

JOHN GOLDFRAP

THE MOTOR RANGERS'
WIRELESS STATION

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Marvin West

The Motor Rangers' Wireless Station

CHAPTER I.

THE WIRELESS ISLAND

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Where are you?" he flashed back.

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

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

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

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

He turned to the others.

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

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

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

"Well?" queried Ding-dong.

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

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

Ding-dong speedily raised the *Iroquois*.

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

"*Bully for you, Goat Island,*" came the rejoinder, which

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

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

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

CHAPTER II.

A PASSENGER FOR THE SHORE

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

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

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

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

at fifteen miles, or better, an hour.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"For instance?"

The question was Nat's.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Where are you going to land him?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

their act.

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

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

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

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

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

“You think we’re in for a blow?”

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

“But we’re all right?”

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

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

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

CHAPTER III.

IN THE GRIP OF THE STORM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN THE ENGINE FAILED

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

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

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

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

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

dong anxiously.

Joe drew him aside.

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

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

“What do you mean?”

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

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

“Ther-ther-that’s about it.”

“What did Nat say?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“What’s the matter with them?”

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

wonder she went out of business.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the teeth of the gale.

CHAPTER V.

NAT TO THE RESCUE

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

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

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

could hear him, which was all that he wanted.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

other.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VI.

SAVED FROM THE SEA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dr. Chalmers turned and scrutinized him quickly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VII.

ON "WIRELESS ISLAND."

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

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

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

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

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

another turn left in her.”

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

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

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

The first thing when he awoke Nat looked around for their

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The others stared at him only half understandingly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Jenkins groaned when he heard this.

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

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

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

with your accident – if it was an accident.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The boys nodded. They all read several scientific papers and magazines and had, of course, heard of the reward that Mr. Jenkins mentioned.

“Well, I had invented and perfected such a projectile,” continued Mr. Jenkins, his eyes glowing like two coals in his pale cheeks as he talked.

“What, you had invented a torpedo which could be governed from a ship’s side and absolutely controlled by the operator?” Nat could not help asking. The thing seemed fantastic, improbable; he even thought that possibly the man’s mind might be wandering. But before Mr. Jenkins could reply, Dr. Chalmers struck in with an exclamation.

“Pardon me, but you are not the Professor Jonas Jenkins, late instructor of physics and chemistry at Columbia University, New York City, who withdrew from the faculty to perfect some experimental work, the nature of which was kept a profound secret?”

“I am,” was the quiet reply, “and that experimental work was identical with the plans and papers of which I have just been robbed.”

“Namely, a dirigible torpedo wholly under control at all times?”

“Yes, sir. My torpedo was governed by a principle entirely novel in such lines. Torpedoes have been experimented with which have been governed by wires, at best a clumsy and inefficient device. My torpedo was controlled by a new principle entirely – namely, by wireless!”

“Ber-ber-ber-by wer-wer-wer-wireless!” sputtered Ding-dong eagerly.

“Just so. You understand wireless?” inquired Professor Jenkins.

“A lul-lul-little bub-bub-bit,” stammered Ding-dong.

“We’ve got a plant here, which Ding-dong – William Bell, I mean – erected,” struck in Nat.

“A wireless here on this island?”

The question came from the injured man in anxious, almost quavering tones.

“Yes, sir.”

“Then we’ve a chance to head off that rascal yet!”

Mr. Jenkins raised himself on his cot.

“Can’t you send out a message to all coast stations to alarm the authorities to be on the lookout for the man when he lands? He can hardly escape notice in that boat.”

“Jumping ginger snaps! The very thing!” cried Nat. “What a fine lot of dummies we were not to think of that before; but I guess losing the boats turned us all topsy-turvy. Get busy, Ding-

dong!”

But Ding-dong was already at his instruments. He flashed on his sending current and presently the whine and crackle of the urgent message “*To All Stations*” was audible even in the living hut through the open door of the wireless shed.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN AERIAL APPEAL

While Ding-dong was sending his wireless appeal flashing and crackling into the ether, Dr. Chalmers turned to Professor Jenkins again.

“You have not yet told us what connection this man Sartorius has with the case?” he hinted.

“Sartorius is no more his name than it is mine,” was the rejoinder. “His right name is Miles Minory, and he was dismissed from the University shortly before I left for being engaged in some shady financial transactions. He had worked as my assistant once, and in some way learned of my secret researches. Of a singularly acute mind, he perceived at once the financial possibilities of the device. After approaching some capitalists, he came to me with a proposition to sell out, he, of course, to get a large reward from the capitalists for persuading me to do so. I refused, and told him that I would market my wireless torpedo, when completed, in my own way. Not long after, my rooms were broken into in my absence and my papers tampered with; but, luckily, long before this I had removed the important ones to a place of safety, knowing Minory’s character and that he was likely to adopt crooked methods when others failed to gain his end.

“From time to time I became unpleasantly aware that I was being watched. The secret surveillance got on my nerves, but I persisted with my work until I perfected it. I carried out my last experiments in a remote coast town on the north shore of Long Island. One night I was attacked on my way from my experiment station to my home. Minory did not appear in this outrage, but I knew he instigated it. As in his other efforts to obtain my papers, he failed in this also.

“But it decided me that the vicinity of New York was too dangerous a place for me to carry on my work. I was not sure even that my life was safe if I persisted in holding out against the ring that wanted to seize my invention. In this dilemma I turned to a friend who owns a small ranch in Mexico, not far from Mazatlan. He offered me freely the use of this secluded spot for as long a time as I wished to use it, and I jumped at the offer. Without loss of time I booked passage for San Francisco through a third party, in order to throw my enemies off my trail. When I embarked on the *Iroquois* it was with a light heart, but, as I told you, I was not long left undisturbed in my fancied security. Although that beard Minory wears is as false as the name he traveled under, I knew him even in the disguise he had adopted. I was on guard, but – well, the rest you know.”

During the recital of this remarkable story they had listened without a word of interruption. Now, however, everyone had questions to ask, all of which Mr. Jenkins readily answered. We shall not detail the conversation here, as Professor Jenkins’

narrative as already set down appears fully to cover it. In the midst of the talk, and while Joe was fixing up the best breakfast he could on the hut stove, Ding-dong, his face red with excitement, came running in.

"I've sent out a full description of the m-m-man and the two b-b-boats to all coast stations within reach," he exclaimed. "But tell me one thing, professor, could this Sus-ar-Sartorius run a mum-mum-motor boat?"

"I don't know," was the rejoinder, "but one thing I can tell you, he is a slick enough customer to be able to do almost anything."

"From the way he fixed that carburetor and those plugs it certainly appears that way," commented Joe, looking up from the frying pan; "why do you suppose he wanted to delay the *Nomad*, anyhow?"

"To mum-mum-make a further sus-sus-search through the Professor's trunks, I guess," was Ding-dong's reply.

"What! He was looking in my trunks?" cried Mr. Jenkins.

"Yes, sir; Ding-dong caught him at it," put in Joe.

"The cunning scoundrel! He is cleverer than even I thought," cried the professor. "In one of my trunks was a working model of the wireless torpedo. If he secured that it would be of invaluable aid to whoever had the plans. In fact, without it as a key they would have some difficulty in following out my calculations and designs."

"So that was the reason he was so anxious to come ashore with us!" cried Nat, a light breaking in on him; for it would

have appeared more reasonable to suppose that, having rifled the professor of his papers, the thief would desire to keep on the high seas. "I see it all now. He knew that your trunks would be shipped ashore with you, Professor, and in some way he also knew that they held what he hadn't yet obtained, the working model. He must have calculated that on the way between the *Iroquois* and the shore he would have time to ransack your baggage and get hold of it."

"And his desire to lay hands on it gave him nerve enough to tamper with the engine and endanger his own life as well as ours in that gale," supplemented Joe.

"It is all as clear as day now," cried Nat; and then in a chagrined voice he muttered, "What a pack of boneheads we've been! Just think, we had him right in our power and he's slipped through our fingers like so much water!"

"Never mind," consoled Dr. Chalmers, "you couldn't very well have acted on what knowledge you had up to the time that Professor Jenkins recovered consciousness. I think, in fact, that – Hark!"

It was Ding-dong's "wireless alarm" clanging out the call for Goat Island.

"On the jump! Run like a jack-rabbit now, Ding!" cried Nat excitedly. "This may be news of the rascal!"

But it was not; however, it was news of a still more astonishing nature, and, so far as the boys were concerned, almost as gratifying, dearly as they would have loved to catch Sartorius – or

Minory, as we must now call him. Nat and Joe, who had followed Ding-dong to the wireless shed, bent over him while he answered the call and then switched to his receiving instruments.

“It’s the fishing steamer, *Hattie and Jane*,” he explained hastily. “You know, Capt. Eli Thompson’s boat, the one that collects fish from the fleet. She carries wireless so that she can get quotations and instructions from her owners even at sea.”

He broke off, and as the dots and dashes began to beat into his ears from the *Hattie and Jane*, he wrote swiftly with nervous, flying fingers.

As they bent over him with open mouths and wide eyes, Nat and Joe burst into a joyous “whoop!” of delight as they read the message Joe’s pencil transcribed on the pad.

“*Your motor boat, Nomad, found drifting. No one on board. Are you all right? – Thompson, S. S. Hattie and Jane.*”

“Gee! I’ll bet the captain thought we were all murdered or something!” cried Joe, gripping Nat’s shoulder, while Ding-dong sent back a reassuring message.

“Hush!” cried Nat. “Here’s more coming.”

“*Hawser has been cut. How can you explain?*”

“The hawser cut?” shouted Nat. “Cracky! I see it all now. That fellow couldn’t run the *Nomad* himself and means to row ashore. He figured, though, that we might swim out to her and start in pursuit, so he cut the mooring rope and set her adrift.”

“Oh, for five minutes alone with him!” panted Joe.

“What’ll I say?” asked Ding-dong, half turning.

“Say that we will explain when we see him. Ask him if he will bring the *Nomad* to Goat Island. Tell him we are marooned here and will pay him well for the job.”

Ding-dong obediently rapped out the message and then switched to the receiving set again. They saw him give a reassuring nod as he wrote down on his pad:

“Will be at Goat Island within three hours. Catch light, and can spare the time. Is fifty dollars too much?”

“The old rascal!” grinned Nat, too delighted to be angry at this somewhat steep figure. “He knows he’s got us under his thumb and sees a chance to make a good wad of salvage. Tell him ‘all right,’ Ding-dong, there’s nothing else for it.”

“Satisfactory. Make all haste you can,” was flashed back, and then came *“Good-byes.”*

As soon as Ding-dong had grounded his instruments and taken off his head receivers there was a scene of wild jubilation in the wireless hut. The boys whooped and cheered like Indians and joined in a wild war dance.

“Whoopee!” yelled Joe, “there may be a chance of catching that old fake-whiskered cuss, after all. He’s got a good long start, but what with our wireless warnings and with the long row ahead of him, we have a fighting chance of overhauling him.”

“And I reckon he won’t be in a desperate hurry, because he’ll never figure that we could have such blind luck as to have the *Nomad* picked up by about the only wireless craft along the coast that knew her and her owners and could notify them at once of

the recovery,” cried Nat. “Boys, it’s one chance in a thousand, but it looks as if luck was beginning to run our way again after all our set-backs.”

Within a very few minutes those at the living hut were apprised of the state of affairs. The effect on every one’s spirits was wonderful. Even Dr. Chalmers and his friend became infected with the excitement of the chase after a man who had proved himself as consummate a rascal as could be found on earth.

But in the midst of the jubilation, Joe propounded a sudden question that came like a dash of cold water on their hopes.

“Suppose before he cut the *Nomad* adrift he rifled the trunks and got the model?” he exclaimed.

It was a possibility that, strange to say, in the general excitement, had not yet occurred to any one of them.

“In that case, if we don’t find him I am in as bad a fix as ever,” declared the professor blankly. “With the model it wouldn’t take a clever fellow like Minory more than a few days to understand the principles of my invention, rush patent papers to Washington and reap his reward from the unscrupulous capitalists employing him. You see I was so afraid of possible leaks that I was waiting till I had every detail complete before I filed application for a patent. With nobody in my confidence concerning my work, I have absolutely no proof nor witnesses that the wireless torpedo is the product of my brain. Minory, on the other hand, has the backing of almost unlimited money and influence.”

“Humph!” grunted Nat, in a low aside to Joe, “we may be euchered after all, then.”

“*We!*” rejoined Joe in a rather astonished tone.

“Yes,” was the sturdy reply. “I like this professor and I hate to see such a rascal as Minory getting away with a thing to which a man has devoted the best efforts of his life. We, Joe – I said *we*– are going to help him in every way in our power.”

“Bully for you, Nat. I’m with you to a crisp!” cried Joe, while he gave Nat a slap on the back that almost drove the breath out of the young leader’s body.

CHAPTER IX.

A STERN CHASE

In the meantime, from station to station, within a radius in which it was reasonable to suppose the fugitive would land, the wireless was sending out its waves of alarm. The various stations attached to life-saving headquarters along the coast took the message and, in turn, telephoned the local authorities of near-by towns. Ding-dong received these assurances through the ether and transmitted them to his friends. Excitement was rife. It looked as if by means of the wireless they had spread a net that left not a mesh for the fugitive to slip through.

Nor was this all on which they based their hopes of overhauling him. It was a long, weary row to the shore, and, as Nat had pointed out, Minory, deeming himself secure from pursuit, would probably be in no particular hurry, but conserve his strength. From the bridge of the *Nomad* such an object as a rowboat would be conspicuous for a long distance. If only Captain Thompson hastened his return with the wandering motor craft, they stood about an even chance of capturing Minory themselves. It was a situation that thrilled them, and the time dragged wearily till smoke on the horizon announced the approach of the *Hattie and Jane*.

She anchored off the island and flashed ashore a message

of greeting. Attached to her stern by a stout hawser was the errant *Nomad*. At sight of the returned wanderer the boys set up a ringing cheer. Captain Thompson, a weather-beaten old salt, rowed ashore in the dory that the *Hattie and Jane* lowered, and received his reward. He pocketed it with a grin, as much as to say, "A pretty good morning's work"; but the boys did not grudge it to him. The return of the *Nomad* meant much more to them than that.

The dory was loaded up with gasoline, and after two trips between the shore and the *Nomad*, the latter was ready, with full fuel tanks, "to receive passengers." Professor Jenkins, still so weak that he had to be supported to the boat, was the first to be taken off. Then the boys closed up the shanty and the wireless station and within half an hour were under way, with the *Hattie and Jane* flying a bunting salute in response to the boys' string of flags which spelled out to the fishing steamer "Good luck."

"Now, Joe, keep your eyes peeled," ordered Nat. "I'd give a whole lot to run that fellow down and land him ourselves. If once he gets ashore, he's slippery enough to get clear away."

Dr. Chalmers, who had gone below with his patient, and also to make an examination of the professor's trunks, came on the bridge at this moment with a dismal report.

As they had apprehended, Minory, before cutting the *Nomad* loose, had ransacked the trunks. The model was gone, and the doctor feared that to inform the professor of the loss might cause a serious relapse in his condition.

It was agreed, therefore, to reply only vaguely to any questions he might ask. But fortunately the inventor, completely worn out by excitement and weakness, sank into a deep sleep almost as soon as he was laid on the divan below, and they were spared the necessity of evasive replies to the questions he would have been sure to ask about the safety of the model.

It must be confessed that when Nat learned the clever and thorough way in which Minory had carried out the last part of his desperate plan for stealing the fruits of the professor's inventive faculty, his heart rather sank. Somehow, he did not feel quite so sanguine as he had at first that they would succeed, either themselves or through their wide-flung messages, in capturing the fellow. The remarkable ingenuity he had shown in his attempts on the wireless torpedo in New York, in his successful espionage of the inventor across the continent, and in his last coup of getting himself on board the craft on which the man he had injured was being conveyed ashore all showed an acute intellect, a depraved sort of genius for carrying out whatever nefarious ends its possessor had in view. Nat didn't underrate his antagonist. He knew by this time that they had a wily and perhaps a desperate foe to fight.

The sea was as smooth as glass, and, although the sun beat hotly down, there was yet a refreshing breeze. These factors would aid Minory in his long row, supplementing the work of his muscles, which, despite his scrawny form, Nat judged to be wiry and powerful.

The *Nomad* was crowded along to every ounce of her speed capacity. Ding-dong never left his engines a second, but watched them with anxious solicitude. He was fully aware of how much depended now upon the performance of the motor. So far it was running sweet and true, with a humming song that delighted the watchful boy engineer. Oil can in hand, he doused the bearings and moving parts with lubricant from time to time, feeling a shaft collar or an eccentric band to detect symptoms of overheating.

The distant coast range, faintly blue and luminous, loomed up through the heat haze before long, but although Nat stationed Joe with the binoculars to keep active and constant watch for the skiff, nothing appeared in the field of the powerful glasses to warrant Joe in giving the alarm.

Once he saw something black and was on the point of crying out. The next minute he was glad that he hadn't. The object proved to be only a floating log with a solemn line of seagulls bobbing up and down on it as it rose and fell on the swells.

"Begins to look bad, Nat," commented Joe, as the outlines of the rugged, bare coast range became clearer and still no sign of a boat swam within the horizon of the glasses.

"I must admit that it does," rejoined Nat, "but it's up to us to keep hoping against hope."

Suddenly a thought came to Joe.

"See here, Nat, unless that fellow is as skillful a boat handler as he is a crook he couldn't land on the bare coast. The surf would be rolling too high even on a calm day like this to permit him to

do so even if he tried to.”

“That’s so, Joe; you do have a bright thought once in a while.”

“Thank you,” grinned Joe; “and now let me go on to say that in my opinion he’ll make for some cove.”

“Of which there are none too many hereabouts,” responded Nat. “Let’s see, which one is the nearest?”

“Why, Whale Inlet, in the salt meadows beyond Point Conception.”

“That’s right, but he’d hardly know of that unless he is more familiar with this coast than it is reasonable to suppose.”

“But having observed what the conditions were along the beach and realizing that he couldn’t negotiate the surf, he’d be likely to go hunting for such an inlet, wouldn’t he?”

“Sounds reasonable. But the point is just this, why wouldn’t he go toward Santa Barbara itself?”

“Why, because, if he’s as shrewd as I think he is, he will have guessed that we have sent out a wireless alarm for him by this time.”

“But how does he know we have such an apparatus?”

“Just this. If for no other reason, he knows we picked up that wireless from the *Iroquois*, that message that got us into all this pickle.”

Before Nat could reply, the sailor whom they had rescued with his employers the night before, and who had been standing with Mr. Anderson on the bridge, gave an exclamation.

“I don’t want to give a false alarm, gentlemen, but what’s that

object off there?”

“Where?” demanded Nat. “Give me the glasses, Joe, quick.”

Something in the sailor’s voice had made him alert and active in an instant.

He applied the glasses to his eyes and gazed through them for a few seconds.

“It’s a boat, a rowboat,” he announced after his brief scrutiny.

“Our boat?” asked Joe almost tremulously.

“I think so,” was the reply, as the *Nomad’s* course was altered and she was headed directly for the distant speck that the sailor’s sharp eyes had espied.

CHAPTER X.

MORE BAD LUCK

“Oh, thunderation!”

It was Ding-dong who uttered the exclamation as a sharp crack sounded in the engine room and he sprang forward to shut off the motor. An eccentric band had snapped with a report like a pistol, and the *Nomad* was temporarily out of commission.

Down the speaking tube came an impatient query.

“What’s up? What’s happened?”

Ding-dong shouted up a reply.

“How long will it be before you can fix it?”

“About fifteen minutes. Luckily I’ve an extra band handy.”

The stammering boy, as was usual with him in stress of circumstances, had temporarily overcome his impediment in speech.

“Bother!” exclaimed Nat in a vexed tone. And there was good reason for his impatient intonation. Bit by bit the *Nomad* had been creeping up on the solitary rowboat.

Hardly more than a few hundred yards now separated them, and they could see Minory, with white, anxious face, straining at his oars – as if any human power could get him beyond reach of the fast motor cruiser! Ahead of him lay an inlet meandering up among some salt marshes. It was Whale Creek, so called because

a huge whale had once been stranded there.

