in view he cast himself down in the bunk and, despite the hardness of the bed and the chilliness of his scantily clad limbs, he rapidly slipped away from his surroundings into a dreamless sleep.

When he awoke the sun was shining through the stern ports. That is, it was for one instant, and then in the next it was obscured again. Harry was enough of a sailor to know that this meant

a cloudy day, with possibly a piping wind scurrying the clouds across the sky.

“Thank goodness it’s daylight anyhow!” he exclaimed, jumping from his uncomfortable couch, with an ache in every limb in his body; “now to go on deck and attract their attention ashore.”

Utterly unprepared for the shock that was to greet him, Harry bounded up the companionway stairs and on to the deck.

Had a bomb exploded at his feet he could not have been more thunderstruck than he was at the sight which greeted him.

There was no island, no distant mainland. Nothing but miles upon miles of tumbling blue water in which the *Betsy Jane* was wallowing about, casting showers of spray over her bow every time she nosed into a billow.

Harry’s heart stood still for an instant. His senses swam dizzily. Then, with a sudden return of his faculties, he realized what had occurred.

The mooring rope of the *Betsy Jane* had been cut or had broken, and he was miles out on the Atlantic without a prospect of succor.

CHAPTER V. – ADVENTURES ON THE HULK

A sudden sharp puff of wind, followed by a heavier dip than usual on the part of the dismantled hulk, apprised the boy that both breeze and sea were increasing. Putting aside, for the moment, by a brave effort, his heart sickness, Harry ran to the rail and peered over the side. The motor boat was careering gallantly along by the side of her big consort, and the boy was glad to note that the painter still held, despite the strain.

But Harry knew, from his examination the previous night, that it would be useless to try to escape by the motor craft. She was disabled beyond hope of repair, unless he could get another spark plug. Having made sure the motor craft was all right, Harry returned to the bow and sat down to think the situation over.

It would have been a trying one for a man to face, let alone a lad; but Harry's numerous adventures had given him a power of calm thought beyond his years, and he managed to marshal his ideas into some sort of shape as he crouched under the bow bulwarks.

“Evidently the *Betsy Jane* was caught by the tide, when it turned, and carried out to sea,” he thought, “and then, when the wind got up, she drifted still faster. I wonder if her mooring rope broke or if it was cut – guess I'll take a look.”

The boy dragged inboard the end of the mooring line that still hung over the bow. One look at it was enough. The clean cut strands showed conclusively that it had been severed, just above the water line, by a sharp knife. The fact that the Daniels could not know that any one would come on board after they slashed the line did not make their act any less heinous in Harry's eyes. It had been their deliberate intention to set the schooner adrift, and they had succeeded only too well in their act of spite.

"Whatever will they be thinking on the island when they discover all this?" thought Harry with a low groan. "They'll imagine that I'm dead, or at least that some fatal accident has befallen me, and, worst of all, they have no boat to use to reach the mainland. They are just as much prisoners as I am."

Sharp pangs of hunger now began to assail the lad, and he recollected, with a thankful heart, that on board the motor boat there were the remains of a lunch they had taken ashore with them on their expedition the previous day. There was also a keg of water. Harry lost no time in descending the gangway and making his way to the locker where the food had been stored. First, however, he made a foray on the water keg. Taking out the stopper he found that it was only half full, but he slaked his thirst gratefully, taking care to use as small a quantity of the fluid as possible. He knew that before long the water might be precious indeed.

In the locker he found the remnants of the lunch. As he consumed the scraps of bread and cheese, and a small hunk of

corned beef, he recalled with what light hearts they had fallen to the meal of which he was now devouring the remains. The recollection almost overcame him. With a strong effort the boy choked back a sob and formed a grim determination not to dwell upon his miserable situation more than was possible. He felt that the main thing was to keep a clear head.

There was some spare rope on board the hulk, and with this Harry made the fastenings of the launch more secure, leading one end of the rope on board the schooner itself, and making it fast to a cleat. He felt that the craft would be more safe if attached thus than would have been the case had he depended on the gangway alone.

This done, he took a look about him. He had had a vague hope that he might sight a ship of some sort, but the ocean was empty as a desert. Not a sail or a smudge of smoke marred the horizon. All this time the wind had been steadily freshening, and Harry judged that the schooner must be drifting before it quite fast. The inclined superstructure naturally added to her "windage" and made her go before the gale more rapidly. The sea, too, was piling up in great, glistening, green water rows, which looked formidable indeed. But so far the *Betsy Jane* had wallowed along right gallantly, only shipping a shower of spray occasionally when a big sea struck her obliquely on the bow.

"If only I had plenty of food and water," thought Harry, "this would be nothing more than a good bit of adventure, but –"

In accordance with his resolution not to dwell on the more

serious aspects of his predicament he dismissed this side of the case from his mind. But as the day wore on, and he grew intolerably thirsty, the thought of what might be his fate, if he did not fall in with some vessel, beset his mind more and more, to the exclusion of all else. In the afternoon, as closely as he could judge the time, he took another drink from the fast-diminishing supply in the keg. He noticed, with an unpleasant shock, that the fluid was growing alarmingly lower. Before he took the draught he had cleaned up the remaining crumbs left in the locker, and was now absolutely without food.

The rest of that afternoon he passed watching the empty sea for some sign of a ship, but not a trace of one could he discover. Utterly disheartened he watched the sun set in a blaze of crimson and gold. The sunset lay behind him, and Harry knew by this that he was drifting east at a rapid rate. Just how rapid he had, of course, no means of calculating. Of one thing he was thankful – the sea had not increased, and the wind appeared to have fallen considerably with the departure of daylight.

“Surely,” thought the boy, “I must have drifted on the track of ocean vessels by this time. I know there’s a line to Halifax, and another to Portland, besides the coasters.”

With this thought came another. What if he should be run down during the night? The idea sent a shudder through his scantily clothed form. He knew that derelicts are often the cause of marine disasters, and during the dark hours the hulk might invite such a fate if he did not take steps to guard against it.

Accordingly he lit his lantern and hung it in the underpinning of the inclined superstructure.

“At least they can see that,” he thought, as he completed the hanging of his warning light.

Then, having done all he well could under the circumstances, Harry cast himself down in the lee of the weather bulwarks and tried to sleep. But in his scanty attire he was far too cold to do aught but lie and shiver till his teeth chattered. He determined to pass the rest of the night below, and once more sought a couch in the empty bunk. But sleep was a long time coming. Tired, excited and hungry as the boy was, he could not compose himself to slumber. Ten or a dozen times he started up and ran to the deck, thinking that he had heard the distant beat of some vessel’s engines. But each time it proved a false alarm.

At length tired nature asserted herself, and he sank to sleep in good earnest. When he awakened it was daylight, and there was an odd feeling about the motion of the *Betsy Jane*. She seemed to have ceased her rolling and pitching, and was almost steady in the water. Suddenly there came a jarring crash that almost threw Harry out of the bunk.

Much startled, he ran on deck, and found, to his astonishment, that the vessel lay right off an island. Seemingly she had grounded on a reef of rocks stretching out from the island itself. At any rate, as the waves rocked her she gave a jarring, crunching bump with each pitch of her hull. The island appeared to be a small one, and in general appearance was not unlike Brig Island. In fact, at

first Harry had thought that in some magical way the *Betsy Jane* had drifted back to that small speck of land. But a second glance showed him that the island off which the dismantled hull had grounded differed in many essentials from the one he had left. Far to the westward, about twenty miles as well as the boy could judge, lay a dim streak of dark blue that Harry guessed was the mainland. But for all the good it did him it might have been a hundred miles removed.

Harry was still gazing at the island and wondering how he could reach it before the *Betsy Jane* pounded herself to pieces on the rocks, when he started violently. The island was not, as he had supposed, uninhabited – at least, he had caught sight of a swirl of blue smoke rising from among the trees on its highest part. This meant help, companionship and food. An involuntary cry of joy rose to the boy's lips, which the next instant turned to a groan as he looked over the side of the schooner and saw that the reef on which she had struck was much too far out from the shore for him to try to swim the distance, even if a roaring, racing tide would not have made it suicidal to attempt the feat.

“Unless I can attract the attention of whoever lives there by shouting, I'm as badly off as I was before,” exclaimed Harry, in a voice made quavery by panic.

CHAPTER VI. – HARRY MEETS AN OLD FRIEND

All at once, while he was still gazing at the column of smoke shoreward, Harry became aware of a figure coming out of the woods toward the beach. He shouted with all his might, and the man who had appeared from the undergrowth waved a reply.

Then his voice came over the water.

“What’s up?”

The tone somehow was strangely familiar to Harry, and, for that matter, when he had first seen the figure of the newcomer it had struck him with an odd sense of familiarity. Suddenly he realized why this was.

“Ben Stubbs!” he yelled at the top of his lungs.

“Ahoy, mate!” came back after a pause; “who are you?”

“Harry Chester!”

“By the great horn spoon! What the dickens are you doing out there?”

Cupping his hands to make his voice carry the better, Harry hailed back once more.

“I drifted here on this hulk. Can you take me off?”

“Can I? Wait a jiffy.”

Ben Stubbs – for it was actually the “maroon” whom the boys had rescued from a miserable fate in the Nicaraguan treasure

valley – began running along the shore as fast as his short legs would carry him. Presently he vanished around a wooded promontory, leaving Harry in a strange jumble of feelings. What could the good-hearted old companion of several of their adventures be doing on this desolate island off the Maine coast? When they had last heard from him he had been running a tug boat line in New York harbor, having purchased the business with the profits made out of the discovery of the treasure trove in the Sargasso Sea.

Before a great while the man who had so opportunely appeared came into view once more. This time he was in a skiff, rowing with strong strokes toward the stranded hulk of the *Betsy Jane*. Harry watched him with eager eyes. Fast as Ben Stubbs rowed, it seemed an eternity to the anxious boy before his strangely rediscovered friend reached the side of the grounded schooner.

When he did so he hastily made fast, and was up the gangway ladder three steps at a time. Fortunately for his haste, the sea had diminished in roughness considerably, and the *Betsy Jane* lay almost motionless on the reef. Otherwise he would have stood a strong chance of being thrown from his footing. Harry was at the gangway as Ben Stubbs' weather-beaten countenance came into view at the top of the steps.

Ben seized the boy's hand in a grip that made Harry flinch, but he returned it with as strong a clench as he could. For a moment both of them were too much overcome with emotion at

the strange meeting to utter a word. It was Ben who spoke first.

“Waal, what under the revolving universe are you doing here?” he demanded.

“I was about to ask the same question of you.”

“It’s a long story, boy, and you look just about played out. What has happened? I never dreamed that you were even in this neighborhood.”

“I guess the same thing applies to me, so far as you are concerned, Ben,” rejoined Harry, between a laugh and a sob. “As for myself, I’ve been adrift all night on this old hulk. Some rascals cut her loose from her moorings at Brig Island.”

“Wow! you’ve drifted all the way from there. Why, it’s fifty miles or more away.”

“I know it. It seemed a million to me. What worries me is what the others must be thinking. They won’t know if I’m dead or alive.”

“We’ll find a way to let ’em know, never fear,” struck in Ben in his deep, rumbling voice; “but I reckon you’re hungry and thirsty?”

“Am I? Why, I could eat a horse without sauce or salt, as you used to say.”

“Then get in the skiff and come ashore. I’ve got a sort of a hut there. It ain’t much of a place, but I’ve got enough to eat and a good spring of clear water, and I can give you a suit of slops.”

“But the schooner?” demanded Harry.

“She’ll be all right, I reckon. She’s lying on a sort of sandy

ridge that runs out here. The sea's gone down so that she won't do herself any harm, and we can't do her any good right now. You see, the tide is falling. When it rises we'll try to get her off and anchor her in a snugger berth."

Harry might have argued the point, but the prospect of food and drink made so strong an appeal to him that he did not stop to waste words. Five minutes later they were rowing ashore, and, while Ben bent to the oars with a will, Harry told him in detail all that happened since they came to Brig Island, and the reason of their presence there. He knew that he was safe in confiding in old Ben.

The relation of his story occupied the entire trip to the shore, and when Ben had beached his skiff he seized Harry by the arm and began hurrying him up the beach toward a small hut, half canvas, half lumber, which stood back under the shelter of a low bluff. The boy was desperately anxious to learn the reason of Ben's presence on the island, for he knew it could have no ordinary cause. But the weather-beaten old adventurer would not allow the boy to say another word till he had clothed himself and eaten all he could put away of a rabbit stew washed down with strong coffee.

"Now, then," remarked Ben, as soon as Harry had finished, "I suppose you're a-dyin' to hear what I'm doin' on Barren Island, which is the name of this bit of land?"

"I am, indeed," declared Harry, shoving back the cracker box which had served him as a chair; "the last person in the world I

would have expected to see when the *Betsy Jane* grounded was Ben Stubbs.”

Ben chuckled.

“Allers turnin’ up, like a bad penny, ain’t I?” he said, shoving some very black tobacco into his old pipe. “Member ther time I dropped out of the sky in thet dirigible balloon?”

“Well, I should say I did,” laughed Harry; “but how you got here is past my comprehension. What became of the tug boat line?”

Ben snapped his fingers.

“All gone, my lad! Gone just like that! I reckon I’m not a good hand at business, or the crooked tricks that answers for that same. Anyhow, to make a long yarn a short one, I went on a friend’s note and he dug out. That was blow number one. To meet that note I had to mortgage some of my boats, and in some way – blow me if I rightly understand it yet – I got myself in a hole whar’ the lawyer fellers bled me till I was mighty near dry. I tried to struggle along, but it wasn’t no go. Then came a strike of tug boat hands and that finished me. I couldn’t stand the long lay off without anything to do, so I sold out for what I could get, and – and here I am.”

“I’m mighty sorry to hear that you failed, Ben,” said Harry with real sympathy in his tones, “but you haven’t said yet what you are doing here on Barren Island, as you call it.”

“I’m a-gettin’ to that, lad,” said Ben, emitting a cloud of blue smoke; “give me time. As I told you, that feller on whose note I

went, skedaddled. You see, I'd trusted him as my own brother, bein' as I knew his father when I was a miner. He – that's this chap's father, I mean – was a Frenchman, Raoul Duval was his name, and his son's name the same. Old man Duval made his pile in Lower Californy and was makin' fer his home in New Orleans when ther steamer he was travelin' on blew up, and he and all his gold dust – a whalin' big lot of it – went to the bottom.

“I never calculated to hear anything more of Duval arter this, but one day this young feller I've been tellin' you about shows up in New York and hunts me up. He tells me that he's old Raoul's son, and that he'd had a run of hard luck and so on, and wants to go into business, and if, for his father's sake, I'll help him out. I asks him how he found me out, and he says that in his father's letters home I had often been mentioned, and that when he heard of the Stubbs Towing Line he made inquiries and found that I was in all probability the same man.

“As I told you, I let him have the money. It don't matter just how much, but it was quite a bit. You see, I did it for the old man's sake. I was sorry afterward. Young Duval wasn't a chip of the old block at all. He was idle and dissipated. His business went under and he skipped out.”

“Did you lend him this money without security of any sort?” asked Harry incredulously.

“In a way, yes. In another way, no. The young chap, when he came to me, had a wild story about knowing where the steamer on which his dad lost his life had sunk. He said that from letters

written home before he left Lower Californy, he knew the old man was carrying with him, besides the dust, a fortune in black pearls. Of course, all these went down when the steamer blew up. He had tried, he said, to get a lot of folks interested in a scheme to get at the wreck and recover the dust and the pearls, but they had all laughed at him. He said if I'd give him the money he wanted he'd give me, in return, the plan of the location whar' the steamer went down."

"And did he?"

"Yes; but since he acted as he did I guess there's no more truth in his yarn than there was in anything else he told me. Anyhow, I've never bothered my head about the matter since."

"Have you got the plan?"

"Sure enough," Ben fumbled in his pocket, "here it is; it's a roughly drawn thing, as you see, but I reckon if the ship was really there it would be an easy matter to locate her bones."

Harry nodded. He was looking over the map with deep attention. It was, as Ben had said, a crudely drawn affair, and purported to have been sketched by one of the survivors of the wreck, who, of course, did not know that in the returning miner's cabin there was so much wealth.

"How did young Duval get hold of this?" he asked at last.

"He said that by chance he met a man who was the lone survivor of the disaster. This feller didn't know who Duval was, and began talking to him about the wreck. Duval, recollecting that his father had carried a sum that amounted to more than

\$75,000, was naturally interested. He asked the man if he could draw him a sketch of the scene where the steamer sank. The feller said he could, and that thar sketch is what he drew. At least that's Duval's story, and I'm frank to tell you I don't believe a word of it."

"But still you haven't told me what you are doing on this island," said Harry after an interval.

"That's so, too, lad. I got so interested in tellin' my troubles I clean forgot about Barren Island. Well, it's this way. Arter the crash I felt ashamed to show my face. Oh, all the creditors were paid up – every last one of 'em. But I felt like I was an old failure, and good fer nuthin', so I remembered all of a sudden about this island that I'd been stranded on a good many years ago. I made inquiries and found that I could live here rent free as long as I liked, with none to interfere, and so I came here. It's quiet and might be lonesome to some folks, but it suits me well enough, and I was calculatin' to spend the rest of my days here, till you came along. But I feel different now."

"How's that?" asked Harry, not knowing well just what to say to the old man who took his business failure so much to heart.

"Why, I was watching you studyin' that map. I could see by yer face that you put some stock in Duval's yarn. Ain't that so?"

Harry could not but confess that it was. The old man's story, and the map, had aroused in him the strong desire for adventure that both Boy Aviators possessed to a marked degree. Of course, from what Ben had said, Duval did not appear to be a person

on whom much reliance could be placed, but then, again, there was the map, and it at least, even if crude, appeared to have been a genuine effort to mark the spot where the wreck lay. It showed a bayou marked "Black Bayou," running back from the main stream of the Mississippi. A black dot some distance up this bayou was lettered "Belle of New Orleans," presumably the name of the steamer on which Duval met his end.

The boy was still pondering over the map when, from seaward, there came a sound that made both Harry Chester and Ben Stubbs spring to their feet.

"It's a gun!" shouted the old man, as the booming echoes died away; "may be a ship in distress."

"Hardly, in this weather," rejoined Harry, in a perplexed tone.

But Ben Stubbs had darted from the shanty and was running for the beached skiff. A minute later Harry was close on his heels, and presently they were pulling around the point, about to run into the surprise of their lives.

CHAPTER VII. – A PUZZLING PROBLEM

It is now time that we returned to the island where we left Pudge Perkins patrolling the beach, and Frank Chester and Billy Barnes wrapped in slumber. Frank had set the alarm clock for midnight, when it had been arranged that he and Billy were to turn out on patrol, and its insistent clamor had only just commenced when he sprang out of his bunk broad awake and prepared to go on duty. Billy stretched and yawned a bit before he, too, tumbled out.

“Gee whillakers!” he exclaimed, as he got into his clothes, “it seems to me that we are making a lot of fuss over nothing, Frank. I don’t believe those fellows will come near the island to-night.”

“Perhaps not; but it’s our duty to be on guard. If anything happened to Dr. Perkins’ invention now it would be almost impossible to repair it in time for the tests he wants to make.”

Talking thus the two lads got into their clothes, drank some coffee, which Frank had prepared while they were dressing, and then set out into the night. They made for the cove from which Harry had started his eventful swim.

“Best wait here till they come round,” said Frank, and he and Billy found places in the sand and made themselves as comfortable as possible till they should hear the footsteps of one

of the young sentries. They had not long to wait. Hardly fifteen minutes had elapsed before Frank's sharp ears caught the sound of some one approaching. A minute later Pudge joined them. His first words were not calculated to make the newcomers feel at ease.

"Where's Harry?" he demanded.

"Don't you know?" ejaculated Frank with considerable surprise.

"No. I've been making my patrol regularly, and the last three times I've been round I haven't met him."

Frank's face could only be dimly seen in the darkness, but all his alarm was plain enough in his next words.

"What can have become of him?"

"Maybe he took the dinghy and decided to look over the motor boat and the hulk," suggested Billy.

"That's easy enough to find out," declared Frank, starting for the place where the dinghy had been beached. A moment later he stumbled over the anchor and, closely following this, by the aid of a lighted match, he made the discovery that the rope had been slashed.

"Harry never took that dinghy," he exclaimed apprehensively, "there's been some crooked work here."

"Thunder and turtles! What do you mean?" gasped Pudge, fully as anxiously.

"That some one has landed here and stolen the dinghy and taken Harry along with them. I can't think of any other

explanation. Harry would never have cut that rope.”

“You mean he’s been carried off?” The question came from Billy Barnes.

“I can’t think of any other explanation. Pudge, did you hear anything that sounded suspicious?”

“Oilskins and onions, no! Not a sound. Let’s fire a pistol and see if we get any answer.”

“That’s a good idea, Pudge – Great Scott!”

“What’s the matter?” demanded Billy Barnes, as Frank broke off short and uttered the above exclamation.

“Look here! Harry’s clothes! Wait till I get a light. There! Now, see all his outer garments and his pistol lying by them.”

“Gatling guns and grass hoppers, if this doesn’t beat all.”

“He can’t have been carried off, then,” burst out Billy, “but if he wasn’t, how did that dinghy rope come to be cut?”

Frank made no answer at the moment. The discovery of Harry’s clothes on the beach had put a dreadful fear into his mind. What if the boy had heard a disturbance on the hulk or on the motor boat and, having swum off to see what was the trouble, had been seized with a cramp and drowned?

But Frank firmly thrust the question from him the next minute. Such thoughts were by far too unnerving to be dwelt on. The others remained silent. They seemed to be waiting for Frank to speak. Presently the words came.

“It’s too dark to see anything out there,” said the boy, in as firm a voice as he could command. “Let’s fire three shots – the

signal we agreed upon – and then if Harry is on the hulk or the motor boat he will be sure to answer them.”

The others agreed that this seemed about the best thing to do, and Pudge, taking Harry’s discarded weapon, fired it three times. Then came a long pause, filled with an ominous silence.

“Try again,” said Frank in a strained voice. Once more three sharp reports sounded. But again there was no answer.

“That settles it,” declared Frank solemnly; “something has happened to Harry. We must get out to the hulk and to the motor boat.”

“How? The dinghy’s gone, and – ”

“I’m going to swim for it.”

Already Frank had thrown off his outer garments. On the beach lay a balk of timber which they sometimes used to tie the dinghy to. Frank now ordered his companions to help in rolling this down to the water.

“I’m going to use it as a help in swimming out there,” he said; “the water’s pretty cold, and I don’t want to risk a cramp.”

“Wait till daylight, Frank,” urged Billy; “it won’t be long till dawn now, and – ”

But Frank cut him short abruptly.

