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Title: The Boy Pilot of the Lakes; Or, Nat Morton's Perils

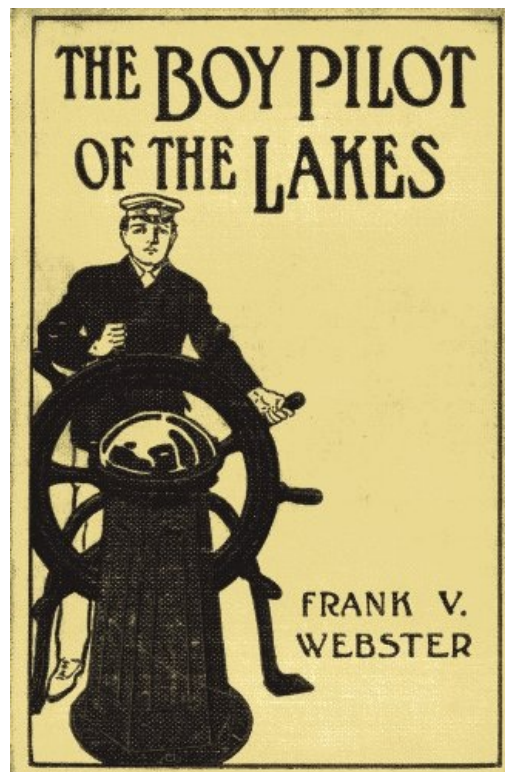
Author: Frank V. Webster

Release Date: July 28, 2010 [EBook #33282]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Steven desJardins and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BOY PILOT OF THE LAKES; OR, NAT MORTON'S PERILS ***





"SAM FELL INTO THE WATER."—[Page 110.](#)

The Boy Pilot of the Lakes

Or

Nat Morton's Perils

BY
FRANK V. WEBSTER

AUTHOR OF "ONLY A FARM BOY," "BOB THE CASTAWAY," "TOM
THE TELEPHONE BOY," "THE YOUNG FIREMEN OF LAKEVILLE,"
ETC.

ILLUSTRATED
NEW YORK
CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

BOOKS FOR BOYS

By FRANK V. WEBSTER

12mo. Illustrated. Bound in cloth.

ONLY A FARM BOY, Or Dan Hardy's Rise in Life
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THE BOY PILOT OF THE LAKES, Or Nat Morton's Perils
TWO BOY GOLD MINERS, Or Lost in the Mountains
JACK THE RUNAWAY, Or On the Road with a Circus

Cupples & Leon Co., Publishers, New York

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The Boy Pilot of the Lakes

CHAPTER I NAT SAVES A BOAT

[Pg 1]

"There's a rowboat adrift!" exclaimed one of a group of men who stood on the edge of a large pier at Chicago's water front.

"Yes, and the steamer will sure smash it," added another. "She's headed right for it! It's a wonder folks wouldn't learn to tie their boats secure. Whose is it?"

"I don't know. It's a good boat, though. Pity to see it knocked into kindling wood."

"That's right."

The pilot of the big freight steamer, which was approaching her dock after a voyage down Lake Michigan, also saw the drifting boat now, and, doubtless thinking some one was in it, he pulled the whistle wire sharply. A hoarse blast from the steamer's siren came across the water. The signal was one of alarm.

At the sound of it a boy, who had been sitting on a box at the edge of the wharf, idly swinging his bare feet to and fro, looked up. He was a lad about fifteen years old, with brown eyes and a pleasant face. Though clean, his clothes—what few he had on—were very much patched. [Pg 2]

"Something's the matter," said the lad. "Something in the path of the steamer, I guess," for he had been around the lake front so constantly that he was a regular water-rat, and he knew what every whistle signal meant.

As the boy glanced out to where the steamer was he saw the rowboat, almost in the path of the big vessel, for the pilot of the freighter had shifted his wheel to avoid a collision, though changing his course meant that he could not make as good a landing as he had expected.

"Why, that rowboat's going to be smashed!" the boy exclaimed, repeating the general opinion of the crowd. "The steamer can't get up to the bulkhead without grinding it to pieces. There! He's reversing!"

As he spoke there came across the narrow expanse of water the sound of bells from the engine-room—bells that indicated, to the practiced ear of the lad, the signal for the engineer to back the freight steamer.

"That boat's worth saving," the boy murmured as he jumped off the box and went closer to the end of the pier. "I'm going to do it, too. Maybe I'll get a reward." [Pg 3]

He lost no time in useless thinking, but, throwing off his coat with one motion and divesting himself of his trousers by another, he poised himself for an instant on the stringpiece of the pier, clad in his undergarments.

"Here! What you going to do?" yelled a special officer who was detailed on the pier. "Nobody allowed to commit suicide here!"

"Who's going to commit suicide?" demanded the boy. "I'm going after that rowboat."

"The steamer'll run you down!"

"Not much! Didn't you hear the reverse signal?"

The officer had, but he did not know as much about boats and their signals as did Nat Morton, which was the name of the lad about to leap into the lake.

In fact, the big steamer, which had slackened speed on approaching the pier, was now slowly backing away. The action of the wind, however, and the waves created by the propeller, operated to send the rowboat nearer to the large vessel.

With a splash Nat Morton dived into the lake, cleaving the water cleanly. When he shot up to the surface a few seconds later he was considerably nearer the boat, for he had swum under water as far as he could, as it was easier and he could go faster. Few tricks in the swimming or diving line were unknown to Nat Morton. [Pg 4]

"That's a plucky lad," observed one man to another.

"Indeed he is," was the reply. "Who is he?"

"I don't know much about him, except I see him along the lake and river front every time a steamer comes in. What he doesn't know about boats and the docks isn't worth knowing. They say he can tell almost any of the regular steamers just by their whistles, before they can be seen in a fog."

"Well, he's a good diver, anyhow. Guess he'll save that boat, all right. It's a nervy thing to do. He ought to get a reward."

"So he had, but I don't suppose he will. Probably some sailor tied his boat up while he went ashore, and the knot slipped. He'll never give the boy anything."

"Look! He's almost at her now."

"So he is. Say, but he's a swift swimmer. I never saw any one who could beat him."

"Me either. There! He's in the boat and he's rowing her out of the way."

"That's right, and the crowd on the steamer is cheering him. Guess that pilot's mad enough to chew nails. It'll take him ten minutes longer to dock now, on account of that rowboat getting in his way."

"Lots of pilots would have run right in, and not cared whether they smashed the boat or not," said a third man, joining in the conversation. [Pg 5]

"So they would, but John Weatherby isn't that kind. He's one of the best and most careful pilots on the lake, but he's getting old. Perhaps that's what makes him so careful."

"Maybe; but now the steamer's coming in. The boy has the boat out of the way. I've got to get my team. I'm expecting a big load this trip."

"So am I," added the other two men, who were teamsters and freight handlers. They separated to get ready for the unloading of the cargo, which would soon follow the docking of the steamer,

that was now proceeding again after the delay caused by the drifting boat.

In the meanwhile, Nat Morton had climbed into the small craft, and finding a pair of oars under the seats, was propelling it toward a float from which it had drifted. He had paid little attention to the cheers of the crew of the freighter, who in this way showed their appreciation of what he had done. Nat was anxious to find the owner of the boat, for he had in mind a possible reward.

As he reached the float he saw a young man hurrying down the inclined gangplank that led to the top of the bulkhead. The youth seemed excited.

"Here! What are you doing in my boat?" he cried. "Get out of it right away! I thought some of you dock-rats would try to steal it if I left it alone an hour or so." [Pg 6]

"Oh, you did, eh?" asked Nat as he stepped out on the float. "Well, you're mistaken. Next time you want to learn how to tie a knot that won't slip when you leave your boat, if you don't want it knocked into kindling wood by a steamer."

"Tie a knot! Smash the boat! Why—why—you're all wet!" exclaimed the other.

"Shouldn't wonder," observed the boy calmly. "The Chicago River isn't exactly dry at this time of the year."

He finished tying the boat, making a regular sailor's knot, and then started up the gangplank. Clearly he might expect no reward from this man.

"Hold on a minute," said the owner of the boat.

"I'm in a hurry," replied Nat, "I want to get my clothes. They're up on the pier, and somebody might take a notion to walk off with 'em. Not that they're worth an awful lot, but they're all I have. Guess you'll have to excuse me."

"Going for your clothes? I don't exactly understand."

"He jumped off the dock and got your boat, which went adrift right in the course of that steamer," explained a 'longshoreman who had listened to the conversation and who had seen what Nat did. "Plucky thing it was, too. If it hadn't been for him you wouldn't have any boat now."

"Is that so? I didn't understand. I thought he was trying to steal my boat." [Pg 7]

"Steal your boat? Say, you don't belong around here, do you?"