Nat knew that at the mouth of Whale Creek lay shoals and quicksands among which the *Nomad* could not navigate. If they could not cut off Minory before he gained the entrance to the creek, his escape appeared certain, for the *Nomad* carried no dinghy and Minory had the whip hand of them in the shallow water.

“You’d better give up!” Nat had hailed to Minory across the water. “Even if you get ashore the authorities are already on the lookout for you, warned by wireless. You don’t stand the chance of a rat in a trap.”

Minory’s answer had been to stand up in the skiff, holding aloft in one hand the model and in the other the plans and calculations that had cost the sleeping inventor below so much effort.

“If you come any closer, down these go to Davy Jones!” he had yelled desperately.

“To do such a thing would be only to increase the sentence you will get in a court of law!” Mr. Anderson had shouted back indignantly.

“He’s only bluffing!” Joe had rejoined.

It was just at this instant that the unlucky disaster in the engine room had occurred. Joe could have cried with vexation.

“Of all the luck!” he exclaimed as the *Nomad* lost way and came to a standstill, swinging seaward with the outgoing tide. Minory stood up in his skiff and shook a triumphant fist at them.

They turned away from him, and the next moment something came buzzing and singing past their ears.

It was followed by a sharp, cracking report. Then came a yell of defiant laughter.

“The rascal’s shooting at us!” exclaimed Nat.

“Yes; duck quick!” cried Joe, as the revolver was once more leveled.

“You’ll have to get up early to get ahead of me, you whelps!” was the insulting cry borne over the waters.

Nat’s teeth clenched; his cheeks flamed red. He did not often lose his temper, but the ruffian’s audacity had made him mad clear through.

Regardless of his danger, he sprang erect and faced the man in the skiff.

“We’ll get you yet, Minory!” he shouted.

For an instant the occupant of the small boat appeared taken aback, and that for a good reason. Obviously, if they knew his real name, the professor must have not only discovered his loss, but recovered sufficiently to tell the whole story. His acute mind reasoned this out in a jiffy, and it gave him pause. But only for a fraction of time. The next minute, with a cry, “Take that, you young cub!” another bullet came singing and whinging through the air.

“I’ll go below and get the rifle!” cried Joe furiously. “We’ll show him two can play at this game; we’ll – ”

“Do nothing of the sort,” said Nat calmly; “he can hardly get

much of an aim standing up in that cranky skiff, and if he wants to get away he'll do better by taking to his oars than by blazing away at us."

"There he goes now," cried the sailor. "I guess he was so plumb mad clear through at the quick tracks we made after him that he just naturally had to blaze away at us."

As the man spoke they saw Minory, with another mocking laugh, bend to his oars once more and row rapidly toward the creek mouth.

"Once let him get in there and we've lost him," cried Nat despairingly.

"Better lose him than have any bloodshed," declared Mr. Anderson. "That fellow is a desperate man, and wouldn't hesitate to use firearms to protect himself from capture."

"It looks that way," commented Joe. "Whee! Look at him row!"

"Consarn him, I wish he'd bust an oar!" growled out the sailor gloomily.

"No, all the busting seems to be done on this ship," was Joe's dismal response.

"Now, Joe, no grumbling," warned Nat, always optimistic even when things appeared blackest; "we may get him yet. 'There's many a slip –'"

"'Tween the law and the crook," growled out Joe, finishing the quotation for him.

"Oh, put it the other way round," advised Nat.

Just then Ding-dong appeared on deck.

He held up the broken eccentric ring which he had just detached.

“Here it is,” he said; “that’s what has crippled us.”

“Broken?” asked Joe.

“Yes, snapped clean through.”

“And it was a new one not long ago!” exclaimed Nat.

“Yes, and the best made. It beats me how it came to fly off the handle that way.”

“Good thing it didn’t wreck the whole engine,” was Joe’s comment.

“Yes; lucky I was below, or it would have,” rejoined Ding-dong, stammerless in his excitement.

“Let me look at that eccentric strap a minute, Ding-dong,” said Nat quietly, but with a strange ring in his voice.

Ding-dong, looking rather surprised, handed it over to the young captain of the *Nomad*. Nat didn’t often have anything much to say about the machinery. He left that part of the running of the boat to Ding-dong and Joe, although he was quite conversant with it.

They watched him while he examined it carefully at the broken ends.

“It’s a wonder this lasted as long as it did,” he said.

“Why! It was new and – ”

“Yes, I know, but see these marks on it. What are they?”

“Cantering cantilevers, the marks of a file!” cried Joe.

“That is what I thought. That fellow was too slick not to have turned some trick like that.”

CHAPTER XI.

“THERE’S MANY A SLIP.”

Ding-dong accomplished his repairs in a shade under the fifteen minutes he had allowed for the operation.

“All ready!” he reported up the speaking tube.

“Come ahead!” cried Nat eagerly.

The skiff was once more a diminished speck, alarmingly close in to the shoals that Nat dreaded. Moreover, during the wait, while they had fretted and fumed, the outseting tide had carried them further out to sea. Thus it appeared as if the very forces of nature were allied with Minory.

But the boys set up a triumphant shout as once more the bow of the *Nomad* began to cleave the water and all fixed their gaze eagerly on the object of their pursuit. He, for his part, must have been watching them closely, for Joe observed through the glasses that, as soon as they began to move once more, he quickened his stroke.

On and on rushed the *Nomad*, and the water began to grow yellow and green in patches about her, marking spots where there was shoal water. Between these patches threaded narrow streaks of blue which showed deep channels that could be safely traversed.

The man they were pursuing evidently knew the surface

indications of the water as well as they did, for it was seen that he carefully navigated the skiff over the shallowest water where the yellow color showed that sand bars lay close to the surface. As the passages grew more and more intricate, Joe fairly gasped as Nat kept right on. But Nat showed not the slightest sign of relinquishing the chase, although all about them as the tide ran out the bars grew more and more numerous.

“Say,” Joe ventured to remark presently, “hadn’t we better slow down?”

“Not yet,” came through Nat’s gritted teeth. Joe saw the well-known forward thrust of Nat’s jaw that betokened that he was in deadly earnest, but he made no further comment.

Every minute, though, he expected to feel the grating jar that would announce the end of the chase and the grounding of the *Nomad*. So far everything was going smoothly and they were steadily overhauling the skiff, although their loss of way by the eccentric breakage and tide drift had been considerable.

Things were still in this condition when the skiff entered the mouth of the creek, and suddenly, after proceeding a few yards, vanished as if she had sunk. But Nat knew that no such thing had occurred.

“He’s turned up into a side channel where he knows we won’t stand the ghost of a chance to nail him,” cried Nat. “Bad luck and more of it.”

“Nothing to do but to turn back, eh, Nat?” asked Joe, secretly rather relieved at this termination to the chase. He didn’t want to

see the *Nomad* aground and helpless till high tide set her afloat again, or, worse still, till tackles had to be rigged or help sent for to drag her into deep water.

“Yes,” sighed Nat, “that’s about it.”

He was preparing to turn around in a rather larger patch of blue water than the others which lay amidst the yellow and green “danger signals,” when Joe tugged at his sleeve excitedly.

“Nat! Nat! Look there!”

Coming down the creek was a low, racy-looking motor boat without a cabin, but with a high, sharp cutwater that indicated that she was built for speed.

Nate, the sailor, gave a quick gasp of astonishment.

“Jee-hos-phat! That’s Israel Harley’s boat! Him as was suspected of smuggling opium for the Chinese smugglers but was acquitted on his trial.”

“I’ve heard of him,” said Nat, “but I didn’t know he lived back in there.”

“Yes, Whale Creek, or a tributary of it, runs miles back, right up to Martinez almost. It’s a cinch for Israel to get that light-draught craft of his’n back up there. He lives in a sort of shanty town with a lot of other fishermen, and they say that, although all the crowd are hard and tough, Israel is the toughest of ’em.”

“I know he has a bad reputation. He must have made a lot of money, though, to buy that boat. She’s a beauty, and fast, I’ll bet,” said Nat, casting admiring glances on the high-bowed motor boat which could be seen threading the intricacies of Whale Creek as

it wound in and out among the greenish-gray salt meadows.

“Yes, they say that Iz would do anything for money and wasn’t no ways partic’lar,” was the response. “I’ve hearn, too, that in old days he and his gang made a lot of coin by setting false lights on the shore and then looting the ships that was wrecked on that account. But that’s all long ago. I guess opium smuggling from South Sea schooners is more in his line now.”

“How has he kept out of the clutches of the law so long?” asked Joe.

“He’s got some sort of political pull,” was the rejoinder, “and besides that, there ain’t hardly nobody would testify against him, they’re so all-fired scared of what would happen to them if they did. There’s a whole clan of Harleys back there at Martinez, and they’re all about as hard as old Israel, and that’s saying a heap.”

“Hullo! What’s up now? They’re slowing down!” cried Nat suddenly.

“So they are, and right by that little side passage that Minory vanished into.”

“Maybe he’s in trouble and they’ve stopped to see what’s up,” suggested Joe.

“No; look, they’ve stopped! Look there! Minory is rowing up to them and talking to them. Put the glasses on ’em, Joe, and see what they’re up to.”

Joe clapped the binoculars to his eyes.

“Crickey!” he cried excitedly, “I saw him pass something to old Harley, and he’s getting on board the black motor boat.”

"I'll bet he's cooked up some fairy story and that old Israel has agreed to take him some place down the coast, maybe Santa Barbara, and set him ashore where he can hit a railroad or a steamer," suggested Mr. Anderson.

"That may be so," was Nat's thoughtful rejoinder; "from what Joe saw, it looks as if money had been passed. If he had kept on to Martinez he would have found himself miles out of civilization. It's wild country back there, and I guess he is anxious to hit the railroad or the ocean right now."

The black motor boat got under way again, leaving an abandoned skiff behind. What story the rascally genius had concocted, of course they did not know, but Joe could see old Israel, or a man whom he guessed was he, pointing at the *Nomad* as if she were the subject of the conversation on board the fast, rakish craft.

On she came with a bone in her teeth, and, heading round, threaded her way rapidly out of the intricate passageway and across the *Nomad's* bow. Nat almost groaned aloud in his chagrin.

"Can't we overtake her?" asked Mr. Anderson.

Nat shook his head despairingly as he watched the black craft cut smoothly through the water at a rate that he estimated at fully eighteen knots or over an hour.

"Not a chance on earth, sir," he said.

"There's not a boat round here can touch her," declared the sailor with grim confidence. "I reckon old Israel uses her in his

opium smuggling. He needs a fast boat for that, and maybe some of that political ring helped him put those speedy engines in her, for they must have cost a pretty penny.”

Suddenly one of the figures on the black craft was seen to move toward the stern. Then came a mocking wave of farewell and a shouted something that they could not catch.

Nat set his teeth forcefully.

“There’s one chance in a thousand that she’ll break down or something,” he said with grim determination, “and I’m going to follow her as long as I can.”

“Good for you, my lad,” exclaimed Mr. Anderson. “The luck’s bound to turn some time. So far it has favored them – maybe it will be our turn now.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE SMUGGLER AT BAY

But it didn't look much as if Mr. Anderson's words were to be verified. Dr. Chalmers came on deck, as he had been doing from time to time to learn what was going on. He was told of the startling turn that affairs had suddenly taken, and Nat asked him if it was important that Mr. Jenkins should be set ashore speedily.

"I think not," was the reply. "Thanks to your medicine chest, I have the antiseptics I require for treating the wound, and, so far, he is still asleep, which is an encouraging sign. Keep on, my boy, and get that rascal if you can."

He went below once more to watch his patient, and the others concentrated their minds on the chase. Ding-dong came on deck for a breathing spell and was placed in possession of the facts.

"If w-w-w-we only had wur-wur-wireless on board, we'd soon stop their little ger-ger-game," he groaned.

"We'll have it just as soon as possible," Nat assured him. "All this has shown me what a useful thing it would be to have an installation made right on board."

The black motor boat zipped through the water like a streak. So fine were her lines that she left hardly any wake, except a churned up streak of white that marked where her powerful propellers were biting into the water and driving her onward at

twelve hundred revolutions a minute.

“The only chance we stand is if she breaks down,” muttered Nat, as he watched the rapidly receding outlines of the craft.

“And we stand as good a chance of doing that as she, to judge by past performances,” grunted Joe.

“I’m afraid it looks that way, Joe; still, we can only keep on and hope for the best. We won’t give up the chase now, whatever happens.”

“That’s the talk,” said Mr. Anderson approvingly; “they must be driving her cruelly to keep up that pace, and machinery is only machinery and something may give.”

“Well, I hope it does soon,” commented Joe, “or she’ll be out of sight.”

This looked as if it was entirely likely to happen. Diminished to a mere speck, the speedy craft made the *Nomad*, fast as she was for her sturdy, sea-going build, look like a stone barge chasing a canoe.

“If it would come on to blow, there would be a different tale to tell,” said Nat, “but it’s ‘set fair’ by the look of it and we’ve nothing to hope from in that quarter.”

Then what they had feared happened. The fast craft vanished over the horizon. They were hopelessly outclassed.

“Beaten to a frazzle,” choked out Joe indignantly, “and by a miserable opium-smuggling, piratical old thief at that.”

“We’ll keep right on,” repeated Nat, and he grimly steered the same course he had been holding when their speedy quarry

vanished from view.

Half an hour later he was to be mighty glad he did. Up over the rim of the horizon came the form of the fleeing black craft. Clearly, it had been compelled to slow up from some cause or other.

“Hurray!” yelled the excitable Joe. “We’ve got a chance now!”

“Have they broken down?” asked Mr. Anderson anxiously.

“Looks that way. They wouldn’t slow up after having given us such a clean pair of heels,” said Nat, his voice aquiver with suppressed excitement, “but she’s an awful long way off yet, and may get under way again long before we catch up with her.”

Joe looked sober again. The chase was pursued in almost total silence. As they neared her it could be seen that the black craft was moving, but slowly.

Nat fairly held his breath as he watched her. What had happened on board? Through the glasses Joe could see the four men on her gesticulating excitedly and working over the engine. Presently clouds of blue smoke and sharp reports like those of a rapid-fire gun burst from the crippled craft.

“Just keep on that way fifteen minutes longer and we’ve got you, my hearties,” exclaimed the sailor.

“What’s up, do you think?” asked Joe.

“Carburetor troubles. Too rich a mixture. Look at that smoke; it’s coming out as black as ink now.”

Nat said nothing, but his flushed cheeks and trembling hands spoke for him. It looked for once as if the tortoise had caught up

with the hare in real life.

“What are your plans if we do catch up with her?” asked Joe in a subdued tone as they bore down on the black craft.

“Call on them to give up their passenger. If they don’t, we’ll have to board her.”

“But we’ve no guns.”

“Man alive, we don’t need them.”

“But they are just as strong a party as we are, and they are probably armed, and we know that one, at least, doesn’t hesitate to shoot on provocation.”

“Well, we’ll pack monkey-wrenches in our hip pockets. If trouble comes we’ll use them, but I’m thinking that old Israel Harley, from all accounts, will give up his passenger without trouble. He’s been too badly singed by the law to want to come near it again.”

“Maybe there’s something in that,” rejoined Joe resignedly. “I’ll go below and pick out a few likely-looking wrenches.”

He turned and went down to the engine-room, where he related to Ding-dong all that had happened in the last exciting moments.

In the meantime the *Nomad* had crept up to the black craft, and those on the bridge could now see that the hood above the engine was raised and that an old, rugged-looking man in rough clothes with three younger men were working over the motor.

“They’ve broken down, sure enough,” chuckled Nat exultingly as the *Nomad* drew nearer.

“Our turn at last,” chortled Joe, as he came on deck and slipped a wrench to Nat and another to the sailor. Mr. Anderson said that, in case of a tussle, he preferred to rely on his fists.

The old man looked up in apparent surprise as the *Nomad* came alongside the thin, sharp motor boat.

“That’s old Iz,” whispered the sailor to Nat. But Nat hardly heard him, for he was face to face with the surprise of his life.

The motor boat was an open one. There was no cabin. All was open except the engine space, which was forward under the high bow and hooded in. All was plainly exposed to the view from the *Nomad’s* bridge, which was considerably higher than the low, swift craft she had overhauled.

There was old Israel, there were his three companions, but of Minory nothing was to be seen. He had vanished as completely as if he had evaporated into air!

CHAPTER XIII.

TRAPPED!

“Wall?” hailed Israel, raising his bushy eyebrows, which overhung his steely-blue eyes like pent-houses. “Wall? What might you be wanting?”

“That fellow you took on board in Whale Creek,” snapped out Nat decisively.

“What feller?” demanded the old man. “Say, young feller, has ther heat gone to yer brain?”

“It’s no use temporizing,” chimed in Mr. Anderson, “we saw you take on a passenger. We want him for a grave crime.”

“Do tell!” exclaimed the old man, while the others, whom the sailor whispered to Nat were the elder Harley’s two sons and his nephew, suspended their work and gazed up as astonished apparently as old Israel appeared to be.

“Wall, you shore must hev sharp eyes in yer head, young feller,” said one of the old man’s sons, a fellow named Seth Harley, who bore as bad a reputation as his father. “So you saw us take on a passenger, eh? Wall, this is the first I hearn on it. Say, Jake, or you, Hank, did you notice any passenger embarking on this packet?”

A contemptuous laugh was the only rejoinder and then old man Harley struck in again in his harsh, rasping voice, like the

dragging of a rough file over metal.

“Spect you be the loonies thet hev stuck up thet thar birdcage contraption on Goat Island, beant yer?”

“If you mean the wireless station, yes,” responded Nat.

“Wall, thet accounts fer ther bees in yer bonnet, then,” scoffed old Israel, while his relatives chuckled in a peculiarly irritating manner; “an’ anuther thing, lemme tell yer,” the old man went on, “you’d better be gittin’ ready to quit that thar island, anyhow.”

“Why is that?” asked Nat, striving to keep his temper, while Joe hopped about, first on one foot and then on another in his irritation.

“Cos we hev a prior claim to it, thet’s why,” retorted the old man, a sudden fiery gleam coming into his cold eyes. “We don’t want none of you spies an’ interferers comin’ from the mainland and mixin’ up in our affairs.”

“We’ve no intention of mixing up in your affairs,” flung back Nat, with an emphasis on the last word. “You’ve just as legitimate a right to use the island as we have and we’ll concede you that, but, as for quitting it at your orders – well, that’s another story.”

“See here, Harley,” interpolated Mr. Anderson, “we suspect you of having on board your boat one Miles Minory. He is wanted for several grave offences. You’ll save yourself a lot of trouble by giving him up. We know he paid you well to help him escape, but the jig is up and we mean to have him.”

The old man stared at him with what appeared to be absolute bewilderment.

“Lan’s sake!” he exclaimed, “you’re as loony as the kids are. Do you see any signs of anyone on this yer craft but me, my two sons and my nevvie here? We’re on a peaceable run to Santa Barbara ter git terbaccy, and so forth, and then you overhauls us and springs this line of talk on us. It’s an insult, that’s what it is! I ain’t harborin’ no criminals. If there was one on board here, d’ye think I wouldn’t give him up? My name’s as good as the next man’s, and I ain’t mixin’ up in that sort of business.”

“He certainly appears to be telling the truth, and yet it isn’t possible we could have been deceived,” said Nat to his companions, in sore bewilderment.

“Do you think he could have slipped overboard into another boat while we lost sight of them?” queried Joe.

Nat shook his head.

“I hardly see how that is possible,” he said. “In the first place, we must have sighted a second craft, if there was one, and, in the second place, there’s nowhere they could land between Whale Creek and Santa Barbara.”

“See here, young feller,” hailed old Harley, addressing himself to Nat, “come aboard if you like and take a look around. If you find anyone here but me an’ the boys, I’ll make you a present of the boat. I can’t speak no fairer than that.”

“What do you think?” asked Nat, turning to his companions.

“I don’t see what harm there can be in accepting that proposal,” said Mr. Anderson. “The boat is broken down and if this was a trap they still couldn’t work you any harm while we

are on hand.”