“My brother’s out there somewhere,” he said in a sharp, decisive voice, “and I’m going to find out what’s happened to him.”

A minute later Frank was in the water pushing the balk of timber before him and heading, as nearly as he knew how, for

the spot where the hulk and the motor boat had been moored.

It was more than half an hour before Billy and Pudge saw him again. Then he reappeared, chilled through and shivering in every limb. His first words almost deprived his companions of breath.

“They’re gone!” he exclaimed.

“What!” the exclamation came from both Billy and Pudge simultaneously. They guessed by some sort of intuition what Frank referred to.

“Yes, they’re both gone,” repeated Frank; “the *Betsy Jane* and the motor boat.”

“Are you sure you’re not mistaken, Frank?” inquired Billy, unwilling to believe the extent of the catastrophe that had overtaken them.

“I’m as sure that they’re gone as I am that I am standing here,” was the reply. “I cruised about on my log for quite a radius, and couldn’t discover a sign of them. I found the motor boat’s buoy, though. She had been untied by some one.”

“But the *Betsy Jane*? Schooners and succotash! The *Betsy Jane*!” broke in Pudge.

“Gone, too,” Frank’s voice broke, “but I wouldn’t care about either if I only knew what had become of Harry.”

“Come on up to the hut and we’ll have some hot coffee and talk it over,” said Billy, who saw that Frank, besides being almost numb with cold, was half crazy at the mystery of Harry’s fate.

Frank suffered himself to be led up to the hut and the rest of the night was passed in speculation as to the fate of the missing

boy. All three of the lads were pretty sure that the two Daniels had had a hand in the night's work somehow, but they were far from guessing what had actually occurred.

Soon after daylight the wireless began working. Dr. Perkins notified them from Portland that he expected to arrive that afternoon at Motthaven, and wished them to meet him. Frank found some relief for his wrought-up feelings in informing the inventor of what had occurred.

“Will charter fast boat and be there with all speed,” came the reply through the air; “make the best of it till I come. Am confident that everything will come out all right.”

And with this message the “marooned” trio on the island had to be content. The day was passed in making a careful survey of the island to discover, if possible, some trace of the marauders. But none was to be found. The tide had even obliterated any footmarks they might have left in the damp sand. Thoroughly disheartened and miserable, the boys ate a scanty lunch and then sat down to await the arrival of Dr. Perkins.

It was sundown when a fast motor boat appeared to the southward, cleaving the water at a rapid rate. A quarter of an hour later Dr. Perkins was hearing from the boys' own lips the strange story of their adventures of the past day and night.

CHAPTER VIII. – THE DERELICT DESTROYER

Assuredly it was a surprising sight that greeted the eyes of Harry and Ben Stubbs as the latter pulled the skiff around the point. Not half a mile away lay a dull, gray-colored craft like a gunboat, with the Stars and Stripes floating from her stern. From her bow a puff of smoke was drifting away, showing that she had been the craft that had fired the shot which had aroused them.

But what could she be doing? Above all, why had the shot been fired? Harry's eyes furnished the answer as he saw that part of the rail of the schooner was missing, a jagged break showing where it had been torn away.

"Great guns!" shouted Ben, "they've bin firin' at your old hulk."

As he spoke there was a flash from the side of the lead-colored craft, and a projectile shrieked by above the pair in the boat, causing them to duck involuntarily.

"Cracky!" shouted Harry, "I've got it. That craft is a derelict destroyer. One of Uncle Sam's craft whose duty it is to put obstructions to navigation out of the way."

"You're right, boy, and they are bent on sending that there *Betsy Jane* to the bottom."

"We must stop them," ejaculated Harry excitedly; "that

schooner is wanted by Mr. Perkins to use in his experiments. That's why he had the runway built. We must signal them somehow."

"No need to, lad. See, here comes a boat."

Sure enough, as he spoke a cutter was lowered from the warlike-looking vessel's side, and before long, impelled by muscular arms, it was flying over the water toward the hulk.

"Pull round and meet them," suggested Harry.

But Ben was already doing that very thing. So fast did the government cutter approach that just as the skiff was rounding the stern of the ill-used *Betsy Jane*, the former craft, with a dapper young officer in the stern, was drawing alongside the hulk.

The astonishment of the officer was great when Harry explained matters.

"It's lucky that I decided to make an examination into the effect of the shots already fired before I finished her up," he laughed. "I am in command of the United States derelict destroyer *Seneca*, yonder. We've just despatched an old hulk some miles out at sea, and when, on our return down the coast, we saw your old hull, we thought it was a good chance to try out a new kind of gun we have to despatch these menaces to navigation."

"I'm glad we heard your first shot in time to explain matters," said Harry; "this craft belongs to Dr. Perkins, the aëronautical inventor, who wishes to use it in some experiments. As I told

you, I unfortunately drifted to sea in it when some rascals cut the rope.”

The officer sympathized to the full with Harry and offered to give him a spark plug for his motor boat from a supply carried for a similar craft on board the *Seneca*.

“But,” he continued, “I’ve got a better plan than that. I’m bound down the coast. I know Dr. Perkins slightly and should be glad to do him a service. Why not accept a tow from me? I’ll get you to Brig Island by nightfall anyway, and that’s much quicker than you could tow this hulk with the motor boat, even if you *could* get her off the sand.”

Harry gladly agreed to this arrangement. A line was made fast to the *Betsy Jane* and affixed to the towing bits of the derelict destroyer. The tide by this time had turned, and after a short struggle the *Betsy Jane* once more floated in deep water.

“I don’t know if this is exactly regular,” remarked the young officer in command, when the hulk lay bobbing astern of the trim and trig government craft, “but I guess it’s all in the line of duty. So come on board.”

Harry and Ben were in the skiff alongside the *Betsy Jane* when this offer was made.

Without hesitation Harry stepped upon the companionway. He turned to Ben, and was about to bid that veteran adventurer good-by, with a promise to visit Barren Island in the near future, when, to his astonishment, Ben calmly hitched his skiff alongside the motor boat and stepped up after him.

“I reckon I’ve had about enough of that island,” he said; “I’m a-goin’ to ship with you on this cruise if it’s agreeable.”

“Agreeable?” laughed Harry. “Why, Ben, you are as welcome as the flowers in May. But haven’t you left a lot of stuff behind on the island?”

“Nothing that ’ull hurt. The only other suit I own you’ve got on, and funny enough you look in it, too,” and Ben chuckled; “as for the hut and what grub’s left, and so forth, any one’s welcome to ’em that takes a fancy to ’em. I’ve got a bit left in the bank yet, and I guess I can afford a new outfit anyway, so heave ahead, Mister Skipper, as soon as you’re ready.”

The officer, who had watched this scene in some astonishment, broke into a laugh.

“I see you are an individual of impulse,” he said, “but if you want to go along it will spare my sending a man on board the schooner to help our young friend.”

“Waal, then, it’s an arrangement that’s agreeable to all parties,” rejoined Ben, lighting his pipe; “so that’s all settled.”

A short time later the *Seneca* moved ahead, at first slowly, and then faster, while the wandering *Betsy Jane* followed docilely after her through the now calm sea. True to Lieut. MacAllister’s promise, they were off Brig Island by sunset. As deep water extended close inshore, the derelict destroyer was enabled to tow the hulk almost up to the boys’ “front door,” so to speak, and from the beach a little group set up a loud cheer as the *Betsy Jane*’s spare anchor rattled down and she swung at rest.

The presence of the little party to witness the arrival is due to the fact that Lieut. MacAllister, who knew from Harry that there was a wireless on the island, had kept his operator busy sending "bulletins" to Dr. Perkins all the way down the coast; and so, when first the *Seneca's* smoke streaked the horizon, all was ready to give the returned wanderer a big reception.

The *Betsy Jane*, having been safely anchored, the *Seneca*, with three toots of her siren, departed on her way, while Harry and Ben lost no time in tumbling into the skiff and rowing ashore. To describe what took place then would take up a lot of space without giving any clearer picture of the reunion that each of you can imagine for himself.

Readers of the former volumes of this series know how highly the Boy Aviators regarded Ben Stubbs, and after a short conversation with him Dr. Perkins came to share their good opinion of the rugged old adventurer. It would be impossible to tell with accuracy how many times that night Harry's story was told, and how many times Frank and the others repeated the tale of their anxious hours while he was missing. The first wireless flash from the *Seneca*, Frank described as "the best thing that ever happened." This opinion the others heartily echoed.

"Well," said Dr. Perkins, as at last they made ready to "turn in," "all is well that ends well, and to-morrow I have an announcement of some interest to make to you lads. From my inspection of the work done so far on the '*Sea Eagle*,' as I have decided to christen her, I think that within a few days we can

take her on her trial trip.”

“Anchors and aëroplanes!” shouted Pudge, in high glee, “I book passage right now!”

“And I – and I – and I,” came from the others, while Ben Stubbs inquired plaintively if there would be room for him.

CHAPTER IX. – THE FLIGHT OF THE “SEA EAGLE.”

Having already given a brief description of Dr. Perkins' *Sea Eagle*, it would be wearisome to dwell in detail on all that was done during the next week to put that craft in shape for the final tests, upon which so much depended. It may be said here, though, that besides a visit paid to Motthaven in an effort to secure the apprehension of the two Daniels, a search was prosecuted for the missing dinghy. Neither mission proved successful.

The Daniels, having discovered that Harry was on board the *Betsy Jane* after they cut that craft loose, had vanished from the little community. As for the dinghy, it was supposed that they had taken that small craft with them. At any rate, it was impossible to get any news of their whereabouts on shore. This may be attributed to a distinct prejudice felt by the fishing community against the dwellers on Brig Island. Your down-easter is inquisitive to a degree, and the secrecy under which operations on the island were carried on was felt as a distinct affront to the little town. So therefore, although the local authorities promised every co-operation in seeking out the Daniels and punishing them for their outrageous conduct, it may be doubted if the efforts went much further than the mere assurance.

But after all, in the rush of interesting work that was now on

hand, the Daniels were almost forgotten. The *Betsy Jane* had been towed round into the nearer cove, where she could be constantly watched, and the motor boat was used in the operation, the officer of the derelict destroyer having fulfilled his promise to furnish the boys with a new spark plug for the engine in place of the one taken by the marauders.

The morning after Harry's return to the island Dr. Perkins had laid down a systematic plan of action. Frank and Harry were assigned to aid him in giving the finishing touches to the *Sea Eagle*, while his son and Billy Barnes were set to work with axes to clear a sort of runway down to the beach. Both Billy and Pudge would much rather have had a hand in the mechanical part of the work, but they pluckily went ahead on their designated duty and stuck to it till a broad path had been cleared from the summit of the island to the margin of the beach.

When this "roadway" through the brush had been cleared, two lines of planking, firmly nailed to stout supports, were run down on each side of it, forming a sort of railway, similar to those from which vessels are launched.

It was down this runway that it was designed to introduce the *Sea Eagle* to her initial plunge. At last the day arrived when all was complete, and the *Sea Eagle* was pronounced fit for the test. During the night before this event not one of the boys got more than half his usual allowance of sleep. In fact, it is doubtful if Dr. Perkins enjoyed much more repose.

By earliest dawn they were out, to find every promise of a

glorious day. Breakfast that morning was a hasty apology for a meal, and hardly had it been gulped down before all hands were in the *Sea Eagle's* shed. As has been said, the boat-like underbody of the craft had been mounted on a wheeled frame before it was assembled. All that had to be done then to get everything in readiness for the final test was to make fast a block and tackle to a stoutly rooted tree, and then wheel the *Sea Eagle* to the top of the inclined runway.

When the odd-looking craft was safely poised on the top of the rails the loose end of the tackle was made fast to the stern of the substructure, and Billy, Pudge and Harry were delegated to "belay" the rope as required. Frank and Dr. Perkins seated themselves in the "boat," and at the words "Let her go!" the *Sea Eagle* in her wheeled frame began her descent down the runway. By means of the tackle the three boys at the summit of the incline easily controlled the novel craft's descent, stopping from time to time while Dr. Perkins and Frank made a survey to see that all was going well.

"Bunting and buttercakes!" grumbled Pudge, as the boys alternately "let go" and "hailed in" on the tackle, "I thought a launching was more of a gala event than this."

"I guess the doctor is too anxious to test out the *Sea Eagle* to bother with the trimmings," laughed Harry; "it's *results* that he's after."

As a matter of fact, the launching of the *Sea Eagle* was a very mild affair compared with what might have been expected. Had

the villagers ashore known of it, doubtless a small fleet of boats would have been lying off the cove to witness it, but it was for that very reason that the deepest secrecy had been observed, and that the early hour had been chosen. As Dr. Perkins said, he “didn’t want any fuss and feathers” made over what was merely, after all, an experiment.

The rolling glide down the runway was made without incident, and at last the bow of the *Sea Eagle’s* “hull” struck the water. A cheer went up then that, rang shrill and clear out over the calm sea. Even Dr. Perkins joined in the enthusiasm, as well he might, for the goal of his ambition was in sight at last.

The *Sea Eagle* had been sent on her initial voyage without the aeroplane wings or the auxiliary lifting bags being attached. It was desired, first of all, to try out her qualities as a water skimmer. As soon as she was fairly afloat, the wheeled carriage on which the descent had been made was drawn ashore. Having been weighted before the start was made, it of course sank under the *Sea Eagle* when the sea and air craft floated, thus allowing it to be reclaimed with ease.

“Looks like a butterfly with its wings clipped off,” commented Billy Barnes as, with the others, he hastened to the beach as soon as their task was over.

Indeed, the odd-shaped hull, with its naked frame and two gaunt aerial propellers, did look strangely incomplete. But the boys knew that the wings were all ready for instant attachment. In fact, it was one of the features of the *Sea Eagle* that the craft

was capable of being taken to pieces and put together again with very little loss of time or labor.

As the hydroplane portion of the *Sea Eagle* floated clear of the weighted frame in which it had made its journey to the beach, Frank looked inquiringly at the inventor. His hand was on the self-starting device which put the powerful motor in operation. Dr. Perkins was actually pale, and Frank could see that his strong hand shook perceptibly as he nodded his head.

But he mastered his nervousness quickly, and, grasping the steering-wheel in a firm grip, he spoke:

“You can start up now,” he said.

Frank turned the starting handle, admitting a charge of gas to the cylinders. Then he pressed a button and instantly the motor responded with a roar and a series of explosions, like those of a battery of gatling guns going into action. Having started it he admitted gasoline, and adjusted the carburetor till the cylinders were all working steadily.

Close to Dr. Perkins' hand was a lever. This, when moved, “threw in” the clutch connecting the motor with the driving mechanism. Directly Frank had finished tuning up the motor Dr. Perkins' hand reached for the lever. He jerked it nervously back. There was a whirr and a buzz, as the chains whirled the twin propellers round, and at the same instant the *Sea Eagle* darted forward like an arrow from a bow.

Faster and faster she went, getting up speed with seemingly marvelous rapidity. But instead of driving deeper into the water,

under the pressure of the aerial propellers which rushed her forward through the atmosphere, the faster the *Sea Eagle* was driven the more lightly did the craft skim the surface of the water, till at top speed – 2,000 revolutions a minute – her bottom barely touched the water. This was owing to the peculiar construction of the hull, which was designed so as to “plane” the water in exactly the manner it did.

Cheer after cheer broke from the lads on shore as they saw the swift craft dart off, slicing the tops of the small waves like a cream skimmer. Dr. Perkins circumnavigated the island three times before he gave the signal to Frank to slow down. Then, releasing the clutch, the inventor allowed the *Sea Eagle* to come to rest, with its bow almost touching the beach.

“Now we will have a weight test,” he announced; “come on, boys.”

The lads ashore surely needed no second invitation. Without bothering to remove shoes or stockings they waded into the water and out to the *Sea Eagle*’s side. In less time than it takes to tell it they were swarming over the side of the cockpit and struggling for positions near the engine. But Dr. Perkins made them arrange themselves so that their weight would be evenly distributed. Ben Stubbs and Harry sat in the extreme stern, while Pudge and Billy occupied opposite seats amidships.

This done, off darted the *Sea Eagle* once more, and speedily set at rest all doubts as to her capability to “plane,” or skim the water, under an added load.

“It’s like riding on a floating island over a sea of raspberry ice cream soda,” declared Billy, when he was asked later to describe his sensations.

But a severer test awaited the *Sea Eagle*, namely, the trying out of her capacity actually to rise into the air. The craft was run partially ashore, and the great wings bolted in place and the stay wires adjusted. The stay wires were tightened by turn buckles till they were taut as fiddle strings, assuring stability of the wings. But in addition the wings were, of course, partially supported on the light but strong skeleton framework before noticed.

Much to the disappointment of the others, only Frank and Harry Chester and Dr. Perkins were to participate in the flying trials. But they took it all in good part, being promised rides later if the tests were successful. As before, the *Sea Eagle*, after she had been backed off and the propellers started, skimmed along the top of the water like a flying fish. But all at once the watchers on shore saw her rise bodily from the water and soar upward into the air. Higher and higher went the craft, gliding like a gull through the ether. It was an inspiring sight, and a perfect tornado of yells broke from Ben Stubbs, Billy and Pudge. But those on board the *Sea Eagle* could not hear the sounds of enthusiasm above the roaring of the motor.

Under Dr. Perkins’ skillful guidance the *Sea Eagle* climbed the aerial staircase till a height shown by the barograph to be almost 4,000 feet had been attained.

“Now to test the buoyancy apparatus,” cried the doctor

suddenly. "Shut off power, Frank."

Frank, who knew what was coming, obeyed the order and turned a valve admitting the pure hydrogen gas from one of the cylinders into the buoyancy devices. Instantly the upper wings swelled, till they resembled puffed-out mattresses more than anything else, and the "volplaning" downward movement was perceptibly checked. But, setting the descending device, Dr. Perkins headed the *Sea Eagle* for the water, and, skillfully manipulating the craft, landed it as lightly as a drifting feather on the water by the hull of the *Betsy Jane*.

Now came a further trial of the capabilities of the wonderful new craft which, so far, had proven such a success. Dr. Perkins set the planes in a rising position and allowed the *Sea Eagle* to hover above the *Betsy Jane*, like the bird for which the aerial craft had been named. Then suddenly he began a rapid descent, landing finally on the very summit of the inclined runway before mentioned. The sides of the *Sea Eagle* were equipped with large metal hooks, which were hastily thrown out by the boys and attached to four "eyes" arranged to receive them.

When this had been done the suction pump was set to work, and the inflated wings emptied of the gas, which was forced back into its receiver, and the valve closed. It was calculated that less than two per cent of the gas was lost during the process. The *Sea Eagle* was now once more a simple hydroplane, without any buoyancy device.

At a word from Dr. Perkins the hooks which had held the

machine in place were disengaged, and instantly the craft began to glide down the runway. Half way down the engine was started, and when the graceful craft reached the abrupt end of the incline, the *Sea Eagle* went soaring off into space like a huge white-winged bird. This test was regarded by Dr. Perkins as the most important, for it proved the entire practicability of launching the *Sea Eagle* from a ship far out on the ocean.

After circling in the air a few times the tests were concluded by a rapid drop toward the earth right above the summit of the island. Just as it seemed as if the new craft must end her career by being dashed to bits against the construction shed, a skillful twist of the steering device sent her soaring upward once more. Two more swinging aërial loops were described, and then, with hardly a jar or vibration, the *Sea Eagle* was brought to rest by her inventor, almost in front of the shed where she had been assembled.

As the thrilling and wonderful trip was concluded, the boys came pressing about Dr. Perkins, showering congratulations and good wishes.

“Why, one could fly across the ocean in such a craft,” declared Frank enthusiastically.

The others laughed, but, to their astonishment, Dr. Perkins looked perfectly serious.

“I have a long trip in view,” he said, “a flight that will test every wire and bolt in the *Sea Eagle’s* construction. I did not announce this before for I wished first to see if everything

worked satisfactorily.”

“No doubt about that,” said Billy Barnes with enthusiasm. He had been dodging about the great flying machine, taking photos from every possible angle.

“No,” admitted Dr. Perkins; “I must say that so far the *Sea Eagle* is all that I could desire. But the final test will put that beyond the shadow of a doubt. Do you boys wish to undertake a long trip?”

“Cookies and cucumbers! Do we!” roared Pudge, as the others pressed eagerly about to hear the unveiling of the doctor’s plan.

CHAPTER X. – “C. Q. D.!”

But they were compelled to curb their impatience till that evening after supper, for the doctor set every one busily to work “stabling” the *Sea Eagle* and attending to the engines after the hard test they had undergone. Every part was carefully gone over, and it was found that despite the strain of the novel craft’s first try-out, nothing save a few minor adjustments were required.

“Now, dad,” said Pudge, after the dishes had been washed and Ben had his pipe going, and the others were perched on the edge of the lower bunks, like so many birds on a rail, “now, then, dad, we are ready to hear your plans for that cruise.”

Dr. Perkins smiled.

“I’m afraid, my boy,” he said, “that you are in for a disappointment. While I thoroughly believe the *Sea Eagle* is capable of conveying our whole party through almost anything, I am unwilling to place too great a burden on her at her first long-distance trial.”

Pudge’s face lengthened.

“Oceans and octopuses!” he groaned, “I s’pose I’m to be left behind, as usual.”

“I’m afraid it will be necessary,” was the reply; “you see, there will only be room under my present plan for experienced navigators. But not to keep you in suspense any longer, my present plan is to cruise down the coast to Florida, round that

peninsula, and then fly up to New Orleans, and then possibly I might test out the *Sea Eagle* still further on a flight up the Mississippi.”

“Wow! And we’re to miss all that?”

“Not *all* of it, Pudge,” smiled the doctor. “I was planning to send you and Billy on ahead to meet us at New Orleans and make arrangements for our arrival there.”

“Cookies and catamounts! That’s not so bad. I’ve always longed to see New Orleans. But, then, would you take us with you up the Mississippi?”

“If we go – yes.”

“Look a-here,” struck in Ben’s bass voice at this point, “I don’t want to butt in, or nothing like that, doctor; but this here is a cruise that just suits me. Would you have any objection if I went along with ther boys ter New Orleans?”

“Why, I hadn’t thought of it,” confessed Dr. Perkins.

“You see, I’ve got some partic’lar business down that way,” said Ben, with a portentous wink at Harry; “ain’t I, Harry?”

The boy addressed instantly guessed that Ben referred to the supposed treasure trove lying at the bottom of the Black Bayou. Now, in the rush of events following Harry’s return from his strange cruise on the *Betsy Jane*, he had quite forgotten about Raoul Duval’s map. But now it flashed back on him, and the recollection caused him to flush with excitement.

Dr. Perkins looked puzzled, while a glance of intelligence shot between the grizzled old adventurer and the boy.

“Have I got your leave to tell about the sunken steamer?” inquired Harry.