"No. My father is the owner of a small steam yacht, and I am taking a trip with him. This is the first time I was ever in Chicago. The yacht is tied out there, beyond some other vessels, and I took this boat and came ashore a while ago to see the sights. When I came back I saw that boy in my boat."

"Humph!" murmured the 'longshoreman as he turned away. "You want to take a few lessons in tying ropes. That boy did you a good service."

"I see he did, and I'm sorry I spoke the way I did. I'll give him a reward."

By this time Nat was up on the pier from which he had jumped. He found his clothes, and put them on over his wet undergarments. The day was hot, and he knew the latter would soon dry.

Besides, he was used to being wet half the time, as he and other lads of his acquaintance frequently dived off the stringpiece and swam around in the lake. So when the owner of the rescued rowboat looked for the boy he could not see him. But he determined to make up for his unintentional rudeness, and so went after Nat.

He found the boy with a number of others crowded about the entrance to the freight office.

"May I speak to you a few moments?" asked the young man. [Pg 8]

"Guess you'll have to excuse me," replied Nat. "I'm busy."

"What doing?"

"I'm waiting for a job. I may get one helping carry out some light freight, and I need the money."

"How much will you get?"

"Oh, if I'm lucky I may make a dollar."

"I'll give you more than that for saving my boat. I want to explain that I didn't understand what you had done when I spoke so quickly."

"Oh, that's all right," said Nat good-naturedly. "But if you're going to give me a dollar I guess I can afford to quit here," and he stepped out of the line, the gap immediately closing up, for there were many in search of odd jobs to do about the dock whenever a steamer came in.

"Here are five dollars," went on the young man, producing a bank bill.

"Five dollars!" exclaimed Nat. "Say, mister, it ain't worth all that—saving the boat."

"Yes, it is. That craft cost my father quite a sum, and he would have blamed me if she had been smashed. I'm much obliged to you. I'm sorry I thought you were stealing her, but it looked—"

"Forget it," advised Nat with a smile. "It's all right. I'll save boats for you regularly at this price." [Pg 9]

"Do you work around the docks—er—"

"My name's Nat Morton," said the lad.

"And mine is John Scanlon," added the other, and he explained how he had come to leave his boat at the float. "I don't know that I will have any more boats to save, as my father's yacht will soon be leaving for Lake Superior. Wouldn't you like a place on her better than your regular job?"

"My regular job? I haven't any. I do whatever I can get to do, and sometimes it's little enough."

"Where do you live?"

"Back there," replied Nat with a wave of his hand toward the tenement district of Chicago.

"What does your father do?"

"I haven't any. He's—he's dead." And Nat's voice broke a little, for his loss had been a comparatively recent one.

"I'm sorry—I beg your pardon—I didn't know—"

"Oh, that's all right," said Nat, bravely keeping his feelings under control. "Dad's been dead a little over two years now. He and I lived pretty good—before that. My mother died when I was a baby. Dad was employed on a lumber barge. He had a good job, and I didn't have to work when he was alive. But after he was lost overboard in a storm one night, that ended all my good times. I've been hustling for myself ever since." [Pg 10]

"Didn't he have any life insurance, or anything like that?"

"Not that I know of. I remember he said just before he went on—on his last trip—he told me if it turned out all right he'd have a nice sum in the bank, but I never heard anything about it. They found his body, but there was no money in the clothes, nor any bank books."

"That's too bad. How do you get along?"

"Oh, I make out pretty well. I live with a Mr. William Miller and his wife. They're poor, but they're good to me. He's a 'longshoreman, and he works around the docks. I do, too, whenever there is any work to be had, and I manage to make a living, though it isn't very much of a one."

"No, I presume not. Perhaps if I speak to my father he might give you a position on his boat."

"I'm much obliged to you," replied Nat. "I like boats and the water. I'd like to be a pilot."

"I'm afraid dad couldn't give you that job," answered young Mr. Scanlon. "We have a good pilot."

"And I don't want to leave the Millers," added the boy. "They've been good to me, and I want to pay them back. But isn't that some one calling you?"

He pointed to a figure down on the float, where the boat was tied. [Pg 11]

"Yes. That's the mate of my father's steam yacht. Probably father sent him for me. Well, I'll have to say good-by. I hope I'll see you again."

"I hope so, too, especially if you have any more boats you want saved. I'm afraid five dollars is too much."

"Not a bit. Take it and welcome."

"It's more than I could earn in a week," went on Nat as he carefully folded the bill and placed it in his pocket. "All the same, I think I'll try for a job here now. It looks as if they needed lots of hands, because the boat is late."

Bidding John Scanlon good-by Nat turned back to the freight office, in front of which there was now only a small throng looking for employment.

CHAPTER II

A CRY FOR HELP

[Pg 12]

Owing to the time he had spent talking to the young man whose boat he saved, Nat lost a chance of getting work in helping to unload the steamer. Still he did help to carry some freight to the waiting trucks and drays, and for this he received fifty cents. But as he had five dollars, he did not mind the small sum paid him by the freight agent.

"You weren't around as early as usual," remarked that official as he observed Nat. "You usually make more than this."

"I know it, but I had a job that paid me better," and our hero told about the boat incident.

"Another steamer'll be in day after to-morrow," went on the agent. "Better be around early."

"I will, thanks."

Then, as there was no further opportunity for work on the pier that day, Nat started for the place he called home. It was in a poor tenement, in one of the most congested districts of Chicago.

But if there were dirt and squalor all about, Mrs. Miller did her best to keep her apartment clean. So though the way up to it was by rather dirty stairs, the rooms were neat and comfortable. [Pg 13]

"Well, Nat, you're home early, aren't you?" asked the woman, who, with her husband, had befriended the orphan lad.

"Yes, Mrs. Miller."

"I suppose you couldn't get any work?"

"Oh, yes, I got some."

"What's the matter, then? Don't you feel well?"

She could not understand any one coming away so early from a place where there was work, for work, to the poor, means life itself.

"Oh, I did so well I thought I'd take a vacation," and Nat related the incident of the day.

The boy's liking for the water seemed to have been born in him. Soon after his mother had died his father placed him in the care of a family in an inland city. The child seemed to pine away, and an old woman suggested he might want to be near the water, as his father had followed all his life a calling that kept him aboard boats. Though he did not believe much in that theory, Mr. Morton finally consented to place his son to board in Chicago. Nat at once picked up and became a strong, healthy lad.

As he grew older his father took him on short trips with him, so Nat grew to know and love the Great Lakes, as a sailor learns to know and love the ocean. [Pg 14]

Soon Nat began asking questions about ships and how they were sailed. His father was a good instructor, and between his terms at school Nat learned much about navigation in an amateur sort of way.

Best of all he loved to stand in the pilot-house, where he was admitted because many navigators knew and liked Mr. Morton. There the boy learned something of the mysteries of steering a boat by the compass and by the lights on shore. He learned navigating terms, and, on one or two occasions, was even allowed to take the spokes of the great wheel in his own small hands.

In this way Nat gained a good practical knowledge of boats. Then came the sad day when he received the news of the death of his father. Though up to that time he had lived in comparative comfort, he now found himself very poor.

For though, as he told John Scanlon, his father had said something about financial matters being better after the delivery of the big load that was on the lumber barge on which he met his death, the boy was too young to understand it.

All he knew was that he had to leave his pleasant boarding place and go to live with a poor family—the Millers—who took compassion on the homeless lad.

Mr. Miller had made an effort to see if Mr. Morton had not left some little money, but his investigation resulted in nothing. [Pg 15]

For about two years Nat had lived with the Millers, doing what odd jobs he could find. His liking for the water kept him near the lake, and he had never given up his early ambition to become a pilot some day, though that time seemed very far off.

Every chance Nat got he went aboard the steamers that tied up at the river wharves. In this way he got to know many captains and officers. Some were kind to him and allowed him the run of their ships while at dock. Others were surly, and ordered the boy off.

In this way he became quite a familiar figure about the lake front, and was more or less known to those who had business there.

When Mr. Miller came home the night of Nat's adventure he congratulated the lad on what he had done in the matter of saving the rowboat.

"And I got well paid for it," added Nat as he finished his story and showed the five-dollar bill. "There, Mrs. Miller, we'll have a good dinner Sunday."

"But I can't take your money, Nat," objected the woman.

"Of course you will," he insisted. "That's what it's for. I owe you a lot of back board, anyhow. I didn't get hardly any work last week." [Pg 16]

"I hope business will be better next week," said Mr. Miller. "I didn't earn much myself these last few days."

There was little to do at the pier the next day, and the following day quite a severe storm swept over the lake. The boats were late getting to the docks, and the longshoremen and freight

handlers had to labor far into the night.

"I don't believe I'll be able to get home to supper, Nat," said Mr. Miller to the lad as they were working near each other on the dock late in the afternoon. "Could you spare time to go up and tell my wife?"