“Then I’m going to go ahead and take him up,” declared Nat. “There’s a bare chance that they may have him in some secret hiding place.”

“Be careful, Nat,” urged Joe.

“Yes, they’re a bad lot,” supplemented the sailor.

“They certainly look it,” agreed Nat; “but, as Mr. Anderson says, they can’t get away from here in their crippled boat, so I don’t see what harm they can do me.”

“All right, go ahead then. We’ll watch carefully and see that no harm comes to you,” said Joe, and Nat swung himself over the side and dropped lightly into the black motor boat.

“Go ahead! Look around all you want to,” said old Harley, squinting at the boy with his odd, twinkling little eyes.

Nat looked around the interior of the hull. It had lockers on each side, far too narrow, however, to hide the body of a man. There were cross seats, too, but these were mere thwarts laid from side to side of the craft and couldn’t have concealed a ten-year-old child.

He examined the floor, but no cracks appeared in it which might indicate a trap-door leading to some place of hiding within the hull. Only the big space under the raised hull forward that housed the engines remained unexamined. Nat hardly thought it worth while, but just the same he decided to make his search thorough. Nevertheless, against his better judgment and against his certain knowledge that Minory had boarded the motor craft,

he was beginning to believe that, in some extraordinary way, a mistake must have been made, or else by some inexplicable means Minory had managed to evade them.

He examined the engine-space with due care, but could see nothing within the dark machinery cabin to warrant him in assuming that Minory was concealed within.

“Wall, what did I tell yer?” cried old Harley triumphantly, as Nat looked perplexed and chagrined. “You’re a nice one, you are, to come accusing a respectable old man who makes an honest livin’ of hidin’ criminals and avadin’ the law, ain’t you?”

“I’ll have to accept your statement as true,” said Nat slowly, “but I’m still convinced that there is some trickery about this affair.”

“Hark at him!” cried old Harley, throwing his hands high in the air in apparently righteous indignation. “But say, son,” he went on, placing a grimy, gnarled hand on Nat’s shoulder, “I don’t bear no malice, not me. To prove it, I’m going to ask you a favor. You’re summat of a ingine sharp, I’ve heard tell; will you take a look at our motor an’ see what ails it? I can’t fix it, no more can the boys here.”

“Oh, I’ll look it over, if that’s all you want,” said Nat, who, truth to tell, had rather a hankering to inspect the piece of machinery that could force a boat through the water at the pace that old Harley’s was driven. “I won’t guarantee to be able to remedy the trouble, though.”

“That’s all right, lad; jes look at it, an’ if you can’t fix it I’ll

hev to ask you fellows for a tow into Santa Barbara, I reckon, fer we're plumb busted down now."

Nothing could have appeared more open and above board than this. Nat, without hesitation, stooped to crawl in under the whaleback hood that protected the motor from spray.

As he stooped he heard a sudden shout from above.

"Look out, Nat!"

But it was too late. The boy was felled by a terrific blow from behind. All the world went red about him and then faded into blackness amidst which a humming noise like that of a speeding motor rang vibrantly.

CHAPTER XIV.

NAT A PRISONER

“Is he coming round, Seth?”

These words in old Israel’s voice were Nat’s next conscious impression. They were coupled with the dousing in his face of a bucket of sea water.

“He’s coming out of it all right, Pop,” was the rejoinder. “Hooky, though, that was a whaler of a crack you gave him.”

“Wall, it had to be a hard one. He’s a powerful strong kid and we couldn’t have afforded to have a tussle with him. He! he! he!” chuckled the old man, “how plumb flabbergasted those looneys on that *Nomad* was when they saw the kid knocked out and us gliding away like sixty!”

“Yes, that was a slick trick, pretending to break down. We’ve got ’em whar we want ’em now. They can’t do anything to us fer fear uv causing trouble fer the kid here.”

“That’s so,” struck in a third voice, that of old Israel’s other son, “but jes the same, it ’pears to me like we’ve bitten off more’n we kin chew this trip.”

“Sho!” exclaimed the old man scornfully. “Ain’t we a-gittin’ paid fer it?”

“Yes, and enough to git us right out of these diggins if they git too hot to hold us,” chimed in Seth reassuringly. “Ain’t no call

to be narvous.”

“Of course there isn’t,” struck in another voice, which Nat recognized as Minory’s. He lay perfectly still, feigning that he was still unconscious. He wanted to hear all that he could. From what he had already caught, he realized that a trick had been played on them and that the motor craft owned by old Harley had not been injured at all; and that the pretended breakdown was only a deception to get him on board and divert the hunt from Minory to himself.

“You’re perfectly safe in this,” Minory went on, addressing old Harley and the others; “the interests I represent would go to a good deal more expense than this to get me safely on my way with what I have in my possession. As for the boy there, you’d best keep him out of the way for a while. That’ll keep his friends busy chasing around after him instead of bothering me.”

“Say, mister, you’re a slick ’un, all right,” declared old Harley in an admiring tone. “It was a good thing we had that little cubby hole up in the bow to stow you in, though, or your scheme might hev fallen through.”

“Phew! I thought I’d die cooped up in there,” declared Minory. “How did you ever come to have a secret hiding place on your boat?”

“Wall, guv’ner, that’s our business,” responded the old man; “but once in while we have stuff on board that it might be inconvenient for the Customs officers to find, an’ so we just rigged up that little stowage fer safe keeping.”

Nat guessed that the “cubby hole” referred to and in which Minory had evidently been hidden while he vainly searched the boat for him, was used in old Israel’s illicit trade for the convenient and safe hiding of the opium he smuggled.

“Well, I’ve fallen into the hands of a fine lot of rascals,” he thought to himself, “but they’ll hardly dare to do more than keep me a prisoner, and maybe I’ll find some way of getting out before long. I wonder where we’re headed for? Gracious, how my head aches!”

“Reckon I’ll douse the kid with some more water,” humanely suggested Seth; “he don’t appear to be coming around very fast.”

But Nat saved him this trouble. He opened his eyes and assumed a look as if he had just come out of a stupor. It wouldn’t do to let the Harleys know that he had overheard their conversation and was conversant with the situation.

“Where am I?” he asked in as bewildered a voice as he could assume.

“On board the *Rattlesnake*, my hearty,” piped up old Israel. “Reckon your head aches pretty well, don’t it?” he added with a grin.

“Sort of,” rejoined Nat, in the easy tone he had decided to assume. He knew that with the odds against him it would be of no use to struggle, and by remaining apparently indifferent to the situation he might stand a chance of bettering it, or at least of gaining some valuable information.

“You see what comes of meddling in other people’s affairs,”

struck in Minory meaningly. "You young cub, you! I'd like to –"

He started toward Nat, who was still recumbent, with the apparent intention of striking him a vicious blow in the face. But old Israel interposed.

"Stop that," he said gruffly; "the boy's been man-handled enough already."

"Bah! Not half enough to suit me," snarled Minory. "If it hadn't been for the interference of him and the other whelps, I'd have been safely away now."

"I should think that if you are the honest man you pretend to be, you'd be ashamed to be associated with such a rascal," declared Nat indignantly, addressing old Israel.

"They're being well paid for what they're doing," scoffed Minory, "and money will buy almost anybody."

"You ought to know," retorted Nat stingingly, and he saw the rascal wince under the thrust.

"Where are you taking me to?" demanded Nat, sitting up and looking about him.

They had reached a point of the coast that he knew lay below Santa Barbara, which they must have passed while he was still unconscious.

"Plenty of time for that when we get there," grinned old Israel; "but you can bet your boots it'll be a place where you can't make any trouble till we get ready to let you."

"For the last time, Harley, I'll give you a chance to set me ashore and let me bring that rascal to book," cried Nat.

Harley's answer was not unexpected by the boy, who had already formed a pretty fair estimate of the old reprobate's character.

"How much'll you give?" he demanded.

"Not a penny of blackmail, you can rest assured of that," declared Nat warmly. "If you don't want to do your duty as honest men, then I'm not going to pay you to do so."

Harley did not reply but went forward and said something to Seth, who had the wheel. The course of the black motor boat was changed and she began to head in toward the shore. Nat took advantage of this opportunity to gaze astern. He hardly expected to see any sign of the *Nomad*, yet somehow, he was disappointed when he didn't.

What was going to be the outcome of it all, he wondered as he rapidly ran over in his mind the events that had taken place since the afternoon before, when they had set out to answer that wireless call from the *Iroquois*. How little had any of them dreamed into what a strange tangle the wireless was to plunge them when Ding-dong Bell had enthusiastically enlisted them in "the cause"! For a moment or so Nat almost wished that they had never engaged in the enterprise, but before long his naturally buoyant spirits asserted themselves. He recalled the many seemingly hopeless situations in which he and his chums had been before during their adventurous careers. With such thoughts came a conviction that buoyed and strengthened his flagging spirits. Come what might, he would face it manfully and

try to win out against seemingly desperate odds.

Although his head still ached with a racking pain, Nat concentrated his faculties on observing the movements of those on the speedy black motor boat. It was plain enough now that they were heading in landward, and Nat noticed with astonishment that their objective point appeared to be the foot of a blank wall of cliffs, where no sign of a landing place was visible. But, after running straight toward the land till they were not more than a quarter of a mile from the forbidding bastion of rocky escarpments, the motor craft was headed southward again, skirting along the coast.

Old Israel stood by Seth in the bow directing him, apparently, in his steering. It appeared to Nat as if the old man was looking for some familiar landmark. At last it hove in sight. Nat saw old Israel point to a lone pine tree on the summit of the cliff. It towered like a signal vane from the midst of a wind-racked tangle of scrub oak and madrone. Beneath it, the cliff dropped sheer and precipitous for a hundred and fifty feet or more.

Once this bearing had been taken, the motor boat was headed in straight for the cliff at a smart speed.

“Looks like he means to run bang into the cliff,” commented Nat to himself, as, with no abatement of speed the black craft rushed onward toward the wall of solid rock.

But, just as it appeared as if Nat’s surmise might be verified, something occurred which the boy, familiar as he was with the coast, would never have suspected to be possible. Before them

loomed an opening in the cliff, rising in a horseshoe shape above the sea level. It was partially screened from seaward by some clumps of trailing bushes, but was plainly enough to be seen on close inspection.

“It’s a cave!” exclaimed Nat under his breath. “I’ve heard of such places along the coast here in the limestone cliffs, but this is the first one I’ve seen.”

In spite of his precarious and uncertain position, Nat felt a keen interest as old Harley’s craft headed straight for the cave mouth. In another moment it had penetrated the dark entrance and was within the natural tunnel. There was a click and sputter of blue flame from forward and a scimitar of brilliant light slashed the curtain of gloom within. It came from the motor boat’s powerful searchlight.

“Well, at any rate, this is a novel experience,” thought Nat to himself, as, moving swiftly, the craft on which he was held prisoner still kept her headway. It was plain enough that old Harley knew the cave well, and perhaps in this lay the secret of some of his seemingly miraculous escapes from officers despatched to look for him. At such times he vanished mysteriously and did not reappear till public sentiment had died down and his case had been “fixed” by his political friends.

Suddenly Harley gave an order:

“Slow her down, Seth.”

The end of this strange journey was evidently close at hand.

CHAPTER XV.

UNDER THE EARTH

The boat's pace decreased and then came another sharp command:

“Stop her!”

The light flashed on a sort of platform of rock ahead of them, a natural dock in this subterranean harbor. The white rays showed numerous bales and boxes piled all about and also a rough sort of table with tin cups and dishes on it, and in one corner, blackened with smoke, was a pile of rocks apparently dedicated to use as a cooking range.

“Well, of all the odd adventures,” thought Nat to himself as the motor craft was run alongside the rock shelf, “this is the queerest I've encountered, and all within striking distance of home, too, that's the strangest part of it.”

But he was not given much time for reflection. Old Israel, in a gruff voice, bade him get out and climb up on the rock platform. There was nothing to do but to obey and Nat clambered up on the natural dock and was followed by the others. The searchlight was extinguished and the place was momentarily plunged into an abysmal darkness. But presently old Israel produced some matches and lit a large lamp that stood on the rude table.

“Better make yourself at home,” he gruffly advised Nat, “you

may be here for quite a while.”

Nat gave a sigh of resignation. Had it not been for the anxiety he knew his friends must be feeling about him he could easily have found it in his heart to rather enjoy this weird adventure. As it was, though, he felt anxious and worried over what they must be thinking.

Seth and his brother set about preparing a meal consisting of fried fish, potatoes and coffee, with flapjacks. When it was ready they were all summoned to sit down and eat, and Nat took his place with the rest of them. He had the hearty appetite of energetic, healthy youth, which even his dilemma had not dulled.

During the meal old Israel and Minory sat apart conversing in wrangling tones. Nat judged that there was some hitch over the payment of the money that had been promised by the latter as the price of the Harleys' aid. However, at length everything must have been patched up amiably, for the two shook hands as though cementing a bargain. Nat caught them looking at him once or twice, but deemed it wisest not to let them know that he was aware of this fact.

After the fish and the rest of the food had been disposed of, Nat was told that he could do what he liked. Having found an old newspaper, the boy sat down close to the lamp and began perusing it. But it was dull work and speedily palled, and he amused himself by exploring the cavern. The rock shelf extended back about twenty feet and was some forty feet across the front. It might, in fact, be compared to the stage of a theater as aptly

as anything else, with the rock walls of the cave forming the proscenium arch.

Whether it was altogether natural in formation Nat could not, of course, say, but he recollected having heard that many such caves existed, and that in the days of the Spanish occupation they were used by the coast Indians as hiding places from their masters. In one or two places on the walls of the cavern he thought he saw traces of rough carvings which appeared to bear out this idea.

Another thing that he noticed, and one which set a bold plan buzzing in his head, was a small boat moored to the front of the rock platform not far from where the black motor boat had been tied. The boy was careful, however, not to let his eyes dwell too long upon this, as the desperate scheme he had half formed in his mind might have been killed in the making had his captors suspected that he had observed it.

Hour after hour went by; it seemed like an eternity to Nat, and at last he began to find himself getting sleepy. Finally he could fight off his drowsiness no longer, and, giving in to it completely, he flung himself on a pile of old sacking in a corner of the cave and immediately dropped off into profound slumber.

How long he slept he had no means of knowing, but when he awakened again the cave was empty, save for Seth, who sat at the table whiling away the time by hacking something out of a bit of wood with his knife. At last Seth began to blink and wink, and apparently in order to keep awake, he walked over to where Nat

lay, seemingly still wrapped in slumber.

“Humph!” Nat heard him say to himself after a long inspection, “that younker’s good for twelve hours’ snoozing after that stuff pop gave him to make him sleep. I reckon there’s no harm if I take forty winks myself. Anyhow, there’s no chance of his getting away.”

So saying, he slouched back to the table, and burying his face in his hands, dropped off into what, to judge by his snores, must have been a sleep as deep as the one from which Nat had just awakened. Nat waited for a while to let Seth get well into the land of Nod and then, with his heart beating like a pneumatic riveter, he arose and crept cautiously toward the small boat he had observed earlier in the night.

For one moment the wild idea of taking the motor boat had flashed through his mind, but he abandoned the idea as it was pretty certain that either Seth or old Israel had pocketed the switch blade or otherwise made it impossible to start her without their knowledge. As he cautiously made his way to the edge of the platform and toward the small boat, Nat found himself wondering what had become of the others. The motor boat was still there, so that obviously they could not have used her in their departure.

“There must be some other way out of the cave,” thought Nat. “Don’t I wish I knew where it is? But with luck this way will prove just as well, provided Seth doesn’t take it into his head and wake up.”

Nat dropped into the small boat and cast her off without Seth's stirring.

The tide must have been setting out, for the boat at once drifted away from the platform toward the mouth of the cavern. The boy had drifted some distance before he thought it safe to take to the oars. Right there and then he made a startling discovery. Small wonder the boat had been left unguarded. There were no oars in it!

"Great Scotland!" exclaimed Nat in a voice of consternation, "this is worse and then some! However, I'm in for it now and must make the best of it, but, in case Seth wakes and takes after me with the motor boat, I'm a goner, sure."

Drifting along on the outseting tide, the boat rapidly got beyond the glow diffused by the lamp beneath which Seth was sleeping, and glided with its helpless occupant into the pitchy darkness of the sea cavern.

CHAPTER XVI.

DRIFTING THROUGH THE NIGHT

“Talk about crossing the Styx! I’ll bet it had nothing on this business of bumping along blindly in an oarless boat in a dark cave,” thought Nat as, sitting in the bottom of the small craft and using the seat for a back rest, he reviewed the situation.

Every minute he dreaded to hear the roaring of the motor boat’s exhaust, which would tell him that he was being pursued. But nothing of the sort occurred, and before long he saw the stars shining at the mouth of the strange subterranean tunnel.

“Thank goodness, it’s a calm night, anyhow,” he thought, as he observed the placid, unclouded sky; “if it had come on to blow, or if a big sea was running, I’d stand a good chance of going to Davy Jones before my time.”

The tide ran stronger at the mouth of the cave and in a very few minutes Nat was out under the stars and drifting seaward, whither he had no idea. He tore out a grating from the bottom of the boat and tried to use it as a paddle, but he made no progress with this crude substitute for an oar and soon gave up the attempt in sheer weariness and disgust.

“I’ll have to let her drift at her own sweet will,” thought the boy, “and trust to luck to being picked up. Wow! but I feel sleepy and heavy. Must be the after effects of that stuff Seth said his

amiable parent gave me to put me to sleep.”

The boy fought against his drowsiness for some time; but, try as he would, his eyes simply refused to stay open. The eyelids felt as if they had been weighted with lead, and ere long the lone passenger of the drifting boat was sleeping under the stars as peacefully as if in his cot at home or on the Wireless Island.

He was awakened by a rough jolt. For a few minutes he had not the least idea where he was, and when his senses did begin to flow back into his sleepy brain he was considerably mystified. The boat was bumping against a huge dark bulk which Nat, in the dimness, at first thought must be a cliff. He was scrambling to his feet a-tingle with astonishment, when a gruff voice hailed him from above:

“Ahoy, there! Who may you be?”

At the summit of the “cliff” appeared a head. The boy could see it blackly outlined against the star-sprinkled sky.

In his astonishment at being accosted Nat could think of nothing to reply but: “Nat Trevor of Santa Barbara. Who are you, and where am I?”

“I’m Captain Sim Braithwaite of the Pancake Shoals Lightship, and this is the Lightship. Now, if you’re tired of boating, you’d better come on board and explain yourself more explicitly.”

“The Pancake Shoals Lightship!” gasped Nat blankly. “Why, I’ve drifted much further than I thought possible.”

“Drifted!” echoed Captain Sim in a gruff voice. “For the love

of Father Neptune, you don't mean to say you're skyhooting around the ocean without oars at one o'clock in the morning?"

"That's just what I do," responded Nat, with an inward chuckle at the captain's evident amazement.

"Dear land of Beulah, you must be fond of salt water to take such cruises! A sort of sea-going lunatic, be you now?"

"I'll come on board and explain. It's a long story," said Nat.

"All right; the accommodation ladder is just for'ard of where you are. Hitch yer boat up and come on board. Suffering tom-cats, I thought you was a whale or something at first! We don't git many visitors out here, but you're the rummest one I ever heard tell on."

As he hitched his boat to the foot of the ladder and then began to climb up the Lightship's high, steep sides, Nat could hear the captain mumbling and grumbling good-naturedly to himself.

"What's the world coming to?" he was saying over and over. "Sea-going lun-atics a-wandering round the good Lord's ocean in boats without oars, an' bumping into lightships an – so here you are!" he broke off as Nat nimbly climbed on board. "Why, you're nothing but a kid! If this ain't the beatingest I ever heard tell of. Well, anyhow, welcome to the Lightship and then spin us yer yarn, fer I know you have one."

"I certainly have," laughed Nat, "and I'm no lunatic, either, as I hope to convince you. But you said this was a Lightship. I see the masts and the big light cages on top, but where are the lights?"

"Ah, that's just it, my lad. I was near crazy with worriment

when you come bumping along. Hen Coffin, he's my partner out here, went ashore last night on leave. He's a fine mechanic, Hen is, and if he'd been here the lights would have been going all right, but, Lord bless you, when something went wrong with the engine that drives the dynamos I was helpless as a babe unborn."