“Sure. Heave ahead, my boy,” was the hearty answer; “I was never much of a hand at spinning a yarn.”

“Pirates and petticoats! What’s all this about a yarn and a sunken ship?” demanded Pudge.

“Sounds like some fresh adventure. Anything like the Buena Ventura cruise?” asked Billy Barnes, referring, of course, to their experiences in the Sargasso Sea.

“I hope not,” laughed Harry. “No, this is a much tamer affair,” he continued. “Ben, here, thinks that he knows of a craft sunk in a bayou off the Mississippi, on board of which is a small fortune in gold dust and black pearls.”

“Gold dust and black pearls!” cried Billy Barnes. “Wow! that sounds like a regular story.”

“Suppose we let Harry heave ahead, as Ben calls it, and tell us what all this is about,” suggested Frank quietly. But his eyes were shining. He knew that what Harry was about to communicate must be of deep interest from the manner in which the boy had spoken.

“Yes, let us hear the story,” said Dr. Perkins; “since we plan to be down in that region, anything of interest to be investigated will add to the pleasure of the trip.”

Thereupon Harry, without further delay, plunged into the narrative as Ben had related it to him. He was interrupted from time to time by excited exclamations, but at last he finished his

narration and then, turning to Dr. Perkins, he said:

“What do you think of it, sir?”

“Aye, aye,” growled out Ben, “supposin’ the yarn is true, have I got a legal right to the stuff?”

“Undoubtedly, if you have papers assigning the claim to you,” said Mr. Perkins, after a moment’s thought.

“Oh, I’ve got them fast enough. I was goin’ to chuck ’em away, but I thought better of it. Glad I did now, but you see I never thought I’d have a chance to go down there.”

Ben reached into his pocket and drew out a battered, brown leather wallet. From it he produced Raoul Duval’s promise to deed him his (Duval’s) interest in the supposed treasure chest, providing the loan Ben had made the mining man’s son was not repaid. He handed the document to Dr. Perkins, who perused it with knitted brows.

“This certainly appears to give you a legal claim to whatever may be of value in the late Duval’s effects,” he said.

“Then you think it is worth looking into?”

“By all means. While the story sounds fanciful to a degree, it is not much more so than plenty of recorded cases. At all events, no harm can be done by trying to locate the wreck, and it may be the means of rehabilitating your fortunes.”

“I dunno what that means,” grinned Ben, “but if it signifies that I’m to get some money out of the cruise, I’m willing right now to split it up any way it suits you.”

“We can talk about that later,” said Dr. Perkins, with a smile

at the old man's enthusiasm; "now would you mind letting me have a look at that map to which Harry has referred?"

"Here it be," grunted Ben, once more diving into the wallet and producing the map that Harry had looked over on Barren Island.

"At any rate, this looks definite enough," declared Dr. Perkins after a careful examination of it. "Of course, as this Duval appears to be a thorough rascal, he may have 'cooked this up,' as the saying goes, in order to induce you to make him a loan. But certain things about it make me believe that it may be genuine. I recall reading some time ago a newspaper account of mysteries of the Mississippi, and among them was an account of the serious disaster to the *Belle of New Orleans*, so, at any rate, that part of the story is authentic enough."

"Meanin' it's true," murmured Ben. "Waal, if you'll help me we'll soon find out the truth of it, or otherwise."

"As I said," rejoined Dr. Perkins, "I had intended to cruise up the Mississippi from New Orleans. What you have told us furnishes us with a distinct object in making the trip, and," he added with a smile, "I suppose the spice of adventure about it does not displease the lads here."

Frank was about to reply when, from the wireless table, there came a queer buzzing sound from an instrument which the boy had connected with his detector.

"Hullo! some one is sending out a message," he exclaimed, "and our wires have caught it. Wonder what it can be."

The boy rose and went over to the wireless table. Seating himself on the stool in front of the instruments he adjusted the “phones” and began putting his variable condenser in tune to catch whatever message was pulsing through the air.

“What’s coming?” demanded Harry, as the instruments began to crackle and snap.

“Don’t know yet,” spoke Frank, again changing the capacity of the condenser; “looks as if – ”

He ceased speaking suddenly. Sliding his hand across the table he made an adjustment to catch longer sound waves. Instantly a hail of aërial dots and dashes came pattering against his ear drums, like rain on a window pane.

With startling suddenness Frank sensed the meaning of the storm of desperate flashes.

“C-Q-D! C-Q-D! C-Q-D!”

“Some one out at sea is calling us in distress!” he cried loudly. The others, brim full of excitement, rose and crowded about him. But Frank waved them back.

“No questions yet, please!” he said sharply, and then bent all his faculties to catching the voice out of the black night.

CHAPTER XI. – “GOOD LUCK!”

The silence in the hut was absolute as Frank bent low over his instruments. Even Pudge was subdued for once. There is something thrillingly dramatic to the most phlegmatic of temperaments in the idea of a wireless call for aid. Across unknown miles the message comes winging through the air – an appeal out of space.

Of course, the others could not catch what was coming, for the whisper of the wireless waves sounds faint and shadowy even to one with the “phones” clasped to his ears. But Frank’s manner showed plainly enough that, whatever was winging its way to his organs of hearing, was exciting to the last degree.

Suddenly the boy switched to his transmitting apparatus. With his helix he began attuning the length of his sparks, while the snake-like blue flame hissed and crackled across the “high-efficiency” spark gap. It looked like a living thing of lambent fire, as it writhed and screamed in response to the pressure on the key.

“What’s wanted? Where are you?”

This was the message that went speeding out on the air waves from the aërials above the hut.

“This is the yacht *Wanderer*, from New York to Rocktown. We have struck a derelict and are leaking badly. Who are you?”

“A station on Brig Island, about four miles at sea from Motthaven. Where are you?”

The latter question was unanswered for the time being. Instead came another query:

“Have you any means by which you can get to our assistance? We are in dire peril.”

“We will try to aid you. But what is your position?”

“Wait. I’ll look at the chart.”

There came a pause, during which Frank rapidly detailed what he had heard to the eager group of listeners. But in the midst of it the unknown sender broke in once more.

“We are about twenty miles to the southeast of you, on an almost straight course. Can keep afloat only a few hours longer. Can you get tug from the mainland?”

“Impossible,” flashed back Frank, “but will do what we can. Are you at anchor?”

“No, but the drift is very little. We are off soundings. Can you come to our aid?”

Frank’s fingers pressed down on the key firmly. Rapidly he sent this message pulsating:

“How many on board?”

“Three. Owner, a friend and a hand.”

“All right. Standby!”

“Good-by, and hurry,” came out of the night, and then – silence.

Frank disconnected his instruments and turned to the others. Rapidly he detailed the impending tragedy out there in the darkness.

“Can’t we get to them in the motor boat?” demanded Harry breathlessly.

Frank shook his head.

“Not in the time we have. They can’t keep afloat much longer, recollect. What can be done? Is there no way we can help them?”

“Yes, there is.”

The words came quietly but in a decided tone from Dr. Perkins. Frank was the first to guess the import of the speech.

“The *Sea Eagle!*” he exclaimed excitedly.

Dr. Perkins nodded.

“Yes. Here is our chance to test her in the service of humanity. She is ready for flight this instant.”

“But in the darkness? How can we pick up this yacht?”

“By the searchlight. Most likely the yacht has rockets. When she sees our searchlight she will send some up. That will give us her bearings. The general location of the craft we know.”

“Are we all to go?” demanded Pudge.

“Hardly,” rejoined his father, slipping into an overcoat, for the night was somewhat chilly, though the air was calm. “Frank and Harry, I need you two. You others await our return. Have hot coffee and food ready, as the survivors may be in need of nourishment.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” responded Ben; “and now, sir, if I may give a bit of advice, lose no time in getting away. I’ve been in some sea disasters myself, and sometimes every second counts.”

“You’re right, Stubbs,” ejaculated Dr. Perkins. “Boys, get the

Sea Eagle ready. I'll bring along the searchlight."

While Frank and Harry hastened on their errand, Dr. Perkins got the searchlight out of its locker. It was a small but powerful one, constructed so as to fit into a socket on the *Sea Eagle's* "bow." Its light was supplied from a small dynamo connected with the engine of the sea-and-air craft. By the time the doctor was ready the *Sea Eagle* had been wheeled out of her shed, and Frank gave a sharp hail.

"All ready, doctor!"

"With you in a moment, my boy," was the response, as the inventor hastened out into the darkness.

The outlines of the *Sea Eagle* loomed up gray and ghostly in the gloom. Only a tiny speck of light showed in her bow by the steering wheel, where a minute electric bulb shed light on the compass. This light was obtained from a storage battery of peculiarly light construction, connected with the dynamo before mentioned.

The boys had clambered on board as soon as the airship had been wheeled out of its shed. They extended their hands to Dr. Perkins and helped him on board. The searchlight was put in place and its wires connected to the storage battery. A snap of a switch and a sharp pencil of light cut the night. The appliance worked to perfection.

"Now, then," said the doctor, as he took the wheel, "the less time we lose, the better. Frank, you had better apply the buoyancy apparatus, as we must make an abrupt rise to clear the

trees.”

“Why not launch from the runway?” inquired Frank; “wouldn’t that be quicker?”

“That’s right. I think it would. Head the prow round for the rails.”

Willing hands pushed the *Sea Eagle* around, for on her ball-bearing supporting wheels she handled very easily, despite her great weight.

Presently the craft was poised at the summit of the incline, ready for her rush downward.

“Give her power!” cried the doctor.

Frank seized the self-starting lever, and gave it a twirl. A pressure of his forefinger on the button followed, and almost simultaneously the motor began to thunder and roar.

“Right here!” cried Frank.

“All right. Hold tight. I’m going to apply full power.”

Dr. Perkins jerked back the clutch lever as he spoke. There was a jarring shock, and then a downward rush through the night, the searchlight cutting a blazing white path through the blackness. Down, down they raced at terrific speed. Suddenly the jarring movement ceased. The *Sea Eagle* appeared to glide upward as if drawn skyward by invisible ropes. As the craft left the rails, and began soaring to the stars that looked quietly down on the exciting scene, a sound was borne upward to the aerial voyagers.

“Good-by.”

And then an instant later in Ben's stentorian tones:
"So long, mates! Go-o-o-d luck!"

CHAPTER XII. – THROUGH THE NIGHT

Up and out into the night winged the great sea-and-air craft, the powerful motors working without a skip, and the propellers beating the air with a noise like the drone of a mastadonic bee – or more appropriately, night beetle. Above shone the stars, steady points of brightness in the dark blue canopy of heavens; below stretched the silent, empty sea, heaving gently. The air was calm and still, and the *Sea Eagle* cleaved her way through it powerfully. Dr. Perkins set the course at due southeast, and kept a careful eye on the compass.

“What speed are we making?” shouted Frank presently.

The inventor glanced at the aërial speed meter, a device of his own invention.

“Close to fifty,” he shouted back, for, owing to the roar of the engines and propellers, it was necessary to raise the voice in speaking to any one at a distance.

“Then we should be in the vicinity in half an hour?”

“Yes; that is unless – ”

But Dr. Perkins broke off abruptly. The *Sea Eagle* had now attained a height of some five hundred feet, at which altitude he intended to keep the craft till they reached the vicinity of the disabled yacht.

The cause of the sudden breaking off of his shouted remarks was this: Without the slightest warning the *Sea Eagle* gave a sickening dip downward, and rushed toward the sea; or rather, to those in the falling ship, it seemed as if the sea was racing up devouringly toward them.

“Gracious, what’s happened?” shouted Harry.

But Frank was too busy with the engine to answer just then.

“Power! Give me lots of power!” yelled Dr. Perkins.

But although Frank instantly opened up the motor to its full capacity of two thousand revolutions a minute, the downward rush still continued.

“The sea! We’ll be plunged into the sea!” cried Harry, in alarm, gripping a side support.

Indeed there appeared to be good cause for his apprehension, for the *Sea Eagle* was falling like a stone flung into space. All this, of course, took place in far less time than it takes to describe or to read it. In fact, hardly had Harry shouted his fears before the *Sea Eagle’s* “hull” – as we must call the hydroplane part of the craft – struck the water, and a huge cloud of spray flew high on either side.

But instead of diving, the *Sea Eagle* shot forward over the waves, gliding over their tops for some time before Frank shut off the motor. Even then such was the “shooting” velocity gained, that the *Sea Eagle* still continued to scoot along until the young engineer, in response to Dr. Perkins’ instructions, reversed her propellers, and thus brought the craft to a speedy standstill.

“What on earth happened?” demanded Frank anxiously, as the *Sea Eagle* lay still, bobbing up and down on the gentle swell.

“We struck an air pocket. An empty hole in space where there was no ether to support us,” explained Dr. Perkins.

“Gracious; I thought we were goners,” cried Harry, still a little shaky over the fearful sensation of the fall.

“Had the *Sea Eagle* been of different construction we should have dived as straight to the bottom as a loon,” said the inventor, “but the spoonlike construction of the bow allowed me to handle her so that, instead of the impulse of the fall being downward, it was diverted into a forward movement along the surface.”

“Shall we go up again?” asked Frank, after a hasty examination had been made to ascertain if anything had parted or snapped under the strain of the suddenly arrested tumble through the air pocket.

“Yes. We had better lose as little time as possible,” was the rejoinder. “If you are ready, start the engine up, and we will try a flight from the surface of the water.”

“You want full power?” asked Frank.

“Yes; but start up gently at first, gradually increasing to top velocity. I think, however, that we shall leave the water at about 1,500 revolutions a minute.”

The next minute the roar of the newly started engine prevented further conversation. In order to develop every ounce of power of which the motor was capable Frank had opened the muffler cut-out, and the uproar was terrific. spurts of greenish flame

spouted from the exhausts, and the acrid smell of burning oil and gasoline filled the air. To any one less accustomed than the Boy Aviators to the uproar of aërial motors, the noise would have been alarming to say the least. They, however, were too much used to such scenes to pay any attention to it.

Faster and faster the *Sea Eagle* sped over the waves, till her keel barely touched the tips of the swells. Then suddenly the jerky motion ceased, and the craft, buoyed by its wings, began to soar upward in a steadily increasing gradient. Before ten minutes had passed they were once more on an even keel at a five-hundred-foot altitude, and bearing steadily for the southwest.

Frank looked at his watch.

“We ought to be getting pretty close to that yacht by now,” he remarked to Harry, who had seated himself at his side, and was assisting in attending to the lubrication and watching of the motor.

“I’ll keep a sharp lookout,” rejoined Harry; “they surely ought to hear the noise of our motor and send up a rocket or wave lights, or something, if they are in the vicinity.

“That’s just what I think. Keep your eyes open while I watch the engine.”

Harry peered out into the night, but as far as he could see nothing appeared but the reflection of the stars in the water to relieve its blackness.

“I can’t see anything yet,” he said, after a while.

“Just keep on looking,” rejoined Frank; “there’s a chance that

they may have drifted from the position they gave us.”

“Well, in any case it would have been impossible for us to fly direct to the spot,” rejoined Harry; “this thing is a good deal like looking for a needle in a haystack, to my way of thinking.”

“I’m not so sure of that. If they are anywhere within five or six miles they must hear the beat of our motor.”

“Wonder why Dr. Perkins doesn’t switch on the searchlight. Hullo, there it goes now.”

As Harry spoke, a fan-shaped ray of brilliant white light cut the night in front of the *Sea Eagle*, like a radiant sword. Hither and thither it swept over the dark sea; but it revealed nothing. All at once Dr. Perkins shut the searchlight off.

“If they have seen it they will reply in some way,” he shouted in explanation to the boys. “Keep a bright lookout for an answer. I’ll keep the *Sea Eagle* swinging in circles. We have been doing thirty miles an hour, and even allowing for the delay when we struck the air pocket we ought to be in the disabled yacht’s vicinity by this time.”

As the searchlight was extinguished Harry peered out into the darkness with straining eyes. Suddenly he gave a shout and clutched Frank’s arm.

“What’s that,” he shouted, “that light off there to the south?”

“It’s a lantern,” cried Frank; “somebody’s waving it.”

Dr. Perkins confirmed Frank’s supposition, and the *Sea Eagle*, on her errand of rescue, was headed for the swinging pin-point of light in the distance.

CHAPTER XIII. – A TWENTIETH-CENTURY RESCUE

As he flew his craft in the direction of the feeble beacon of distress, Dr. Perkins once more switched on the searchlight. Its comforting beam shot across the sea, and finally ceased its swaying and centered on a strange sight. As a dark scene in a theater is illumined at one single point by the calcium light, so the search rays concentrated themselves on a striking picture of distress at sea.

Framed in the circle of white light the boys could see a small gasoline craft, apparently up to the rails in the water. At any rate nothing of the hull but a narrow white strip could be seen, while, on the top of the raised deck cabin crouched the figures of three men. One of these had been swinging the lantern, but he ceased as the bright light from the *Sea Eagle* bathed the group in its rays. One single mast arose high above the pitching hull, and from it could be seen wires strung down to the cabin top. Evidently this was the wireless apparatus which had been the means of bringing the Boy Aviators and their friend to the rescue.

The yacht could not have been more than fifty feet in length – a very small craft to be equipped with wireless; but her owner, if he was on board, must have been congratulating himself at that very moment on his wise precaution.

It was but a few minutes after the searchlight had first revealed the *Wanderer* and her distressed company that the *Sea Eagle* was swinging in a graceful, birdlike circle in the air above the sinking craft.

Frank seized up a small megaphone, which formed part of the sea and sky ship's equipment.

"Ahoy! Aboard the yacht!" he cried.

"Ahoy!" came back the cry, with a note of incredulous wonder in it, as well there might be, considering the extraordinary circumstances.

"Are you the folks we talked with by wireless?" called Harry.

"The very same," was the shouted reply, "but who are you? Can you get us off this? The ship won't last much longer."

"We'll get you off all right," exclaimed Frank comfortingly, and as he spoke Dr. Perkins allowed the *Sea Eagle* to glide down to the surface of the waves, alighting on the water about five hundred feet from the castaways. He at once headed the *Sea Eagle* round, and calling for reduced speed made for the sinking yacht.

"Slow down! Stop her! Reverse!" he shouted in rapid succession, as they bore down.

"On board the yacht!" hailed Frank, as they glided up alongside, "throw us a line."

The desired rope came snaking through the air, falling across the *Sea Eagle's* bow. Harry bounded forward and made it fast.

"Now haul in," ordered Dr. Perkins, as soon as the propellers

had ceased to beat the air; “easy now; we don’t want to foul the wings.”

His order was obeyed; and before long the *Sea Eagle’s* bow was scraping the side of the *Wanderer*. Fortunately, the sea was smooth, or the maneuver would have been impossible of execution. As it was, however, on the easy swell that was running it was made with comparatively small difficulty.

“Well, great Cæsar’s ghost!” blurted out a stout, blond man in yachting costume, who occupied, apparently, the position of owner of the yacht, “if this isn’t the twentieth century with a vengeance. Just think of it, Griggs – rescued by an aëroplane!”

The man addressed, a good-natured-looking man, almost as corpulent as the first speaker, nodded appreciatively.

“We don’t really know how to thank you folks,” continued the stout man; “we haven’t much longer to stay above water, as you see. We hit a derelict at dusk, and stove in our port bow. The water came rushing in so fast that I had barely time to flash that wireless that you so providentially caught.”

“It was feeble enough, I can tell you,” Frank assured him; “fortunately, we were not far off, and so managed to catch your appeal for help.”

The stout man was again warmly thanking his rescuers, when Dr. Perkins interrupted.

“Suppose you come on board,” he said; “by the looks of your craft she is likely to take a plunge at any minute. I’d like to be able to cut loose from her before that happens.”

Taking this hint, the stout man clambered on board the *Sea Eagle* with more agility than might have been expected from a man of his heavy build. This done he extended a hand to his friend, and then came the turn of the third occupant of the cabin roof to disembark. This third man was evidently, from his costume, a paid hand on board the *Sea Eagle*. He was slight and dark and foreign looking, with beady black eyes, and a not over-prominent chin.

Directly all were on board, Dr. Perkins ordered Frank to “cast off” from the sinking yacht. It was well this order was obeyed promptly, for hardly had the *Sea Eagle* been disengaged from the other craft’s side, than the *Wanderer* gave a sudden plunge, bow downward, under the waves. For one instant her stern upreared itself vertically, showing the rudder and propeller, and then, as if by magic, the whole craft vanished, to find a grave in the ocean bed.

All this was seen by the searchlight, which Dr. Perkins had kept concentrated on the yacht while the last act of this ocean drama was being consummated. As the yacht vanished a deep sigh broke from the stout man.

“Good-by, poor old *Wanderer*,” he said, “there’s an end of this cruise.”

“I am sorry that she was not in a condition to tow to Brig Island,” remarked Dr. Perkins.

“My dear sir, so far as the actual monetary loss is concerned it was fully covered by insurance,” responded the stout man; “my

only regret is to see a craft I was very fond of end her days in such a fashion. Also, I am afraid my friend Griggs here will be disappointed at the failure of our cruise.”

“Good heavens!” cried Mr. Griggs, who appeared to be a highly nervous individual, “I’m glad to have my life, Sterrett – glad to have my life. If I don’t catch my death of cold over this I’ll be fortunate indeed.”

“In the meantime,” struck in the man addressed as Sterrett, “we are forgetting in our own troubles the debt of gratitude we owe to our friends here. In the first place, let me introduce ourselves. I am Paul Sterrett, late owner of the *Wanderer*. This is my friend, Samuel Griggs, and yonder,” indicating the foreign-looking third man, “is Francis Le Blanc, our cook and general handy man. We left New York on a cruise up the coast sometime ago, and up till to-night experienced no mishaps. However, as my friend says, we must not repine; we should consider ourselves fortunate indeed to be onboard your remarkable craft instead of being in a watery grave, as we must have been had it not been for your opportune arrival.”

“We consider ourselves fortunate to have been of service to you,” responded the inventor, and then went on in his turn to introduce himself and his party, and also give a brief explanation of the *Sea Eagle*, which had, as may be imagined, excited the liveliest curiosity on the part of the rescued castaways.

“But as we shall now get under way without further loss of time,” he concluded, “you will be able to see for yourselves just

how the *Sea Eagle* is controlled, and what she can do.”

As he finished this speech, Dr. Perkins extinguished the searchlight, which had still been playing on the oil-streaked waters which marked the burial spot of the ill-fated *Wanderer*. This done, he gave Frank the “come ahead” signal. Obediently, as usual, the motor began its song, and the propellers took up the whirring, buzzing refrain. Mr. Sterrett and his companions sat perfectly still in the positions in the stern which had been assigned to them. Had it been light enough to read the expressions on their faces one would have said that they were absolutely dumbfounded.