"Sure. I'm almost done with taking out the light stuff. I'll go in about half an hour. Shall I bring you back some lunch?"

"Yes, that would be a good idea, and then I'll not have to stop, and I can earn more."

As Nat was about to leave, the freight agent called to him:

"Where you going, Nat?"

"Home to get some supper for Mr. Miller."

"All right. See me when you come back. I have an errand for you, and I'll give you a quarter if you do it."

"Sure I will. What is it?"

"I want to send a message and some papers to a firm uptown. It's about some freight they're expecting, and the office is keeping open late on account of it. Now hurry home and come back, and I'll have the message ready for you."

[Pg 17]

Nat was soon back at the pier, with a lunch for Mr. Miller. Then, with the note and papers which the freight agent had ready for him, he started off uptown.

As he was on his way back from the errand, he walked slowly along the water front. He decided he would call at the pier and see if he could help Mr. Miller, so that his benefactor might get through earlier.

Nat reached a wharf some distance away from the one where he had been employed during the day. It seemed to be deserted, though there was a large vessel tied up on one side of it, and two barges on the other.

"I'd like to be a pilot on that big steamer," thought Nat as he contemplated the craft in the glare of an electric light. "That would be a fine job. Well, maybe I'll be on one like her some day."

He was about to walk on, when suddenly the stillness of the night was broken by a cry. It was a shout, and it seemed to come from near the big freight barges.

"Help! help!" cried the voice. "I'm drowning! I'm in the water and I can't get out! Help! help!"

CHAPTER III NAT'S BRAVE RESCUE

[Pg 18]

"Somebody must have fallen overboard from one of the barges," thought Nat, for he could now easily determine that the cry came from the side of the dock where the two big freight carriers were tied. "Why doesn't some one there help him?"

But though he thus wondered, he did not hesitate over what to do. He ran out on the pier, and seeing a gangplank leading to one barge, he sprinted up it. The cries continued.

"I'm coming!" the boy shouted. "I'll help you! Where are you?"

"Down between the two barges! I can't get out!" cried a man's voice. "Hurry! help!"

The voice ended in a gurgle.

"He's gone down under water!" exclaimed Nat. "Man overboard!" he loudly cried, thinking some one on the dock or aboard the vessels might hear him and come to help aid in rescuing the imperiled one. But there came no answer. The pier seemed to be deserted.

Nat reached the deck of the first barge and rushed across it to the farthest rail. He tried to peer down into the black space between the two freight boats, but he could see nothing.

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"Where are you?" he called again.

"Here! Right here!" was the answer. "I fell down in between the two barges. I got hold of a rope, but it slipped from me a moment ago, and I went under. I managed to get hold of it again when I came up, but I can't last much longer. Hurry and help me!"

"I will!" exclaimed Nat. "I'm coming down as soon as I can find a rope to cling to. There isn't room to swim down there."

"No; that's right. I can hardly move. But I can't hold on much longer."

"Don't give up!" yelled Nat. "I'll be right there. Queer there isn't some of the crew here," he murmured to himself.

He glanced rapidly about him. There was a lantern burning high up on the smokestack of one of the barges, which were of the latest type, with big engines to turn the large propellers. It was the work of but an instant for Nat to loosen the lantern rope from the cleat and lower the light to the deck. Then cutting the rope, as the quickest method of detaching it from the stack, he hurried with it to the space between the two barges. He lowered the light, and by its gleam saw an elderly man clinging to a rope that dangled from the side of the barge the boy was on.

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"That's good; show a light!" exclaimed the man. "Now you can see what to do. But please hurry. My arms are nearly pulled from the sockets."

"I'll have to get a rope that will bear my weight," replied Nat. "Hold on a moment more."

He fastened the lantern cord to the rail, so that the light would hang down in the space between the two vessels. Then he got a long rope, a simple enough matter aboard a vessel. Securing one end to a stanchion, Nat threw the other end down between the barges. Then giving the cable a yank, to see that it was secure, he went down it hand over hand.

"I'll have you out of here now in short order," he said to the half-exhausted man. "Can you pull yourself up by the rope?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm too weak."

This was a problem Nat had not considered. He thought for a moment. He was a bright lad, and his life about the docks had made him resourceful in emergencies.

"I have it!" he exclaimed. "Hold on just a few seconds more."

Twining his legs about the cable to support himself, Nat with one hand made a loop in the rope, using a knot that would not slip. Thus he had a support for his feet.

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Standing in the loop he quickly made another below it, for the rope was plenty long enough.

"There!" he cried to the man. "Work your arms into that and then get your head and shoulders through. Put it under your arm-pits, and that will support you until I can haul you up."

"Good idea," murmured the man weakly. With one hand he grasped the loop which Nat let down to him. He evidently was used to cables, for he knew how to handle this one, and in a few seconds he had his head and arms through the loop. This supported him so that he was out of water up to his waist.

"I'll have you out in another minute," declared Nat as he scrambled up the rope hand over hand, until he was once more on the deck of the barge. Then he tried to pull the man up by hauling on the rope, but he found the task too great for his strength.

"I'll have to get help," he said.

"No, no! Don't leave me!" begged the man. "Just lower me another rope, and I can pull myself up."

Nat understood the plan. Quickly running to the other side of the barge, he found a long cable. This he fastened as he had done the first, and he let the length of it dangle between the two vessels so that the man could reach it.

[Pg 22]

"Pull now!" called the man.

Hauling on the rope about the stranger's shoulders, while the latter aided himself in the work of rescue by pulling on the second rope, the rescued one was soon on the deck of the barge beside Nat. He was so weak that he sank down in a heap as soon as he was over the rail.

"Are you hurt? Can I get you anything? Do you belong aboard this barge?" asked the boy.

"No—no, my lad," said the man slowly. "I'll be all right in a few minutes. I'm exhausted, that's all. My name is Weatherby—"

"What, John Weatherby, the pilot of the *Jessie Drew*?" asked Nat, who knew a number of pilots by their names.

"That's who I am, my lad. You may think it queer that a pilot should fall overboard, but I'll tell you how it happened. First, however, let me thank you with all my heart for what you did for me. But for you I would have been drowned."

"Oh, I guess not."

"Yes, I would. I couldn't have held on much longer, as I'm getting old and I'm not as strong as I was."

"Some one else would have come to your aid."

"I don't know about that. There is no one aboard either of the barges. I didn't know that, or I shouldn't have come here to-night. That vessel over there has gone out of commission, and there is no one aboard her. There's a watchman on the pier, but he didn't hear me calling for help. You saved my life, and I'll not forget it."

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"I am glad I was able to," responded Nat.

"What is your name?" asked the pilot. He seemed to be feeling better.

"I'm Nat Morton."

"Nat Morton! I've heard of you. Why, you're the boy who got the rowboat out of the way of the vessel I was bringing in the other day, aren't you?"

"I guess I am."

"Well, I've wanted to meet you to thank you for that. Then, before I get a chance to do it, you do me another favor. I heard about you from a friend of mine—a pilot. He said you were always about the docks."

"Yes, I spend a good deal of my time here. I get occasional jobs, and I like the ships."

"So do I, my lad. The lakes are wonderful bodies of water."

"But hadn't you better go home?" suggested Nat. "You're wet, and, though it's a warm night, you may take cold. It's going to rain," he added, as a flash of lightning came.

"Yes, I will go home if you will help me."

"I will, gladly. Where do you live?"

"I board near here, as it's handy for my business. The *Jessie Drew* is to sail day after to-morrow. I came down here to-night to see a friend of mine, who is captain of one of these grain barges, the second one over there. I didn't know that he and his crew, as well as all those on this barge we're on, had gone ashore. I started to cross from one barge to the other, and I fell down between them. I called and called, but it seemed as if help would never come."

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"I'm glad I happened to be passing," replied Nat. "Now, if you feel able, we'll go ashore."

"Yes, I'm all right now. I'll go to my boarding place and get some dry things. Do you work around here?"

"I help Mr. Miller—he's the man I live with—whenever I can. He's working to-night, helping unload a vessel that was delayed by the storm."

"Yes, it's blowing quite hard. I didn't notice it so much down between those barges, but now I feel quite chilly. So you work on the pier, eh?"

"Whenever I can get anything to do. But I'd like to get a job on a steamer."

"You would, eh? What kind?"

"Well, I'd like to be a pilot, but I suppose I'd have to work my way up. I'd be willing to start at almost anything, if I could get on a vessel."

"You would, eh?" said the pilot, and then he seemed to be busily thinking.

The two walked down the gangplank and off the pier, meeting no one, for the wind, and an occasional dash of rain, made it unpleasant to be out, and the watchman was probably snugly sitting in some sheltered place.

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"This is my boarding place," said Mr. Weatherby at length, as they came to a small house on a street leading up from the lake front. "I can't properly thank you now, but—I wish you'd come and see me to-morrow, when you're not working," he added.