"Maybe I can help you," said Nat, sympathizing with the old man's distress. "Does a gasolene engine furnish your power?"

"Yes, consarn the pesky thing's hide. Thank goodness, there ain't no steamers due up or down to-night; nothing but some coasters and steam schooners, and they know the coast well enough to smell their way out of trouble. But if some big steamer had come blundering along with a foreign skipper on the bridge, phew!" And the old man wiped his forehead on which the perspiration had broken out at the thought of the tragedy for which the failure of the light might have been responsible.

"How do you know that no foreign vessels or big steamers are due to-night?" asked Nat curiously.

"Why, by the wireless, of course. We gets reports from all up and down the coast. They're relayed from one station to another, just as we notify all stations of the ships that pass here."

Nat gave a joyful exclamation.

"What a bit of luck that I bumped into you!" he exclaimed jubilantly.

"It will be for me, if you can fix the engine," said the captain, "but I don't see any reason for you holding a service of thanksgiving."

“I’ll explain about that later,” said Nat. “Now let’s go below, or wherever this engine is, and I’ll do my poor best to get it started up again for you.”

“Bully for you, my young rooster,” cried the bluff old captain, clapping the boy on the back. “Come this way. Right down the hatch here. Look out for the ladder, it’s steep.”

Descending a steep flight of stairs which the captain referred to as “a ladder,” Nat found himself in a cozy, well-lighted cabin, the illuminant being an oil lamp which had been lighted by the captain when the dynamo failed. There were book shelves, easy-chairs and plenty of minor comforts all about. Evidently the Lightship men made themselves as comfortable as possible in their lonely post.

Nat now saw that his host was a ruddy-faced, stout old seaman, weather-beaten and bluff. A peculiarity in his gait was now also explained, for Nat saw that one of his legs was a wooden one. But he had small time to dwell on these details, for the captain ushered him into a compartment opening off the “sitting room,” if it can be so called, which smelled of oil and machinery.

“Thar she is. Thar’s the ornary, all-fired, cussed critter that won’t turn a wheel fer old Cap’n Sim,” he said indignantly, holding aloft a lamp.

Nat looked the engine over. It was a stationary gasolene affair of about twenty horse power. Taking the lamp from the captain he examined it carefully.

“Why, so far as I can see, a loose nut on the sparker has caused

your trouble,” he said, setting down the lamp, “but we’ll soon make sure.”

The boy took a wrench from the tool-rack and tightened up the loose part. Then, throwing the switch, he tested for a spark and found that it appeared to be all right. With a turn of the flywheel he started the engine, a welcome “pop” greeting his first effort. In a few seconds he had the engine whirring steadily away and the dynamo purring as it resumed work.

“Glory be!” shouted the skipper, dancing about on his good leg. “Boy, you’re a genius, that’s what you are. Now, let’s go on deck and start up the lights again. It’s a wonder my hair hasn’t turned gray from worryment, but everything’s all right now, thanks to you, my bucko.”

They soon gained the deck and the captain started to throw on the switch that connected the lights with the dynamo below. He was in the act of doing this, when not more than a few yards off he saw gleaming through the dark, like brilliant jewels, a red and a green light. They were the side lamps of a large steamer and she was coming straight for the Lightship!

“Quick!” shouted Nat, at the top of his voice. “Cap, look! Look, there!”

“Hallelujah!” exclaimed the captain, “if those lights won’t light, there’ll be a bad night’s work on Pancake Shoals!”

With hands that trembled he threw the switch, and the next instant the captain and Nat set up a simultaneous and joyous shout. From the twin mast-heads of the Lightship a brilliant glare

shone out.

From the ship came shouts and hasty orders, and they saw her turn and swing off like some live thing that had been suddenly alarmed.

“Boy,” said the captain very solemnly, “it was Providence that sent you here to-night. You’ve done more’n help me. You’ve saved a valuable ship and maybe some human lives, for no craft that ever went ashore on the Pancake Shoals sailed the seas again.”

CHAPTER XVII.

ABOARD THE LIGHTSHIP

“Waal, I want to know!” exclaimed the captain.

Nat had just explained to him his eagerness about the wireless equipment of the Lightship. The explanation had followed Nat’s story of how he came to be adrift in the Harleys’ boat, which story had frequently been compelled to halt while the captain interjected such remarks as “Great whales and little fishes!” “Land o’ Goshen!” and “Shiverin’ top-sails!” When Nat had related the villainy of the Harleys and Minory, the old man had thumped the table savagely with his fist.

“I’d like to have had ’em in the foc’sle of my old ship, the *Sarah Jane Braithwaite!*” he had exploded. “I’d have shown ’em. Keel-hauling would have been too good for such a bunch of sojers.”

At the conclusion of his story, Nat had asked to be allowed to utilize the Lightship’s wireless in trying to raise his friends.

“Waal, I want to know!” was the skipper’s exclamation, already recorded above. “Anything you want on this ship is yours, young feller, even down to my wooden leg, although I wouldn’t wish that on yer. Come ahead, I’ll show you whar the contraption is. Lord! Lord! these are wonderful days, when lads who can use wireless and fix busted gas engines come drifting along, a-bumping into just the folks that needs ’em.”

The wireless room was on deck, enclosed in a small cabin at the foot of the forward mast of the Lightship. Nat saw that it contained a set of the latest and best instruments, and he soon was sending out broadcast an appeal to locate the *Nomad*. Following this, he tried on a chance to raise Goat Island. He had not much idea that there would be anybody there, but he thought it was worth an effort anyway.

To his amazement when he switched to the receiving apparatus and adjusted the telephones to his ears, out of space came a reply that almost made him fall off his chair. It was sent in a hesitating, unskillful way, very unlike Ding-dong's expert key-handling, or even Joe's.

"Who wants Goat Island?"

"I do, Nat Trevor!" he rejoined. *"Who is this?"*

"Nemo," came back out of the ether.

"Nemo! Why, that's the Latin for 'nobody'" exclaimed Nat, in an amazed tone.

"Are you Goat Island?" flashed back Nat. *"Answer at once!"*

"This is Goat Island," trickled into Nat's ears in the same awkward, hesitating fashion; and then came silence. Try as he would, Nat couldn't raise it again.

"Well, this is a wireless mystery for fair," he muttered to himself, for the captain had left the wireless room to get some hot coffee and food; "that wasn't Ding-dong and it wasn't Joe; now who on earth was it? Some beginner, that's plain, for he couldn't send worth a cent. But then to cap the climax, telling me

it's 'Nemo'! It must be spooks, that's the only way I can account for it – wireless spooks.”

A minute later there came another message.

“Somebody trying to raise the Lightship,” exclaimed Nat, listening with all his might. “Maybe this is news of the *Nomad*.”

“*Nomad put in at Santa Barbara last night,*” was the message coming from the wireless man at the Santa Barbara station, which handled commercial messages. “*Have found out that all on board are at Arlington Hotel. Shall I send message?*”

“*Yes. Tell them, please, that this is Nat Trevor, well and able. Am aboard the Lightship at Pancake Shoals. Tell them to come for me as soon as possible.*”

Nat informed the man that the messages would be paid for at the land end and bade him good-night. With a light heart, troubled only by the mystery of the message from Goat Island, he joined the captain below and told him his good news.

“Waal, I'm glad you found your friends,” said Captain Sim, “but I'll be sorry to lose you, my lad. You're a boy after my own heart. I don't know what I should have done without you.”

“Oh, that's all right,” said Nat easily. “It just needed a little monkey-wrench sense, that's all, and I happened to have given a lot of attention to that branch of science.”

The captain had prepared an appetizing meal, to which they both did ample justice.

“Now, lad,” said he, when it was completed, “you just turn in and take a good sleep and I'll stand watch.”

As Nat was feeling drowsy again, doubtless owing to the far-reaching influence of Israel Harley's opiate, he was nothing loath to accept this proposition, and turned in and was speedily in the land of dreams. When the captain awakened him he felt that the last traces of the drug had vanished, and his senses were as clear as a bell. The sun was high and the sea smooth and sparkling. Nat had some coffee and rolls and then joined the captain on deck. He gazed anxiously toward Santa Barbara, eager to catch the first glimpse of the *Nomad*.

Near by the Lightship several triangular fins were cruising about.

"Sharks!" cried Nat, and recalled with a shudder his terrible experience with these tigers of the sea when he was cast adrift in a sinking boat in mid-Pacific.

"So they be. Thar's lots of them hereabouts," said the captain, "but Lor' bless yer, they're only little fellows. Very different to the fellers that attacked me when the *Sarah Jane Braithwaite* was down among the Andaman Islands. Like to hear the yarn?"

"Why, yes," said Nat, and added with a smile, "I've got a yarn of my own about them, too."

"Waal," began the skipper, exhaling a cloud of blue smoke as he withdrew his blackened old briar pipe from his mouth, "it was a good many years ago but I had a wooden pin even at that time, for d'ye see my port main brace was taken off when a spar fell on me during a typhoon in the Yaller Sea.

"But, to get to ther particlar day I'm talking of. We was

becalmed among the Andamans. A dead flat calm with the pitch boiling in the seams, and there we lay under the broiling sun as 'idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean', as the poet says. My first mate proposed to me that we should take a swim. Now, although I'm minus one of my spars, I'm a right smart swimmer, and I agreed.

"We had a fine time sporting round thar in the cool water, but suddenly somebody on deck hollers, 'Sharks!'

"Now that's a hail you want to act quick on, and you take my alfired-davy on it that we made good time getting back to the ship's side. But just as we reached it, what d'ye suppose?"

"A shark got you?" demanded Nat.

"No, he didn't get me, but he got my wooden leg. Yes, sir, bit it right off where it was strapped on. Took it off whole and entire. Waal, they hoisted me on deck and the carpenter rigged up a jury spar for me and I made out all right, although not so comfortable as I was with my old one.

"The next day it was still flat calm, and I was leaning over the rail whistling for a wind, when what should I see but the most caterwampus disturbance in the water a short distance away. The thing that was making it, whatever it was, was coming toward the ship, and it didn't take me long to make out that it was a shark.

"But I never saw a shark act like that before or since. First it would jump out of the water like a trout and then come splashing down again with a thump that sent the spray scattering for yards in all directions. Then it would roll over and over and snort and

plunge and wrastle about like all possessed.

“I calls my mate over and points it out to him, and by this time all the men was leaning over the bulwarks watching the critter. It came nearer and nearer and I thought I cotched it looking at me with a sort of reproachful look, if you can imagine a fish looking that way.

“‘Bill,’ says I to the mate, ‘get a shark line,’ we carried them in those latitudes, ‘bait it up with a bit of fat pork and we’ll find out what ails that critter.’

“‘Acts to me like it’s got a tummy ache,’ says Bill, as he goes below to get the tackle, ‘maybe it’s been a-eatin’ of green sea apples.’

“‘Waal, we chucks the line over, an’ afore long the shark bolts the pork whole and the hook gets embedded in his jaw and we haul him on board. Waal, sir,” and here the weather-beaten old seaman looked very hard at his young listener, “would you believe me when I tells you that what had been making that shark act so scandalous was my wooden leg?”

“Your wooden leg?” asked Nat seriously.

“Yes, sir, my wooden leg. You see, that shark was the same as bit off my port spar, and the blooming thing had wedged itself right across its gullet. It’s a wonder it hadn’t choked to death. It couldn’t swallow nothing and that was why it was cutting up such didos.”

“It couldn’t swallow anything, captain?” asked Nat solemnly.

“No, sir; not a solitary morsel,” rejoined the captain, wagging

his head.

“Then how did it take the bait?” asked Nat, fairly bursting into laughter. But the captain never smiled.

“I reckon that was one of the inscrutable ways of Providence to help me get my leg back,” he said. “See here,” he held up the wooden leg for inspection, “see those marks? Those were made by shark’s teeth – yes, sree, it was sure a terrible experience.”

“Well,” chuckled Nat, “I don’t want to doubt your word, captain, but I guess that yarn is about what the Andaman shark found your leg, – hard to swallow!”

The captain looked as if he meant to defend his story, but Nat cut him short with a joyful cry:

“Here comes the *Nomad*! Hooray!”

And the *Nomad* it was, and a few minutes later there was a reunion of the Motor Rangers that made the old captain chuckle and stamp his shark-marked leg and yell:

“Bully for you, boys! You sure ought to be glad to see yer messmate again. He’s a boy to be proud of.”

Not long after, the *Nomad* with her crew of three, for Dr. Chalmers, Mr. Anderson and Nate, and Prof. Jenkins had been left ashore – the latter in a hospital, – headed for Santa Barbara. For some days thereafter, during which the professor rapidly regained health, they awaited anxiously for news of Minory, but none came.

A visit to the cave by the authorities, guided by Nat, resulted in their finding that “the birds had flown,” doubtless immediately

after Nat's escape was discovered. They also found a door in the floor which had been hidden by boxes when Nat was in the cave. This door led to a flight of steps, which in turn led to a passage, which, on being followed, was found to open in a rift in the cliffs. To any active person it would have been an easy matter to gain the top, and this doubtless was the way Minory escaped. But, although for the present all trace of both the Harleys and Minory appeared to be lost the boys were destined to hear from them again and that at no very distant time.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JOE RECEIVES VISITORS

It was some days later that Joe was sitting alone in the station on Wireless Island, as the boys had come to re-christen their temporary abiding place. Nat was ashore helping Ding-dong construct a wireless plant on his own place, as the Bell boy, whose father was a well-to-do business man, needed his son to help him in stock-taking, an operation which would take some time. Ding-dong didn't much relish the idea of being cut off from his chums entirely for even that length of time, so it had been decided to put up a light-powered plant at his place, that he might be in touch with Nat and Joe whenever he or they desired.

Nat was not to be back till night-fall when he would bring with him Nate Spencer, the owner of the destroyed *Albicore*, to help cook and make himself handy around the place. Nate had not yet bought another boat and jumped at the chance of spending a short time on the island.

Joe was reading a book dealing with the wonders of wireless when a quick, sharp step on the gravel outside the hut aroused his attention.

"Now, who in the world can that be?" he exclaimed half aloud.

He rose from his chair to go to the door, but before he reached it two men blocked the entrance. Both were strangers to him and

Joe did not much care for their looks.

“Hey, kid, who’s in charge around here?” demanded one of them, a rough, unshaved customer with a red face and shifty eyes. His companion was furtive-faced and had little blinky, red-rimmed eyes like a ferret’s. He suggested a man who was always on the lookout for something.

“Yes, who’s the boss?” came from this second individual.

“I am just at present,” rejoined Joe; “what do you want?”

“We want to send a message,” was the gruff rejoinder, “and dern quick, too.”

“We don’t handle any commercial business,” replied Joe; “this is a private plant.”

“Oh, we know all about that. That’s just the reason we took the trouble to get a boat and come here,” was the reply.

“Yes, our business is private and confidential, and we don’t want no nosy operator at a public station ashore to know nothing about it,” supplemented the ferret-eyed man.

“Where do you want to send the message?” asked Joe, who by no means liked the situation. The men spoke in a dictatorial, bullying sort of way and appeared prepared to enforce their wishes by violence if no other way offered. Joe had no weapon on him, and the only revolver on the island was in Nat’s trunk.

In reply to Joe’s question, the red-faced individual pointed seaward.

“You mean you want to send a message to a ship?”

“Yes, a message in cipher.”

Joe shook his head.

“If it had been some really urgent matter I might have helped you out, but as it is, I’m afraid I can’t do anything. You’d better try one of the stations ashore.”

The red-faced man scowled; but an instant later he assumed what was meant to be an ingratiating manner. He drew out a wallet and tapped it meaningly.

“I’ll make it worth your while,” he said.

“Sorry, but I can’t do it,” was Joe’s rejoinder.

“I’ll make it right with you, kid,” urged the other.

“Nothing doing,” said Joe firmly. “Sorry you’ve had this trip out here for nothing, but you’ll have to go back again if you want to send a cipher message to any ship.”

The ferret-eyed man came close to his companion.

“Bill, you do it yourself,” he whispered, but not so low that Joe didn’t hear him.

“Oh, I’m too rusty. Haven’t tapped a key since I was fired for selling information on that Wall Street pool.”

“Oh, you can do it all right enough,” insisted the other.

“Well, if the kid won’t do it, I guess I’ll have to try,” was the reply, and the two men started out of the shanty and walked toward the wireless hut.

“Hold on there!” cried Joe, springing forward and laying a detaining hand on one man’s arm. “I can’t allow any interference with the apparatus yonder.”

The red-faced man whipped round like a shot.

“Can’t, eh?” he sneered. “I’d like to see you stop me. Ed, grab him!”

The ferret-eyed man seized Joe and pinioned his arms before the boy had a chance to resist.

“There, that’ll be about all from you, my rooster,” grinned the red-faced man. “Bring him along, Ed, we may need him.”

Struggling in the man’s grasp, Joe was dragged to the wireless hut. In one corner of the structure was a closet with a stout oak door in which some of the valuable parts of the plant were locked up when the island was left for any considerable period. The door had a strong padlock and, having thrust Joe inside, the men banged the door and snapped the padlock. The door had a small slit in it, which was lucky, or Joe might have suffocated in the stuffy place. Through this slit he wrathfully watched the men as they went up to the table on which the apparatus was adjusted.

The red-faced man inspected it a bit dubiously.

“I’m all right pounding brass on the regular key and I know a bit of wireless, although I hadn’t learned very much when I was canned for that deal you know about.”

“Oh, you can work it all right,” his companion assured him.

He drew out a paper and handed it to the ex-operator.

“Here’s the cipher code and the message. Now get busy and tap it out and then we can vamoose.”

Joe was entirely powerless to aid himself. The door was thick and strong and there was no possibility of his being able to open it; and, even had he been able to, it wouldn’t have done any

good. His captors were burly, strong men and looked vicious to a degree, and had he managed to get out they would assuredly have given him rough treatment. No; there was nothing for it but to remain quiet and be keenly alert to what was going forward in the room outside.

The red-faced man sat down to the key and at first fiddled clumsily with it. But he soon acquired confidence and then began to flash out his message. By listening Joe readily learned that he was trying to raise the steamer *Vesta* from San Diego for Vancouver, Canada. After a long interval Joe saw a grin of satisfaction come over the man's face.

"He's raised her," thought Joe, and he was correct in his conjecture. Flash-crackle-bang! went the spark, and Joe by close listening heard the man instruct the operator on the *Vesta* to deliver a message to a man named Albert Carter. Then followed a jumble of code words utterly meaningless to Joe.

The sender repeated his message and then rose from the table. "Well, I've done the best I can," he said, "and I guess it's all right."

"Sure it is. Anyhow, he can't kick. You've done what you could to help out a pal."

"Let's be getting along, then. I've no fancy for sticking around here."

"What about him?"

The ferret-eyed man nodded his head in the direction of the closet where Joe was confined.

“Leave him where he is. We want a start, don’t we? Some one will be along and let him out, I guess.”

“Well, so long, sonny,” cried the ferret-eyed man with a chuckling laugh that made Joe’s blood boil, “much obliged for the accommodation.”

“You’ll get in trouble over this,” roared out Joe furiously, “you see if you don’t.”

“Oh, I guess not,” said the man who had sent the message, with a coarse laugh. “Well, shake a day-day, kid. You might have made some money and have saved me the bother of showing you that I could work your wireless without your aid.”

Joe knew it would be useless to reply, so he bottled up the vials of his wrath and remained silent. The men left the hut and no doubt made their way back to their boat in which they had come from the mainland.

“Well, of all the nerve,” sputtered Joe in his prison. “If that isn’t the limit! There’s something mighty crooked about all this,” he went on to himself. “They got word to some one on board that ship bound for Canada, and the trouble they took to do it shows that there is something mighty suspicious about the whole affair.”

He went on thinking – there was nothing else to do, – and racked his brain to recollect what he could of the message. But this wasn’t much, for of course the code words were as meaningless as Greek to him.