Of course both Mr. Sterrett and his friends – as well informed men – knew the wonderful capabilities of the modern aëroplane. They had witnessed many flights, and in common with the generality of progressive Americans, knew the general principles of aërial locomotion. But when the *Sea Eagle* from a “boat” turned suddenly into a hydroplane, they exchanged swift expressions of the utmost astonishment. Only their companion, the paid “hand” from the yacht, sat sullenly unimpressed. In fact, since he had boarded the *Sea Eagle*, he had not uttered a syllable, only mumbling his thanks when Mr. Sterrett and his companion had finished expressing their gratitude for their rescue.

Under the skillful guidance of Dr. Perkins, and the constant attention that Frank paid to the whirring motor, the *Sea Eagle* made a quick run back to the island, being guided, when she was still some distance away, by the ruddy glare of a big beacon

fire lighted by Ben Stubbs. It was an instance of the veteran adventurer's thoughtfulness and resource that he had thought of doing this, for in the hurry of the departure, no such instructions had been given him. But on his own responsibility he had kindled the blaze which materially aided the swift return of the *Sea Eagle* to her eyrie.

Reaching the island, the aërial wonder was sent swinging in decreasing circles, till Dr. Perkins was sure of a safe drop to the workshop on the summit of the little spot of land, and then, with a breath-catching rapidity, the helmsman sent his wonderful vessel earthward, bringing it to a stop within the ruddy glow caused by the blazing bonfire which had guided them.

As the *Sea Eagle* settled to the earth the party that had been left behind on the adventurous night flight pressed to the side of the novel craft. A glance showed them that the mission of Dr. Perkins' craft had been crowned with success, and Billy and Pudge began plying the returned voyagers with eager questions. Ben Stubbs was slightly in the background, and it was not till Mr. Sterrett and his companions had stepped out on to the ground that he got a good look at them.

When he did, he gave a deep-drawn gasp of surprise. An expression of supreme amazement overspread his weather-beaten countenance. But his eyes did not fix on Mr. Sterrett or his companion, Griggs. Instead they traveled beyond the nattily clad yachtsmen and rested on the slim figure of the paid "hand."

"Raoul Duval, as sure as there's a north star!" choked out Ben,

half to himself, “waal, if this ain’t a small bit of a world!”

CHAPTER XIV. – BEN'S PLAN STOLEN

For his part Duval was no less quick in recognizing Ben Stubbs. At the moment, Dr. Perkins and the rest were standing in a group a little apart, and discussing their adventure, while Mr. Sterrett was loud in his praises of the *Sea Eagle*, which he described as the most wonderful craft on earth. Giving a swift look round to see that he was unobserved, Duval pressed a finger to his lips to enjoin silence on Ben, and then beckoned him to come a short distance out of the firelight.

Ben, in wonderment as to this unexpected reappearance of the young man who had exercised such sharp practice on him, obeyed the summons. But when he addressed Duval it was in an angry tone.

“What’s this mean,” he exclaimed, “how did you come here?”

“As you see, by that air ship,” was the reply; “I never expected to see you here, however. I tell you, Stubbs, I’ve had a lot of hard luck. When those boys and that professor-chap rescued us I had been compelled to ship as a deckhand and cook on that yacht. Just think of it.”

“A mighty good thing for you, say I,” grunted Ben brusquely, “a little good, honest, hard work will take some of the crooked kinks out of your brain. My recommendation to you, Duval, is to

stick to that sort of a job, and in time you'll learn to be a man."

Duval shot a look full of malice at the blunt old fellow. But his face was in the shadow, and Ben did not notice it. Instead he continued:

"But I ain't the one to bear a grudge, Duval, although you did come mighty near shipwrecking my faith in human natur'. Shake hands, mate, and for your old father's sake I'll do what I can fer you. I ain't one to kick a man when he's down."

Duval extended his thin, long-fingered hand, and Ben seized it in his rough paw and shook it with a heartiness that made the dark-skinned Duval flinch.

"There!" exclaimed the old fellow heartily, as he relinquished his grip, "that's all ship-shape and in good trim. Now let's get back to the rest of 'em afore they see us talking apart."

"You're not going to give me away to them?" asked Duval, almost breathlessly. "Sterrett thinks I'm all right, and may give me a better job some time."

"I won't stand in your way, lad," heartily rejoined Ben. "In fact, I'd like to help you get on your feet again."

"How about that plan of the location of the *Belle of New Orleans*?" asked Duval, without paying any attention to Ben's last remarks.

"Safe enough in my pocket, mate," replied Ben, tapping his worn coat; "why do you want to know?"

"I wondered if you had investigated my story."

"No, I haven't yet; but I don't mind telling you that I may do

so before very long. And I'll tell you right now, Duval, that if we recover anything valuable from that wreck I'll see to it that you get a good share of it, and then you can set up in business again and make a new start."

Duval expressed what appeared to be very deep thanks for Ben's generosity. But, in reality, his thoughts were busy elsewhere. An idea had come into his head that was to bear strange fruit before very long. They joined the group clustered about Dr. Perkins without their absence having been noticed. Billy and Pudge had seen to it while the *Sea Eagle* was on her mission of rescue that a good hot lunch should be ready on the return of the expedition. A few moments after Ben and Duval joined the others Pudge announced this fact, and the party trooped into the hut, nothing loath, to fall to with hearty appetites on a good meal. Soon after they "turned in," the boys insisting on the strangers taking their bunks, while they and Ben Stubbs put up with "shake-downs" on the floor.

It was very late – or rather early morning – when they retired, and before long all were wrapped in the deep sleep of exhaustion. Ben was the first to awaken, to find the sun streaming into the hut.

"Great guns!" he exclaimed, glancing at Billy's alarm clock on a shelf, "it's after seven."

Broad awake in a jiffy, he aroused the others, going from the floor sleepers to the bunks. Dr. Perkins, Mr. Sterrett and the latter's friend were awakened in turn, and it was not till then that

Ben noticed that Duval's bunk was empty.

“Good fer him,” he said to himself warmly, “the young chap has started to turn over a new leaf by gittin’ out early. I’ll take a turn outside afore breakfast and see if I can find him.”

But Duval was not about the workshop, nor did Ben's calls summon him to breakfast. It was not till that instant that an ugly suspicion flashed into Ben's hitherto unsuspecting mind. Without saying a word to the others he hastily drew out his wallet and, withdrawing to a corner of the hut, examined its contents. Instantly his suspicions were verified.

The plan of the location of the wreck of the *Belle of New Orleans* was missing!

Stifling his anger as well as he could, Ben hastened to the beach. As he had suspected the moment he found the plan missing, the small skiff was gone. What had happened was as plain as print to Ben now. Young Duval had waited till all in the hut were asleep, then he had stealthily crept from his bunk, recovered the plan he had given to Ben, and had decamped in the small boat.

“Waal, the dern scallywag!” burst out Ben, as he stood on the beach in the first shock of his discovery.

In his anger he shook his fist at the strip of sea between the island and the mainland to which, he did not doubt, Duval had crossed in his flight.

“The – the – precious scamp!” he continued, his bronzed features working, “and I trusted him as I would have trusted his

dad.”

Shaking his head, Ben slowly made his way from the beach back to the hut. He said nothing of his discovery during breakfast, but after the meal he found a pretext for drawing Dr. Perkins to one side. To him he communicated what had occurred.

“A good riddance of bad rubbish,” said Dr. Perkins when Ben, whose voice shook with anger, had concluded his story; “we are cheaply rid of him, Ben.”

The inventor, while not a selfish man, was so wrapped up in the success of the *Sea Eagle* that, to him, the loss of the plan of the wreck did not appeal in the same way that it did to Ben Stubbs. But the old adventurer took him up indignantly.

“Bad rubbish, as you say, sir,” he grated out, “but if that paper hadn’t bin worth something Duval wouldn’t have taken it. It’s good-by to recovering that stuff from the *Belle of New Orleans* now.”

“By Jove! I’d quite forgotten my promise to you,” said Dr. Perkins contritely; “but never fear, Ben, I’ll see that you are not a loser.”

“It ain’t that,” rejoined Ben; “I don’t give a snap for the plan; but it’s the ingratitude of that young whippersnapper that’s got me sore. I’d like – I’d like to find that wreck just to get ahead of him.”

“Humph!” rejoined the inventor, “I understand your feelings. He has certainly treated you very badly. But possibly we can think up some way to outgeneral him.”

“Don’t see how we are goin’ to do it without that plan,” rejoined Ben; “but I ain’t one to cry over spilt milk. It’s gone, and that’s all there is to it. The best thing to do is to forget it.”

Frank and Harry, on their way to the *Sea Eagle’s* shelter, were passing at the moment. After asking the inventor if he thought it would be advisable, and receiving an affirmative reply, Ben called them over. As briefly as he could he told them what had happened.

“Well, the precious rascal!” broke out Frank; “I thought there was something snaky-looking about the chap last night. Isn’t there a chance of catching him?”

“Not such a slick rascal as he is, Frank,” rejoined Ben despondently; “no, the plan is gone, and gone for good – so good-by to that.”

But Harry now spoke up, and to the astonishment of the others his voice did not hold a trace of the disappointment they could not help but feel.

“Cheer up, Ben,” he said heartily, “and by the way you might just cast your eye over this and see if it looks familiar.”

As he spoke he dipped a hand into his breast pocket and produced a folded paper. Ben, with a mystified expression, took it and opened the thing up. The next instant it almost fell from his hands.

“Why! – why, by the glittering Pole Star!” he choked out, “it’s the plan itself!”

“Not exactly,” laughed Harry, “but I think it’s a pretty good

copy. You see I always liked drawing and that sort of thing, so when you showed me that plan I memorized it, and when I got a chance I sketched out this copy in case anything happened to the original. I think it's good enough to take a chance on."

"Good enough!" roared Ben, "why, lad, it's the plan itself. Now, then, if we don't beat Master Duval to the *Belle of New Orleans* call me a double-decked, lee-scuppered sea cook!"

CHAPTER XV. – WHAT HAPPENED ASHORE

As Ben had surmised, Duval had waited till the boys and their friends were sound asleep, and had then, in accordance with a plan he had thought of the instant he set eyes on his kind-hearted friend, sneaked out of his bunk and, tip-toeing softly to Ben's clothes, located the wallet and with small trouble or loss of time abstracted the plan of the lost wreck. During the evening the ingrate had heard a description of the island given to Mr. Sterrett by Dr. Perkins, so that after taking the plan he left the hut and made for the beach by the path through the woods.

Shoving off the skiff, he had taken up the oars and started rowing as fast as he could for the mainland. But what with the darkness and his unfamiliarity with that part of the coast, he had failed to land in the cove adjoining the fisher village of Motthaven, and had beached his craft a considerable distance to the south of the place. It was just growing light when the bow of the skiff grated on the sand, and Duval hastily scrambled out and started off. His object was to find a railroad station and travel as far as his scant supply of money would take him from the vicinity of Brig Island.

After that his plans were still vague; but he had an indefinite idea of getting to New York or some large town, and interesting

anybody with capital to finance an expedition for the recovery of the gold dust chest and the bag of black pearls that lay at the bottom of the Black Bayou amid the moldering timbers of the lost steamer. The utter depravity and black-heartedness of this plan, and his base ingratitude to the man who had aided him in every way, did not strike him. Instead, there was but one overmastering thought in his mind, and that was to secure whatever treasure might be in the wreck as quickly as possible, and then vanish from America for some foreign country with his ill-gotten wealth.

Busy with such thoughts as these, he hastened up the beach in the gray of the dawn, and finding a rough sort of path leading up the low cliff that overhung the beach, he started to ascend it. He had not gone more than a few paces, however, before he saw, buried back in some trees, a rough-looking hut.

Duval was hungry and thirsty, and, moreover, his long row, at such a feverish pace, had exhausted him. Determining to tell a story that would account for his presence in that isolated part of the coast at such an early hour, he made up his mind to apply at the hut for some refreshment. His story was to be that he had set off on a fishing expedition and had lost his way and been wandering all night.

“Probably only some fool fisherman lives there who will believe anything I choose to tell him,” he thought; “these fellows are all as thick as mud, anyhow.”

Musing to himself in this fashion, the renegade fellow made

his way toward the hut and, coming to the door, knocked loudly on it. But there was no answer, and when, after repeated knockings, he could elicit no response, Duval determined that, as there appeared to be nobody at home, he would walk in uninvited and see what he could “forage” for himself.

The door was unlocked; in fact, it had no latch and hung crazily on its rusty hinges. Opening it, Duval found himself in an interior as rough and uncouth as the outside of the hut had promised. A table made of old planks, seemingly flotsam from the beach, two soap boxes for chairs, and a rough sort of bunk, or rather shelf, littered with a pile of dirty old blankets, made up the furnishings. On the table were the remains of a meal, which had consisted apparently of roasted lobsters and fish. Two tin cups and tin plates, with battered knives and forks beside them, completed the table service.

“Confound it all,” muttered Duval, “whoever lives here is as poor as a church mouse. Some miserable fisherman, I suppose, who has hardly enough to keep body and soul together.”

He walked to a corner of the shack where there was a sort of cupboard contrived out of old boxes. He had guessed that this formed the pantry of the establishment. Sure enough, in it he found a loaf half consumed, and the remains of a roasted lobster, as well as some scraps of fish. He was too hungry to be particular and was just about to start eating when a quick step behind him caused him to start violently, dropping the food he had in his hand.

But before he could utter a word the young man – or, rather, loutish boy – who had entered so quietly, owing to his being barefooted, stepped up to him and, raising a heavy oar he carried, dealt the intruder a blow that deprived him of his senses for the time being.

As Duval fell to the floor a man in rough fisherman's garb, with a wrinkled, mahogany-tinged face and a tuft of gray whisker on his prominent chin, entered.

“Why, Zeb, what's up?” he exclaimed, in an astonished voice.

“I found this feller snoopin' about in here, pop,” was the rejoinder, “an' I calkelated ter lay him out till we could find out what his business was.”

“Good ernuff, boy,” responded the elder Daniels, for most of our readers must be aware by this time of the identity of the two newcomers; “but who do yer suppose he is? He's dressed like one of them fancy sailors off'n a yacht.”

“Dad, I figger he's a detective sent here by them kids on Brig Island. That's the way it looks to me.”

“I guess you're right, Zeb. Here, give me a hand to get him up on the bunk. By hickory, but you must have hit him a clip.”

“Reckon I did land kind er hard on him, dad, but I wasn't takin' chances of his turning on me.”

The two worthies lifted Duval's limp form and laid it, not over-gently, on the tumbled pile of frowsy blankets. This done, a sudden thought struck the elder Daniels.

“Calckerlate I'll take a look through his pockets,” he said;

“might rummage out something worth havin’.”

Zeb helped his father in this task; but aside from a small sum of money, and a collection of worthless odds and ends, they found nothing that appeared to them to be of importance. In an inner pocket Zeb came across the stolen map. Much mystified, he showed it to his father.

“What do you think this kin be, pop?” he inquired.

The old man took it and knitted his brow over the document in a puzzled fashion.

“By hickory, I kain’t make it out,” he confessed; “thar’s some riting in ther corner, though. Spell it out, Zeb.”

Zeb, obediently, but somewhat laboriously, read out:

“Map of the location of the wreck of the *Belle of New Orleans*.’ That’s what it says; but what does it mean?”

“That’s plain enough, ain’t it?” retorted the old man. “It’s a map of some wreck or other, but what does this feller want with it? That’s the question.”

“Better ask him. He’s opening his eyes and coming to.”

Sure enough Duval stirred uneasily, and threw up his hand as if to ward off a blow.

“Don’t hit me, Frank Chester,” he cried out; “I’ll give back the plan I stole.”

“Oh-ho! That’s the way the wind blows, is it?” muttered the elder Daniels, and then, addressing Duval, who was now staring wildly about him, he said:

“So you come from Brig Island, eh, my hearty?”

“Yes; but how did I get here? Oh, I remember now. I was looking for food and somebody struck me.”

“That was me, I reckon,” grinned Zeb, “who are you, anyhow? Did those kids on Brig Island send you here after us?”

What with the effects of his blow, and his alarm at his position, Duval lost his customary caution.

“I’m no friend of anybody on Brig Island,” he exclaimed, “but what do you know about that place, anyhow?”

“A whole lot,” grimly rejoined the elder Daniels; “now, see here, my lad, you’d best make a clean breast of it. How did you come by this plan?”

The old fisherman, who was pretty keen-minded, had guessed by Duval’s guilty manner that there was some mystery connected with the document which he now flourished.

Duval sat up on the bunk and pleaded for the return of the plan; but to no avail.

“I’m smart enough to see through a wall when there’s a hole in it,” said old Daniels; “now, see here, I reckon you ain’t no friend of them kids on the island?”

Duval shook his head. He had, of course, no reason to dislike the boys; but he was an arrant coward at heart, and saw that the men in whose power he was, hated the young dwellers on Brig Island. He therefore thought it good policy to affect to be of their way of thinking.

“I’m no friend of theirs,” he said, rather sullenly, “but what’s that to you?”

“May be a whole lot, if this plan is what I think it is. Now I’ve a pretty good idea that you come by it in no very honest way. Ain’t that so?”

“I – I was given it,” stammered Duval uneasily, while Zenas’ little gimlet-like gray eyes bored him through.

“That’s a lie,” rejoined Daniels easily; “come on, out with the truth, now. It won’t do you no harm, and may keep you from the constables.”

This was a shrewd move on Daniels’ part. Duval’s eyes dilated with fear at the idea of coming within the reach of the law. Without more ado he blurted out part of the story of the lost *Belle of New Orleans*, and offered to let Zenas share in the prize if he should locate it. While Duval was talking the elder Daniels had leaned forward, consumed with interest. Avaricious to a degree, the thought of the sunken treasure made him fairly burn with desire to gain it.

“You’re sure that was a true story that feller give you?” he asked, as Duval concluded his story.

“I’m certain of it. I know for a fact that my father had a lot of gold dust and those black pearls with him on his last voyage, for he had written home about the fortune that he was bringing.”

“Humph! Waal, your story sounds all right, and I don’t know but what you’ve come to the right shop to get some one to help you get at the wreck. I’ve got a diving outfit and a little money, and I kin raise some more. Now sit down and Zeb will get you a bite to eat, and we’ll talk things over.”

And thus was begun an alliance which was to prove a source of much trouble to the Boy Aviators and their friends in the near future.

CHAPTER XVI. – OFF ON THE “AIR ROUTE.”

In the meantime indignation was at white heat on Brig Island. Mr. Sterrett was for advertising the disappearance of Duval, and offering a reward for his apprehension. He confessed that he had not liked the man's looks, but had shipped him as help was hard to get at the time. Dr. Perkins agreed that it might not be a bad idea to communicate at once with the authorities and try to have the rascal captured.

“But,” he added, “I am afraid he is too clever a scamp to fall into the clutches of the law very easily.”

“I am of that opinion, too,” frankly admitted Mr. Sterrett, “but it will do no harm to do all we can to place him where he belongs.”

To get ashore Frank had first to swim off to the motor boat, for the skiff, as we know, had vanished. He then ran the engine-driven craft in alongside some rocks that sloped down into deep water, and from that elevation the party embarked. A quick run was made to Motthaven, from whence a description of Duval was wired to the metropolitan police, and the local authorities urged out of their usual lethargy by promises of a reward if Duval was found. Late that afternoon the search yielded results in the finding of the abandoned skiff, and the discovery of the hut in

which the Daniels had been living since the boys had instituted proceedings against them.

Some evidences of a hasty departure were found, but no clues that would give any idea of whither the fugitives had proceeded. In fact it was only by piecing together some scraps of torn paper that it was discovered that the hut had been used by the Daniels as a refuge.

“Well,” said Dr. Perkins that evening, after they had bidden good-bye to Mr. Sterrett and his friend, who had returned to New York, “well, in my opinion the less time we lose in getting to Black Bayou the better it will be, for, to my mind, there is little doubt that Duval means to forestall our friend, Ben Stubbs, in ransacking the wreck.”

The others agreed that this seemed highly probable, and Dr. Perkins made immediate arrangements for a caretaker to occupy quarters on Brig Island during their absence. This done, a return was made to the little settlement, and the next day final preparations were made for the adventurous trip through the air. The *Sea Eagle* was provisioned, and a light wireless apparatus installed, the stay wires being used as aërials. Of course the instruments were not so strong as those used at the shore station, but it was calculated that they had a capacity of about twenty miles over land, and forty above the sea, depending, of course, a good deal on the wave adjustment and the weather conditions.

Twenty-four hours after the adventurers had started work on the *Sea Eagle*, the craft was ready for her dash. Ben Stubbs,

Pudge Perkins and Billy Barnes were to go to New Orleans, there to await the arrival of the party. Their departure took place amid regretful wails from Pudge, who loudly declaimed:

“Aërials and ant-hills! I don’t see why we can’t go by the *Sea Eagle*.”

But Dr. Perkins’ word was law and he had decided that the fewer persons who took part in the test the better the chance of success would be, and as Frank and Harry were both experienced aviators he placed great reliance in their aid. The morning after the departure of the New Orleans-bound passengers the caretaker and his family arrived. They were honest folk from the shore, who could be trusted to look after the many valuable devices on the island, and keep curiosity seekers off till the party returned. For Dr. Perkins had decided to use Brig Island as a permanent workshop, and expected, if the *Sea Eagle* proved a success, to build many craft like her and dispose of them at good prices. The working of the electric fence was explained to the caretaker; but he declared:

“I reckon my old gun will do more to keep undesirables off than any of them electric didoes.”

There was now nothing more to do, the caretaker being duly installed, but to take to the air, in what was, at that date, the most unique aërial craft in existence. For the voyage, beside the provisions and extra fuel and oil, life belts had been provided, and not a detail had been overlooked. It was seven o’clock on a fine, breathless morning when Dr. Perkins gave the order, “Start

up the engines!"

A thrill shot through both Frank and Harry at the words. Experienced in aërial adventure as were both boys, they could not but feel that they were embarking on the most adventurous undertaking of their lives.

"We're off!" cried Harry, as a quiver ran through the craft, and the motor roared from its exhausts, emitting clouds of mingled flame and blue smoke.

"Yes; off on a fight for fame and fortune!" cried Frank, as Dr. Perkins threw in the clutch; and, with her propellers beating the air so rapidly that they were a mere blur, the *Sea Eagle* shot skyward.

In half an hour's time, to the watchers on the island, the aërial craft had dwindled to a mere dot in the distant sky, and five minutes later she vanished from view. The boys gave many backward looks as they winged away from Brig Island. Despite their adventures, they had spent many pleasant days there, and it appeared to them to be almost a second home. Of all that they were to experience before returning to the island they little dreamed at the moment, but their hearts beat high with exultation as the *Sea Eagle* winged her way southward at forty miles an hour, and about five hundred feet above the ocean.