"I'll be glad to call and find out how you are."

"Oh, I'll be all right. Now, be sure to come, I—I may have some good news for you." And with that the old pilot went into the house, leaving a very much wondering youth on the sidewalk.

CHAPTER IV GETTING A JOB

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"Now, why in the world didn't he tell me what he wanted of me, instead of keeping me guessing?" thought Nat, as he made his way back to the dock where Mr. Miller was working. "I wonder what it can be? If he wanted to thank me he could just as well have done it now as to-morrow."

"Maybe he wants to give me a reward," the boy went on musingly. "I don't believe I'd take it. Accepting money for rescuing a boat is all well enough, but not for saving life. Besides, if I hadn't done it somebody else would. No; if he offers me money I don't believe I'll take it. Still, I do need some new clothes," and he glanced down at the rather ragged garments he was wearing.

"I've been waiting for you some time," Mr. Miller said when Nat got back. "I thought you said you wouldn't be gone long on that errand."

"Neither I was."

"What kept you, then?"

"Well, I had to rescue a man."

"Rescue a man? Are you joking?"

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"Not a bit of it. I pulled Mr. Weatherby, the pilot, out from between two barges." And Nat proceeded to relate his adventure.

"Well, things are certainly coming your way," remarked Mr. Miller. "Maybe he'll give you a big reward."

"I'd rather he'd give me a good job," returned Nat. "Maybe he could get me a place on some boat. That's what I'd like. I could earn good money then."

"I wouldn't like to see you go away from us, Nat. My wife and I have become quite attached to you."

"I would not like to go, Mr. Miller, for I have been very happy in your home. So I'm not going to think about it."

"Still, I would like to see you prosper in this world," went on the man who had befriended Nat. "If you have a chance to get a place on a boat, take it. You may be able to come and see us once in a while, between trips."

"I will always consider my home at your house."

"I hope you will, Nat."

"Still, nothing may happen," went on the boy. "Did you get the ship all unloaded?"

"Yes, the holds are emptied, and I have a job to-morrow helping load her. I guess you could get something to do if you came down."

"Then I shall."

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"But I thought you were going to call on Mr. Weatherby?"

"I am, but he told me to come when I was not working. He is going to be home all day."

"That will be all right, then. Now let's hurry home. I think it's going to rain harder soon, and my wife will probably be worrying about me."

The storm, which had been a fitful one all day and part of the night, showed signs of becoming worse. The wind was more violent, and when Mr. Miller and Nat were nearly home it began to rain in torrents.

The rain continued all the next day, but as the wharf where Mr. Miller and Nat worked was a covered one, they did not mind the storm. At noon-time the boy found a chance to go to the boarding-house of Mr. Weatherby.

"Well, here comes my life-saver!" greeted the old pilot. "How are you feeling to-day?"

"Very well, sir. How are you?"

"Not so good as I might be. I'm lame and stiff from pulling on that rope, but I think I'll be able to sail to-morrow. I believe you told me last night that you would like a job on a ship," the pilot went on.

"Yes, sir," replied Nat, his heart beating high with hope.

"Hum! Well, what kind of a job would you like—pilot or captain?"

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"I think I'd rather begin a little lower down," replied Nat with a smile, for he saw that Mr. Weatherby was joking.

"Perhaps that would be best. Well, as it happens, I have a chance to get a young lad a position on the steamer of which I am pilot. You see, I have a steady job piloting. My vessel, the *Jessie Drew*, makes trips all over the lakes, and Captain Wilson Marshall, who is a part owner, is not so familiar with all the harbors and the various routes as I am. So he engages me steadily. In fact, he and I are old friends, as well as distantly related; so I have a somewhat different position than do most pilots."

"And can you get me a job on a boat—your boat?" asked Nat eagerly.

"I think I can. I may say I am sure I can. The captain asked me yesterday to look out for a bright youth to help with the cargo, assist the purser, and be a sort of cabin assistant. I had no one in mind then, but after our meeting last night, when you were of such service to me, and I heard you say you wanted a job, I at once thought of this place. I saw the captain this morning, and he has practically engaged you—that is, if you want the berth, and he is satisfied with you when he sees you. The last item I know will be all right. And now it is for you to say whether you want the place."

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"Want it? Of course I want it! I can't tell you how much obliged I am to you for this! I——"

"Now—now—don't get excited over it," cautioned Mr. Weatherby. "If you're going to be a pilot you must learn to keep cool. Shall I tell Captain Marshall you'll take the place?"

"Yes, and be glad to."

"Not quite so fast. Why don't you ask me what the wages are, and how long you'll have to work?"

"That's so. I didn't think of that. But I don't mind how long I have to work. It can't be much longer than I have to work now, and I get very little for it."

"Then I guess you will be satisfied with the hours and the wages paid aboard the *Jessie Drew*. When can you come?"

"Any time. I am not regularly hired at the dock."

"Then perhaps you had better stop now, go home and get ready. We will sail early to-morrow. Bring along a change of clothes, for it often happens you'll get wet through in a storm, or when the lake is rough."

"I'm afraid I can't do that," said Nat slowly, as a change came over his face.

"Why not?"

"Well—er—that is—you see, I haven't any other clothes. These are all I've got. Mr. and Mrs. Miller are very poor. Her husband doesn't earn much, and I don't, either. It takes all we both get to buy food and pay the rent. I don't have any left for clothes. They're not good enough to go on board the boat with. I'm afraid I can't take the job."

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"There is no use denying that the clothes might be better," admitted Mr. Weatherby gravely. "Not that I care anything about what garments a man or boy wears, so long as they are clean, and yours are that. Still, I think it would make a better impression on Captain Marshall if you were to have a newer suit. I'll tell you what I'll do. Here, you take this money and go and get yourself a good suit and some underwear, and whatever else you need."

"I can't take your money—I haven't earned it," objected Nat, who was quite independent.

"Nonsense, boy. Take it as a loan, then, to be paid back whenever you feel like it. It's a pity if I can't do a good turn to the lad who pulled me up from between those vessels. You will offend me if you don't take it. Besides, I want you to have this job. I may need you to save my life again, and, to be frank with you, I shouldn't like Captain Marshall to see the boy I recommended in such clothes, though, as I said, personally I don't care a rap about them."

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"All right," replied Nat quietly. "If you put it that way I'll borrow this money."

"That's the way to talk. Now you'd better go, buy what you need, and then come back to me this evening," went on Mr. Weatherby, handing Nat some bankbills. "I will then take you down to the ship and introduce you to Captain Marshall. You'll probably stay aboard all night, so you had better tell your friends good-by."

"Where is the ship going to?"

"I don't know exactly. We'll probably call at several lake ports to unload or take on cargo. Now you'd better go, and be back here about seven o'clock."

Nat hurried back to the wharf to tell Mr. Miller the good news. His friend rejoiced with him, though he was sorry to see the boy leave. When Nat reached the tenement and told Mrs. Miller, that lady cried a little, for she had grown to love the boy almost as a son. She went out shopping with him, and in a few hours Nat was ready to step aboard the *Jessie Drew* and take a long voyage.

It was not easy to part from his kind friends, but he was consoled by the thought that he would soon see them again.

At the appointed hour he was at Mr. Weatherby's boarding-house, and a little later the two were going aboard the big lake steamer.

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"Ah, Mr. Weatherby!" exclaimed a man as Nat and the pilot stepped on the deck, "you're aboard early, I see."

"Yes; I didn't want to get left. Mr. Bumstead, let me introduce a friend of mine to you. He did me a great service. This is Nat Morton. Nat, this is Mr. Bumstead, the first mate."

Nat shook hands with the mate. That official was not a very kindly looking person. He had red hair, and he seemed surly, even when he smiled, which was not often.

"Is he going to take a voyage with you?" asked the mate of the pilot.

"Yes. He's going to help out in the purser's office. I got him the job."

"You did!" exclaimed the mate.

"Yes. What of it? You seem quite surprised, Mr. Bumstead. I recommended Nat for the place because he saved my life."

"Has Captain Marshall given him the place?" asked the mate in a surly tone.

"Yes. Why?"

"Because I had recommended my nephew for the place, and he would have got it, too, if you hadn't interfered. I'm going to see the captain about it later. It's not fair, giving a landlubber a good job aboard this ship. I'll have him put ashore. I told my nephew he could have the job, and he's going to get it!"

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With that the mate strode off, muttering to himself.

"I'm sorry about that," said Mr. Weatherby in a low voice. "I didn't know he had any one for the place. Nat, I'm afraid he'll make trouble for you. You'll have to be on your guard, but I'll do all I can for you."

"I guess I can look out for myself," replied the boy. "I haven't lived around the docks all my life for nothing."

But Nat did not know the perils that were in store for him, nor to what lengths the vindictive mate would go to be revenged.