“I do wish I could figure out what it was,” he said to himself, “if only I could and get word to that ship about the manner in

which the message was sent, I might be the means of preventing some grave wrong being done to somebody; for I am sure those men are no good. You could tell that by their faces, let alone their actions. Hello!”

Joe stared through the slit in the door at the entrance to the wireless hut. It had been suddenly darkened by the figure of a man.

“Anybody around here?” came a voice.

“Yes, I’m here,” cried Joe eagerly, for he knew by the voice that it was neither of the men who had treated him so roughly.

“Where the dickens are you?” came the natural inquiry.

“Here in the closet.”

“Well, what in Sam Hill! – ”

The figure came forward and Joe almost dropped with surprise right there and then. He had good reason.

The newcomer was Hank Harley, old Israel’s nephew. It certainly was an afternoon of surprises for Joe.

CHAPTER XIX.

AND ALSO GETS A SURPRISE

“Let me out of here,” cried Joe, rattling the door.

He felt that his liberty came first and that the time for questioning Hank would come later.

“Sure, I’ll let you out,” responded Hank, “but how under the sun did you get in there?”

“I was shoved in here and then the door was locked.”

“Who by?”

“Let me out first. I’ll tell you that later.”

“All right. The key is in the padlock. I’ll have you out in a jiffy.”

Hank’s behavior puzzled Joe. He did not appear to be belligerent or threatening. On the contrary, he seemed to be only too anxious to do a good turn to another youth in distress.

“Well, this beats rooster fighting!” exclaimed Hank, as Joe stepped out into the room. “You surely couldn’t have locked yourself in there. How did you happen to get in such a fix?”

“I’ll tell you all about that later,” said Joe hurriedly; “but I want to thank you, Hank Harley, for what you’ve done for me. It’s a big favor and I’m grateful for it.”

“That’s all right,” murmured Hank rather shamefacedly, “I reckon it was up to me to do something for you fellows after the

other day's work."

Joe looked at him in surprise. What did this new attitude mean? True, Hank had taken no active part in the kidnapping of Nat, but he had made no move to prevent it; and yet here he was, apparently seeking their friendship. But the boy had no time to devote to speculation or questioning right then.

His sharp eyes had spied two pieces of paper lying on the floor near the wireless instruments. He eagerly picked them up and then gave an exclamation of delight.

"Why, those fellows have dropped the cipher and the key to it," he exclaimed as he scanned the two sheets, "and here's the message written out, too. Well, if this isn't real luck!"

Knitting his forehead in thought, Joe went painstakingly over the message. It contained words he recollected having heard the intruding operator use. Then he took a pencil and with the help of the key managed to turn the meaningless message into plain English. This is what he wrote down:

"Leave *Vesta* before arrival at Vancouver. San Diego police have wired to arrest you there."

"Phew!" whistled Joe, "so that was the game, eh? No wonder those fellows didn't want to send their despatch from a land office! They were warning a friend, apparently a confederate of theirs in crime. Well, the rascals! I'll fix it so that their warning will fall flat."

He began sending out calls broadcast for the *Vesta*. It was some time before he raised her a hundred miles or more to the

north of Goat Island. When he finally got in connection with the steamer, he requested the operator to transmit a private and confidential message to the captain. Then he sent word that the man to whom the two confederates had wirelessly was in all probability a criminal, and that it would be wise to keep him under surveillance and hand him over to the police at the first opportunity. When he had done this and received warm thanks for it, Joe began to try to raise the authorities ashore. He succeeded in getting a message into Santa Barbara police headquarters, which replied that they would be on the lookout for the two men who had visited the island. The information concerning the passenger on the *Vesta* was transmitted by the local authorities up the coast as far as Vancouver.

“Well, that’s a good job done,” sighed the lad contentedly, as he shoved his chair back and grounded his instruments. “Now then, if only they can nail those two fellows ashore, the wireless on Goat Island will have justified its existence for this day at any rate.”

All this time Hank Harley, a tall, raw-boned youth with big awkward hands and feet, had been looking on at Joe’s activities with much the same expression as a small boy gazing at a magician. It was plain that to Hank the whole thing savored of mystery. He stared at Joe with such wonderment and admiration that the boy could not help smiling.

“Were you talking to some one with that thing?” he asked incredulously.

"I certainly was. I was giving some information to a ship more than a hundred miles off."

"Sho! Go on, now. Was you, honest?"

"Just as true as I'm sitting here," replied Joe, but he saw that Hank's face bore an expression of disbelief, and doubted if he would be able to explain to the unsophisticated youth the rather intricate theory of the wireless. He contented himself, therefore, by replying:

"I felt just the same way as you do about it, Hank, till I found out for myself just what wonderful things the wireless could accomplish."

Hank, with a look of keen curiosity on his rough features stepped close to the instruments. He cautiously stretched out his gnarled fingers and touched the detector. The next instant he gave a howl of pain and bounded up till his head almost touched the roof of the shanty.

"Wow! Ow! Ouch!" he yelled at the top of his voice.

"What on earth is the matter?" demanded Joe, who had not seen Hank's movement.

"Ouch! She bit!"

"She? Who?"

"Them things thar," and Hank pointed to the instruments.

Joe couldn't help laughing at Hank's woebegone and alarmed expression as the young fisherman rubbed his arm.

"That wasn't a bite, Hank, that was an electric shock. I wouldn't advise you to tamper with the instruments again. Come

here and I'll show you how to work the key."

"What, me? No, siree bob," and Hank shook his head with deep conviction. "Let sleeping dawgs lie, says I. I wouldn't touch that thar thing ag'in fer a new fishing boat. Wow, but the sparks flew!"

"It was lucky for you that we are not operating a high power station," declared Joe. "Had we been doing so you might have been knocked out."

"Sho! Killed dead?"

"Maybe. At the big stations the electric forces in the atmosphere are so strong that visitors cannot bring their watches into the operating room, unless they want to run the risk of seriously disarranging the mechanism."

Hank looked prepared to believe anything by this time.

"Say, Joe," he said, "now that we've buried the hatchet, s'pose you tell me something about how this contraption works."

"It's rather hard to explain in simple language, Hank, and I guess there are heaps of fellows just like you who'd like to understand the first principles of wireless without tackling a lot of dry text books, so here goes."

"Let her go," said Hank, knitting his brows and preparing to assimilate knowledge with a determined look on his rugged features.

"Of course you know about the waves of the sea," began Joe. "Well, the air, or more properly the ether, is full of just such waves. But they are not set in motion till a disturbing element

answering to a storm or a wind at sea is set loose among them. For instance, when I depress this key, I set loose an electric shock that agitates the ether and sends out waves. These waves may be long or short as I desire, according to the power of the shock sent out.

“In 1888 a Professor Hertz began the first attempts to utilize these waves to send messages through the air. In a crude way he succeeded, and paved the way for his followers along these lines. Hertz found that heat and light are all electric waves. The waves that he set in motion from his apparatus bear his name, Hertzian waves.”

“Then all the air is full of waves?” asked Hank, looking about him in a rather scared sort of way, as if he rather expected to be engulfed in some atmospheric disturbance at any time and was preparing to swim for his life.

“That’s it, Hank, you’re catching on fine. But understand, the waves require some force to agitate them. It’s like a mill pond, the air is, quite smooth till you chuck a stone into it, and then waves begin spreading out in all directions.”

Hank nodded as if he quite understood this homely illustration.

“Heave ahead,” he said, settling back in his seat.

“All right,” smiled Joe. “Now you see my detector here, – quite an elaborate bit of mechanism, isn’t it?”

“Yep, that’s what bit me,” muttered Hank, rubbing his arm once more at the recollection.

“Well, Hertz had to make his detector just out of a circle of wire with a gap in it. A screw adjustment lengthened or shortened the distance between the ends of the wire, making the gap larger or smaller. The waves, as they came in, were registered on this detector in the form of minute sparks. Is this all clear to you?”

“Oh, as clear as mud,” was the non-committal reply, with a wave of the hand.

“In 1895, Sir Oliver Lodge detected waves from an oscillator over a distance of forty yards, using a filings tube coherer, a galvanometer and a cell.”

“Hey, hey, hard apart there!” cried Hank. “You’re out of soundings, mate.”

“Well, that is a little technical, I’ll admit,” smiled Joe. “I’ll try and get down to plainer language.”

“Yep, my head ain’t tough enough to take in all that. It’s swimming now as if you’d chucked a dictionary at it,” growled Hank. “Tell me the names of them biting jiggers on the table thar, and what they’re supposed to do.”

“Very well. This,” touching it, “is the coil or transformer. That produces the spark that slips up into the aerials, those wires over our heads, and sends it shooting off into space just like that stone you might chuck in the pond.”

“Um-hum, that’s all clear enough. Heave ahead.”

“Now you see this little appliance? That is the vibrator. By that I can regulate the length and ‘fatness’ of my spark. Now when I press down the key like this – ”

S-s-scrack!

Hank almost jumped from his seat as the green spark whined and leaped between the terminals.

“ – well, that is a dot. If I make the contact longer, it forms a dash. Of course you know the Morse alphabet is made up of dots and dashes. For instance the letter A is. – .”

To illustrate Joe made the dot-dash sign, at which Hank blinked his eyes, but resolutely suppressed other symptoms of nervousness.

“And so on through the alphabet. Each letter has its own combination of dots and dashes. The only instruments needed in a simple set are the coil, spark-gap, wireless key and batteries; that is, for a sending set. Now we come to the receiving part of it.

“Suppose another operator miles away has been sending out into space the dot-dash just as I have been doing. If I had my receivers on, that is, those telephone-like things that I put on my head and over my ears, why then I'd have heard it, providing my apparatus was tuned to his wave lengths.”

“Hold hard! Hold hard! I don't quite get that.”

“Simple enough. As I told you, various shocks of current produce various wave lengths. Well, suppose my receiving apparatus is only adjusted to receive a wave length of one thousand feet, and he is sending a wave of one thousand two hundred feet, then my apparatus will not be 'in tune' with his. That is, I shouldn't be able to hear him.”

“Wa'al, how d'ye fix that – by touching off them biting

things?” asked Hank. “Look a’out!” he added, as he saw Joe’s hand move toward the receiving tuning coil, “you ought’er have them things muzzled. If they bit you in the dog-days you’d git hydrophoby, sure as cock-fightin’.”

“Now then, Hank, a receiving tuning coil is used to adjust the wave lengths of the receiving circuits. This tuning, as it is called, is very simple. See, I move these sliding contacts along a bar, at the same time listening in. As soon as I am ‘in tune,’ I hear the dots and dashes from the other chap begin beating into my ears. Easy, isn’t it?”

“Humph, ’bout as easy as walkin’ a tight rope or running an air-ship! Joe, I couldn’t larn nothin’ ’bout such didoes in a billion, trillion of years.”

“In order to get the waves from the aerials into the receivers at my ears, they have to filter through the detector – ”

“That’s the thing that bit me, that d’tector.”

“ – through the detector, which consists of two mineral points in very delicate contact.”

“But is the blamed thing of any real use?” Hank wanted to be informed.

CHAPTER XX.

HANK EXPLAINS

Joe laughed at Hank's last question.

"Of use? Why, man alive, since wireless has been introduced, it has averted some great sea disasters and been the means of saving thousands of lives, not to mention its commercial value."

"Do tell! It's saved a lot of ships, hey?"

Hank looked really interested now.

"It certainly has. Some time ago the *Prinz Joachim*, of the Atlas Line, from New York to the West Indies, grounded on a remote island of the Bahama group more than a thousand miles south of New York. In the old days she'd have stuck there, while the passengers took to the boats or played Robinson Crusoe on the island. But nowadays what happened? Why, Henry Muller, her wireless man, was sent for by the captain, and he at once began pumping out the call for the home office of the line in a Broadway skyscraper.

"Almost by the time the last of the passengers, aroused by the shock, had come on deck to learn the cause of it, the captain was able to assure them that New York had the news and that the home office had flung out a call for rescue ships along the whole length of the Atlantic Coast. At the same time, of course, the vessel's own wireless was on the job, too.

“Well, several ships were quickly located in the vicinity, and before long a small fleet was rushing to the *Joachim's* aid. There was no fear on board. In fact, William Jennings Bryan, who was a passenger, could not resist the opportunity to make a speech. He suggested that they form a republic on the island, and that, as he could not be elected president of the United States, they make him chief executive of the island realm.

“Then take the case of the steamer *Momus*, carrying one hundred and twelve passengers, that caught fire off Cape Hatteras. Every effort was made to fight the blaze, which started among cotton bales in the forward hold; but to no avail. In this emergency, wireless signals were flashed in all directions.

“Before long they were answered. The *Comus*, a sister ship, heard them and informed the *Momus* that she was seventy-eight miles away and would come at top speed to the rescue. The two ships, by constant interchanging of their positions through the night, came together at two o'clock in the morning. Naturally, every passenger was up and about, but on the other hand there was no panic. The fact that wireless was on board gave a feeling of security to all, which they certainly would not have had otherwise.

“All the passengers were taken off in safety, and the relief ship stood by till the *Momus* was beached in shallow water and the fires drowned out. Twelve hours afterward the water was pumped out. The passengers re-embarked and the ship resumed her voyage. Incidentally, the ship and her cargo, valued at three

million dollars, were saved. Not the least remarkable feature of this rescue was that throughout the whole affair the general manager of the line at his desk in New York was kept in constant touch with the situation and directed the operations.

“But I’m preaching a regular sermon,” broke off Joe.

“No, no; heave on, Joe. I like to hear about it,” declared Hank, who, to tell the truth, was anxious to stave off the inevitable time of explanation of his presence on the island, which he felt was close at hand.

“To switch to the naval uses of the wireless, then. The torpedo boat *Beale* was overtaken by a heavy storm off the Virginia capes. The waves were mountain high and it soon became clear that unless assistance came, and that speedily, the long, lean craft would be unable to ride out the gale. The *S. O. S.* signal, which means ‘in dire distress,’ was sent out, and was read by the wireless station at Norfolk. It was quickly passed on to Washington and received by the assistant secretary of the navy, who at once got into communication with the *Beale*. He asked for further details so that he could despatch relief intelligently. The *Beale* responded, and all this within a few minutes, that she was awash and making bad weather of it. This reply was in the secretary’s hands in time to enable him to send relief ships out from Norfolk, and the *Beale* and her crew were saved.

“There is one other field in which the wireless plays an important part. That is in the capture of criminals. A runaway now stands a much greater chance of being caught at sea than

he does ashore. In former years the exact reverse was true. A man who tries to flee from America to Europe to avoid the consequences of a crime is, so to speak, like a runner caught between bases. The wireless spreads a net about him from which he cannot escape.

“One notable case occurred in 1911. A crime had been committed in London, and the search for the man who did it was carried on by an immense corps of police and detectives all over Europe working in harmony. London, Paris, Berlin were all searched, but without results. The runaway had vanished utterly.

“While the search was at its height and hope of capturing the man had been about given up, a wireless call was picked up one night at a station on the Irish coast from the captain of a trans-Atlantic steamer in mid-ocean. It asked for a detailed description of the man who was wanted. It was sent, and the captain of the vessel replied that he believed that he had the man, for whom a fine-tooth comb search had been conducted, on board his ship.

“Excitement ran high. People on both sides of the Atlantic awaited more details, but the ship got out of range for a time and was not heard from till the station at Cape Race, Newfoundland, picked up a message from the captain to say that he was sure he had the criminal wanted on board. He asked that detectives be ready when the ship came into quarantine on the St. Lawrence River, for she was bound for Quebec.

“The criminal was trapped like a wild beast. While the ship was still three days from port, the police began to gather.

Newspapers from all over the country rushed men to the place where it had been arranged by wireless to board her. And all this time, the man wanted had no idea that the net was being drawn about him. It was not till he was actually under arrest that he learned what wireless had done toward his capture. And this is only one of a number of such cases.”

“Do tell,” exclaimed Hank amazedly; “that thing is a sort of a conjurer, be’ant it?”

“It is all of that,” smiled Joe; “but now tell me, Hank,” he said, “how did you happen to come here in the nick of time to let me out? What brought you here, anyhow?”

Hank looked grave. A troubled expression came over his sunburned face.

“I allowed I’d just sail out here and straighten matters out,” he stammered.

“What matters?”

“Why, that thing about soaking your chum on the head and carrying him off to the cave. I had no part in it. Honest Injun, I didn’t, and I was too scared of old Israel and the rest to do anything.”

“Humph,” remarked Joe, “but you didn’t try to help him at all.”

“I was going to after we got back from taking Minory out of the cave, but when we did he had gone. Got clear away in that little old boat. It was all old Israel’s fault. He’d do anything for money, Iz would. When the Minory chap flashed a big roll on

him, it was all off. It's lucky things didn't turn out worse."

"Where are your uncle and the others now?" demanded Joe.

"Honest, I don't know," rejoined Hank, looking Joe straight in the eyes. "They haven't shown up at Martinez. I reckon they are scared and are waiting till things blow over a bit before they show their heads."

"That sounds plausible," answered Joe. "Are you through with them?" he added.

"Yes, sir," was the emphatic reply. "I want to live straight. I never had much use for old Israel, but this last bit of business sickened me. I came out here to see you fellows to tell you that I was your friend, and that if I hear anything about that bunch I'll tell you."

"That's good of you, Hank," said Joe warmly.

"No, tain't, but I'm glad you believe. I was afraid that maybe you'd have me arrested."

"But you wanted to put yourself right, so you came anyway."

"Yes, I jes' had to."

"Well, that was brave of you, Hank," declared Joe, "and from now on we'll count you as our friend."

"You sure can do that. I'll do anything I can for you."

"You showed that this afternoon. But, as you came over, did you see anything of a boat leaving the island?"

"A launch?"

"I guess that's what they came in," responded Joe, and he then related all that had occurred that afternoon. Hank exclaimed

angrily and blamed himself for not stopping the launch as he heard Joe tell of the escape of the men after locking him in the closet.

“I could have stopped that launch plum easy, if I’d only known,” he said, “but I thought that they were just visitors.”

“So they were and very unwelcome ones, too,” laughed Joe, who, now that his troubles were over, could, as usual, see the humorous side of them as well as the serious.

“There’s something else I want to tell you,” said Hank, as he picked up his hat and prepared to go.

“What’s that?”

“Well, you remember what old Israel said about you fellows not having any rights on this island?”

“Yes, what of it?”

“Just this, that if it hadn’t been for that affair of Minory’s, they meant to attack you.”

“They did!”

“Yes, siree. Old Israel, he allowed he’d drive you off the island even if he had to drive you into the sea.”

“Well, that’s pleasant.”

“And the first step was to be the wrecking of your wireless contraption.”

“Thank goodness, they are where they can’t do us any harm now! I guess they’ll lie low if they’re wise. There’s a law in California, you know.”

“Old Israel, he never took no account of the law, nohow,”

declared Hank with a sort of grudging admiration, “and if you’re wise you’ll keep a good lookout for him. When he gits sot on a thing, he most generally always put it through, and he’s sure determined to drive you off Goat Island.”

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE MIDST OF ALARMS

Joe had plenty to ponder after Hank had left. Of course, he had heard from Nat of the mysterious "Nemo" call, and, in view of what he had heard from the reformed member of the Harley family, it looked to him very much as if old Israel had had some hand in the affair. Then, too, there was Hank's remarkable change of front. Joe had at first questioned the youth's sincerity but after a time his manner left no room to doubt that his proffer of friendship was genuine. Joe was very glad that this was so, for, in case old Israel returned and tried to make trouble, Hank would prove a valuable ally.

"I reckon I'll see if I can raise the *Nomad* and flash Nat the news of the afternoon," thought Joe, upon whose hands the time was beginning to hang heavily.

If anyone was on board the *Nomad*, this would be an easy thing for Joe to do, for by this time the wireless outfit, that the boys had agreed would prove a valuable addition to the *Nomad's* equipment, had been installed.

But before Joe could reach his instruments the wireless "alarm clock" began ringing loudly, sounding the Goat Island call. Joe hastened to the apparatus and sent out a reply. Then he adjusted the head band and the receivers and began listening. The message

that came made his cheeks tingle with pleasure. It was from the Chief of Police of Santa Barbara and was as follows:

“Congratulations. Good work. Man on Vesta bank robber badly wanted. Probably a reward case.”