They had been in the air about an hour when they encountered a situation which may become common enough before many years have passed, but which was an exciting novelty to them. Off on the horizon a liner was sighted, steaming toward the American

coast. Before long they made her out to be a big, two-funneled craft, painted black, and with numerous decks rising above her shapely hull.

“One of the transatlantic liners that make Portland their terminal,” decided Dr. Perkins.

“Shall I wireless them?” said Harry.

“Yes, do so. It will be an interesting experiment, and besides will show how the apparatus will work.”

Harry lost no time in getting to work. After a brief interval he “raised” the operator on the liner, Dr. Perkins keeping the *Sea Eagle* swinging in big, lazy circles while he did so.

“We sighted you from the bridge half an hour ago,” flashed the operator, “who and what are you?”

“The hydro-aëroplane *Sea Eagle*, bound from Maine for New Orleans. Who are you?” flashed back Harry.

“The *Ultonia*, of the Portland and Liverpool line, eight days out from England,” was the rejoinder; “have you got any American newspapers on board?”

Now it happened that Dr. Perkins had brought some papers of the day before along in his pockets, and at Harry’s request he handed them to him.

“What are you going to do?” asked Frank.

“I was going to suggest that we dive across the *Ultonia* and deliver the papers,” said Harry; “can we do it, doctor?”

“By all means,” rejoined Dr. Perkins, deeply interested; “flash them a message of what we intend to do so that they may be

prepared.”

Harry sent out the message and the operator flashed back a quick “Thanks,” adding the next moment: “Good-by. I’m going to beat it out on deck and watch you.”

Frank, in the meantime, had done the papers up in a compact bundle and weighted them with an empty beef can.

“All ready?” cried Dr. Perkins.

“All ready, sir,” was the prompt reply from the boys.

“Then hold tight. I’m going to make a swift dive.”

The liner was now almost directly underneath the soaring *Sea Eagle*. Her rails were black with passengers craning their necks upward at the great, man-made bird. From her funnels poured clouds of inky smoke, while her sharp prow cut the water on each side of her bow into sparkling foam. On the bridge were uniformed officers, pointing binoculars and spy glasses aloft, for the operator had communicated the news of what the *Sea Eagle* was about to do.

Suddenly the watching throngs of ocean travelers saw the *Sea Eagle* poise in air like a hawk about to pounce. Then down she came, cleaving the air like a falling stone.

A great cry went up from the packed decks. It seemed as if the air craft must perish, that nothing could check her fall, and that she was doomed to plunge headlong into the sea. But in a flash the cry changed to a mighty cheer.

Less than forty feet from the water the *Sea Eagle* was seen to shoot upward and straight toward the steamer. Like an arrow

from a bow the great aërial craft shot whizzing above the liner's bridge, and under the wireless aërials extending from mast to mast. Just as she roared by above the officers' heads, like some antedeluvian thunder-lizard, something was seen to fall downward and land on the top of the charthouse. It was the bundle of papers thrown by Harry. A sailor scrambled up and got them, while the crowded decks yelled themselves hoarse.

Then the *Sea Eagle* soared up high above the mast tips, and Harry seated himself at the wireless once more. Presently to his ears came a message from the speeding liner far below.

“Captain Seabury wishes to congratulate you on the most wonderful feat of the century.”

CHAPTER XVII. – AN AËRIAL AMBULANCE

Harry was about to flash back an answer to the message of congratulation when, suddenly, into the scene of triumph was injected a grim note of threatened tragedy. One of the passengers, a young woman who had been leaning far out over the rail of the boat deck waving a handkerchief of filmy lace and linen, was seen, all at once, to topple from her perch.

The next instant, and while her shrill scream for help still rent the air, a young man who had been standing beside her jumped out into space without waiting to do more than strip off coat and shoes. The *Ultonia* was speeding ahead at the fastest gait her twin screws were capable of. She was a large vessel, probably some 15,000 tons of registration, and her momentum was too great to stop her for a considerable distance.

From the *Sea Eagle* horrified eyes saw the accident, and witnessed the young woman's head bob up for an instant amid the frothy wake of the big craft. The liner's whistle screamed out a shrill alarm, and men could be seen scampering to lower a boat, while life buoys were thrown overboard.

But before anything more could be done the *Sea Eagle* took a sudden swoop, a swift dive downward, characteristic of the bird for which she had been named.

The wonderful craft struck the water with a force that sent a cloud of spray boiling up about her, temporarily hiding her substructure and her occupants from view.

“She’s sunk!” went up a moaning cry from the decks of the liner. But, no! An instant later it was seen that the *Sea Eagle*, an aëroplane no longer but a winged boat, was speeding as fast as her twin propellers could drive her toward the spot where the young woman had last been seen.

Hardly a word, except Dr. Perkins’ caution to “hang on tight,” had been exchanged between the aviators from their simultaneous observation of the accident till the moment the *Sea Eagle* struck the water. But now orders came quick and fast.

“Attend to the engines!”

The order came from Frank, and Harry sprang into the place his brother vacated.

Frank hastily buckled on one of the life jackets and then, as the *Sea Eagle* skimmed the water at a twenty-five knot gait, he scanned the seething lane of foam behind the liner. Suddenly he saw what he was looking for. A white, imploring face, crowned with a wealth of golden hair.

“Save me!” screamed the girl who, although she had been swimming, was by this time too exhausted with the effects of her immersion and the weight of her water-soaked clothes, to keep up any longer. Without an instant’s hesitation, Frank leaped into the water and began striking out with powerful strokes for the sinking girl. He reached her side just as she was going down for

the third time.

In the meantime the young man who had sprung after her had also become exhausted, and would certainly have sunk had not Dr. Perkins headed the *Sea Eagle* in his direction. Leaning far out as they came alongside the struggling man, Harry grasped him by the collar, and then half dragged him into the hydroplane portion of the air craft. This done, full speed was made for Frank and the young woman.

None too soon did they reach Frank's side. With the blind instinct of a drowning person the young woman was clinging so tightly to Frank that, strong swimmer though he was, he had much difficulty in keeping above the water. Dr. Perkins ordered the motor stopped as they neared the two, and allowed the *Sea Eagle* to glide up to them. Then both he and Harry bent all their strength to hauling on board, first the young woman and then Frank.

By this time the liner's speed had been checked, and her officers were swinging her in a broad circle to the scene of the accident. A boat had been lowered and was heading for the *Sea Eagle*, but Dr. Perkins, snatching up the megaphone, hailed the oarsman and told them that everything was all right.

This done, power was applied once more, and the *Sea Eagle* headed for the liner's side. As if guessing his intention a gangway had been lowered, and all was ready for their reception as they came alongside. In the meantime the young man had introduced the golden-haired young woman as his bride, and himself as

Stanley Travers, of Portland, Me. To say that both he and Mrs. Travers were grateful would be not to state one half of their actual feelings.

In fact, their expressions of appreciation took so long that one of the officers at the head of the gangway shouted:

“This is a mail boat and we must hurry, please.”

While this was going on congratulations on the plucky act had been shouted down from the uniformed skipper on the bridge and from a score of the passengers that banked the rails three and four deep.

At last Mr. and Mrs. Travers, wet to the skin, clambered up the liner's tall, black side, and the boat was hauled up on the davits. As the big craft, dipping her ensign and blowing her siren, heaved ahead, a shout of enthusiasm went up. But it was drowned by the roar of the *Sea Eagle's* motor. Hardly had the propellers of the vessel begun to churn the water once more before Dr. Perkins' craft rose from the water like a white-winged sea gull after a refreshing dip. As the gallant sea-and-air ship rose, her three occupants waved their hands in farewell in rejoinder to the babel of shouts beneath them.

“Well, at any rate, if the *Sea Eagle* never does anything more,” remarked Dr. Perkins, “she has accomplished a great deal.”

“I should think so,” exclaimed Frank, who had slipped into dry clothes as soon as the *Sea Eagle* took the air once more; “it isn't every craft that finds her baptism in life-saving at sea.”

As long as they could see the *Ultonia* the big liner continued

to blow her whistle, and doubtless the eyes of all her passengers remained fixed attentively on the wonderful sky ship as she waxed smaller and smaller against the blue. That afternoon the voyagers found themselves off Cape Ann. High above the cape they flew, cutting off a good chunk of distance in this way. The folks in West Gloucester stared in wonderment as the huge air ship soared by high above the town, and when a short time later the aviators passed above the white-winged fishing fleet, every tin pan and fog horn in the flotilla of small craft sounded an enthusiastic "God speed" to the air travelers.

Far behind the main body of the fisher craft lagged a small sloop, and as the *Sea Eagle* came closer to her the boys noticed that her flag was flying from the peak "union down," a sign of distress the world over. The big hydro-aëroplane was flying low at the time, and it was easy to see, without the aid of glasses, that several men were running about the sloop's decks and shouting something up at the air voyagers.

"Shall we go down and see what the trouble is?" asked Frank, as he and Harry saw the signs of distress.

"Yes," decided the doctor, "no craft, either of the air or of the sea, can disregard such a signal of disaster. It will be odd if, for the second time on the very first day of our cruise, we are able to render aid to somebody who needs it badly."

The boys thought so, too, and as they dropped seaward the minds of all three occupants of the *Sea Eagle* were busy with speculations concerning what could be the cause of the sloop's

distress. Dr. Perkins caused his craft to alight gently on the sea a short distance from the sloop, and then headed her over the waves toward the distressed vessel. As they drew closer they could see a grizzled-looking fellow, in rough fisher's garb, leaning over the side.

“Come quick!” he shouted, “there's been bad work going on aboard!”

CHAPTER XVIII. – AN ERRAND OF MERCY

“What’s up?” cried Frank.

“Yes, what’s the trouble?” came from Dr. Perkins.

“Trouble enough. We sprang a leak two days ago, out on the fishing banks, and have been at the pumps ever since. Now we’ve got the leak stopped, but my mate, Joe Higgins, was struck on the head by the boom and is so mortal bad that if we don’t get a doctor for him pretty quick I’m afraid he’ll die. Then, too, our provisions is run out.”

While the man was reciting this catalogue of mishaps the *Sea Eagle* was run alongside, and Dr. Perkins made her fast with a line the man flung to him.

“First let’s have a look at the injured man,” he said and, without further delay, Captain Zebedee Crooks, as he informed the travelers his name was, led them aft to a tiny cabin, stuffy, dark and reeking of fish. The boys followed Dr. Perkins into this wretched little den and Captain Zebedee lighted a sea lantern.

Its rays showed them a heavily built man of middle age lying on a locker. His head was bandaged, and although he breathed he showed no other signs of life. Dr. Perkins, with the skill of a professional man, made a hasty examination.

“This man is badly hurt,” he said at length. “I am afraid his

skull is fractured, but of that I cannot be certain. He should be ashore in a hospital.”

“Aye! I know that,” rejoined Captain Zebedee, “but at the rate we are going now we won’t get ashore till to-morrow night, and by that time poor Joe may be dead.”

“I think it extremely likely,” replied Dr. Perkins, “but we must get him ashore at once.”

“What, in that sky schooner of yours?” Dr. Perkins nodded.

“Yes, we must get him on deck without further loss of time. Then we’ll rush him to a hospital.”

“The good Lord who sent you here bless you!” exclaimed the rugged old fisherman, affected almost to tears. “I never thought when I seen you away up thar in ther sky that you’d bother to notice the poor *Star of Gloucester*; but you did. You come down from the clouds like so many angels.”

“Funny-looking angels,” remarked Frank to Harry, in an undertone. But Captain Zebedee’s gratitude was so heartfelt and earnest that neither of the boys could find it in them to smile at his odd phrases.

Captain Zebedee summoned some of his crew from the deck and as tenderly as possible the injured man was conveyed from the cabin. This done, he was lowered into the *Sea Eagle* and laid on a pile of blankets already prepared for his reception.

“Better make for Bayhaven,” counseled Captain Zebedee; “there’s a good hospital there, and it lies right on the coast about in a straight line from here.”

Dr. Perkins nodded, and then, having seen that the injured man was in a position to endure the ride comfortably, the flight to the shore was begun; but not till a substantial amount of provisions and some fresh water had been supplied to the fishing smack. As the *Sea Eagle* took to the air the *Star of Gloucester* was set before the wind, and staggered off on her slow course once more. The last the boys saw of the clumsy fisherman, the stout figure of Captain Zebedee was leaning on the stern bulwarks waving to them as they winged shoreward.

The coast was a rocky one, with gaunt cliffs and few habitations. But as they reached it and flew low above a small house on the summit of the cliffs, they spied a man at work in a small garden. Of him Frank inquired the way to Bayhaven. The man was too much astonished to answer at first, and stood looking stupidly up at the winged monster above him.

But finally he collected his wits and pointed to the south. The *Sea Eagle* was thereupon headed round, and, not long after, her passengers came in sight of a tiny town huddled in a cove almost at the water's edge. Heading out seaward once more, Dr. Perkins dropped to the water in the harbor, and then at reduced speed ran the *Sea Eagle* up to the long wharf which jutted out at the foot of the little city's main street.

By the time they arrived alongside of the jetty half the population of the town was on hand to greet them. Their approach through the air had been seen when they were still some distance off, and as the *Sea Eagle* was the first air ship ever seen

in Bayhaven it may be imagined what a sensation Dr. Perkins' craft created.

But all eager questioners were waved aside while Dr. Perkins and his young friends called for volunteers to help lift the injured man out of the *Sea Eagle*. A dozen willing hands responded, and before long the mate of the *Star of Gloucester* was on his way to the hospital in a wagon which had been hastily converted into an ambulance. It may be said here that, thanks to the prompt manner in which aid had been secured for him, the man recovered after a long illness, and was able to resume his work on Captain Zebedee's ship, where he never tires of telling of how he was saved by an aërial ambulance.

Dr. Perkins accompanied his patient to the hospital, where he saw him comfortably settled. In the meantime Frank and Harry had been left on guard with the *Sea Eagle*, for the crowd had grown so large, and so curious, that it would not have been wise to have left the ship to the mercies of the inquisitive. The boys answered a perfect hailstorm of questions as good-naturedly as possible, but once or twice they had to use physical means to keep the younger element of the population of Bayhaven off the decks.

By the time Dr. Perkins returned they were heartily tired of their job, and hailed his proposal that they should go up to town and purchase a fresh supply of provisions, with much delight. Leaving Dr. Perkins to cope with the throng, the two boys, arm in arm, made their way through the press and set off for the main

street, which sloped up from the wharf. One or two of the crowd followed them, gaping curiously at the youthful aerial voyagers. But the boys were too used to the curiosity of crowds to mind this, and before long their followers dropped back to gape at the great flying machine.

They found the town a small, uninteresting place. There were several shops, a hotel, with the usual group of loungers hanging about the porch, and further back a canning factory, which gave employment, in one way or another, to most of the inhabitants of Bayhaven. Beyond the hotel was a big "general store." Entering it, the boys made a variety of purchases, and arranged that the goods should be shipped to the *Sea Eagle* as soon as possible.

They were just leaving the place when out of the dusk – for by this time it was getting late – there came a figure that caused both boys to come to a dead stop in petrified astonishment. As for the man who had caused their sudden stoppage he, for his part, appeared to be nonplussed for a second. But the next moment he turned and fairly ran out of the store.

"After him!" cried Frank; "it's that rascal Duval!"

"That's what!" cried Harry, no less excited.

Both boys, to the utter amazement of the storekeeper, who thought they had gone suddenly crazy, dashed out of the door of the emporium, and taking the steps outside in one jump they made off in the direction in which Duval, for there was no doubt it was he, had vanished. But as ill luck would have it, the cannery whistle had just blown for the cessation of the day's work, and

round the corner there streamed a big crowd of the employees.

It took the boys some time to work their way through the throng, for some of the men were inclined to tease them by stepping in their way and otherwise annoying them so that by the time they got through the crowd all hope of catching, or even sighting, Duval was gone.

Greatly disappointed, and almost as much mystified by their sudden encounter with the rascally Frenchman, the boys decided to turn back and go down to the *Sea Eagle*. On their way they discussed Duval's sudden reappearance with interest.

"What can he be doing here?" wondered Harry.

"Blessed if I know," was the rejoinder, "but I'll bet he's up to some mischief or other. My! How he ran when he saw us."

"He had good reason to," declared Harry; "I guess we'd have had him arrested if we'd ever caught him."

"Not much doubt of that," declared Frank; "we could have charged him with the theft of that boat, anyhow, and that would have held him in the custody of the authorities till we could have obtained further evidence."

"Well, I don't imagine we'll see him again," decided Harry, as they turned into the Main Street.

"No such luck," declared Frank.

But, after all, the boys were to see Duval again, and sooner than they expected, too.

CHAPTER XIX. – PLUMBO FOUND WANTING

They were still talking in this vein when they reached the wharf. The crowd had, by this time, thinned out somewhat, and they made their way to the *Sea Eagle* without difficulty. They found Dr. Perkins talking with a most peculiar looking individual. He was long and lanky as a bean pole, and his thatch of bright red hair was crowned by a hat that a scarecrow might have disowned.

“Wonder who our new-found friend can be?” laughed Harry, as they clambered down a rough ladder to *the Sea Eagle’s* deck.

They soon found out. Dr. Perkins, it appeared, had decided to spend the night at Bayhaven, and had engaged quarters at the hotel which the boys had passed. The man with whom he was talking rejoiced in the name of Plumbo Boggs, and was a village character. However, he was honest, though not overmuch endowed with brains, and had been recommended to the inventor as a reliable man to leave in charge of the *Sea Eagle*.

Immediately Dr. Perkins had introduced this strange character, Plumbo broke out into rhymed speech which was a peculiarity of his. Some odd twist in his brain made it impossible for him to express himself in prose.

“I’m Plumbo Boggs of old Bayhaven; from harm your air ship

I'll be savin',” quoth he, striking an attitude.

“Do you always talk that way?” inquired Frank.

“Yes; I'm a poet, though you didn't know it,” was the response.

“Well, I don't know that that will keep you from being a good watchman,” smiled Dr. Perkins.

“I'll watch by day or I'll watch by night; you'll soon find that I'm all right,” was the quick response, while Plumbo's blue, rather watery eyes, flashed feebly.

“That's satisfactory. Mind, you are to let no one on board, under any pretext whatever.”

“Pretext is a word that I don't understand; but I'll keep them off though they come in a band,” rejoined Plumbo.

“How much will you do the job for?” asked Dr. Perkins.

“Two dollars will be my price to stay here; pay it and then no trouble you'll fear.”

“I'll agree to that,” said Dr. Perkins, “we are going uptown now. I'll have your supper sent down to you and you are to remain here till you are relieved by us early to-morrow.”

“I'll stay right here, watchful and steady; you'll find me here when to go you're ready,” declared Plumbo.

“And now that everything is well I guess we'll start for the hotel,” said Frank, and not until both Dr. Perkins and Harry burst into a roar of laughter did he realize that he had caught the rhyming “infection” from the poetical Plumbo.

“Be sure and don't forget my supper; I like pork and beans and bread and butter,” called Plumbo after them as they left the

wharf, and he took up his vigil.

“An eccentric sort of character, but I guess he’ll take good care of the *Sea Eagle* while we’re gone,” said Dr. Perkins.

It was on the tip of Frank’s tongue to tell about their encounter with Duval; but the next instant he decided not to speak of it. Dr. Perkins had several important matters on his mind, and after all, the boy argued, Duval could not do them any harm now. After supper the editor of the local paper called round at the hotel to elicit from the aërial voyagers the story of their trip as far as it had gone. He was also correspondent for the Associated Press, he informed them. Dr. Perkins granted him a careful interview, in which he described part of their adventures, but was cautious not to reveal any of the details of the *Sea Eagle’s* construction. Shortly after the newspaperman had taken his departure the party retired, having left an early call for the morning, for it had been determined to get under way as soon as possible the next day.

Bayhaven retired early to its rest, and the streets were deserted when, soon after midnight, three men walked down the main street, taking care to keep in the shadows of the buildings as they proceeded. One of the men was Duval, and the others were the Daniels, father and son. Their presence in Bayhaven is soon explained.

As we know, the elder Daniels had offered to get money to finance the trip to the Black Bayou, and it was from relatives in Bayhaven that he calculated on getting it. The trio had arrived in the town the day before, and Daniels had promptly obtained

the money as a loan, he having represented that the treasure was undoubtedly to be found in the long-forgotten wreck.

They had been on the streets the day before when the approach of the *Sea Eagle* was announced, and Duval instantly guessed that the oncoming air ship was the same that had rescued him and his employers from the illfated *Wanderer*. Neither the Daniels nor Duval himself knew anything of the destination of the *Sea Eagle*, nor did they guess for an instant that Harry Chester carried with him an exact duplicate of Duval's stolen plan. But their evil natures prompted them to do all the harm they could to the party, and it was with this end in view that they were making their way down the badly lighted and deserted streets of Bayhaven at such an hour. Duval's dislike of the boys had been roused to fever heat by their chase of him in the afternoon, and he was burning to do them some injury. From one of the elder Daniels' relatives the rascals had learned that Dr. Perkins and his two young friends were registered at the hotel, leaving the *Sea Eagle* in charge of Plumbo. At once they had decided to visit the air ship and see what harm they could do it.

Stealthily they advanced toward the wharf, revolving in their minds as they went what they would do when they got there.

"We'll have to get that half-witted chap out of the way," declared Duval, in a low tone, "or he may make an outcry and arouse the whole place."

"Leave that to me," Daniels assured him; "we'll fix him up all right."

“You don’t mean to hurt him? I don’t want to get mixed up in anything like that,” whimpered Duval, who was somewhat of a coward, as we know.

Daniels actually chuckled.

“Waal, you are a chicken-hearted fool,” he muttered, “but don’t you be scared. There won’t be no necessity of hurtin’ this Plumbo. I can recollect him from a time when I was here years ago. He’s soft-headed and talks poetry. Them two things most allers goes together I’ve found.”

Nothing more was said till they reached the wharf. It was dark and deserted, but in the starlight the dim outlines of the *Sea Eagle* could be seen as she lay at her moorings.

“I’ll bet a cruller that chap’s asleep,” whispered Zeb, as they crept forward cautiously.

“Hope so. It’ll make our work a lot the easier,” chuckled his worthy father.

But the next moment they had undeniable proof that the watchman was not slumbering. From amidst the ghostly outlines of the *Sea Eagle* came Plumbo’s voice.

“Who’s there so late? Answer up, mate.”

“Is that you, Plumbo?” said the elder Daniels.

“Yes, this is me, as you can see.”

“How are we goin’ ter see you when it’s so confounded dark?” growled Daniels.

“Well, what do you wish? To bathe or fish?” inquired Plumbo, ignoring this remark. Then he continued:

“You’d better skip. You’ll not board this ship.”