CHAPTER V NAT IN TROUBLE

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Captain Marshall proved to be a kind man, but rather strict in his views. The pilot introduced Nat to him, and the commander of the *Jessie Drew* gravely shook hands with the lad.

"I have heard about you," he said, and Nat began to think he was getting to be a person of some importance. "I saw what you did the day that drifting rowboat got in our way, though, at the time, I didn't know it was you. Mr. Weatherby has told me what you did for him, and I must congratulate you on your quickness and wit in an emergency. That is what we need on a vessel."

"The purser will tell you what to do. You must remember one thing aboard a ship, especially when we're out on the lake; the thing to do is to obey orders at once, and ask the reason for them afterward. I expect you to do that. If you do you'll not get into trouble. I shall have a friendly eye on you, and I trust you will do as well as the pilot thinks you will. Now you may report to the purser, who really is more of a supercargo than he is a purser. He'll find plenty for you to do."

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"Yes, sir," replied Nat, wondering just what his duties would be. He knew where to find the man who was to be his immediate superior, for on the way to the captain's cabin Mr. Weatherby had pointed out to Nat where the purser's office was.

"Oh, yes; you're the new boy," said the purser, whose name was George Dunn. "Well, come into my office, and I'll show you part of what you'll have to do during the voyage."

It was fortunate that Nat knew something about ships and the terms used aboard them, or he would have been sadly confused by what Mr. Dunn told him. As it was, much that he heard he did not comprehend. He found that part of his duties were to make out lists of the freight, enter the shipments on bills, put them in various books, check up manifests and way-bills, and help the purser verify the freight as it was taken on or put off.

Luckily Nat had had a fair education before his father died, and he could write a good hand and read excellently. He was not very accurate at figures, but he was bright and quick to learn.

"I guess that will do for to-night," said Mr. Dunn when it came nine o'clock. "I had most of the stuff checked up before you came aboard, or there'd have been more to do. However, we'll manage to keep you busy in the morning."

"I wonder if I'll ever get a chance to learn to be a pilot?" said Nat, for the purser seemed so friendly that he ventured to speak to him of that pet ambition.

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"I shouldn't wonder. We're not very busy once we get loaded up, and often when sailing between ports a long distance apart there is little to do for days at a time. If you want to learn navigation, and Mr. Weatherby will teach you, I don't see why you can't do it."

"I hope I can."

"Come on, and I'll show you where you'll bunk," went on Mr. Dunn. "You want to turn out lively at six bells in the morning."

"That's seven o'clock," observed Nat.

"Right you are, my hearty. I see you know a little something about a ship. That's good. Oh, I guess you'll get along all right."

It seemed to Nat that he had not been asleep at all when six strokes on a bell, given in the way that sailors ring the time, with short, double blows, awoke him. He dressed hurriedly, had his breakfast with the others of the crew, and then did what he could to help the purser, who had to check up some boxes that arrived at the last minute, just before the ship sailed.

A little later, amid what seemed a confusion of orders, the *Jessie Drew* moved away down the river, and Nat was taking his first voyage on Lake Michigan as a hand on a ship—a position he

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had long desired to fill, but which hitherto had seemed beyond his wildest dreams.

"How do you like it?" asked Mr. Weatherby, a little later, as he passed the boy on his way to the pilot-house.

"Fine."

"I'm glad of it. Attend strictly to business, and you'll get along. I'll keep you in mind, and whenever I get a chance I'll take you into the pilot-house, and begin to instruct you in the method of steering a ship."

"I'll be ever so much obliged to you if you will."

"Why, that's nothing, after what you did for me," replied Mr. Weatherby, with a kind smile at Nat.

As sailing on large vessels was not much of a novelty to Nat, except of late years, since his father's death, he did not linger long on deck, watching the various sights as the freighter plowed her way out on Lake Michigan. He went to the purser's office, to see if there was anything that needed to be done. He had temporarily forgotten about the mate's threat to have him discharged.

As Nat drew near the place, he heard voices in dispute, and, when he entered, he was surprised to see the first mate, Mr. Bumstead, standing at the purser's desk, shaking his fist in the air.

"I tell you those boxes are not aboard!" exclaimed the mate.

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"And I say they are," replied the purser firmly. "They are down on my list as being taken on this morning, and—er—what's his name—that new boy—Nat—Nat Morton checked them off. You can see for yourself."

"Oh, he checked 'em off, did he?" asked the mate, in altered tones. "Now I begin to see where the trouble is. We'll ask him—?"

"Here he is now," interrupted Mr. Dunn, as Nat entered. "Did you check up these boxes?" he asked, and he handed a part of the cargo list to Nat.

"Yes, sir. They were the last things that came aboard this morning."

"I told you so!" exclaimed Mr. Dunn, turning to the mate.

"Wait a minute," went on that officer. "He says he checked 'em off, but I don't believe he did. If he did, where are they? They can't have fallen overboard, and I didn't eat 'em, I'm sure of that."

"I checked those boxes off as you called them to me, Mr. Bumstead," replied Nat. "You stood near the forward cargo hold, and the boxes were stowed away there. I was careful in putting them down on my list."

"Yes! Too careful, I guess!" exclaimed the mate angrily. "You've got down ten more boxes than came aboard. That's a nice mess to make of it! But I knew how it would be if the captain took a greenhorn aboard! Why didn't he get some one who knew how to check a cargo?"

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"I know how to check a cargo," replied Nat quietly.

"I say you don't! There are ten boxes missing, and you've got to find them, that's all there is about it!"

"Everything down on my list came aboard," insisted Nat.

"Well, those ten boxes didn't, and I know it. You made a mistake, that's what you did, or else you let the boxes fall overboard, and you're afraid to admit it."

"No boxes fell overboard when I was checking up, Mr. Bumstead."

"Well, where are those ten missing ones then?"

"I don't know."

"Of course you don't. And no one else does. You made a mistake, that's all, and it's going to be a bad one. It puts me to a lot of work. I'll have to check over all my lists to make up for your blunder."

"I made no blunder."

"I say you did, and I'm going to report you to Captain Marshall. I'm not going to work with a greenhorn, who don't know enough to check up a simple list. I'll report you, that's what I'll do, and we'll see how long you'll have a berth on this ship!"

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Angrily muttering to himself, the mate started for the captain's cabin, while poor Nat, much distressed over the trouble into which he had gotten, stood dejectedly in the purser's office.

CHAPTER VI

AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY

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"Don't let him worry you," said Mr. Dunn consolingly. "He's a surly fellow, and he's always interfering in my department."

"But the captain may discharge me," replied Nat. "Still, I am sure those boxes came aboard. I counted them carefully and I don't believe I would be ten out of the way."

"Of course not. Probably the mate stowed them in some other place and he's forgotten all about it. They'll turn up."

"I hope so, for I would not like to make a mistake the first day out."

At that moment a deckhand came up to where Nat stood talking to the purser.

"Captain wants to see you," he said to the boy.

"Don't get excited now," advised Mr. Dunn. "Here, take our checking list with you and tell the captain exactly how it happened. If you are sure the boxes came aboard say so—and stick to it."

"I will," answered Nat, and, with rather an uneasy feeling, he went aft to where the captain's cabin was located.

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He found the mate there, looking quite excited, while Captain Marshall was far from calm. Evidently there had been high words between the men.

"What is this, Nat?" asked the captain. "The mate says he is short ten boxes. You have them on your list as coming aboard, but they are not to be found. You know that will make trouble, to have anything wrong with the cargo."

"I'm sure nothing is wrong," replied Nat. "I went over my list carefully, and I am positive the boxes are on board."

"And I say they're not," insisted the mate. "I guess I've been in this business long enough to know more than a green lad who has only been here a day."

"You want to be careful, Nat," went on Captain Marshall. "I have always depended on Mr. Bumstead in regard to matters connected with the stowing of the cargo."

"I am sure those boxes are aboard, sir," went on Nat firmly. "If you will allow me to take a look I think I can find them."

"What! Go through all the cargo after it's stowed away!" exclaimed the angry mate. "I guess not much! I'll not allow it!"

The door of the cabin opened and there entered the pilot, Mr. Weatherby. He started back on seeing the mate and Nat.

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"Oh, excuse me," he said. "I didn't know you had any one in here, Captain Marshall."

"That's all right, come right in," replied the commander. "There's a little difficulty between Nat and Mr. Bumstead, and I'm trying to straighten it out."

He related what had taken place, and told of the missing boxes.

"And there you are," he finished. "It seems to be quite a mix-up, and I'm sorry, for I like to keep my cargo and the records of it straight."

"Hum," murmured the pilot. "Mr. Bumstead says the boxes are not here, and Nat says they came aboard, eh? Well, I should think the easiest way would be to look and see if they are here or not."

"That's what I proposed," exclaimed Nat eagerly.