Joe felt a distinct feeling of pleasure over the despatch. It demonstrated in no uncertain way the practical utility of their plant. But the boy felt somewhat disappointed that the two miscreants who had so roughly used him had not been apprehended. He was not a revengeful lad but he would certainly have liked to learn of the men’s capture.

Presently he set about the task of raising the *Nomad* by wireless. But, although he tried for more than an hour to get some response, he failed to do so.

“That’s queer,” thought the boy. “Nat said that he would surely be on his way back before dark. Well, I suppose I’ve got to make up my mind to spend a solitary evening of it.”

As it grew dark he cooked his supper and ate it with a hearty appetite. Afterward he read for a while and then, feeling drowsy, determined to turn in.

“I guess there’s no chance of Nat’s coming back to-night,” he thought as he extinguished the light.

How much later it was that he awakened, he did not know, but some impulse made him go to the window and look over toward the wireless hut. To his astonishment a light was shining in the casement of the structure that housed the instruments.

Joe’s heart gave a great bound.

“It’s Israel Harley!” he exclaimed under his breath. “What am I to do? He’s sure not to be alone and Nat’s revolver is locked in his trunk.”

The boy was no coward, as those who have followed the Motor Rangers’ adventures know, but the situation was one that might have tried stronger nerves than Joe Hartley’s, gritty as he was.

He saw a shadow cross the lighted window as whoever was within the wireless hut moved about.

“I don’t like this a bit,” muttered Joe to himself, as he cast about for the best means of coping with the situation. “Those fellows are just about as bad as bad can be and I’ve had one experience with ruffians already to-day. I don’t feel like having a second struggle.”

The light burned steadily on, but whoever was within the hut did not pass the window again.

“They may be demolishing the instruments and smashing things up generally right now,” said Joe to himself as he watched and waited.

The thought was like a tonic to him. He determined to delay no longer but, come what might of it, to surprise the intruders and trust to luck for the outcome. He selected a short, heavy oar from some that lay outside the shanty. It made quite a formidable weapon when wielded by a muscular lad like Joe, and as his fingers closed on it he felt ready to give battle to a whole tribe of Harleys.

In a quiver of excitement and suspense, he crept forward

almost noiselessly over the soft sand. What the outcome of the affair would be he did not know nor did he dare to think. But he was determined at all hazards to guard the valuable equipment of the wireless station.

“At any rate, I’ll give a good account of myself,” he thought as he advanced toward the lighted hut.

Nevertheless he caught himself wishing more than once that his chums were with him. About twenty feet from the hut he paused and listened intently. He fully expected to hear the noise of breakage as the vandals destroyed the instruments.

But to his astonishment all was utter silence. The only sound to be heard was the breaking of the waves on the sandy beach below.

“Funny I don’t hear any voices, either,” he muttered. “There must be more than one of them. Old Israel’s not the sort of man to come alone on an enterprise of this kind.”

Once more he paused after advancing a few steps, but as before no suspicious sounds broke the stillness.

“It can’t be spooks,” he thought, and the next minute had to smile at himself for entertaining such a silly notion.

“No, it’s human beings all right, and ones who have no good intentions toward us or they wouldn’t come sneaking around here like thieves in the night. I suppose that they saw that the *Nomad* had gone from her moorings and that the shanty was dark and assumed that there was no one here.”

He advanced still further and was now quite close up to the

hut. Still all was silence within. Had it not been for the light in the window he would have deemed that he was the victim of a delusion. But there was no mistaking the fact of the light, and no mistaking, also, that it was a human agency that had kindled it.

“Thought there was no one here, eh?” muttered Joe, gritting his teeth. “Well, Harley and Co., here’s where you get the surprise of your young lives.”

He stepped forward with brisk determination and prepared to thrust the closed door open.

But the next instant he stopped dead.

“Well!” he ejaculated in startled amazement.

From within the hut had come the last sound in the world he expected to hear. It was the whine and crackle of the spark. Somebody was sending a message!

CHAPTER XXII.

AN UNEXPECTED STUDENT

“Open the door!”

Joe spoke in an authoritative voice as he rattled the portal of the hut. It was locked inside, and at the first turn of the handle the crackling and sputtering of the spark had ceased.

“Hurry up, now,” hailed Joe again as a scuffling sound followed his first order, but no audible reply issued from within.

“It can’t be old Israel and his crowd,” thought the boy as he listened, “and it can’t be those two rascals who were here this afternoon. Either one of those lads would have flung the door open long ago and rushed out on me. Who in the world can it be, then? Somebody trying to play a joke? They’ll find it a pretty unpleasant one.”

Joe waited a minute or two and then as no move was made by whoever was within to open the hut door, he hailed again in an angry voice.

“You’d better obey. It will be all the worse for you if you don’t.”

Footsteps sounded inside and Joe gripped his oar, prepared to bring it down with a crash on the head of whoever appeared. He was not going to take any chances. There followed the sounds of fumbling with a lock and the next minute the door opened. Out

stepped a figure so utterly unlike any one that Joe had expected to see that he almost dropped his oar in his astonishment.

The intruder who had caused Joe so much disquietude was a slender stripling of a youth of not more than fifteen. He had a pale, studious face, big, frightened eyes and walked with a limp.

“Don’t hit me! Don’t!” he begged as he saw Joe standing there with lips grimly compressed and the oar raised ready to strike.

“Caught you right in the act, haven’t I?” spoke Joe, as fiercely as he could.

“Yes, sir,” said the lad in a thin, wavering voice.

“What do you mean by trespassing here?” demanded Joe.

The lad stammered something and Joe, touched in spite of himself by the youth’s wan, pale look, spoke more kindly.

“I’m not an officer or a judge,” he said, “but I’m in charge here, and you are trespassing on private property.”

The boy looked alarmed.

“I’m – I’m sorry,” he said, “I suppose I’d better get out.”

“Tell me what you came here for before you do that,” said Joe. “I’m interested in knowing.”

“I didn’t think there’d be any harm. I came over in my sailboat.”

A sudden thought struck Joe.

“Is this the first time that you’ve been here?” he demanded.

“No,” confessed the lad, hanging his head; “I’ve often come over here when you were all away.”

“And you thought that was the case to-night?”

The lad nodded.

“But what object brought you?”

The boy's eyes kindled and his pale cheeks flushed.

“I love the wireless,” he said, speaking more firmly; “I wanted to use it and I had no other opportunity.”

“You can operate?”

The boy nodded and once more his eyes brightened.

“Yes, a little bit. I'm not very good at it yet.”

“You're good enough to sign your name '*Nemo*,' though, aren't you?” shot out Joe on a hazard. A conviction had been growing in his mind that this sickly-looking lad must be the “Nemo” who had so mystified them. The stranger's face turned crimson. He hung his head and looked embarrassed.

“How did you guess it?” he asked, after a considerable pause. And then he went on, “It's no use beating about the bush. My name is Jim Dolliver; I come from Powell's Cove. My dad is a small rancher and hasn't much use for me because with this game foot I'm not able to do much work. I begged him to let me take up wireless telegraphy and make a future for myself, but he says that it's 'all foolish rot.' I heard about you boys building this plant out here, and one night when I knew you weren't here I sneaked over in my boat and began practice on a real key. You see I'd learned the Morse alphabet and the theory of wireless at home and practiced with a home-made key. I found it came easier than I expected, and the habit of coming over here kind of grew on me. That night when I got the call for Goat Island, I just couldn't

help answering it, but I got scared and cut off. It was wrong of me, I know, to sneak in and use your apparatus this way, but I just couldn't help it."

"And what are you going to do now?" asked Joe, watching the lad keenly.

"Say good-bye, I guess; that is, if you don't arrest me for trespassing. I've always been very careful with your instruments, and I know I haven't injured them, but I see now that I ought never to have come here at all."

He was starting toward the beach, but Joe detained him.

"Look here, sonny," he said, "I don't see why there should be any objection to your using our plant for practice if you want to. Of course, I'd have to consult my chums and – "

"Then you're not angry?"

"Not a bit. I think you've shown a whole lot of grit and pluck in taking all the pains you have to get real practice on a real wireless set. I mean to tell Nat and Ding-dong – those are my chums – about you, and we'll see what can be done."

"Oh, that's awfully good of you!"

"Not a bit, and now you'd better be getting back home. It's quite a sail from here to Powell's Cove, and your folks will be wondering where you are."

"I haven't got any folks, only just my dad," was the pathetic reply; "and dad, he don't take no account of where I go. He's got a friend stopping with him, though, that's powerfully interested in you fellows over here."

“Is that so?” asked Joe rather indifferently.

“Yes, he’s always talking about you and about the wireless. From what I’ve heard him telling dad, he hasn’t got much use for you, either.”

“How is that, Jim?”

“Why, he says that you are interfering busybodies, and that if it wasn’t for you, he’d be out of the country by this time instead of having to hide his head.”

Joe grew suddenly interested.

“What sort of a looking fellow is this friend of your father’s, and when did he come to stop with him?” he asked.

“Oh, about two weeks ago. I don’t like him a bit. He’s got a big, black beard and looks at you ever so fiercely. He don’t go out much, and whenever there’s a rig or anything coming along the road, he beats it for the cellar. ’Pears to me like he’s scared of something, and – Why! what’s the matter?”

There was reason for the question, for Joe had suddenly developed a wild fit of excitement and was clasping Jim Dolliver’s hand.

“Your coming here to-night was the best thing that ever happened, Jim,” he cried. “Gracious,” he added to himself, “there isn’t a doubt in the world but that Jim’s father’s friend is Miles Minory.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CALL FROM THE SHORE

It was early the next morning that the “wireless alarm” summoned Joe from his couch. Sleepily he made his way to the wireless hut and was soon in communication with Nat. Something had gone wrong with the *Nomad's* wireless, it appeared, and Ding-dong's new station was not in working order. This was the reason that Joe had not been called up the night before.

“*Anything happened?*” asked Nat.

“*Lots,*” tapped out Joe sententiously, “*but you'll have to wait to hear all about it till you get over here.*”

Nat rejoined that he would be over about noon, and then Joe, in order to keep his mind occupied, set about a general cleaning up of the wireless instruments and a thorough “spring cleaning” of the shanty.

This work occupied him so busily that he had little time to notice the weather, and it was not till a sudden downpour of rain beat a tattoo on the roof of the wireless hut that he looked out. The sky was overcast and quite a brisk sea was running. The wind, too, was blowing pretty strong.

“Nasty weather,” thought Joe, “but that won't worry the *Nomad.*”

Just then came another call from Nat. The *Nomad* was about half an hour away from the island and making good time despite the big seas.

“*Will be home to dinner,*” flashed Nat, and Joe flashed back “*M-M-M,*” which, in telegrapher’s language, signifies “laughter.”

The *Nomad* came into the cove on schedule time. Her white sides were wet and glistening with spray, and Nat and Nate Spencer in their oilskins looked every inch the young seamen when they came ashore in the dinghy, the same one, by-the-way, that had been recovered from Whale Creek.

Over the meal that followed their arrival, Joe told his story amid frequent interruptions. When he came to the narrative of young Dolliver and the mysterious man who was dwelling in the elder Dolliver’s ranch house, Nat agreed with him that in all probability they had, by an extraordinary coincidence, crossed Minory’s trail once more. Of course it might be a mistaken supposition, but Nat agreed with Joe that it was at least worth while investigating.

“I’ll take a stroll around after dinner and look at the weather,” said Nat. “If it isn’t too rough we can run over in the *Nomad*, but after all, possibly it would be just as effective to call up Ding-dong and let him communicate with the authorities.”

While Joe and Nate washed dishes and otherwise set things to rights, Nat started out on his tramp. It was still raining hard and blowing harder, with a nasty, choppy gray sea running.

“Pretty dusty,” commented Nate, looking out of the window

on the dreary seascape.

But within the shanty all was snug and warm and cheerful, and when Nat returned in half an hour or so, he found a picture of comfort awaiting him. He divested himself of his wet oilskins and heavy boots before he spoke, and then he had some remarkable news to impart.

“There’s a small schooner of not more than thirty-five or forty tons anchored off the southerly end of the island,” he said.

Nate looked up instantly. It was clear that to his seaman’s mind the news was puzzling.

“What in the world will she be anchored there for?” he asked in an astonished voice. “If she’s hove to to ride out the storm, why doesn’t she come into the cove?”

“Just what puzzled me,” said Nat. “I watched her from behind some sand dunes, but not a sign of life could I see on her decks. She looks like a fishing schooner, and yet there are no dories piled up on her deck, which makes it look all the more odd.”

“It does that,” agreed Nate; “and anyhow, fishermen wouldn’t heave to for this bit of a blow.”

“I’ll tell you what, Nate,” said Nat presently, “suppose you go and take a look at her. Then come back and tell us how you size her up. You’re sailorman enough to know a craft by the cut of her jib, and maybe you will know what vessel this is.”

“All right,” assented Nate cheerfully. “I’ll slip into my oilers, get around there and be back in two shakes of a duck’s tail.”

“And, oh, Nate, don’t show yourself if you can help it. There’s

plenty of cover behind the salt grass that grows on the dunes.”

“Don’t worry about that,” Nate assured him, “I’ll be as invisible as Mort Kennedy, who owes me ten dollars, is every payday.”

The sturdy fellow strode out into the storm, leaving the two boys alone.

“Are you troubled because that fishing schooner is lying to off the island?” asked Joe, as Nate slammed the door behind him.

“Frankly, I don’t quite like the look of it,” rejoined Nat; “if she is lying to because of the storm, the cove is the natural place for her to seek shelter and not the open sea.”

“That’s right, it *has* a funny look. Say, Nat, you don’t think that old Israel Harley can be on board, do you?”

“I don’t know, Joe; I don’t know what to think. He is a daring old villain, and he has no reason to love us. After what Hank told you yesterday, it behooves us to be on the watch constantly. Till that schooner goes away, we can’t leave the island.”

“Then I’d better send a flash to Ding-dong. I wonder if his station is working yet?”

“It ought to be, but in that case I should think he’d have given us a call.”

“Well, we can try it, anyhow. Come on down to the hut while I get busy with the instruments.”

The two boys tried for a long time to raise Ding-dong, sending out the call “*D-B*,” the prearranged signal, incessantly. But no answer came for a long time, and when it did it was hardly

satisfactory. It was from the Santa Barbara operator, who had been listening in.

He cut into Joe's waves with a sharp summons for "*G. I.*"

"*Right here,*" flashed back Joe eagerly, thinking that it might be Ding-dong at last. He was soon undeceived.

"*This is station O at Santa Barbara talking,*" came through the air to the Motor Rangers' aerials. "*You been trying to get young Bell's station?*"

"*Yes, what's the trouble?*" inquired Joe.

"*I don't know exactly, but something was the matter with his wave lengths this morning. He was trying to get you, but couldn't succeed. But he reached me all right and left a message for you fellows.*"

"*A message? What is it?*" flashed back Joe.

"*Here it is, – all ready?*"

"*Go ahead.*"

"*Dear Nat and Joe. Don't worry. I have left Santa Barbara on a hot clew to you know who. I expect to recover everything before night. – Ding-dong.*"

"We-el, what do you know about that?" gasped Nat, as Joe said "*Good-bye*" and cut off.

"That kid is off along the trail of trouble again as sure as you are a foot high," exclaimed Joe. "Now what are we going to do? Where do you suppose he's gone?"

"Looks a good deal as if he might have found out something about Minory, doesn't it, and is anxious to keep all the credit

of recovering the plans and the models to himself,” commented Nat.

“But in that case he may run into grave danger,” protested Joe excitedly. “That fellow wouldn’t stop at a trifle. What are we going to do about it, Nat?”

“There’s only one thing to be done now,” declared Nat.

“And that is?”

“Raise Santa Barbara, notify the authorities of the place where we suspect Minory may be found, and let them take after him. If Ding-dong has gone to the right place, they may arrive in time to get him out of trouble. If he’s gone somewhere else, why, I don’t see that there’s anything we can do but hope for the best.”

“That’s about all,” said Joe, as he turned to his instruments. At that moment the door was flung open and in came Nate with a burst of rain and wind at his back.

“That feller off the point is no fisherman,” he declared positively. “I think that it’s up to us to keep our weather eyes open to-night.”

“For what?” asked Joe, as he tapped out the Santa Barbara call.

“For trouble,” was the brief reply. “Got any shootin’ irons on the island?”

“Only an old revolver,” said Nat. “We’ve never needed them.”

“S’pose you’ve heard about the cowpuncher,” said Nate dryly. “He had never needed a revolver for forty years, but when he did need it, he needed it *durn bad!*”

“And you think that is our position?” asked Nat.

“I ain’t saying,” was the response; “but that schooner’s got other business off this island than riding out this ten-cent blow.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT JOE DID

Joe raised Santa Barbara and flashed out the news which he wanted transmitted to the local authorities. In a short time a word of thanks came back and positive assurance that they would set out without delay for the Dolliver ranch. Nat and Joe felt somewhat relieved at this. They knew only too well Ding-dong's proclivities for getting into trouble, and if he was off after Minory by himself he had done a peculiarly fool-hardy thing.

"We've done all we can, anyhow," said Nat, "and now the best thing to turn our minds to, is that schooner. I think there is not much doubt now that she is here to do harm to us."

"All the indications point that way," agreed Joe.

Twice during the afternoon Nate tramped down to the point to see if the schooner was still hove to, and both times he returned with the report that she was still in the same position, although the rain flaws were blowing over the ocean so thickly that at times it was hard to make her out.

Not until the evening meal had been despatched was anything said about laying out the work for the night. It was Nat who broached the subject.

"Joe," he said, "it has just occurred to me that something may be known of this schooner in Santa Barbara. Suppose you

connect with the operator there and see if you can get hold of old Captain Merryweather. He's a sort of port official and should know if this schooner left there recently."

"That's a good idea," indorsed Joe; "but in the meanwhile what will you be doing, for I see that you have some plan in your head?"

"Well, this is the way I've figured it out," said Nat. "If the folks on that schooner mean to make a landing to-night, depend upon it they'll come ashore in the cove."

"Not a doubt of it," struck in Nate.

"With the sea that is running, there's not another place on the island where they could land. Within the cove, however, is quiet water and an easy sloping beach to run a boat ashore."

"Then you think the schooner is still there, Nat?" asked Joe.

"Not a doubt of it in my mind. However, I mean to make sure in a very short time. Nate, I want you to go down to the point and see what you can make out of the suspicious craft. I'll go down to the cove and turn the skiff over to make a shelter. You can report back to me there. Joe will remain by the wireless till he gets some reply to his message to Captain Merryweather. Then he'll join us there, too, unless something new and unexpected has turned up by that time."

Joe would much rather have accompanied Nat, but he said nothing and turned cheerfully to his duty. Like Ding-dong, he had grown accustomed to look upon Nat as a leader, and he obeyed unhesitatingly his orders. Nat and Nate trudged out into

the storm and Joe seated himself at the apparatus to carry out his appointed task.

The operator was able to inform him that the authorities had already set out for the Dolliver ranch, and that he would keep him posted as to further developments. Joe then transmitted his message to Captain Merryweather. This done, he disconnected and sat down to await a reply.

Above him he could hear the wind screaming and screeching through the aerials and the steady downpour of the rain on the roof. It seemed hours, and was, in reality, about an hour and a half, before he got a reply to his message.

“Captain Merryweather has learned that a small schooner put into Santa Barbara last night,” was the dispatch. *“She must have left some time before dawn. A dockman reports that he saw three strange men being rowed out to her in a dory a short time before she sailed. That is all he can find out.”*

“Three men; that sounds like old Captain Israel and his two sons,” mused Joe, as he cut off. “The schooner may either belong to them or to some of their friends; it’s hard telling, but at any rate Captain Merryweather’s information sounds important. I’ll hurry down to Nat with it.”

He extinguished the light and slipped out into the storm. He half ran, half stumbled to the cove, filled with the importance of his mission. But somewhat to his alarm, there was no Nat and no Nate there. Joe began to feel seriously uneasy. It was not like Nat to fail to be at the place he had appointed for a meeting, more

particularly as Joe knew his chum would be waiting for a reply to the Santa Barbara message with some anxiety.