“That’s just what we came here to do,” replied Daniels, in an unruffled tone; “your mother is very ill and we come down to take charge of the air ship while you go home as quick as possible.”

Now poor Plumbo’s love for his widowed mother was a matter of common talk in the village, and the cunning of the elder Daniels had suggested this scheme to him as they came along. It worked even better than he had dared to expect. The rhyming watchman gave a gasp of pained astonishment.

“I must go home; though I ought not to roam,” he said.

“Make your mind easy about that, lad,” Daniels assured him; “we’ll watch this cloud clipper while you’re gone. Dr. Perkins told us to stay here while you are gone.”

“I’ll go home in a hurry; be back in a scurry,” declared Plumbo, who was completely taken in. His none too acute brain had been easily imposed upon by Daniels’ rascally trick. He scrambled up on the wharf and at once set off on a run for his home, crying as he went:

“Watch every crack till I can get back.”

“Oh, go to the dickens while we get our pickin’s,” growled out young Zeb Daniels, at which specimen of wit his father laughed heartily, though in a subdued way.

“Now, then, boys,” said Daniels, as Plumbo’s footsteps died away, “get busy and spile this cruise for that bunch of fine gentlemen. We’ll show ’em what it means to try to take folks’ livings away.”

CHAPTER XX. – FRANK’S BATTLE

It was about midnight that Frank, for no reason that he could explain, awakened with a vague feeling of uneasiness. Try as he would he could not compose himself to sleep again, but lay awake, struggling with a sort of intuitive suspicion that all was not well with the *Sea Eagle*.

At last, so strong did his conviction become, that, although he was ridiculing his fears all the time, he arose and dressed himself, and then started out for the wharf. For a moment he thought he would rouse Harry, who slept on another bed in the same room; but in the end he decided not to disturb his brother’s repose. Perhaps he had a vague fear of ridicule, but at any rate Frank crept out of the hotel alone and made his way silently down the dark and empty streets.

“This is certainly a fool’s errand I’m going on,” he told himself; “I suppose that my reward for my pains will be to hear some more of Plumbo’s poetry, and yet – and yet, I can’t help it. I couldn’t sleep another wink unless I was sure that the *Sea Eagle* was all right.”

Musing thus, and minimizing his own fears, Frank came in due time to the wharf. He made his way down it and was about to step forward to descend the ladder that led to the *Sea Eagle*’s deck, when he heard something that made him pause. He recognized the sound instantly.

It was the rasp of a file!

“My gracious! Somebody *is* tampering with the *Sea Eagle!*” exclaimed the boy to himself. “My fears were not as groundless as I thought them, after all. I wonder if that rascal Duval – ”

The current of his thoughts was suddenly checked at this point by another noise near at hand. It seemed to come from behind a big pile of boxes on the wharf.

“Goodness! What’s that?” thought Frank, and then for the first time it flashed across him that if more than one man was engaged in the nefarious work that he was sure was going on, he was at a serious disadvantage. He had no weapons but his hands, whereas the others were undoubtedly well armed.

“I’ll slip back uptown as quickly as I can and arouse the authorities,” he decided, “if they are quick we can catch the rascals red-handed. I wonder what can have become of that fellow Jumbo or whatever his name was? I suppose he went to sleep or something. Well, it serves us right for leaving such an eccentric fellow on guard.”

Frank, who had been crouching in the shadow of the very boxes behind which he had heard the suspicious sounds, rose quickly to his feet. He was just slipping off, congratulating himself that he had been unobserved when from behind the boxes a dark figure suddenly emerged.

“Hands up, Frank Chester,” it exclaimed; “we’ve got you where we want you this time.”

“Zeb Daniels!” exclaimed Frank, dumbfounded with

astonishment. He had not supposed the rascally young fisherman within miles of the place.

“Yes; that’s me. Don’t move a step or you’ll get hurt.”

But Frank’s indignation overcame his prudence.

“What are you doing here?” he demanded angrily.

“None of your business.”

“It isn’t, eh? Well I know that you are damaging Dr. Perkins’ boat in some way and – ”

Frank stepped deftly aside as Zeb, who was a far heavier, stronger boy than the young aviator, made a tigerish jump at him, at the same time brandishing a thick club threateningly.

But Zeb’s sudden rush proved his undoing. Before he could recover his balance Frank had planted a clean, hard punch on the young ruffian’s jaw, and Zeb reeled back dizzily. He recovered himself almost instantly, however, and without making a sound hurled himself at Frank once more. In a rough and tumble fight the sturdily built fisher boy might have been a match for Frank Chester, but Frank had already gained some advantage and he met Zeb’s frenzied charge coolly.

Zeb, as he got within reach, let loose a tremendous swing which, if it had struck Frank’s head as his burly young opponent intended, might have laid him flat. But to his astonishment Zeb’s fist met only empty air. Frank had ducked the blow with consummate ease, and the next instant:

One! Two! – Crack! Smack! Two well-planted blows landed on Zeb’s face and body. Frank was rushing in to complete his

victory when he was suddenly seized from behind in a powerful grip and hurled to the ground with great violence.

Zeb's father, on board the *Sea Eagle*, had heard the disturbance, and had swiftly and silently climbed the ladder leading up on to the wharf. Behind him, but at a prudent distance, came Duval. The Frenchman had no love for fighting, unless the odds were all in his favor, and he was by no means certain how many men might have attacked them.

The elder Daniels took in the situation in a flash, and pinioned Frank's arms, just as the latter was about to put an end to the battle. Duval saw instantly that there was no personal danger to himself, and while the elder Daniels held a grimy, leathery paw over Frank's mouth to prevent his shouting for aid, Duval pinioned the lad's lower limbs. Helpless as a baby Frank lay there on his back, completely at the mercy of three individuals whom he had no reason to suppose would handle him gently.

While he still lay there a helpless captive, young Daniels came up, and doubling up his fist deliberately struck the helpless boy in the face. But the elder of the Daniels angrily checked him.

"Stow that," he muttered roughly. "What's the matter with you?"

"I wanted to get even with him," whined Zeb; "he licked me and –"

"Waal, git even some other way. Bring me that rope off them pile of boxes while I make him fast."

Zeb said no more, but obediently fetched the rope, and before

many minutes had passed Frank was bound hand and foot. Moreover, a gag, consisting of a dirty fragment torn from the elder Daniels' shirt, was thrust into his mouth.

"What'll we do with him now?" demanded Zeb, when this had been done.

"Humph, I hadn't thought of that," rejoined the elder fisherman; "we can't leave him here, for we don't want any one to find him when they come down, as they are bound to do afore long when that idiot Plumbo finds out that we've fooled him. What *will* we do with the young game cock?"

"I'd like to chuck him overboard," quoth Zeb amiably, staunching his bleeding nose with a dirty coat sleeve.

"Don't waste time talking rubbish," angrily rejoined his parent; "see here, Duval, kain't you think of something?"

"Yes, I can," was the eager reply; "it's just occurred to me. Ho! ho! I guess that'll keep him quiet for a while."

"Well, what do you propose to do?" growled Daniels. "Don't stand there like an owl. Out with it."

"Well, my friend, you see those big barrels over there?"

"Yes, what about them?"

"We'll put him in one of those and give him a sea trip."

"By Jeehosopha, but that's a notion! I reckon by the time he's picked up, or drifts ashore, he'll be sorry he interfered with us."

"That's a great scheme," chuckled Zeb, equally delighted. "That's what I call getting even in good shape."

"Hold on a minute; how's the tide?" murmured Daniels. "We

don't want him to be picked up too quick."

"The tide's running out, pop," said Zeb, after a minute; "I tell you, though, what's the matter with putting the barrel in that dory there and then loading him in it? We can row out a ways and then dump him overside."

"That's the best idea yet," warmly approved his worthy parent; "come on, boys, tumble the barrel into that dory. Lively, now!"

The barrel, quite a big one, which had been used for salting down fish and was quite watertight, was lowered into the dory that Zeb's sharp eyes had spied with some difficulty.

Frank had watched the movements of his captors as well as he could in the darkness; but he was quite unable to guess what all this meant, which, perhaps, was just as well. As the conversation had been carried on in whispers, he had not overheard a syllable of the rascally plan to set him adrift out of pure malice.

Still bound and gagged, he was lowered into the dory, unable to call out or move, despite the now serious alarm he felt. What could the men be going to do with him, he wondered, and was still busy speculating on his probable fate when Zeb and his father cast off the dory and, with rapid strokes, began to row toward the mouth of the harbor on which Bayhaven is situated.

CHAPTER XXI. – A RASCALLY TRICK

While all this had been occurring on the wharf Plumbo Boggs had discovered the deception that had been practiced on him, and was hastening as fast as he could to the hotel. Even he, whose mind could not be called quick acting, realized that he was the victim of a trick, the object of which was, in all probability, to injure the *Sea Eagle*.

Arousing the night clerk, Plumbo begged to be directed to Dr. Perkins' room. The night clerk knew the eccentric character, and lost no time in escorting him to the doctor's quarters. Plumbo thundered on the door with noise sufficient to arouse the other guests.

"What is it? What's happened?" shouted Dr. Perkins, thinking for an instant that the place must be on fire at least.

"Oh, doctor, come quick! They've played us a trick!" yelled Plumbo.

"Who? Where? What do you mean?" exclaimed Dr. Perkins, coming to the door.

"Two men and a lad; they've fooled me bad."

"Do you mean that they persuaded you to leave the *Sea Eagle* alone and unguarded?"

"They told me a story to get me from there; or I'd have given

your air ship the best of good care,” pleaded Plumbo, seriously alarmed at the angry look that had come over the doctor’s face. “Don’t be angry with me, I pray; if they hurt it I’ll ask you no pay.”

“As if that would help,” cried Dr. Perkins angrily; “wait there till I get some clothes on.”

He retreated into the room and as he hastily donned some garments he wondered who the men could be who had induced the soft-witted poet to leave his position of trust.

“For the life of me I can’t imagine who they can be,” he was thinking, while he hurriedly laced his shoes, when the door opened and in walked Harry fully dressed.

“I heard the noise in the corridor, and heard Plumbo telling you that something had happened to the *Sea Eagle*,” he said excitedly.

“I don’t know that anything has happened yet,” cried Dr. Perkins anxiously; “I’m hoping not. But from what I can gather from Plumbo’s foolish talk three men induced him, on some pretext, to leave the ship unguarded. I must say it looks suspicious. But I cannot think who there is in this place where we are unknown who would want to harm us.”

The thought of Duval flashed across Harry’s mind. He and Frank had decided not to tell Dr. Perkins about their encounter lest it should worry him; but surely the time to tell about it had come now.

“We ought to have told you,” he said, rather falteringly, “but

we did not want to cause you undue anxiety, – we saw Duval this afternoon.”

“What!”

Dr. Perkins almost shouted the question, or rather exclamation, in a thunderstruck tone.

“Yes. We tried to catch him, but he escaped us. Frank can tell you all about it. By the way, where is Frank?”

“Isn’t he in your room?”

“No; when I was awakened by the noise in the passage I saw that his bed was empty. I supposed that he had got out of bed ahead of me and had come in here.”

“I haven’t seen him since we retired.”

“Then where can he be?”

The inventor and the boy aviator stared at each other for an instant.

“Good gracious, this looks serious, indeed,” exclaimed Dr. Perkins; “not in his room, and not in the hotel, apparently. Where can he have gone to?”

“That’s what’s worrying me,” cried Harry, in a rather quavering tone; “I’m sure, perfectly sure, that that rascal Duval knows something about him wherever he is. Maybe he heard some word of a plot to injure the *Sea Eagle* and has gone down to see if he can frustrate it. Duval – ”

“Yes; but Duval, if it is he, is not alone in this thing. Plumbo says there were two men and a lad.”

“Two men and a lad,” cried Harry joyously, “then the lad must

have been Frank.”

“But who could the others have been? They all came together and sent our watchman away.”

“It’s all a deep mystery, doctor. I think our best plan is to make all the speed we can to the wharf. Perhaps we can find some solution there.”

“Yes; let us do so at once. I am all ready, are you?”

“Yes; I hurried to get dressed as soon as I heard the noise in the corridor.”

Plumbo was waiting, and as they hastened down the street he explained in his odd rhyming speech just what had happened. He could not describe the men except to say that one had whiskers on his chin. In a part of the country where this is a favorite facial adornment this information was not much of a clew.

It took the alarmed party much less time to reach the wharf than they would have thought was possible. In fact, almost the whole distance was traversed at a run. But when they arrived at the wharf and a lantern, which Dr. Perkins had had the foresight to bring along, had been kindled, they found nothing to inform them as to what had taken place. The doctor had not expected to find Plumbo’s three men there, but he had had an idea that he would find something damaged about the *Sea Eagle*. But as careful an examination as it was possible to make by lamplight failed to reveal any trace of damage.

Naturally this, instead of helping to clear the mystery, only deepened it. What object could the men have had who had sent

Plumbo off on his wild goose chase if it had not been to wreak injury to the *Sea Eagle*?

“Maybe they were some inventors who wanted to steal your ideas,” suggested Harry, recalling some experiences of their own with unscrupulous aviators.

But Dr. Perkins shook his head.

“Every important feature of the *Sea Eagle* is fully covered by patents,” he said; “there isn’t a single idea they could appropriate in the short time they could have spent here anyhow.”

Harry had to admit that this was so, but to tell the truth his thoughts were centered more on Frank and on the strange circumstances surrounding his disappearance than they were on the *Sea Eagle*.

“I’m as certain as that daylight will come again that Frank fits into this mix-up somewhere,” he said, voicing his thoughts, “but the question is where?”

“Well, he’s not here now, that’s certain,” declared Dr. Perkins. “I propose that we should return to the hotel now that we have discovered that no damage has been done. He may meet us there.”

“Let’s search the wharf first,” said Harry, but, naturally, even their painstaking search failed to reveal any trace of Frank’s fate till, all at once, Harry, who was carrying the lantern, came upon his brother’s cap lying where it had fallen in the scuffle among the boxes.

The bit of headgear had been kicked close to the string-piece

of the wharf, and a fearful fear that made Harry's head swim shot into his mind. Could Frank have come down to the wharf, suspecting mischief was on foot, and have either fallen or been thrown into the water?

"Look – look here, sir," he exclaimed in a shaking voice, as Dr. Perkins asked him what was the matter.

"What is it?" asked the doctor, coming forward. "A clew?"

"Yes; it's – it's Frank's cap, doctor. Pray heaven no harm has befallen him."

"If it has, swift vengeance is going to overtake somebody," declared Dr. Perkins, clenching his hands; "where did you find the cap?"

"Close to the string-piece. You – you don't think he could have fallen over?"

"Nonsense," declared Dr. Perkins with a confidence he was far from feeling; "we'll get him back again safe and sound, never fear."

But Harry's heart sank as he fingered his brother's cap.

"I'm trying to think so, too, sir," he said miserably; "but – but –"

He paused abruptly, for he could not have gone further without breaking down. Harry had gone through some anxious moments in his life, but never had his heart sunk so low as it did that night on the Bayhaven wharf.

In the meantime, let us see how it was faring with the boy whose disappearance had caused such cruel fears – fears which

even the vengeful tempers of Daniels and his son would have been satisfied with. We left Frank gagged and bound on the bottom of the dory, while Zeb and his father were pulling with strong, swift strokes for the open water.

The dory shot swiftly and silently seaward, with Frank completely in the dark as to what was to be his fate. It occurred to him, though, that perhaps they meant to maroon him on some island. This thought did not give him so much anxiety as might have been expected, for he knew that the waters about Bayhaven were fairly populous with boats, and did not suppose that his captors meant to keep him a prisoner any longer time than would be necessary for them to take their departure from that part of the coast before the authorities could be notified.

Imagine, then, his thrill of surprise when the boat suddenly stopped and the barrel, into which some big stones had been thrown to keep it upright in the water, was lowered from the dory. This done, Frank was lifted by main force and placed in it.

A brutal laugh broke from Zeb and his father as they shoved the barrel containing its helpless captive away from the side of the dory. Duval said nothing, but his white teeth showed in a grin in the starlight. Frank, gagged as he was, could not utter a word or move a limb. He could only realize, with dumb agony, the terrible nature of his fate.

Still laughing, the brutal rascals who had conceived the idea of setting him adrift, rowed off at a quick rate, leaving the barrel and its helpless occupant bobbing up and down on the swells of

the starlit sea.

CHAPTER XXII. – REUNITED!

Frank's heart sank as he cast a look about him and perceived the helplessness of his position.

“If I could only get this gag off and shout for help,” he thought, “maybe somebody would hear me.”

But there seemed to be no means of compassing this end, try as he would to think of some way. All at once, as the stars were beginning to fade and a faint flush of gray appeared in the east, he perceived a nail sticking up on the rim of the barrel. This gave him an idea. By bending slightly he would be able to bring the edge of the gag against the sharp pointed bit of metal, and possibly tear it out. At any rate, it was worth trying, and Frank at once proceeded to put his plan into action.

It was a hard job to bend low enough to bring his mouth on a level with the nail, but fortunately the barrel was a large one, and consequently he had not so very far to stoop. By making a desperate effort he succeeded at last in dragging the gag across the nail. In doing this he scratched his chin, but he did not mind that, for the nail caught and held the rag, tearing it out of his mouth as he moved his head.

“Hurray!” breathed Frank, inhaling a great lungful of fresh air. “Now I can at least make a racket, and maybe that will bring some one.”

With all his might he began shouting for help. In the still

morning air his voice carried clearly across the water, and to the lad's huge delight it was not long before he perceived, coming toward him a small fishing boat, which, from the "chugging" sound it made, was evidently furnished with a gasolene engine.

But the question that now agitated the boy was, "Would they see him or hear his voice above the loud noise of the motor?" If they did not, Frank realized that his plight would pass from a serious to a desperate state, for the barrel was, by this time, caught in a current which was rapidly increasing the distance between himself and the shore.

To his intense relief, however, he saw the fishing boat suddenly change her course, and before long she was close enough for him to read the name "*Two Sisters*" on her broad, bluff bow.

"Waal, by the tarnal!" came a gruff voice, "who and what are yer out here in a ba'rl?"

The speaker, a burly-looking fellow, with a rough but kindly countenance, regarded Frank's face, which was all that was visible of him, with the most intense astonishment, as well he might. In a long experience off shore, covering all sorts of adventures, Captain Elihu Carney of the *Two Sisters* had never before beheld a floating barrel with a human head projecting from it.

"It's a kid – a boy!" shouted one of his mates from the stern of the *Two Sisters*, where he held the tiller.

"Crack-e-e! so it air. Hey, kid, what yer doin' out here? Takin'

a cruise, or is this one of them new-fangled health cures?"

"It's neither, I assure you," cried Frank; "get me out of this and I'll tell you all about it."

"I'll run alongside and you can climb out."

"No, I can't," returned Frank; "I'm bound hand and foot."

"What! Say, you be'ant one of them movin' picter fellers makin' a fillum be yer?"

Captain Carney's rugged face held a look full of suspicion. Once not long before his boat had been boarded by a beauteous maiden, apparently fleeing from a band of desperadoes. The gallant captain had fished her out of the dory in which she was rowing from her pursuers and had threatened the apparent rascals with all sorts of dire things. Then to his chagrin a voice had hailed him:

"Hey, you old mossback! You've spoiled a grind!"

A "grind" being moving picture language for a film.

"I certainly am not," returned Frank indignantly; "no moving pictures about this, I can tell you. This is the real thing."

"Waal, as I don't see no camera about I reckon it's all right. Put her head round, Eph, and we'll pick him up, but 'once bitten twice shy,' you know."

Eph, the helmsman, brought the bow of the *Two Sisters* round and slowed up the engine. A minute later the fishing boat's side was scraping the barrel, and Captain Carney's muscular arms lifted Frank out of his floating prison as if he had been an infant.

"Waal, I'll be double decked consarned!" he roared, as he saw

the ropes that confined the boy's limbs. "Who done this?"

"Some rascals who had good cause to wish me harm," said Frank. "I suppose they thought they could get rid of me while they made their escape."

"What's the world comin' to?" cried the rugged skipper, throwing up his hands.

He reached into his belt for a tarry sailor's knife and cut Frank loose in a few strokes of the keen blade. But the boy was so stiff from loss of circulation that it was some time before he recovered the use of his limbs. The *Two Sisters*, it turned out, was headed for Bayhaven, to which port she belonged, but so far had Frank drifted in his – or rather somebody else's barrel – that he was able to tell his whole story before the wharf was reached.

As they neared it the skipper ordered Eph to blow the compressed air whistle so as to apprise every one ashore that something unusual was happening. Among the crowd that hastened to the wharf in response to the frenzied tooting Frank recognized Dr. Perkins and Harry. As they drew close he saw how white and strained their faces were, and realized what anxiety they must have been through on his account. He shouted loudly, and at the sound of his voice both Harry and the staid inventor set up a series of cheers that drowned the tooting of the whistle. As for Plumbo Boggs, who was also on the wharf, he burst into rhyme at once.

"Home again! home again from the stormy sea; now that your chum is found all right, don't blame me!"

So saying he capered about, snapping his fingers and performing a dozen odd antics while the *Two Sisters* was making fast. Without waiting for Frank, who was still stiff and sore, to come up on the wharf, Harry and Dr. Perkins jumped to the deck of the *Two Sisters*, and the former fairly threw his arms about his brother's neck.

"If you only knew how glad I am you have come back," he exclaimed.

"What ever happened to you?" demanded Dr. Perkins.

"It's a long story," said Frank, "and I'm famished. Suppose we ask Captain Carney and Eph to breakfast with us and while we are eating I'll tell you all about it."

CHAPTER XXIII. – OFF ONCE MORE

AS our readers are fully acquainted with Frank's adventure it would only tedious to relate all that took place at the breakfast. It may be said, however, that both Captain Carney and his mate received a substantial recognition of their services, from Dr. Perkins, in the form of a check. At first the bluff fishermen were by no means willing to take pay for what they had done, but were finally prevailed upon to accept the present, which, as Captain Carney owned, "would come in mighty handy."

After the conclusion of the meal all hands adjourned to the wharf, and a thorough examination was made once more of the *Sea Eagle*, with the object of detecting any damage which the Daniels and Duval might have done her, and which might have been overlooked in the lamplight investigation made by Dr. Perkins and Harry. A bright spot was found on one of the metal braces. Undeniably it had been done by the teeth of a file, but it was only a superficial damage, which did not affect the strength of the *Sea Eagle* in any way.

"I guess Frank scared them away before they had time to do any more harm," was Dr. Perkins' conclusion; but later on he was to have a different opinion.

As things were at present, however, Dr. Perkins felt no

hesitation in declaring the *Sea Eagle* fit to resume her voyage without further delay. The fresh provisions being on board, and there being nothing to prevent an immediate start, the voyagers at once made ready for a continuance of the trip which, so far, had proved so packed with adventure.