"Yes! I guess I'll have you disturbing the whole cargo to look for ten small boxes!" exclaimed the mate. "Not much I won't! I'm right, and I know it!"

"No, I think Nat is right," said Mr. Weatherby quietly.

"Do you mean to tell me I made a mistake?" inquired Mr. Bumstead.

"I don't know whether you did or not. But I know Nat's plan is the only one that can decide the matter. If the boxes came aboard the last thing, they can't be very far down among the rest of the cargo. It will not take long to look. What do you say, captain?"

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Captain Marshall was in a sort of quandary. The mate was his chief officer, and he wanted to be on his side because Mr. Bumstead owned some shares in the ship, and also because Mr. Bumstead relieved the commander of a lot of work that, otherwise, would have fallen to the share of the captain. On the other hand Mr. Marshall did not want to offend the pilot. In addition to being a relative of his, Mr. Weatherby was one of the stockholders in the company which owned the steamer *Jessie Drew*, and, as the captain was an employee of this company, he did not want to oppose one of the officers of it.

"I suppose that's the only way out of it," the captain finally said, though with no very good grace. "Only the whole cargo must not be upset looking for those boxes."

"I'll be careful," promised Nat. "I think I know where they were stowed."

"Um! You think you do, but you'll soon find you're much mistaken!" said the mate scornfully.

"I'll give you a hand," said the pilot. "Mr. Simmon, my helper, is in the pilot-house," he went on, in answer to a questioning glance from Captain Marshall. "The ship is on a straight course now, and we'll hold it for an hour or two. Now, Nat, come on, and we'll see if we can't solve this puzzle."

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It did not take long to demonstrate that Nat was right, and the mate wrong. The ten boxes were found in the afterhold, where they had been put by mistake, which accounted for the mate not being able to find them.

"What have you to say now?" asked the pilot of Mr. Bumstead, when the search was so successfully ended.

"What have I to say? Nothing, except that I think you did a mean thing when you got this boy in here, and kept my nephew out of the place, which he needs so much. But I'll get even with him yet for coming here." It appeared the mate's protest to Captain Marshall, about employing Nat, had been of no effect.

"I guess Nat needed a place to work as much as did your nephew," replied Mr. Weatherby, when his *protégé* had gone back to the purser's cabin. "His father is dead, and you ought to be glad that the orphan son of an old lake sailor has a chance to earn his living, instead of making it hard for him."

"Was his father a lake sailor?" asked the mate quickly.

"Yes. Nat's father was James Morton, who was employed on a lumber barge."

"James Morton! On a lumber barge!" exclaimed the mate, turning pale. "Are you sure of that?"

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"Certainly. But what of it? Did you know Mr. Morton?"

"Jim Morton," murmured the mate. "I might have recognized the name. So his son is aboard this vessel! I must do something, or——"

"What was that you said?" asked the pilot, who had not caught the mate's words.

"Nothing—I—er—I thought I used to know his father—but—but it must be another man."

The mate was clearly very much excited over something.

"Now look here!" exclaimed Mr. Weatherby sternly. "Nat is not to blame for coming here. I got him the place, and I'll look out for him, too. If you try any of your tricks I'll take a hand in the game myself. Now, I've given you your course, and I want you to keep on it. If you run afoul of me you'll be sorry for it."

The mate turned aside, muttering to himself, but the pilot thought it was because he had made a mistake about the boxes.

"Look out for him, Nat," said Mr. Weatherby, a little later, after the pilot had reported to the captain the result of the search for the missing boxes. "He seems to have some grudge against you, and he'll do you an injury if he can."

"I believe that," replied Nat, "though I can't see why he should. I never injured him, and it was not my fault that I got the place he wanted for his nephew."

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"No, of course not. But keep your weather eye open."

"I will."

Captain Marshall showed no very great pleasure at finding that Nat was in the right. The truth was he feared the mate would be chagrined over the mistake he himself had made, and Captain Marshall was the least bit afraid of Mr. Bumstead, for the commander knew the mate was aware of certain shortcomings in regard to the management of the vessel, and he feared his chief officer might disclose them.

"You want to be careful of your lists," the commander said to Nat. "You were right this time, but next time you might be wrong."

Nat's pleasure at finding he had not made a mistake was a little dampened by the cool way in which the captain took it, but Mr. Weatherby told him not to mind, but to do his work as well as he could, and he would get along all right.

For two or three days after that the voyage proceeded quietly. On the third day the ship stopped at a small city, where part of the cargo was discharged. Nat and the purser were kept busy checking off, and verifying cargo lists, and, when the *Jessie Drew* was ready to proceed, Nat took to the mate a duplicate list of what cargo had been discharged.

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"Sure this is right?" asked Mr. Bumstead surlily.

"Yes, sir," replied Nat, more pleasantly than he felt.

"Don't be too sure, young man. I'll catch you in a mistake yet, and when I do—well, look out—that's all."

He tossed the list on his desk, and, as he did so, some papers slipped to the floor of his office. He

stooped to pick them up, and something dropped from his pocket.

It was a flat leather book, such as is used by some men in which to carry their money or papers. Nat idly glanced at it as the mate restored it to his pocket. Then the boy caught sight of something that made his heart beat quickly.

For printed in gold letters on the outside of the wallet was a name, and the name was that of his dead father, James Morton!

"That pocketbook! Where did you get it?" he eagerly asked of the mate.

"Pocketbook? What pocketbook?"

"The one that dropped from your pocket just now."

"That? Why, that's mine. I've had it a good while."

"But it has my father's name on it! I saw it. It is just like one he used to carry. He always had it with him. Let me see it. Perhaps it has some of his papers in it!"

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Nat was excited. He reached out his hand, as if to take the wallet.

"You must be dreaming," exclaimed the mate, and Nat noticed that his hands trembled. "That is my pocketbook. It has no name on it."

"But I saw it," insisted Nat.

"I tell you it hasn't! Are you always going to dispute with me? Now get out of here, I want to do my work," and the mate fairly thrust Nat out of the room, and locked the door.

"I'm sure that was my father's pocketbook," murmured the boy, as he walked slowly along the deck. "How did the mate get it? I wonder if he knew my father? There is something queer about this. I must tell Mr. Weatherby."

Nat would have thought there was something exceedingly queer about it, if he could have seen what the mate was doing just then. For Mr. Bumstead had taken the wallet from his pocket, and, with his knife, he was carefully scraping away the gold letters that spelled the name of James Morton—Nat's father.

CHAPTER VII

NAT HAS AN ACCIDENT

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Nat vainly tried to recall some of the circumstances connected with his father's death, that would give him a clue to the reason why the mate had Mr. Morton's pocketbook. But the trouble was Nat could remember very little. The sad news had stunned him so that he was in a sort of dream for a long time afterward.

The body had been recovered, after several days, but there was nothing in the pockets of the clothes, as far as Nat knew, to indicate that Mr. Morton had left any money, or anything that represented it. Yet Nat knew his father was a careful and saving man, who had good abilities for business.

"If I wasn't sure it was his pocketbook, I would say that there might be plenty of such wallets, with the name James Morton on them," thought Nat. "The name is not an uncommon one, but I can't be mistaken in thinking that was poor dad's wallet. How the mate got it is a mystery, unless he took it from my father. Or, perhaps dad gave it to him, yet I don't believe he would do that either, for he once told me the wallet was a present from mother, and I know he would not part with it. I must consult with Mr. Weatherby."

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Nat did not get a chance to speak to the pilot about the matter until the next day. Mr. Weatherby looked grave when he heard our hero's story.

"Are you sure you weren't mistaken?" he asked.

"Positive," was Nat's answer. "I knew that wallet too well."

"Then I'll make some inquiries. Suppose you come with me."

Nat and the pilot found the mate in his office, looking over some papers.

"Nat thinks you have something that belonged to his father," said Mr. Weatherby, pleasantly.

"He does, eh?" snapped the mate. "Well, he's mistaken, that's all I've got to say. Now I wish you'd get out of here. I'm busy."

"But it won't do any harm to make some inquiries," went on the pilot. "Do you mind showing me the pocketbook?"

"There it is!" said Mr. Bumstead suddenly, pulling the wallet in question from his pocket. "He said it had his father's name on? Well, it hasn't, you can see for yourself," and he quickly turned

the pocketbook from side to side, to show that there were no letters on it. Then, without giving Mr. Weatherby a chance to look at it closely, he thrust it back into his pocket.

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"Are you satisfied?" he demanded. Nat hesitated.

"I—I suppose so," answered the pilot. "There is no name on that. Nat must have been mistaken."

"I told him he was dreaming," answered the mate, with a leer. "Now don't bother me again."

"Are you sure you saw the name on that pocketbook?" asked Mr. Weatherby of Nat when they were out on the main deck.

"Positive."