However, there was nothing for it but to wait, and Joe, with what resignation he could muster, sat down in the dark under the shelter of the dory, while about him the storm raged and howled. Under the upturned boat he was snug and dry, and if he could have lighted a fire of driftwood he would have been quite warm. But he knew that was out of the question. To do such a thing would be to betray at once that they were on the watch.

Presently there came the sound of hurrying footsteps on the sand. Joe's heart gave a quick leap, but the next instant he was reassured. It was Nat and Nate.

"Where have you been?" asked Joe anxiously. "You gave me a fine scare when I came down here and found you gone. I thought old Israel must have kidnapped you again."

"I've been down to the point with Nate," rejoined Nat. "The schooner has just got under way. From her tactics we both believe that she is heading round for the cove."

"Wow! It looks like trouble then."

"I'm afraid so. No vessel would lie to in an open roadstead all day and then run into a sheltered cove at night unless she wished the cover of darkness for her work, whatever it is."

"Humph, I haven't much doubt what that work is," grunted Nate laconically.

"Heard from Santa Barbara?" inquired Nat of Joe, as he and Nate joined him under the boat.

“Yes; that’s what brought me down here. A small schooner answering the description of the one that lay at anchor all day off the island left the port last night after taking on three men.”

“Three men; that surely sounds like old Israel and his two precious sons.”

“That is what I thought. It clinches the matter in my mind.”

“Coupled with the actions of the schooner, I’ve reached the same conclusion,” said Nat.

“How long will it take the schooner to get around here, do you think?” asked Joe presently.

“Oh, quite a while yet,” responded Nate. “She’s got to beat up against the wind and take several tacks to make it.”

“To my mind that fact again puts this up to Harley,” said Nat. “He knows this island like a book, Nate says, and could get into the cove at any hour of the day or night. A stranger would never take a chance on running in in the dark.”

“Particularly on a night like this,” said Joe, as a long, shuddering blast of wind swept over the upturned boat.

Nat crept out from the shelter and made his way toward the cove. He was back in a short time with information that thrilled them all.

“The schooner is coming into the cove,” he announced in a tense voice.

“Now the show is a-goin’ to begin to commence,” muttered Nate under his breath. “Better get that gun of yours, Nat. Joe and I will do the best we can with our fists and oars in case there’s

a scrimmage.”

CHAPTER XXV.

LIKE A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

The wind was dropping, and against the scurrying clouds, behind which shone a pale and sickly moon, they could see outlined a pyramid of canvas – the schooner!

“Don’t talk more than you have to,” said Nat, who had secured his firearm and brought oars for Joe and Nate. “If they come ashore, just follow them without exposing yourselves to view. There’s a chance that they may, after all, be honest fishermen, and we don’t want to attack the wrong men.”

“That chance is a pretty long one, I’m after thinking,” said Nate under his breath.

“We’ll see how they come to anchor,” he said presently. “If they let go their mudhook with a rush and a rattle, it may be that they are all right. But if they sneak in and let it go easy so as not to alarm anybody, why, then, it’ll look as if we’ve had ’em sized up right.”

The watchers crawled out and made their way through the spiky grass along one arm of the cove. They gained a point where it was possible even in the darkness to see the tall spars of the schooner and the black bulk of her canvas as, noiselessly as a phantom craft, she glided into the cove. Suddenly her “way” was checked and she came to a stop with all her canvas still standing.

“They’ve let go the anchor with all the sails set,” murmured Nate, “and they dropped that mudhook like a cat stalking mice. I reckon they’re honest fishermen – not. That’s a regular smuggler’s trick, that is, all right.”

“Why don’t they lower the sails?” was Joe’s not unnatural question.

“Cos they don’t want the rattling of the blocks and the cordage to be heard,” rejoined Nate. “Seein’ no lights up above, I suppose they’ve figured that we are all asleep and dreaming. But we ain’t, not by a jugful,” he chuckled.

Then came the sound of oars as they creaked in the rowlocks of a small boat. Joe’s heart beat wildly with excitement, and even Nat felt a thrill, as there no longer remained any doubt that hostile men were about to land on the island. When Hank had told Joe the day before of old Israel’s plans of vengeance, he had not taken them very seriously. Now, however, they faced the fact, and faced it to all intents and purposes unarmed.

“Lie down,” ordered Nat, as the sound of the oarsmen became more distinct; “we don’t want them to see us yet.”

They all threw themselves flat amidst the spiky dune-grass and waited for what was to come. Presently they saw a small boat grounded on the beach, and five men leaped out. They grouped themselves about one figure, which Nat instinctively felt must be that of old Israel himself.

At any rate, he appeared to be giving orders to the others. The group split up. Two of the men started in the direction of the

shanty, while three, including the one suspected to be old Israel, set out to the southward.

“Now what in the name of time does that mean?” demanded Nate in an astonished voice.

“It means that our job is just twice as hard,” rejoined Nat. “I can’t make out myself exactly the object of it, but I reckon we shan’t be long in finding out.”

“We’d better follow them,” suggested Nate.

“Yes, we had better. Nate, you take the two men that went toward the hut. Joe and I will trail that group of three.”

“All right, Nat; and say, if you’re in trouble, just fire a shot from that shootin’ iron of yours and I’ll come on the jump.”

“All right, Nate, I won’t forget. We might need you badly in case of a mix-up.”

“You can sure count on me,” the sturdy waterman assured them.

Then they parted, Nate striking off toward the shanty, whither two of the strangers had preceded him, and Nat and Joe taking the trail after the trio, one of which they firmly believed was none other than old Israel himself.

Through the darkness they made the best speed they could after the old smuggler and his two sons, for they now knew by the sound of the voices that had been flung back to them on the wind that their surmise had been correct. It was old Harley himself and his rascally offspring who had landed on Goat Island under the cover of night.

At first their motive in so doing had been plain enough to Nat, or at least he had thought it was. Now, however, he was by no means so certain that the destruction or injury of the wireless was the sole object of their call. This striking off through the dark to the southerly point of the island was inexplicable to the boy, and as they made their way along, sometimes stumbling over rocks and clumps of beach-plum bushes, he confided his bewilderment to Joe.

“I wonder what all this means?” he said. “There’s nothing to the south, so far as I know, but some low cliffs and waste land.”

“I’ve no more idea than you have,” rejoined Joe, equally puzzled. “One thing is sure and certain, though, they are not out for a pleasant stroll.”

“No, they’ve got some definite object in view, and I’m inclined to believe that we don’t figure in it as prominently as we thought we did,” was Nat’s rejoinder.

They paced on in silence, always keeping the three figures in front of them in view, but creeping along as close to the ground as they could and taking advantage of every bit of cover that offered.

“Say, Nat,” exclaimed Joe after a while, “it’s my belief that they are making for those old ruins!”

“You mean the remains of that mission that the early missionaries from Spain built here?” asked Nat, referring to a jumbled pile of adobe ruins which were supposed to mark the site of one of the early religious houses of California.

“That’s what. See, they’re striking off to the right.”

“That is the direction, sure enough, but what would they want there?”

“We can only find out by following them. Hullo, what are they doing now?”

The group ahead had halted not far from the pile of debris and heaped-up stone and wood that marked the remains of the monks' establishment.

One of them stooped low while the others shielded him from the wind. Then came a sputter of flame as a match was struck, and then the steady glow of a lamp or lantern. With this means of illumination kindled, the party that the boys were breathlessly trailing proceeded once more.

Suddenly Nat stopped short and seized Joe's arm.

“The lamp, Joe, it's gone!” he cried, pointing to the midst of the ruins where the lamp had been last seen.

Sure enough, the lantern had suddenly vanished, leaving the boys deeply mystified as to the cause of its sudden disappearance.

“They must have some hiding place among the ruins,” exclaimed Nat excitedly, “That is why old Israel was so mad about our being on the island! What shall we do?”

“Follow them,” said Joe determinedly. “We've started on this thing, let's see it through.”

They struck out toward the ruins at a half run. In their excitement, prudence was temporarily thrown to the winds. Soon they were stumbling and barking their shins amidst the ruinous

pile. In the dark it was almost impossible to see their way. All at once Nat, who was in the lead, gave a sharp exclamation:

“Get back, Joe! Back, as quick as your legs will let you!”

CHAPTER XXVI.

DING-DONG'S CLUE

Ding-dong Bell, released early from the, to him, irksome task of stock-taking in his father's store, was making the last adjustments on the new shore wireless station which was to place him in communication with his chums on Goat Island. He hummed away at the work he loved, as busy as a bee and as active as a squirrel. The new station was in the backyard of his home and at some distance from the house, owing to Mrs. Bell's nervous fears that it would attract lightning.

The boy had tried to explain to her that a properly grounded apparatus presents no such danger, but the good lady would not be convinced; so Ding-dong had been compelled to set up his instruments in an old tool shed, rather than in his own room as he had fondly hoped. He was now rigging up a "wireless alarm-clock," connecting it with his room so that when anyone called him he could be summoned day or night.

He was stringing the wires for this when, from the road outside, came the sharp "chug-chug-chug" of a motorcycle. It stopped at the back of the shed and a cheery voice hailed:

"Hello, Ding!"

"He-he-hello, yourself, Pepper," cried Ding-dong, as, hurrying out of the shed at the summons, he came face to face

with a lad of about his own age whose head was thatched with a mop of brilliant red hair. He had been nicknamed Red Pepper, shortened to Pepper, and his last name was Rodman.

The newcomer wore motor-cycling togs and was hatless. He had dismounted from a spick-and-span-looking two-cylindereed machine which stood leaning against the fence.

“Come on in,” invited Ding-dong cordially.

“I wouldn’t mind a drink of ice-water,” responded Pepper. “I’ve just come back from a long spin in the country and I’m mighty thirsty, I can assure you.”

“I’ll do bub-bub-better than ice-water,” promised Ding-dong hospitably; “how about some lemonade?”

“Oh, yum-yum,” exclaimed young Pepper joyously; “lead me to it.”

“In a jiffy. This way,” said Ding-dong, leading the way into the house, where he soon set before his guest a big glass pitcher full to the brim of the cold and refreshing drink. Pepper did full justice to it, tossing off three glasses.

“My goodness, Pup-Pup-Pepper, but you must be as hot as your nu-nu-nickname,” exclaimed Ding-dong as he watched.

“Well, I was mighty dry, for a fact,” agreed Pepper, smacking his lips; “I feel a lot better now. I’ve ridden all the way in from beyond Powell’s Cove, and it’s a mighty dusty trip.”

“How’d you get that tut-tut-tear in your coat?” asked Ding-dong, regarding a rent in Pepper’s neat khaki motor-cycling coat.

“Why, that happened out at Powell’s Cove,” was the response.

“I meant to tell you about it. I was dry as an old crust out there, and I saw a small ranch house standing quite a way back from the road. It was a lonesome-looking sort of a place, but I judged I could get a drink there, so I chugged up to the door.

“It was open, and not seeing anyone about, I went in uninvited. From a room in the back I heard voices, and so I walked in there, too. There were two men sitting at a table. One of them was explaining something to the other, and they had on the table what looked to me like a model of a torpedo, or something of that sort.”

Ding-dong pricked up his ears.

“A mu-mu-model of a tut-tut – ”

“Yes, of a torpedo. Then, too, there were a lot of plans.”

“Her-her-hold on!” cried Ding-dong, his words tripping all over each other in his excitement. “Wer-wer-what did the men lul-lul-look like?”

Pepper looked rather astonished.

“How do you expect me to get on with my story if you keep butting in?” he asked in an aggrieved tone of voice.

“I’ve a per-per-particular reason,” cried Ding-dong.

“Well, one had a big black beard, an ugly-looking customer, and the other – ”

But he got no further.

“Hokey!” yelled Ding-dong, while Pepper looked on in a rather alarmed way, as if he thought his young companion had gone suddenly insane; “it’s Minory for a bet! Minory, the fellow

that swiped the wireless torpedo!”

“What, the one you told me about? That invention of the Professor What’s-his-name?”

“The same fellow,” cried Ding-dong. “What a shame the professor has gone East! I’ll wire him at once.”

“Wouldn’t it be better to wait and see if you haven’t made a mistake?” asked Pepper soberly. “You know it might not be the same at all. Other men than Minory have black whiskers. My pop has, for instance.”

“That’s so,” said Ding-dong in a chastened voice. “But go ahead, Pep, and tell me the rest.”

“All right, I’d have finished by this time if it hadn’t been for you,” said Pepper. “Well, the minute I appeared, both men jumped up and glared at me as if I’d been a mountain lion or something. The black-bearded fellow made a run for me and shouted out to know what I wanted there. I told them I was after a drink of water, but the fellow grabbed me by the arm. I wrenched free, but I tore my coat in doing it. That was the rent you saw.

“You can bet I lost no time in running for the door where I’d left my motorcycle. The black-whiskered chap came after me, but the other one held him back.

“Don’t grab him, Miles,” I heard him say. ‘He’s nothing but a fool kid. You’re so nervous I think you’d be suspicious of a cat.’”

“Mum-Mum-Miles!” shouted Ding-dong Bell. “That was Minory’s first name! Oh, Eureka! We’ve got him! But I beg your pardon, Pep; how did you get away?”

“Well, they told me that if I ever said anything about them, they’d find me out and kill me,” went on Pepper, “and they looked fierce enough to carry out their threat. One of them asked me if I’d seen anything on the table, and of course I said ‘No.’ I guess if I’d admitted seeing that model or anything, I’d have been there yet.”

“I don’t der-der-doubt that a ber-ber-bit,” agreed Ding-dong. “So after that they let you go?”

“Yes, and told me never to come near there again, and not to do any talking if I valued my life. Of course that was just a bluff, but I made out to be scared to death by it.”

“The wisest thing to do,” agreed Ding-dong, and then he began to speak earnestly and rapidly.

“Say, Pepper,” he said, losing as he often did in moments of stress his impediment of speech, “are you game to help me out on a big enterprise?”

“What do you mean?” asked the other.

“Just this. Your motorcycle will carry two, won’t it?”

“Yes, I’ve got an extension seat behind. I take my brother out on it once in a while.”

“Will you ride me out to that ranch house while I reconnoiter?”

“When?”

“To-night.”

“Gee whiz, Ding, it’s a pretty risky thing to do, isn’t it?”

“I don’t think so. I’m not going into the house or anything. I

just want to prowl around and see what I can find out. Then if everything is O. K. and Minory's there, I'll notify the police and he can be arrested at once."

"That sounds reasonable," admitted Pepper, "but say, Ding, don't go putting your head into a hornet's nest. I've heard you've got a kind of habit of doing that."

"Who says so? I'm as careful as – as an old lady carrying eggs to market!"

"All right then, I'll do it. I'll be here at seven o'clock."

"Good boy. I won't be able to keep still till that time arrives."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A LONELY TRAIL

The hours crept by with leaden feet for Ding-dong until the chugging of Pepper's motorcycle was heard soon after supper. The young wireless operator had tried to communicate with Goat Island in the meantime, but, as we already know, had failed in his attempt. As a last resource, therefore, he had entrusted a message to the operator at Station O.

"All ready?" demanded Pepper, as he came dashing up.

"Been rur-rur-ready ever since you left," declared Ding-dong; "let's get off as soon as possible."

"All right, run along behind, and when I tell you to, swing into the seat," ordered Pepper.

He started his motor with a whirr and a bang and the speedy machine dashed off down the street, with Ding-dong clinging on behind with all his might. But he enjoyed the ride and waved to several of his young acquaintances as the motorcycle sped through the town and then out upon the country road.

"How far is it out there?" asked Ding-dong of Pepper, as they chugged along at a fast gait.

"Not more than ten or twelve miles, but it is in a lonesome canyon near the sea, and as the ground is very unproductive out that way, there isn't another ranch within miles. It makes a fine

hiding place for a man like you describe this fellow Minory to be.”

“Yes, I’ll ber-ber-bet he thought he could stay there for a year without being found out. It’s a lot less rer-rer-risky for him than to ter-ter-try to take a train, for he knows all the depots and steamers are watched.”

“What puzzles me is how he came to take up his residence there. He’d hardly be likely to stumble on such a place by accident,” said Pepper, “especially as he is an Eastern product.”

“That’s all b-b-b-beyond me,” declared Ding-dong, “but I g-g-g-guess after his arrest that will be straightened out.”

“Gracious, talk about counting chickens before they’re hatched! You’ve got the handcuffs on him already.”

“If it’s Mum-Mum-Minory he’ll be in safe hands before long,” declared Ding-dong stoutly.

“Well, don’t you go messing up in it,” implored the cautious Pepper. “From what I saw of those fellows this afternoon, they wouldn’t stop at much if they thought they were going to be betrayed to the authorities.”

“Oh, I’ll be c-c-c-careful,” promised Ding-dong.

The motorcycle began to hum along roads that grew wilder and less inhabited. It was still twilight, and they could see lone ranches setting back among dismal bare hills, with a few scrawny cattle or sheep grazing behind apparently interminable stretches of barb-wire fences.

“Nice cheerful sort of country,” commented Pepper. “I don’t

wonder your friend figured that nobody would come nosing around here unless they had to.”

“But you rode out here this afternoon,” said Ding-dong; “gog-g-g-good thing you did, too.”

“That remains to be seen,” commented Pepper laconically.

It grew dark. They came to a cross-roads where stood the ruins of what once had been a store. But it had long since fallen into decay and stood there deserted and ruinous like the tombstone of past prosperity.

“Are we near there now?” asked Ding-dong.

“Yes, it’s about half a mile up this road and then quite a distance back from the sea-beach.”

“Then as we’re so close, you’d better shut down your machine. They might hear it and be on the lookout.”

“That’s so. Get ready to dismount then. All right? Whoa!”

The motorcycle stopped and the boys jumped off. Pepper leaned his machine up against the ruined store and prepared to follow Ding-dong and guide him. But the latter protested. There was no sense in Pepper’s running the risk of being captured, he argued; and besides, if he (Ding-dong) got into trouble, it would be the better plan to have Pepper out of harm’s way so that he could go back and give the alarm.

Pepper was forced to agree to this logic, and it was decided that if Ding-dong didn’t return in an hour Pepper was to ride at full speed back to town and get help. The boys shook hands and parted, Pepper assuring Ding-dong that he could not mistake the

house, as there was only one in that direction.

It would be idle to deny that Ding-dong felt a thrill that was not wholly excitement as he struck off down the dark road alone. To make matters worse, it began to drizzle and blow; the storm which had already struck Goat Island was sweeping inland.

“Suppose this should all turn out to be a wild goose chase,” the boy thought as he trudged along, “I’d look like a fine idiot. But somehow I don’t think it will be. I’ve got a strong feeling that Minory’s jig is up at last. However, we’ll soon see.”

At length, to his right, and back from the road, he spied a solitary light.

“I guess that is the place,” he thought with a sudden sensation of tightness in his throat as if his heart had just taken up quarters there. To the boy there appeared something sinister, something like the evil glare of a one-eyed man in this solitary light in that lonely part of the country.

But Ding-dong didn’t hesitate long.

“I’ve got to take the bull by the horns if we ever want to get Minory by his whiskers,” he said to himself, and struck into a narrow sort of cow-track that appeared to lead toward the distant light. Behind him the sea moaned and crashed on the beach; ahead of him towered the solitary house in the gloomy canyon.

It was a rough track, little more than a trail, that the boy had decided to follow, but he found that it was steadily bringing him nearer to the light. Once he almost turned heel and ran for his life, such was the tension on his nerves. Out of the darkness

before him had loomed suddenly a white face. It looked like a ghostly skull, and Ding-dong was so startled that he almost cried out aloud. The next minute he got mad with himself, for with a "Whoof!" the "baldy" steer, for that was what the white-faced apparition was, turned and clattered off.

"Wow! I'm getting as nervous as a girl on graduation day," said Ding-dong to himself. "Bother this rain! I'll catch one thing sure out of this, and that's a fine young cold."

The light was quite close now, and he advanced more cautiously. At last he could see the outlines of the ranch house bulking blackly against the slope of the bare hillside beyond. Like a cat stalking a mouse, Ding-dong crept forward. His heart beat so loudly that it sounded to him like the banging of a hammer against his ribs.