The gasoline tank was refilled, and the emergency receptacles for the liquid fuel seen to. Plumbo Boggs was paid and instructions left to telegraph Dr. Perkins in New Orleans in case any trace was found of the miscreants, who undoubtedly had intended to injure the *Sea Eagle*, and who had played such a dastardly trick on Frank.

“You’ll fly from the sea far up to the sky; good-by! good-by! good-by! good-by!” cried Plumbo Boggs as the ropes that held the *Sea Eagle* to the wharf were cast off and, amidst a loud cheer from the crowd, the engine was started.

It was a fine summer morning with a glassy sea and a sky that was cloudless, except in the east, where a great mass of castellated white clouds were piled up.

“You’d best hug the shore,” were Captain Carney’s parting words of advice. “To my mind we’ll have a storm of some sort before the day’s out.”

But in the noise and excitement of the departure his words were unheard and the *Sea Eagle* started off down the coast with the warning unheeded. Dr. Perkins ran the craft over the water till the mouth of the harbor was reached, easily outdistancing some fast launches that tried to keep up with them. When they got

“outside,” the *Sea Eagle* was driven ahead at top speed, and with her rising planes set at a sharp angle she was driven upward till a height of some five hundred and fifty feet had been obtained. Her course was due south.

They were flying over a small island not far from the shore when Frank, who was looking over the side, noticed a dory ashore on the beach. He had hardly noticed this before three figures came running down to the beach and pointed upward. One of them jerked a rifle up to his shoulder, and a minute later a puff of smoke came from the barrel. Simultaneously a bullet sang through the rigging of the *Sea Eagle*, boring a small hole in one of the upper planes, but, fortunately, not striking any vital part of the craft or doing injury to her passengers.

“That’s those rascals now!” exclaimed Frank indignantly. “They must have rowed down to that island and are waiting there for a chance to get ashore quietly. Shall we go down and attack them?”

Dr. Perkins shook his head.

“Nothing much would be gained by it,” he said, “and it would only delay our trip.”

The *Sea Eagle* was flying fast, and the rascals on the island, who, as Frank had rightly guessed, were the two Daniels and Duval, had no chance to try a second shot. At noon, after a steady flight all the morning, the voyagers found themselves off Martha’s Vineyard. A hasty lunch was eaten in midair, with the *Sea Eagle* still winging her way like a grayhound of the sky.

The shore swam by below them like a panorama, but they only viewed it indistinctly, as the course was kept about five miles off shore. In the afternoon they saw, off to the right, a stretch of mammoth hotels and amusement resorts.

“Atlantic City!” cried Frank. “I’ll bet there are hundreds of glasses leveled at us from the boardwalk right now.”

“I guess so,” rejoined Harry. “We must look funny way out here at sea.”

It was half an hour later that Frank’s attention was attracted to the sky by the sudden blotting out of the sun, which had been shining brightly. He gave a cry of alarm as he looked upward. A vast bank of black clouds had come rolling up, like a sable curtain, blotting out the blue sky. The sea below was leaden and angry in hue, and its surface was flecked with white caps.

“We’re in for some bad weather, I’m afraid,” declared Dr. Perkins, when Frank called his attention to it.

Hardly had he spoken before, from the cloud bank, a red, jagged flash of lightning blazed. It was followed almost instantly by a sharp clap of thunder, and some heavy rain drops began to patter on the broad upper planes of the *Sea Eagle*.

“I’ll make for shore,” declared Dr. Perkins; “we must be about off Cape May now. We can lie there in shelter till this blows itself out.”

“That will be the best idea,” said Frank. “This is going to be a hummer. Wow! Look at that!”

A flash of lightning, that seemed as if the whole curtain

of clouds had been split from top to bottom, had caused his exclamation. So brilliant was the glare that it caused them all to blink involuntarily.

“Put on full speed, Frank!” shouted Dr. Perkins above the deafening peal of thunder that followed.

Frank needed no second bidding. He opened both gasoline and spark levers to their full capacity. Dr. Perkins had already headed the *Sea Eagle* for the distant low-lying shore. This caused the craft to plunge almost as much as if she were “bucking” into a heavy sea. For the wind was off shore, and the thunder storm, as such storms frequently do, was coming up against it.

Suddenly, in the midst of the fight with the wind, Frank noticed an ominous sound from the motor. It gave a sort of spluttering, coughing exhaust and slowed down perceptibly.

“What’s wrong now?” he exclaimed anxiously. “Gracious, if the motor should go out of business now!”

He did not say this aloud, but bent over the laboring machine to try and ascertain what was the matter with it.

“More speed!” cried Dr. Perkins from the forward part of the air ship; “we can’t fight this wind at this pace.”

“There’s something the matter with the motor,” shouted Frank above the now almost continuous rolling of the thunder. “I can’t make out what – ”

A sudden loud report, like a pistol shot, came from the engine – a back-fire, as it is called – and the next instant the motor stopped dead.

The *Sea Eagle* was at that moment some 750 feet above the angry sea, with the storm raging about her furiously. Before Dr. Perkins could realize what had happened, the big craft began to drop downward with sickening velocity, while her occupants clung on to whatever was handy, with the desperate clutch of drowning men.

Frank had just time to shout:

“The life preservers! Quick, quick! for heaven’s sake!”

But there was no time to obey the order before the *Sea Eagle* struck the waves, hurling spray and wind-driven foam in a great cloud all about her wings and substructure.

CHAPTER XXIV. – A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

The next moments were filled with anxiety. The sea was running high, and, although Dr. Perkins had brought his craft upon a level keel by skillful volplaning, before it struck the waves, the situation was extremely serious.

The hydroplane portion of the *Sea Eagle* was built lightly, and, although it was well strengthened with braces, the test was a severe one. Over the bow the crests of the waves broke constantly, showering the occupants with spray. The *Sea Eagle* was tossed about helplessly, a plaything of the waves, while her adventurers strove to collect their thoughts and decide what was to be done.

First they adopted Frank's suggestion and donned the life jackets, so that if the worst came to the worst they would have a fighting chance for their lives. When this had been done, Frank, who had had some experience in motor boats, supervised the rigging of a "spray-hood" across the bow. This kept some of the spray out, and, although it was formed of sheets of spare canvas intended to be used as waterproof night coverings, it answered its purpose well enough.

"Do you think that there is a chance of our keeping afloat?" asked Harry when this had been done.

“Well, we appear to be making out all right so far,” rejoined Dr. Perkins; “the wing floats are working well, and if only we can get the engine going again we may be able to fly ashore yet.”

The wing floats referred to were nothing more nor less than the light cylindrical pontoons affixed to each lower wing tip. They acted precisely as “outriggers” would do in steadying the *Sea Eagle*. In fact, had it not been for this lateral support, the craft must have turned turtle under the terrific tossing she was receiving.

“I’m going right to work on the engine,” announced Frank.

With Harry to help him, the lad proceeded to carry out this purpose. But it was the hardest bit of “trouble finding” he had ever done. The motion of the *Sea Eagle*, as she was tossed on a wave crest and then hurled into the abyss beyond, made it hard to hold on, let alone investigating the complicated mechanism of a motor. But as time wore on and they still kept afloat, they began to have hopes that they would at least stay on the surface till the engine could be started once more.

One after another Frank made the different tests employed to ascertain the various troubles that may assail a gasolene motor. He tested the ignition, the spark, the gasolene supply and the bearings. Everything appeared to be all right, and he paused in a puzzled way before he went to work on the carburetor. That is a delicate piece of mechanism, even to an ingenious boy like Frank Chester; but he finally concluded that the trouble must lie there. His first task was to open the relief cock and drain the

brass bowl of the mixing chamber.

He turned the valve, and the mystery of the stoppage of the engine was instantly explained.

Sand had been placed in the carburetor by persons whom Frank had little difficulty in mentally identifying.

“So that was what those rascals did!” he cried aloud. “No wonder we couldn’t find anything the trouble with the ship. They were too foxy for that, and could hardly have found a better way of injuring the *Sea Eagle* than to do that.”

“Is there any way of fixing the damage?” asked Dr. Perkins, who, with Harry, had hastened to Frank’s side as he cried out over his discovery.

“Yes. Thank goodness, we’ve got a spare carburetor on board, for it would take a week to clean out this. If no sand has got into the cylinders I think I can promise to get things going again before very long.”

Out of the locker in which the spare parts were kept Frank produced another carburetor. But unscrewing the feed pipe and taking off the old mixing chamber and adjusting the new one were tedious tasks, especially under the circumstances in which Frank was compelled to work. But at last it was done, and with a beating heart Frank adjusted the self-starter. A few seconds now would decide their fate.

Harry shivered in anticipation of failure as his brother, having got the engine going by the just mentioned appliance, turned on the gasoline and spark.

For a breathless instant their fate hung in the balance, and then there came the welcome sound of the exhaust. Bit by bit Frank allowed the speed to increase, till the engine was running at its full capacity of revolutions. But the propellers were not turning, as before testing the motor he had thrown the clutch out of gear.

"I think that we can try to rise now," he said calmly, after the motor had run without a miss or a skip for ten minutes or so.

"I think so, too," said Dr. Perkins, "and I want to tell you, Frank, that you have done what I would not have believed possible under the conditions."

Another anxious moment followed when the clutch was thrown in and the full load of the propellers came upon the engine. But not a hitch occurred. The large-bladed driving fans of the *Sea Eagle* beat the air rapidly and surely, and the hydroplane-formed underbody began to glide over the tops of the waves, instead of rolling and pitching helplessly among them. To the westward, too, there showed a patch of lighter sky, heralding the passing of the storm.

But, as if unwilling to allow them to escape without again bringing their hearts into their mouths, the storm had one more buffeting to give them. As full power was applied, and the *Sea Eagle* rose above the tossing wave crests and headed slantingly skyward, there came a sudden puff of wind.

Skillful as Dr. Perkins was, it caught him momentarily unprepared. In the wink of an eye the *Sea Eagle* careened over, almost on her "beam ends." It seemed as if the right hand wing

tips actually touched the water. One inch more and there might have been an abrupt conclusion to this story, but Dr. Perkins' hands seemed to be everywhere at once. They flashed among levers and wheels.

For the space of a breath the *Sea Eagle* hung almost vertically, and then the big craft suddenly righted and shot upward on an even keel once more. But the moment had been an awful one, and as they winged their way upward not one aboard was there but felt that they had been delivered from a dreadful fate by what might well be described as a miracle.

CHAPTER XXV. – A RACE TO CLOUDLAND

Scudding before the wind, for the half gale that was blowing had shifted during their battle with the waves, the aërial voyagers made fast time beneath the storm wrack racing by overhead. In fact, it appeared to the boys that they actually outflew the wind. At any rate, it was not long before the thunder of the great breakers on a low, sandy beach told them that they were close to the shore.

An instant later houses and streets came into view, and Dr. Perkins began looking anxiously about beneath for a place to land. He soon spied a spot, – a large ball-ground, or at least it appeared to be one, not far from the center of the city. Calling to Frank to “stand by” the engines, he began to descend in a series of circles.

Coming to earth in a high wind is a risky bit of business for the air man, about as dangerous a maneuver, in fact, as can be imagined. But in this case there was no choice for Dr. Perkins and his young friends, unless they wanted to be carried clear across the cape and into Delaware Bay.

Below them they could now see excited crowds racing toward the ball-ground, as soon as it became evident that that was the spot where the air men intended to alight. This did not please Dr.

Perkins at all. A crowd was the last thing that he wished to have about when he made his drop earthward. But there was no help for it, and he kept on descending, trusting to the good sense of the throngs below to get out of the way when the time came.

But crowds have never been remarkable for their common sense, and this one was no exception. The last "bank" had been made with safety, and the *Sea Eagle* was making a clean-cut swoop to earth, when the crowd rushed in right below her. To have kept the craft on its course would have meant much injury, and possible loss of life. On the other hand, Dr. Perkins knew that in the wind that was blowing it would be dangerous in the extreme to the air craft to change her course.

"Get out of the way!" he shouted.

"Out of the way unless you want to get hurt!" yelled Frank and Harry.

But the crowd, like foolish sheep, only stared and gaped, and made not the slightest effort to avoid the on-driving *Sea Eagle*.

There was only one thing to do, and Dr. Perkins did it. There was a quick twist of his steering wheel, and the *Sea Eagle*, instantly obeying her helm, darted off in an opposite direction to the one in which she had been advancing. Like a flash Dr. Perkins pulled the rising lever, at the same time shouting to Frank to stop the engines momentarily. He thought that the *Sea Eagle* would rise of her own volition, and knew that if the engines kept driving at top speed that his craft would be plunged prow first into the earth.

So he chose the lesser of the two evils, and the maneuver might have been successful but for one thing. There was not room in which to execute it.

The *Sea Eagle* hesitated, half rose, and then crashed down to the ground, landing heavily on one wing tip and smashing it to bits. Frank and Harry were pitched clean out of the hydroplane substructure when the impact came, and a cry of alarm went up from the crowd. But Dr. Perkins clung to his seat and brought the big craft to a stop.

Fortunately neither Frank nor Harry had been much injured, beyond being badly shaken up and bruised, and they were both on their feet again in a jiffy after the accident. The crowd, as if realizing that its actions had had a good deal to do with the accident, forebore to press in, and they made their way to Dr. Perkins' side without difficulty.

"Is she much injured?" was Frank's first question.

"By good luck I think we have escaped serious damage," rejoined Dr. Perkins, "but only an examination can tell."

At this moment a well-dressed, prosperous-looking man came elbowing through the crowd. He came straight up to Dr. Perkins with hand extended.

"Well, Perkins!" he exclaimed. "I always told you you'd have a tumble some time, and now you've had it; right in my back yard, too. But I'm sincerely glad to see that neither you nor your machine appears to be much injured."

The newcomer was Mr. James Studley, an old acquaintance

of the inventor's, who was summering at Cape May. The doctor was very glad to see him and accepted his cordial invitation to spend the night at his house, the boys, of course, being included in the invitation.

In the meantime, a squadron of police had arrived, who drove back the crowds, and arrangements were made to keep a guard on duty all night till an examination of the wrecked machine could be made.

“The accident, if it had to happen, could not have occurred more conveniently, so to speak,” Dr. Perkins confided to his companions as they followed Mr. Studley to a handsome house not far away. “Mr. Studley is a manufacturer of aëroplanes, and has started a factory here, so that very probably we can get material to repair our damages without much trouble.”

This was good news indeed to the boys, who had begun to fear that the trip might be abandoned.

They enjoyed a good dinner and a change into dry clothes as the guests of Mr. Studley and his wife, and bright and early the next morning repairs were made to the splintered wing tip, which was not so badly damaged as had at first appeared. Mr. Studley, who had provided workmen and materials for the task from his aëroplane factory, refused to hear of any compensation.

“Such services should be rendered freely and gladly by one birdman to another,” he declared laughingly. “Who knows that some day I may not drop in on you at your island, in more senses than one.”

As every trace of the storm had vanished, and the morning was bright and clear, no obstacle opposed itself to the continuance of their journey as soon as the repairs had been completed. So fine was the weather, in fact, that Mr. Studley declared his intention of accompanying them in a light “runabout” aëroplane of the monoplane class, for a short distance.

The machine, a pretty little affair of the Bleriot type, was soon wheeled out, and Mr. Studley declared all was ready for the start. As on the evening before, a large crowd had gathered, but the police kept them back, and gave the two vastly different aëroplanes a clear field in which to rise. A greater contrast could not well be imagined than that presented by the heavy, rather cumbersome-looking *Sea Eagle* with her substantial underbody and huge wing spread, and the trim, dainty little monoplane, which was named the *Green Firefly*.

“We’re all ready when you are,” exclaimed Dr. Perkins, turning to his friend, who was already seated in his long-bodied, gauzy-winged air craft.

“All right! Clear the way!” cried Mr. Studley with a wave of his hands.

His mechanics gave the propeller of the monoplane a twirl, as it was not provided with self-starting mechanism, and a moment later the roaring fusillade of the *Sea Eagle*’s motor was drowning the sharp, angry, hornet-like buzzing of the *Green Firefly*.

“Go!” yelled Mr. Studley, and simultaneously, as it seemed, the two sky ships dashed forward over the smooth sward.

“Hooray!” shouted the crowd.

“They’re off!” shouted others.

And then, a minute later:

“Look! They’re going up!”

“So they are!” cried the spectators, as if there was any room for doubt about the matter.

The light *Firefly* was first, by the fraction of a second, to point her sharp nose up toward the tranquil blue dome of the sky. But the *Sea Eagle* was not tardy in following.

“Come on!” shouted Mr. Studley, casting a swift glance back over his shoulder at his large comrade of the air. He appeared to think that he would have little difficulty in distancing the huge machine.

“We haven’t begun yet!” cried Dr. Perkins back to him, with an answering wave of the hand.

Nor was the *Sea Eagle* as yet making a quarter of the speed she was capable of. On account of her great weight, and general size of her wing spread, it was not advisable to “open everything up” at once when she made an ascent from the land.

The *Firefly* darted ahead like some creature that rejoiced to be sporting in its element. But close behind came a roar and whirr as Frank let out another notch on the *Sea Eagle*. Up and up they flew, while the crowd below dwindled to pigmies, and the houses looked like so many toy Noah’s Arks. It was plain enough that Mr. Studley was engaged in a good-natured effort to show his friend that the *Firefly* was an infinitely faster craft than her

cumbersome rival. He darted this way and that, making spirals and doing rocking-chair evolutions with the perfection of aërial grace.

Dr. Perkins attempted none of these stunts, but from time to time he turned back to Frank and nodded as a signal to give the craft a little more power.

By the time the twin propellers were developing their top push and speed, the owner of the *Firefly* realized that he had a tussle on his hands. He ceased his graceful evolutions and settled down to real flying. But he had not gone a mile over the aërial race track before the *Sea Eagle* thundered past him like a "Limited" of the skies.

"Good-by and thank you!" Dr. Perkins found time to yell, as they flashed past, bound due south once more.

"Good-by. Good luck to you!" came from Mr. Studley, as he waved his hand in the realization that he was beaten.

There was no time to exchange more words. In a few minutes the boys, looking back, could only see a black speck like a shoe button against the sky to mark where the defeated *Firefly* was turning about and heading for home.

As for the *Sea Eagle*, at sixty miles an hour, and with her motor going faster every minute, that staunch and speedy craft was winging her way at top speed for her distant goal.

CHAPTER XXVI. – THE BOY AVIATORS' PLUCK

But it was almost a week later that the 1,400 odd miles down the coast to Fernandina, Florida, and from thence overland to the Crescent City, were completed. Storms and minor accidents spun out the voyage to this length, although Dr. Perkins had calculated on making a faster run. In fact, his aim had been to make about 500 miles a day, with night flights to help out, if possible.

Many interesting incidents, which it would require another volume to chronicle in detail, marked the trip. Off Savannah the *Sea Eagle* towed a disabled motor boat, containing a pleasure party, into port, and a short time later flew above the Atlantic squadron of the United States fleet bound south for target practice. Aërial greetings were exchanged by wireless between the *Sea Eagle* and Uncle Sam's bulldogs of the ocean.

The next day the *Sea Eagle* was once more enabled to render aërial ambulance service by taking an injured keeper from a lighthouse off Fernandina into port, and arranging for a substitute to be sent out at once. At every city they stopped they received a great reception, for by this time the flight of the *Sea Eagle* had received the attention of the country through the medium of the newspapers.

Possibly one incident may be worth chronicling in more

detail. This occurred when, a short time after rising for a night flight from Eufala, Alabama, to the Mississippi State line, Frank descried, through some trees, what he thought was the rising moon.

“That’s the funniest-looking moon I ever saw,” declared Harry, who happened to be doing duty as engineer.

“Why, what’s the matter with it?” demanded Frank.

“Why, it’s red.”

“Probably caused by the mist from some marshlands,” decided Dr. Perkins, who was resting, while Frank guided the *Sea Eagle*, at which he had become quite expert. But the next moment he changed his opinion.

“It isn’t the moon at all. It’s the glare from a fire, and a big one, too. Let’s hurry up, boys.”

Neither Frank nor Harry needed any urging, and the *Sea Eagle* was soon traversing the air so fast that the wind sang in their ears. As they raced along the glare grew brighter and angrier, glowing with a lambent red core from which flames could be seen leaping skyward like a nest of fiery serpents.

A few minutes brought them into full view of the conflagration. It proved to be a fine old farm-house. The front of the place was a mass of flame, and the blaze appeared to be bursting through the roof. Men could be seen running about the grounds like a nest of disturbed ants, and others were hastening on foot, in autos and in buggies, from every direction.

Nobody paid any attention to the oncoming aëroplane in

the excitement, and when it dropped to earth on the lawn in front of the blazing building, there was the liveliest sort of confusion. Some of the farmers did not know what to make of the visitor from the skies, but their more enlightened neighbors soon informed them, and recalled the newspaper accounts they had read of the *Sea Eagle's* great flight.

"Anybody in the building?" shouted Frank, jumping from the *Sea Eagle* as the craft came to a standstill.

Nobody answered for a moment, but suddenly, from the back of the building, came a piercing scream.

"Help! Help!"

"Goodness, that's a woman calling!" exclaimed Frank. "Come on, Harry."

Both boys dashed round to the rear of the blazing mansion, and there, at a third-story window, they saw a woman with a baby in her arms, leaning out and frantically calling for help.

"Get a ladder!" shouted Frank.

"No time to hunt for it," cried Harry. "We'll have to try another way."

"What do you mean?"

"See the flat roof of that coach house over there? If we had a board we could make a bridge from it to the window."

"But how are we to get to the roof of the coach house?"

"Fly there."

"What! in the *Sea Eagle*?"

"Why not? The roof is flat and big enough to give us room to

land if we are careful.”

“Cracky! I think you’re right. Has anybody got a board?”

“Here you are,” exclaimed a man who had darted off to a lumber pile when he overheard Harry’s plan.

“Good! I think this will be long enough. Come on, Harry, let’s lose no time. See, the flames are almost at that part of the house.”

At top speed the two boys ran back to the *Sea Eagle*, calling to Dr. Perkins to join them. Hastily they explained what they meant to do. Dr. Perkins was inclined to doubt if the plan was feasible, but as it appeared to be the only way to save the woman and the child, he agreed to attempt it, grave though the risk of disaster to the *Sea Eagle* appeared to be.

While the excited men gathered about, and the woman’s cries still filled the air, the *Sea Eagle* was started up, and after circling about, dropped to the coach house roof. The big craft landed without mishap, but Frank reversed the engines barely in time to prevent her from rolling off. However, with the front wheels of the substructure on the very brink of the cornice, the *Sea Eagle* came obediently to a standstill.