"Perhaps it was some other wallet."

"No, it's the same one. I can tell because there's a dark spot on one corner, where it got some oil on once, dad told me."

"But his name is not on it," remarked the pilot. "I had a good enough look at it to determine that."

"I can't account for it," went on Nat, more puzzled than ever. He knew he had seen the name, yet now, when he had another sight of the wallet, it had disappeared. And no wonder, for the mate had done his work well, and had so smoothed down the leather, where he had scraped off the letters, that it needed a close inspection to disclose it. This close inspection Mr. Bumstead was determined neither Nat nor the pilot should make.

Though he said nothing to Nat about it, Mr. Weatherby had some suspicions concerning the mate. For a long time he had distrusted the man, but this was because of certain things that had occurred aboard the *Jessie Drew*. Now there was something else. Mr. Weatherby questioned Nat closely as to the incidents connected with Mr. Morton's death. When he had learned all he could he remained a few moments in deep thought. Then he said:

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"Well, Nat, don't think any more about it. It is very possible you were mistaken about the pocketbook. That form of wallet is not uncommon, and of course there are lots of men with the same name your father had. Why the mate should have a pocketbook, with some other name on it than his own, I can't explain. But we'll let matters lie quietly for a while. If you see or hear anything more out of the ordinary, let me know."

"I will," promised Nat; and then he had to go to do some work in the captain's office.

"I think you will bear watching, Mr. Bumstead," murmured the pilot, as he went back to take the wheel. "I don't like your ways, and I'm going to keep my eye on you."

On his part the mate, after the visit of Nat and Mr. Weatherby, was in a somewhat anxious mood.

"I wish that boy had never come aboard," he mused. "I might have known he would make trouble. I must be more careful. If I had only been a few hours sooner my nephew would have had the place, and I would not have to worry. Never mind. I may be able to get him here yet, but I must first get Nat out of the way. He is too suspicious, and that sneaking pilot is helping him. Still, they know nothing of the case, nor how I got the wallet, and I'll not give it up without a fight. I must hide that pocketbook, though. Lucky I got the name off, or I'd be in a pretty pickle. If I had known he was Jim Morton's son I would almost have given up my place, rather than be on the same boat with him. But it's too late now."

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He placed the wallet in a secret drawer in his safe, and then went on with his work, but it seemed that his attention was distracted, and several times he found himself staring out of his cabin window at nothing at all.

Nat tried to follow the pilot's advice, and give no more thought to the memento of his father which he had so unexpectedly discovered, but it was hard work.

For the next few days he was kept very busy. Captain Marshall found plenty of tasks for him, and, with running errands for the commander and the two mates, attending to what the purser had for him to do, and rendering occasional services for the pilot, the lad found himself continually occupied.

He was learning more about ships than he ever knew before, and on one or two occasions Mr. Weatherby took him into the pilot-house, and gave him preliminary instructions in the exacting calling of steering big vessels.

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The freighter had stopped at several ports, taking on cargo at some, and discharging it at others. All this made work for Nat, but he liked it, for he was earning more than he had ever received before.

"Nat," said Mr. Dunn, one day, "I wish you would go down into the forward hold, and check over those bales we took on at the last port. We've got to deliver them at the next stop, and I want to be sure the shipping marks on them correspond to the marks on my list. I had to put them down in a hurry."

"All right," answered the boy. "Here are the manifest slips all written up, Mr. Dunn," and he handed the purser some blanks, filled in with figures.

"That's good. You are doing very well, Nat. Keep at it and you'll get a better job soon."

Taking a lantern Nat went down into the forward hold, to examine some bales of goods, in accordance with the purser's instructions. The bales were heavy ones, but they had been stowed away in such a manner that the shipping marks were in sight.

As Nat left the purser's office a man, who had been standing near a window that opened into it, moved away. The man was the mate, Mr. Bumstead, and as he saw Nat disappear below the deck he muttered:

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"I think this is just the chance I want. We'll see how that whipper-snapper will like his job after to-day."

While Nat was checking off the bales, finding only one or two slight errors in the list the purser had given him, he heard a noise forward in the dark hold.

"Who's there?" he asked, for it was against the rules for any one to enter the cargo hold, unless authorized by the captain, mate or purser.

No answer was returned, and Nat was beginning to think the noise was made by rats, for there were very large ones in the ship. Then he heard a sound he knew could not have been made by a rodent. It was the sound of some one breathing heavily.

"Is any one here?" asked Nat. "I shall report this to the purser if you don't answer," he threatened.

Still no reply came to him.

"Perhaps it is one of the sailors who has crawled in here to get a sleep," Nat thought. "Maybe I'd better not say anything, for he might be punished."

He listened, but the sound, whatever it was, did not come again. The hold was quiet, save for the slight shifting of the cargo, as the vessel rocked to and fro under the action of the waves.

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"There, all done but one bale," said Nat, half aloud, "and that one is turned wrong so I can't see the marks. Never mind, it's a top one, and I can easily shift it, as it's small."

He climbed up on a tier of the cargo, first setting his lantern down in a safe place, and then he proceeded to move the bale around.

Hardly had he touched it when the big package seemed to tumble outward toward him. He felt himself falling backward, and vainly threw out his hands to grasp some support. Farther and farther the bale toppled outward, until it struck against Nat, and knocked him from his feet.

He fell to the floor of the hold, in a little aisle between two tiers of freight, and the bale was on top of him.



"He fell to the floor of the hold"

He heard a crash of glass, and knew that the lantern had been tipped over and broken. Then everything was dark, and he heard a strange ringing in his ears. Nat had been knocked unconscious alone down in the big hold, but, worse than this, a tiny tongue of fire, from the exposed lantern wick, was playing on the bales of inflammable stuff.

CHAPTER VIII IN THE PILOT-HOUSE

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About half an hour after Mr. Dunn had sent Nat into the hold the purser began to wonder what kept the boy. He knew his task should not have taken him more than ten minutes, for Nat was prompt with whatever he had to do.

"I hope he isn't going to do the way one boy did I used to have," said the purser to himself, "go down there and sleep. I think I'll take a look. Maybe he can't find those bales, though they were in plain sight."

As he started toward the hatchway, down which Nat had gone, he met Captain Marshall, who, as was his custom, was taking a stroll about the ship, to see that everything was all right. He never trusted entirely to his officers.

When he saw the purser, Mr. Marshall came to a sudden stop, and began to sniff the air suspiciously.

"Don't you smell smoke, Mr. Dunn?" he asked.

The purser took several deep breaths.

"I certainly do," he replied, "and it seems to come from this hatch. I sent Nat down there a while ago, to check off some bales." [Pg 60]

"I hope he isn't smoking cigarettes down there," said the captain quickly. "If he is, I'll discharge him instantly."

"Nat doesn't smoke," replied Mr. Dunn. "But it's queer why he stays down there so long. I'm going to take a look."

"I'll go with you," decided the captain.

No sooner had they started to descend the hatchway than they both were made aware that the smell of smoke came from the hold, and that it was growing stronger.

"Fire! There's a fire in the cargo!" exclaimed Captain Marshall. "Sound the alarm, Mr. Dunn, while I go below and make an investigation. If it's been caused by that boy——"

He did not finish, but hurried down into the hold, while Mr. Dunn sounded the alarm that called the crew to fire quarters.

Meanwhile, Nat had been lying unconscious under the bale for about ten minutes. The flame from the lantern, which, fortunately, had not exploded, was eating away at the side of the bale which was on top of him. Luckily the stuff in the bale was slow burning, and it smoldered a long time before breaking into a flame, in spite of the fact that the lantern was right against it. Considerable smoke was caused, however, though most of it was carried forward. Still, enough came up the hatchway to alarm the captain and purser. [Pg 61]

It would have been very dark in the hold, but for the fact that now a tiny fire had burst out from the bale. By the gleam of this Captain Marshall saw what had happened. A bale had toppled from its place and smashed the lantern. But as yet he had no intimation that Nat was prostrate under the bale.

Meanwhile the smoke was growing thicker, and it was getting into Nat's nostrils. He was breathing lightly in his unconscious state, but the smoke made it harder to get his breath, and nature, working automatically, did the very best thing under the circumstances. Nat sneezed and coughed so violently, in an unconscious effort to get air, that his senses came back.

He could move only slightly, pinned down as he was, but he could smell the smoke, and he could see the flicker of fire.

"Help! Help!" he cried. "Fire in the hold! Help! Help!"

That was the first knowledge Captain Marshall had of the whereabouts of the boy. It startled him.

"Where are you, Nat?" he cried.

"Under this bale! I'm held down, and the fire is coming closer to me!"