"Wish I could muffle it," he said, in vain trying to compose his nerves.

It was a risky thing that the boy was doing, and one which a lot of men would have hesitated at. He knew Minory's character, and was pretty sure that the man who would harbor him could not be much better than his guest. He might expect small mercy if he fell into their hands. Yet he was doing what he deemed to be his duty, and that thought gave him courage to proceed.

At last he reached a point of vantage where he could creep up on the window sidewise, and very slowly and patiently he did so. The casement was open, for the night was warm, and crouching under the open sash he listened attentively to the growl

of masculine voices which was audible from within.

With a sharp thrill he recognized one of them as being Minory's. The other was unknown. He had just made this discovery when something happened so entirely unexpected that the boy was for an instant almost deprived of his wits.

Without knowing it, he had been standing on a board. Suddenly it snapped in two without the slightest warning. As it broke, it gave a loud "crack!" almost as loud as a pistol shot.

"What's that?" came a shout from within, and Ding-dong heard a heavy-footed rush for the window.

"It's a spy!" came a shout, and then an oath.

Ding-dong's activities returned with a rush. Like a jack rabbit he darted off, running as he had never run before. Behind him came shouts:

"It's one of those kids! Get him! Get him if you have to shoot him! Don't let him get away!"

Ding-dong's fear lent him wings. As he fled, he heartily wished he had informed the police and let them attend to the case. But it was too late for such wishes now. All at once his foot caught in a root and he fell headlong. He was up in a second, but in that brief fraction of time his pursuers had gained on him.

Bang! A report sounded behind him and a bullet whistled somewhere near his head.

"Gracious, pretty close shooting, considering they're on the run!" thought the boy.

Panting and desperate, he pressed on, while behind him still

came the rapid beat of feet. Then came another sound that caused his terror to redouble. It was the sharp rattle of a horse's hoofs coming forward at top speed! Ahead of the boy lay the sea. He could go no further.

“Gracious! It's all over now!” he thought, when suddenly the earth appeared to drop out from under his feet and he felt himself falling, clutching frantically at the air, through space. Above him somewhere, heard dimly as if in a dream, came shouts and hoarse cries mingled with the trampling of hoofs.

Ding-dong gave a desperate shout, and it was still on his lips when he struck something solid but soft and yielding.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AT THE OLD MISSION

When Nat saw the light, carried by the men whom they had been following, vanish as if it had been a Will o' the Wisp, it will be recalled that both he and Joe started forward suddenly. It was an ill-advised move, for the instant that they advanced from behind a still up-standing section of the ruined mission wall, which had obscured the lantern, old Israel and his two sons sprang upon them.

Entirely unprepared for such a move, the two boys were taken off their guard, but nevertheless the oar which Joe carried came into effective play. Seth Harley grabbed him, but as his hands clutched the Hartley boy's clothing, "Whack!" came Joe's oar on his arm, temporarily disabling him.

With a howl of mingled rage and pain, Seth held back, leaving the field to his father and brother. Old Israel, although of great age, demonstrated his ability in a rough and tumble, leaping at Nat and pinioning his arms before the boy had a chance to defend himself. Joe having disposed of Seth for the time being, dashed to the rescue, but he was, in turn, tackled by old Israel's other son and borne to the ground almost as soon as he interfered.

The unequal contest came to a speedy conclusion, with the Harleys victorious. Nat and Joe found themselves bound and

secured, hand and foot, within a few seconds from the time that they had engaged the smuggler's crowd.

"Thought we wasn't on the lookout, did yer?" scoffed old Israel, as he made some lashings of rope fast about the boys' wrists and ankles. "Wa'al, you got another guess comin' now, ain't ye? What'll we do with 'em, boys?"

It was useless to make any outcry, and both lads knew it, so in silence they awaited the verdict that was to decide their fate. It was Seth Harley who delivered it:

"That pesky kid, thar', got away from us once and I ain't calculatin' to hev him do it agin," he said. "Let's put 'em in the old Booty Hole. It'll be a long time afore they git out of thar', I'm thinkin'."

Naturally enough, neither of the boys had the least idea of what the "Booty Hole" was, but Nat opined that it was some sort of a cellar or excavation amidst the ruins, and in this he was not mistaken. The two lads were roughly seized and pushed forward among the ruins without any regard to their feelings. As they were half-dragged, half-shoved over the rough ground and piled-up debris, old Israel kept up a running fire of satirical comment on their plight.

"Wa'al, this is sure a fine fix fer two bright byes to be in, ain't it?" he grinned. "Two nice young fellers that thought they knew it all, hum? This is the one time that you don't git away, kid," he added, addressing Nat with a vicious intonation. "We're agoin' ter put yer where you won't git out till Kingdom Come, and

maybe not then.”

The boys did not reply. To have given utterance to their feelings in words would have been as useless as to have made active resistance. Seth, who was slightly in advance, while old Harley and his other son held the boys, paused suddenly.

“Here we are,” he said, and stooping, he raised a big flat stone which in turn disclosed a door, apparently a part of the cellarge of the former mission building.

There was a ring in the door which the younger Harley gripped, and then flung the portal back. It revealed a steep flight of steps and beyond them abysmal darkness. It was plain enough to the boys that they were to be thrust into this place as prisoners.

If any doubt of this fact had existed in their minds it was speedily dissipated.

“Git down thar’,” growled old Harley with an oath, as he gave Nat a vicious shove.

“See here, Harley,” exclaimed the boy. “What useful purpose do you think you’re serving by treating us this way? You know as well as I do that you are amenable to the law for your conduct. Don’t think for a minute that you can ever escape your just punishment.”

“Talk like a striplin’ preacher, don’t yer?” sneered the old man. “Jes’ let me tell yer one thing, young feller, thar’ ain’t a law in Santy Barbary County that kin touch ole Iz Harley; so put that in your pipe an’ smoke it.”

The boys were suddenly jerked forward, and toppling over,

fell in a heap down the steep steps of the cellarage. Then they heard the door above them slammed to with a bang, and they were alone in the darkness, lying, luckily uninjured, at the foot of the steps.

“Nat, are you all right?” spoke Joe.

“Sure, but I feel a bit dizzy after that plunge.”

“What are we going to do?”

“Get out of here if possible.”

“I like that ‘if possible’! There doesn’t look to me to be a chance on earth.”

“If only we could get these ropes off! Say, mine are kind of loose around the wrists! Maybe I can wriggle out of ’em. If I can, we can at least get the use of our hands and feet again.”

Nat worked hard for half an hour or more on his wrist bonds and finally succeeded in stretching them till he could get his hands free. In their haste, the Harleys had not bothered to tie the ropes really tight or the boys’ plight would have indeed been a desperate one.

“Whoopee! I’m loose,” he cried presently. “Lucky the Harleys didn’t bother to search us or we might have more hard work ahead of us, but I reckon this knife will help some.”

He reached into his pocket, pulled out his knife and slashed at his leg bonds. In another minute he was free, and Joe’s liberty followed immediately.

“Now for some matches,” exclaimed Joe.

“I think I’ve got some,” responded Nat. “Yes, hurray, here’s

a whole box!”

He struck a lucifer and a yellow flame flared up, illumining their surroundings. They saw that they were in a smallish excavation with bricked-up sides. From the walls hung moldering chains suggesting that at one time the place might have been used as a prison for rebellious Indians or fractious monks. But the boys didn't waste much time in looking at their prison. By common consent they made for the stairway.

“I guess old Harley must have used this place to store his smuggled goods at some time or other,” hazarded Nat, as they ascended the steps; “it must have made an ideal place for the purpose, too.”

“Well, I hope it wasn't made to store two boys in,” commented Joe.

“Not these two, anyhow, let's hope,” added Nat.

They were not surprised to find that the door at the head of the steps did not yield to their shovings.

“I'll bet they've weighted it down with old rocks and debris,” cried Nat, recalling sundry noises he had heard on the door after it was slammed shut.

“What shall we do now?” wondered Joe, with a note of despair in his voice.

“Let's look around down below and see if we can't find something that we can use to force the door in some way,” said Nat.

They descended the steps once more, this time in the darkness,

for it was necessary to husband their stock of matches. When they reached the floor of the old cellar Nat struck a light, and after one or two matches had been expended they were fortunate enough to discover in a corner of the place a stout oaken plank, which had apparently once formed part of a flooring.

“Good!” exclaimed Nat.

“I don’t quite see how that solves our problem,” commented Joe.

“Wait and you’ll see,” was the reply, and Nat once more led the way up the steps.

At one point the door did not fit closely, and it was here that Nat inserted one end of the plank.

“Catch hold,” he told Joe, and then using the plank as a pry the two boys bent all their strength toward raising the door.

As the portal sloped outward the stones with which the Harleys had weighted it slipped back, and it was not long before the two lads were free once more.

“Thank goodness, we’ve seen the last of that place,” said Joe, as they stood in the open with the wind howling furiously about them and the rain beating across the sands, for the storm had once more revived with more fury than ever.

“Not the last of it, Joe, for we’re coming back there.”

“What for, I’d like to know? Just for old acquaintance sake?”

“No; for a more material reason. Didn’t you notice those boxes and bales in one corner? Old Harley must have used it as a storehouse for his smuggled stuff just as he did the cave, and I

think they were intending to visit it to-night when we surprised them.”

“Ginger! Nat, I guess you’re right. Maybe those things are valuable.”

“Not a question of that. But now let’s get on our way back to the wireless station. Nate may need our help by this time.”

Putting their best pace forward, the two boys headed for the huts. They were not more than half way there, when out of the storm a figure appeared. It was Nate. He gave a shout of relief at seeing them unharmed.

“From the talk of those fellows I thought you were in a living tomb,” he explained; “they said they’d buried you alive where you’d never get out.”

Nat laughed.

“I guess a good many folks have thought that they had the Motor Rangers down and out,” he said, “but they are here yet. Now, tell us what happened over at the station, Nate.”

“If it hadn’t a’ bin fer this storm, I reckon there’s a whole lot of things would a’ happened,” was the reply; “but it come on to blow so hard that they was scared their ground tackle would drag and put the schooner on shore, – you know the wind’s shifted and is blowing right inter the cove. The two fellers I was shadowin’ made straight fer the wireless hut and I reckon calkerlated to smash things up generally, but I got on the job with my oar, – by the way, I busted it, – and persuaded ’em it would be healthier for them some other place.”

“What, you routed two of them?” cried Nat.

“Don’t know about routed ’em, but I sure got ’em on the run. Then the others come along and hollered to ’em, and, as by that time it was blowing great guns, I reckon they thought it ’ud be a sight better to vamoose than to bother after me; so they all piled inter the boat and rowed off to the schooner. She’s been gone about an hour. Then I set out to look fer you, fer I heard ’em boasting about how they’d got you bottled up.”

By the time Nate had finished his narrative they were almost at the huts.

“Now for a good, hot supper and bed!” cried Joe luxuriously, as they came in sight of the structures. “We’ve had just about enough excitement for one night, I guess.”

But they were not destined to slumber uninterruptedly. It was past midnight when the loud and insistent clangor of the wireless gong routed them out of bed.

“News of Ding-dong, I’ll bet a cookie,” cried Joe, slipping on a bathrobe and slippers and running for the wireless shack. But it was not any information concerning Ding-dong that came winging through the storm-stressed air. Instead, it was a message for assistance of the most urgent kind. Nat, who was listening in at the extra receivers, gave a gasp as he heard it.

The message was from the Pancake Shoals Lightship and called for immediate assistance.

“*We are adrift after collision with a schooner,*” was the despatch. “*Send help at once. Braithwaite.*”

“That’s the old skipper who was so kind to me the night I escaped from the cave,” cried Nat. “Tell him we’ll get on the job at once, Joe. Ask him to give us his position.”

“Why, we can’t tow him with the *Nomad*,” objected Joe.

“We’ll try to. There isn’t a steam tug in the harbor now. I happen to know, for I saw the last one, the *Sea King*, steaming north with a tow when I was over there. It’s up to us to help out.”

Joe turned to his instruments, while the wind howled and screamed about the little shanty. Briskly he tapped out the message and then waited for the answer. Both boys felt the wonder of it as they listened to the manifold noises of the storm. The marvel of an electric wave that could penetrate the disturbed elements and carry a message of hope and succor to a distressed craft! The answer was not long in coming.

“*We are drifting south rapidly. About ten miles off shore. Come with all speed you can.*”

The situation was hastily explained to Nate, who had joined them, and in less time than would have seemed possible the trio were in oil skins and rowing out to the *Nomad*. Joe acted as engine tender while Nate and Nat held the bridge. Out into the storm pushed the stout little craft with her engines going full speed.

As she rounded the point that terminated the cove, however, Nat had to signal, “Slow down.” The seas were running furiously, lashed by the gale into watery mountains. Into the vortex of the battling, unrestrained elements the *Nomad* plunged

like a gladiator. A huge wave hurtled over the bow dousing the occupants of the bridge with blindfolding, choking spray. Nat realized that they were bent on a desperately dangerous adventure.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CORNERED AT LAST

“See any lights ahead?”

Half choked and blinded by the spray, Nat put the question to Nate as under reduced speed the *Nomad* fought her way through the storm.

“Not yet, but I’m keeping a bright lookout for them.”

“That’s right. We ought to sight her before long, if she hasn’t gone ashore.”

Fifteen, twenty, thirty minutes passed and the stout little craft still plunged forward in the night, at times almost entirely obscured by spume and flying spray. With anxious eyes they peered through the blackness.

“She can’t have gone down!” suggested Nate in his blunt way.

“Oh, surely not that!” cried Nat. “There, – there, – look!”

“Good!” shouted Nate with stentorian lungs and sublime disregard of grammar, “it’s her, for sure.”

Directly ahead of them a brilliant rocket had pierced the gloom of the tempestuous night and burst in a shower of rubicund radiance high in air.

“Hold the wheel, Nate, and head direct for her. I’m going to get busy with the wireless!” cried Nat, and dived below.

Presently across the tossing waves a message went flashing to

the Lightship.

"This is the Nomad. We have seen your rocket. Will be alongside in a short time."

"Bully for you," came back the blunt answer from old Captain Braithwaite, *"we need you dern bad."*

"How did you get adrift?" flashed Nat.

"A schooner bumped into us and the force of the collision broke us loose."

"What became of the schooner?"

"We rescued the crew but the craft is a wreck on the Pancake Shoals," was the rejoinder.

Nat cut off the instruments and visited Joe with the news. Having imparted his information to the young engineer, after bidding him pay strict attention to signals from the bridge, he went on deck again. The sea was still running high, but the wind appeared to be less boisterous. Ahead of them the tossing lights of the Lightship could now be seen. He took the wheel from Nate, tackling it with renewed vigor. The thought that their wireless was to be the means of saving human lives inspired him with a sort of desperate courage. Nat felt at that moment that he could have dared anything and won out.

Another rocket cut the night and spattered against the black sky like an egg chucked at a blackboard.

"There she goes!" cried Nate exultingly, and Nat, taking a chance, signalled to Joe for more speed. Under her increased momentum the *Nomad* dived into the seas fearfully. Her

occupants were doused from head to foot, but at the moment they did not care about that. All their energies were bent on reaching the side of the stricken Lightship as quickly as possible.

“Go it! Whoop la! Beats automobiling!” yelled Nate in his excitement.

“Wow! what a dive!” cried Nat. “Go it, my beauty! Down we go!”

Then across the water came a rousing cheer as Nat snapped the switch that turned on the *Nomad's* searchlight. The circle of light showed the big Lightship tumbling about in the high seas as helplessly as a skiff. The light showed, too, something else that gave Nat a wild thrill.

Leaning over the rail beside Captain Braithwaite was a familiar figure. It was that of Israel Harley! Like a flash it dawned upon Nat that it was his schooner that had collided with the Lightship and cut her adrift. The storm, by a coincidence little short of miraculous, had delivered his enemy into his hands!

It was the next morning and Santa Barbara was buzzing with excitement. The storm had died out and the sea was calm and the air mild. Everyone who could get there was on the waterfront gazing seaward. The wireless had flashed ashore the story of the *Nomad's* daring rescue of the Lightship, and the news had spread like wild fire.

With it, too, had come information for the authorities. Israel Harley and his two sons, as well as two men who had formed the crew of the wrecked schooner, were on board and under guard,

and would be delivered to the police as soon as the *Nomad* and the cumbrous craft she was towing arrived.

Among all the crowd there were none so excited as a red-headed youth whom our readers will recognize as Pepper, and a lad with an impediment in his speech, who couldn't keep still a minute. Yes, the latter was really Ding-dong Bell. It will be recalled that Ding-dong in his flight from the lone ranch house stumbled into what appeared to be an unfathomable pit. In reality it was a fish-pond, long unused, which was partially filled up with soft sand and sea-weed. This broke the force of his fall and, except for a few bruises, he was uninjured. He had, however, to wait a long time before help arrived. But, thanks to his lusty lungs, his cries for aid were heard by the police, who arrived at the ranch-house while Minory and Dolliver were still searching for him.

Both men were arrested and Dolliver made a complete confession, admitting that Minory and he had been friends in the east many years before, and that knowledge of a crime he had committed in his youth had given Minory a power over him which he could not resist. Minory seemingly knew of Dolliver's whereabouts and utilized his ranch as a hiding place, holding Dolliver powerless by his knowledge of his past.

The model and the plans of the wireless torpedo were recovered, and Ding-dong sent a message winging eastward to Professor Jenkins informing him of their safety. We perhaps may look ahead a little here and inform our readers that before

many months had passed the Jenkins Wireless Torpedo was an accomplished fact, with headquarters on Goat Island. Prominent in the company formed to promote it were Nat Trevor, Joe Hartley, and William Bell.

But that is decidedly looking into the future. Just at present we must turn seaward and behold the *Nomad* struggling like a pigmy ant with a huge beetle at her task of bringing the Lightship into port. The authorities had already sent for a tug to tow the guardian craft back to the shoals, so that when the two vessels dropped anchor in the harbor, the *Nomad's* part was over.

Two boats from the new arrivals were on their way shoreward when a messenger thrust a note into Ding-dong's hand. It was addressed to Joe Hartley and was from the Chief of Police of the town. Ding-dong opened it, as the messenger had informed him that it was for the first of the three chums that he encountered.

“Thanks to your wireless, the two men who annoyed you have been arrested,” he read. “The criminal they warned is also under arrest. I am authorized to inform you that a reward of five hundred dollars awaits you for your clever work in their apprehension’.”

It may be said here that Joe devoted the reward to the education of young Jim Dolliver, who, following the arrest of his father, was left homeless. He was taken on as an assistant at Goat Island when the Wireless Torpedo Company was formed and proved a valuable help to the boys and their elders in their work.

As for Minory and the Harleys, they all received heavy sentences for their evil doings, although the elder Harley and his sons did not receive as heavy penalties as that meted out to Minory, who, it transpired, had a long criminal record reaching back to his youth.

And now, amidst the enthusiastic crowd of their fellow townsmen, let us for the present take our leave of the Motor Rangers. Their Wireless Island, at first looked upon as a mere boyish freak, had proved its value in no uncertain way, and certified the worth of their training in the science of aerial telegraphy.

Busy, happy days lay ahead of them, and Goat Island, – its name now changed to Wireless Island, – became the scene of activities which attracted the attention of the scientific world. The wireless torpedo is now an assured success, and, thanks to the boys, the United States is the only country which possesses its secret. Had Minory and the promoters back of him succeeded in filching the secret, it was their intention to sell the valuable implement of war to a foreign power which had offered a large sum for it.

The boys often talk of that first message that came to them that drowsy afternoon when it seemed that there was, to use Joe's phrase, "nothing doing." The remarkable series of adventures that grew out of that sharp summons to the *Iroquois* forms a never-failing topic of conversation with them and with their friends.

And so, wishing the boys good fortune and pleasant times, we bring the tale of their Wireless Island to a close. Ahead of them, along the trail of life, lie new adventures and experiences in a novel field. Those who choose to do so may read of these in a succeeding volume devoted to the interests of the Motor Rangers.

THE END