They had brought the board with them, and it was shoved across to the woman, who saw at once what they intended to do. She secured it to the ledge of the window at which she had been standing, and Frank worked his way across the plank bridge and took the child in his arms. He recrossed in safety with it, and then came the woman’s turn to trust herself to the frail bridge. But she hesitated till smoke was pouring into the room, and then,

fairly driven to try the slender support, she began to cross it.

From the coach house roof the boys called encouragingly to her, for the plank was far too weak to bear the weight of two persons. Even under Frank and the baby it had sagged ominously. Something in the woman's face as she neared the end of her journey caused Frank to reach out toward her. It was well that he had the foresight to do so, for as she reached the end of her journey she suddenly fainted.

Another instant and she would have fallen forty feet to the ground, but Frank caught her dress in a strong grip. Luckily, it was of stout material and did not rip as he seized it. Dr. Perkins and Harry came to his aid the next minute, and with their united strength they managed to draw the woman's limp form to safety.

Hardly had they done so before the flames began breaking out fiercely from the back of the house, and, driven by the strong wind, they were uncomfortably close to the coach house roof. No time was lost in placing the woman and her infant in the *Sea Eagle*, after which the air craft was started. Dr. Perkins rose to a suitable height from which to make a safe descent, and then swept down to the ground, carrying the first woman and child in the history of the world to be saved from a blazing building by aëroplane.

The woman soon recovered after some friends of the neighborhood had taken her and her child to a nearby dwelling.

The owner of the building, and the husband of the woman who had been so bravely rescued, now came bustling up, his face

beaming with gratitude. At the moment he was not thinking of the fire but of the brave strangers from the sky who had saved his wife and child.

“I don’t know who you are, or where you came from,” he exclaimed, “but you literally dropped from the skies when all hope appeared lost. I was in town buying stock, and on my way out I saw the flames coming from my home. Knowing my wife and child had retired I dreaded to think what would have happened if they had not been aroused. I arrived here in time to find my worst fears realized. How can I ever thank you for what you have done?”

“Oh, we only tried to do what we could,” said Frank modestly; “we saw the fire and came down to see if we couldn’t help.”

“I owe the lives of my wife and child to your quickness and courage, and that wonderful airship of yours,” vehemently declared the man, whose name was Winfield Thomas, a wealthy farmer. “It was a real blessing you happened along as you did.”

Dr. Perkins and the boys could only repeat how glad they were to have done what they could. Without waiting much longer, except to congratulate Mrs. Thomas on her quick recovery, and to express the hope that she would feel no bad effects from her experience, the voyage was shortly resumed. But the adventure at the burning farm house long remained in the boys’ memory, and strengthened their attachment to the *Sea Eagle*.

Nearing New Orleans they caught a wireless message from Billy Barnes telling them that he had secured quarters for the *Sea*

Eagle in Algiers, a suburb across the river from the city. That night one stage of the trip was concluded when, in answer to a signal given with a blue lamp, they dropped into a field on the outskirts of Algiers and housed the *Sea Eagle* in a large barn.

“Thunder and turtles!” cried Pudge when that night in the St. Charles Hotel they were relating their adventures. “You fellows have all the fun and we do all the work.”

“Never mind, Pudge,” said Frank; “I guess we’ll have adventures in plenty ahead of us when we try to locate the wreck of the *Belle of New Orleans*.”

“Which will be as soon as possible,” said Dr. Perkins. “Our trip has taken us longer than I anticipated, and there is a strong chance that Duval may have got ahead of us.”

“There’s another reason for hurrying,” declared Billy, who had just wired to his paper a long account of the *Sea Eagle’s* trip; “they say that the river is rising. There have been unprecedented rainstorms and the levees are weakening. Negroes are at work on them all along the line, but they doubt if they can make them hold if the river keeps rising.”

CHAPTER XXVII. – CAPTURED BY AËROPLANE

During the short time that they had been in the city Ben Stubbs and his two young companions had done wonders in the way of collecting equipment for the purpose of rifling the treasure which it was expected lay in the submerged hulk of the *Belle of New Orleans*. A diving suit with pumping apparatus of the latest type, blocks and tackles and hand spikes were among the things laid in stock. Ben had also invested in a new device, a submarine searchlight. The choice of this last was warmly approved by Dr. Perkins.

“I was wondering how it would be possible to find one’s way about the sunken ship without some such article,” he said approvingly, and old Ben’s rugged face glowed with satisfaction.

“Trust an old timer, sir, for remembering those things,” he said.

“Indeed, nobody could have selected a more complete outfit,” rejoined Dr. Perkins.

The inventory of the goods was taken the next morning, and hiring a boat the stuff was transported to Algiers, where the *Sea Eagle* had been looked after over night by a couple of darkies.

As they crossed the river in a hired boat they noticed how swiftly the current ran and how discolored it was. The negro who

rowed them commented on it, too.

“Dey be po’ful big flood befo’ long, genelmen,” he opined, “an’ when ole man Mississip’ git up on his hind lags ain’t nuffin’ kin stop him. Dem lebees dey go jes lak so much straw er hay.”

“All the more reason for our making haste,” said Dr. Perkins, addressing the others; “it would be hard fortune indeed if Ben were to be robbed of his fortune by a flood.”

The shed which had sheltered the *Sea Eagle* overnight was close to the water’s edge so that the goods were soon transported on board. All was found to be in good shape, and the two darkies, who had watched the air craft overnight, received an extra gratuity for their pains. The adventurers had been particular not to give out any details of their flight, and it was expected that they would stay in New Orleans for some days before proceeding, so that no curious crowd, only a few negroes and stragglers, were on hand to see them start.

Dr. Perkins had an excellent chart of the river, showing distinctly the location of Black Bayou, which lay back from the river amidst a maze of other wriggly creeks and water courses. The *Belle of New Orleans* had been on her way to a “far back” plantation to pick up cotton, when she blew up, which accounted for the wreck being submerged in such an out of the way place.

As they flew along the river, but far above it, they could see human beings, busy as ants, working along the levees, strengthening them against the dreaded floods which already had devastated whole sections of country in Ohio and farther up the

mighty stream. At length the course of the *Sea Eagle* was changed till she was flying over a perfect maze of water courses and bayous, winding in and out of a dense forest. From above, it looked like a lace work of water overlying a piece of dark green plush.

But the map showed a landmark for Black Bayou. Harry's plan was marked "Ruined plantation house and sugar mill." Frank was the first to spy out this important "bearing." The *Sea Eagle* was at that time not very far up, and the gaunt walls and desolate overgrown buildings of the once prosperous place could be seen clearly. "Giant cypress with three forks," was the next marking, and, sure enough, on a little patch of an island, not far from the ruined plantation, they presently saw a gaunt dead tree answering this description.

"Bayous and bullfrogs! We're getting hot now!" cried Pudge excitedly. "Ben, I believe that that rascal was telling the truth after all."

"I'm inclined to think so, too, Master Pudge," rejoined Ben; "and look – look there – that must be the Catfish Island marked on the plan. See, it's just the shape of one of them critters."

"So it is, Ben," cried Frank, peering down. "Goodness, this is exciting, though. Just think, in a short time we shall know if our flight for a fortune is –"

"A fizzle or not," interrupted the slangy Pudge.

"Right off Catfish Island two points to the north," read out Harry.

Dr. Perkins glanced at the compass and slightly altered the direction of the *Sea Eagle*; then he allowed the great craft to drop gently to rest on the waters of Black Bayou.

Harry referred to the plan again.

“North a hundred yards to the Lone Pine Island.”

“There it is,” cried Frank, indicating a small spot of land on which a dead pine reared its bare trunk.

Hardly had he spoken when a canoe shot round a bend in a small bayou just ahead of them, and a wild-looking man, who had been paddling it, checked his frail craft. His unkempt whiskers covered him almost to his waist, and his clothes were ragged to a degree. But none of them thought of this as the swamp dweller so unexpectedly came into view.

“Is this the Black Bayou?” they cried almost in chorus.

The other nodded and stared wildly and half in alarm at the strange-looking craft that confronted him.

“*Oui!* Thees Black Bayou,” he rejoined in soft, broken accents; “what you want, eh?”

“Did you ever hear tell of the *Belle of New Orleans?*” asked Ben, in a voice that shook with suppressed excitement.

To his astonishment the Acadian – for the weird figure in the boat was one of those strange dwellers of the cypress swamps – burst into a loud laugh.

“Oh ho! Oh ho!” he cackled; “what you want wid zee *Belle of New Orleans*, eh? What you want weez her?”

Ben hesitated, and before he could reply the other burst into

another weird cackling laugh, and held up a small object.

“You want zee pearl, zee gold, hey? Zey all gone! See, I have one. Zee men who come here two day ago give it me for help zem. Adieu!”

Before anybody on the *Sea Eagle* could utter a word the fellow gave a deft stroke of his paddle and his canoe shot off into the trackless paths of the swamps.

“Well, what under the sun!” burst out Frank, while Pudge weakly ejaculated:

“Centipedes and spongecakes!”

“It’s all clear enough,” exclaimed Ben bitterly. “Those ruffians got ahead of us. That ’Cadian took them to the scene of the wreck and they’ve rifled it.”

“That was undoubtedly a black pearl he held up,” said Dr. Perkins in a faint voice. “I suppose they gave him that for guiding them here.”

The sudden shriek of a high-crested kingfisher made them look up suddenly. The bird was darting from tree to tree on an island at a little distance. Suddenly something that lay at the foot of a tree caught Ben’s sharp eyes.

“What’s that? That glittering thing yonder?” he exclaimed, pointing.

“Easy enough to see,” said Dr. Perkins, starting up the *Sea Eagle* for the little island.

“It’s a diving helmet!” cried Frank as they drew closer to the object, “just look, the rascals must have left it there after they got

the treasure out of the sunken wreck. I guess they thought that as they were so rich they need not bother with it.”

They landed on the island as disconsolate and downcast a band of treasure hunters as ever set foot on the site of a treasure trove. Abundant evidences of a camp were all about them. The ashes of a fire, and scraps of food and paper. One of these caught Frank’s attention. It was a fragment of newspaper, and what had challenged Frank’s notice was that a band of red ink had been drawn around some printing on it. Frank read the marked portion with a somewhat vague curiosity. For the moment he did not realize what an important clew he had stumbled upon. Then it rushed upon him with full force.

Ben and the others were on the shore of the island pointing down into the muddy waters of the bayou.

The earth was trampled in the vicinity, and showed plainly that the miscreants who had stolen the treasure had carried on their operations from that point of the bank.

“Down thar somewhar’ lies the wreck of the *Belle of New Orleans*,” said Ben, shaking his head dolefully, and pointing into the black current; “but it ain’t going to do us no good, mates. It ain’t going to do us no good; them sea skunks has got ahead of us for fair.”

It was at this point that Frank’s shout interrupted them.

“What is it?” cried Dr. Perkins.

“This paper. Come here. I think it’s a clew to where they have gone.”

They crowded about him while Frank read out from the marked paper.

“The new South American Commerce Company’s steamer *Buenos Aires* sails to-morrow for the latter port. She is a fast, capable craft and will make a direct run to the Argentine. The inauguration of this service is a distinct addition to the commercial importance of New Orleans and establishes new trade relations with South America.”

“Very pretty,” said Ben; “but what does it prove?”

“Yes, I don’t see much of a clew in that,” put in Harry.

But Frank raised his hand to command silence.

“Listen a minute,” he said. “Of course, I may be altogether wrong, but it seems to me that the reason this paragraph is marked is because those fellows meant to sail on this very boat.”

Ben brought his hand down on his knee with a resounding whack.

“By hookey, lad!” he roared; “that’s reason. That’s solid sense and reason.”

“What is the date of that paper?” asked Dr. Perkins.

“Luckily the paragraph was torn off from the top of the page,” said Frank, “and the date of the issue is legible. It is dated yesterday.”

“Then the *Buenos Aires* sailed this morning?”

“Yes; that’s the way it looks.”

“And while we are wasting time here she is heading down the river for the open sea,” groaned Harry.

“Can’t we wireless to New Orleans and find out?” asked Pudge.

“That’s a mighty good idea, Pudge,” said his father, “but the set we have on the *Sea Eagle* wouldn’t carry as far as that.”

“Then let’s get on board again and fly back as quickly as possible. We are only wasting time here,” said Frank.

His suggestion was quickly acted upon, and the voyagers reëmbarked. They were a very different party from the pleasantly excited expedition that had set out that morning so full of hope and enterprise. Frank alone kept up his spirits. He sat constantly at the wireless as they winged their way back to New Orleans, incessantly trying to get into communication.

At last he caught the operator of the Harbor Master’s office. Instantly he flashed his query:

“Did *Buenos Aires* sail this a. m.?”

“Yes. Ship sailed early to-day.”

“Where will she be now?”

“About off Fort Jackson, near the mouth of the river,” came the reply. “She has wireless, but it is out of order, so that I can’t tell you exactly where she is right now.”

“Thanks!” flashed Frank and disconnected.

He quickly communicated his tidings, and immediately a hasty, excited consultation followed. The result of it was that Dr. Perkins decided to ground the *Sea Eagle* in Algiers. This done, Ben would swear out a warrant before the most available justice, and then, if they could find a deputy nerry enough to make the

trip, he was to be taken on board the *Sea Eagle* and the *Buenos Aires* overtaken before she got beyond the jurisdiction of the State.

But after landing in Algiers these plans were changed. It was decided instead to swear out a federal warrant, as there was grave danger of the ship getting out of the State's power before they could overtake her. On the extraordinary circumstances being related to him, the U. S. Commissioner at New Orleans readily granted the warrant for the arrest of all three of the rascals. It now remained only to find a Deputy U. S. Marshal courageous enough to make the trip through the air.

The only one available seemed a bit doubtful.

"A trip in an aëroplane!" he said. "I've never taken such a journey and I'm scared of the blessed things. You see, I've got a wife and family, and –"

"Don't be afraid. There's really no danger, and we'll be over water most of the way," urged Dr. Perkins.

The deputy seemed to come to a sudden conclusion. His eyes snapped and his lips tightened.

"All right, I'll go with you!" he suddenly cried. "Wait till I 'phone the missus and I'm your man. Those rascals played you a mean trick, and I'd like to see you win out."

The hearts of the adventurers gave a bound of hope. There was a chance of seeing justice come into its own, after all.

The *Buenos Aires*, a fine ship of five thousand or more tons, dropped rapidly down the river. She had few cabin passengers,

and of these only three were on deck. The remainder were in their cabins putting their belongings to rights.

These three men were the elder Daniels, his loutish son and Duval. But they all wore smart new clothes, and Duval had shaved off his mustache. As for the two Daniels, it is an example of what clothes can do to say that they looked more like prosperous, rather countryfied commission dealers than rugged fishermen from Maine.

“Let’s have a look at them pearls again,” Daniels was saying, after he had given a cautious glance about him to make sure they were not observed.

Duval reached into his pocket and drew out a canvas bag. From it he poured out a number of black, lustrous objects, catching them in a cupped hand.

“Twenty of the beauties,” he exclaimed; “twenty black pearls – the rarest gems that come out of the ocean.”

“What are they worth again?” asked the elder Daniels, licking his lips anticipatively.

“Thirty thousand dollars at the least.”

“Jiminy! Hold me, some one!” sputtered Zeb.

“And that, counting the gold dust in the cabin, makes a fortune of close upon seventy-five thousand dollars we got out of that old hulk, don’t it?”

“That’s right,” answered Duval; “you fellows did a good day’s work for yourselves when you knocked me on the head in that hut.”

“Waal, I should say so. Let’s go below and look at that gold again. I kin hardly keep my fingers frum touching it. We’re rich, boys, we’re rich!”

The three worthies disappeared below after Duval had carefully replaced the black pearls in their bag. It was some hours later when they came up again and the ship was passing the Port Ead’s light.

“We’re safe now,” exclaimed Duval in a low tone; “even if they do discover the trick we’ve put up on em, they could never catch us now. In another two hours we’ll be out on the gulf and by to-morrow we’ll be out of reach of any one in Yankeeland.”

“Hullo, what’s up astern?” asked Zeb suddenly. “What are they all pointing at?”

“Pointing at? What do you mean?” demanded Duval, suspicious as are most guilty consciences of anything unusual.

“Something in the sky. Hark! They are shouting!”

“Something in the sky!”

Duval’s face went white. His knees shook. By a flash of guilty intuition he had guessed what that something was, even if the next minute a shout had not split the air.

“An aëroplane! It’s an aëroplane!”

Duval’s knees quivered under him. He trembled like a man with the palsy. Old Daniels came up to him hastily.

“Duval, they’ve sighted one of them airyoplanes – you don’t think – ”

“No, I don’t *think*. I know,” choked out Duval, “they are after

us. Hark!”

From the distance came the sound of shots high up in the air. In reply to the signal – for such it was – the *Buenos Aires*' whistle emitted three long, mournful toots. Her engines began to slow down. As Duval felt the steamer's speed check he dashed below to his cabin. As for Daniels, he stood rooted to the spot, his lips moving, but no speech coming from them. Zeb was nowhere to be seen.

Up on the *Buenos Aires*' lofty flying bridge her officers, in the meantime, had been almost equally excited. They had seen the aëroplane some time before; but as nowadays such craft are a fairly common sight, they had not paid overmuch attention to it. It was not till the unusual size of the craft was revealed that they scrutinized it closely.

Then, as the big winged man-bird swung above the steamer's masts, had come the quick six pistol shots. An imperative signal, rightly interpreted “Stop!”

The whistle had replied and the vessel's way been checked as the jangling signals sounded in the engine-room, and “Slow down” flashed up on the telegraph.

“What do you want?” hailed the captain through a megaphone, as the *Sea Eagle*– for of course our readers have guessed the identity of the craft of the air – swung above him.

“We want to board you with a United States warrant!” came the startling reply from midair.

“A warrant! For some of my passengers?”

“Yes; for three men whom we have reason to believe booked passage as Daniel Maine and son and another one who calls himself Francis Le Blanc.”

“I have three such men on board and recognize the authority of the United States. How will you board me?”

“We’ll come alongside.”

The captain looked as if he didn’t understand how this was going to be done, but gave orders to stop the ship, drop anchor and lower the gangway. This was done, and the *Sea Eagle* dropped to the water alongside with perfect precision. In the meantime, the wildest excitement reigned on board. Rumors flew thick and fast as to the errand of the men from the air.

Lest it should be wondered how Dr. Perkins and his companions knew the names under which the three rascals had sailed, we had better clear this matter up. Before embarking in the *Sea Eagle* in pursuit of the *Buenos Aires*, a passenger list had been obtained from the offices of the steamship company. It will be recalled that Francis Le Blanc was the alias, or false name, which Duval had used when in the employ of Mr. Sterrett on the yacht *Wanderer*. This gave them a clew, and when they came across the names Daniel Maine and son, booked for an adjoining cabin, there remained small doubt that those names concealed the two Daniels.

The *Sea Eagle* was soon made fast, and Marshal Howell, followed by Dr. Perkins and the two Boy Aviators, sprang up the gangway. The others they had been compelled to leave behind,

as, with the three prisoners to carry back, the *Sea Eagle* would have been overcrowded.

As they reached the top of the gangway Captain Stow and his officers advanced to meet them.

“To what am I indebted for the honor of this visit?” asked the seaman.

The marshal showed his authority and his warrant.

“We don’t wish to detain you longer than necessary, captain,” he said, “so will you have us shown to their cabins?”

The captain himself led the way below, and conducted them down a corridor to the stern of the ship. As they reached the end of the passage a door was thrust suddenly open and a bullet whizzed past Frank’s head. At the same instant Zeb’s figure appeared in the doorway.

But before he could fire another shot the marshal had wrested the pistol from him and burst into the cabin. Frank was close behind him. At a port hole was Duval; he had something in his hand and was just about to hurl it out of the port hole, when Frank, in one bound, was at his side and had his arm captive. With a snarl like a wounded wild beast Duval turned on him, whipping out a knife as he did so. But before any harm could be done, Dr. Perkins seized and disarmed him.

It was speedily found that the bag which Frank had saved was the one containing the black pearls which Duval, in his extremity, had determined to throw away rather than let any one else gain their possession. The Marshal slipped the handcuffs on Zeb and

Duval, who submitted sullenly to arrest. It was not till then that their thoughts turned to the elder Daniels. He was not in his cabin, and search of the ship failed to reveal him. The mystery was soon to be explained, however.

A boat with a colored oarsman had been lying alongside the steamer waiting to take off the pilot. In the confusion old Daniels had opened the bag of gold dust, selected a packet, and, dropping into the boat, told the negro to row him ashore to secure help for the officers. The negro naturally supposed that he was acting under proper instructions, and put the old fisherman ashore. He was never heard of again.

Zeb and Duval sullenly refused to utter a word, but ultimately, after their return to New Orleans, Frank had an interview with Duval in his prison cell, in which he made a clean breast of everything. From Bayhaven they had hastened south by fast trains, stopping on the way to buy diving dress. The Acadian whom the boys had encountered in the swamps had guided them to the scene of the wreck, receiving one black pearl as his reward.

Of the voyage back from the *Buenos Aires* with the two prisoners not much can be said. It was made at a good rate of speed, and both Duval and Zeb were docile. Indeed, there was no use in their being otherwise. On account of his youth and the pleadings of Dr. Perkins and the boys, Zeb got a light sentence in a reformatory institution, and it is hoped that he will prove a far better character when he gets out. Duval was more severely dealt with, but even he got off more lightly than he deserved, thanks

to the clemency of the people he had wronged.

And so ends the story of the Boy Aviators' Flight for a Fortune in the most wonderful aëroplane constructed up to date. But no doubt, in the rapid march of events, even the *Sea Eagle* will soon be surpassed. Already, while this book goes to press, plans are being made by no less than four separate aviators to dare the terrors of a transatlantic passage. Whether they will succeed or not is in the lap of the future, but the author is certain that some day flights across "The Pond" at seventy or eighty miles an hour will be so common as to attract but small attention.

Some of my readers doubtless wish to know how Ben disposed of his fortune. Well, part of it he wisely invested in real estate, and the rest he is thinking of putting into the company Dr. Perkins has formed to manufacture *Sea Eagles*. Mr. Sterrett is a member of the company, and so are the Boy Aviators. Naturally Ben's keen wish to have them share some of his good fortune was refused, for, as we know, the Boy Aviators' adventures in the past had netted them a good share of this world's goods. Billy Barnes is publicity agent at a good salary for the *Sea Eagle* Company, Ltd., and the work just suits his tastes. As for Pudge, he is as hard a worker as anybody at the plant on Brig Island, learning the business "from the bottom up."

And so, wishing them well in their future undertakings, we will here take leave for the present of our friends, until we hear of them again in the next volume, entitled "The Boy Aviators with the Air Raiders."

THE END