Captain Marshall did not stop to ask any more questions. He sprang down beside the bale, and, exerting all his strength, for he was a powerful man, he lifted it sufficiently so that Nat could crawl out. The boy had only been stunned by a blow on the head. [Pg 62]

But, during this time, Mr. Dunn had not been idle. With the first sounding of the fire alarm, every member of the crew sprang to his appointed station, and, down in the engine-room, the engineers set in operation the powerful pumps, while other men unreeled the lines of hose, running them toward the hold, as directed by the purser.

So, in less than a minute from the time of sounding the alarm, there was a stream of water being directed into the lower part of the ship where the fire was.

"Come on out of here!" cried the captain to Nat, as he helped the boy up, and let the bale fall back into place. "This is getting pretty warm. I wonder what's the matter with the water?"

Hardly had he spoken than a stream came spurting into the hold, drenching them both. It also drenched the fire, and, in a few minutes, the last vestige of the blaze was out.

"Good work, men!" complimented Captain Marshall, when he had assured himself there was no more danger. "You did well. I'm proud of you."

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Nat, who had been taken in charge by the purser, when it was found there was no danger of the fire spreading, was examined by that official. Nothing was found the matter with him, beyond a sore spot on his head where the bale had hit him.

"How in the world did it happen?" asked Mr. Dunn, as the crew began reeling up the hose, and returning to their various duties. Nat told him about hearing the noise, and the bale falling.

"Do you think it fell, or did some one shove it?" asked the purser.

"I don't know. It seemed as if some one pushed it, but who could it be? What object would any one have in trying to hurt me?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. You must report this to Captain Marshall," said the purser. "He'll want to know all about it."

There was no need of going to the captain's cabin, however, for he came to find Nat, as soon as the excitement caused by the fire had subsided.

"Now tell me all about it," he said. "Every bit. Were you smoking down there?"

"No, sir," replied Nat indignantly.

He related all that had taken place, and the captain had every member of the crew questioned, as to whether or not they had been in the hold at the time. They all denied it.

"Maybe it was because the bale wasn't stowed away level," suggested Mr. Bumstead, with a queer look at Nat, as our hero, together with the purser and the pilot were in Captain Marshall's cabin, discussing the occurrence.

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"That's possible," admitted Mr. Dunn. "But what made the noise?"

"Rats, probably," replied the mate. "There are some whoppers down in that hold."

"Would you say they were large enough to topple over that bale?" asked the pilot suddenly.

"No—no—I don't know as I would," answered the mate. "Of course not. More likely the lurch of the vessel did it."

"Well, it was lucky it was no worse," spoke the captain. "If that lantern had exploded, and the blazing oil had been scattered about, there would have been a different ending to this. Nat would probably be dead, and the ship a wreck. After this no lanterns are to be carried into the hold. Have some electric lights rigged up on long wires, so they can be taken in," he added to the mate, who promised to see that it was done.

"Hum," remarked Mr. Weatherby, as he and Nat walked toward the pilot-house. "You can't make me believe a lurch of the ship loosened that bale so it fell. Bumstead doesn't stow his cargo in such a careless fashion. He's too good a sailor."

"What do you think then?" asked Nat.

"I think some one pushed that bale down."

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"Do you think the person wanted to hurt me?"

"I can't say as to that. It may have been done by accident, by a sailor asleep in the hold. Certainly no rat did it," and the pilot smiled. But he was more worried than he would admit to Nat.

"I am glad I got out."

"I don't suppose you feel much like taking a lesson in navigation?"

"Oh, I'm always ready for that," was the answer. "I'm all right now. My head has stopped aching."

"Then come into the pilot-house with me, and I will explain a few more things to you. I think you have a natural talent for this sort of life, and I like to show to boys, who appreciate it, the different things there are to learn. For there are a good many of them, and it's going to take you a long time."

Nat had no false notions about learning to be a pilot. He knew it would take him several years to be a capable one, but he determined to get a good ground work or the higher branches of it, and so he listened carefully to all that Mr. Weatherby told him.

He learned how to read the compass and how to give the proper signals to the engineer.

For a number of days he spent several hours out of the twenty-four in the pilot-house with Mr. Weatherby. He got an understanding of the charts of the lake, of the various signals used by

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other ships, to indicate the course they were on, and he learned to know the meaning of the shore signal lights, and the location of the lighthouses that marked the dangerous rocks and shoals.

"You're doing very well," Mr. Weatherby said to him one day. "Much better than I expected. Some time I'll let you try your hand at steering a bit."

"Oh, that will be fine!" exclaimed Nat, but he little knew what was going to result from it.

CHAPTER IX A NARROW ESCAPE

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Though he was much interested in beginning on his long-cherished plan of becoming a pilot, Nat did not lose sight of the fact that there was some mystery concerning his father, in which the mate had a part. He had not given up his belief that Mr. Bumstead had Mr. Morton's wallet, in spite of the mate's denials. But Nat saw no way by which he could get at the bottom of the matter.

"I guess I'll just have to wait until chance puts something in my way," he said to himself. "At the same time I've got to be on the watch against him. I believe he, or some one of his cronies, pushed that bale on me. I don't suppose it would have killed me if it had fallen flat on me, instead of only partly, but it looks as if he wanted to drive me off of this ship. But I'll not go! I'll stay and see what comes of it."

The freighter was on quite a long voyage this trip. After calling at the last port on Lake Michigan it was to go through the Straits of Mackinaw into Lake Huron. There, Mr. Weatherby told Nat, it would not be such easy navigation, as there were many islands, for which a pilot had to watch, day and night. Some were not indicated by lights, and only a knowledge of the lake would enable the steersman to guide a ship away from them, after dark, or during a fog.

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"Do you think I'll ever be able to do it?" asked the boy.

"Some time, but I shouldn't attempt it right away," replied the pilot with a smile.

Remembering the promise he had made to Nat, the pilot one day called the boy into the little house where the wheel was, and said:

"Now, Nat, I'm going to give you a chance to appreciate what it means to steer a big vessel. I'll tell you just what to do, and I think you can do it. We have a clear course ahead of us, the lake is calm, and I guess you can handle the wheel all right. You know about the compass, so I don't have to tell you. Now take your place here, and grasp the spokes of the wheel lightly but firmly. Stand with your feet well apart, and brace yourself, for sometimes there will come a big wave that may shift the rudder and throw you off your balance."

The pilot-house of the *Jessie Drew* was like the pilot-houses on most other steamers. The front was mainly windows, and the center space was taken up with a big wheel, which served to shift the rudder from side to side. So large was the wheel, in order to provide sufficient leverage, that part of it was down in a sort of pit, while the steersman stood on a platform, which brought his head about on a level with the top spokes. On some of the lake steamers there was steam steering gear, and of course a much smaller wheel was used, as it merely served as a throttle to a steam-engine, which did all the hard work.

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Nat was delighted with his chance. With shining eyes he grasped the spokes, and gently revolved the wheel a short distance.

"That'll do," spoke Mr. Weatherby. "She's shifted enough."

Nat noticed that, as he turned the wheel, the vessel changed her course slightly, so readily did she answer the helm. It was a wonderful thing, he thought, that he, a mere lad, could, by a slight motion of his hands, cause a mighty ship to move about as he pleased.

"It's easier than I thought it was," he remarked to his friend the pilot.

"You think so now," answered Mr. Weatherby, "but wait until you have to handle a boat in a storm. Then the waves bang the rudder about so that the wheel whirls around, and almost lifts you off your feet. More than once it's gotten away from me, though, when there's a bad storm, I have some one to help me put her over and hold her steady. I like steam steering gear best, for it's so easy, but it's likely to get out of order at a critical moment, and, before you can rig up the hand gear, the boat has gone on the rocks."

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"I hope we don't get wrecked on the rocks," said Nat, as, following the directions he had received, he shifted the wheel slightly to keep the vessel on her proper course.

"Well, we'll be approaching a dangerous passage in a few hours," replied the pilot. "There are a number of rocks in it, but I think I'll be able to get clear of 'em. I always have, but this time we'll arrive there after dark, and I like daylight best when I have to go through there."

"Do you want to take the wheel now?" asked the boy, as he saw that Mr. Weatherby was peering anxiously ahead.

"No, you may keep it a while longer. I just wanted to get sight of a spar buoy about here. There it is. When you come up this route you want to get the red and black buoy in line with that point, and then go to starboard two points, so."

As he spoke Mr. Weatherby helped Nat put the wheel over. The big freighter began slowly to turn, and soon was moving around a point of land that jutted far out into the lake.

Nat remained in the pilot-house more than an hour, and, in that time, he learned many valuable points. At the suggestion of his friend he jotted them down in a note-book, so he might go over them again at his leisure, and fix them firmly in his mind. [Pg 71]

As the afternoon wore on, and dusk approached, a fog began to settle over the lake. Nat, who had been engaged with the work in the purser's office, had occasion to take a message to the pilot, and he found his friend anxiously looking out of the big windows in front of the pilot-house, while Andrew Simmon, the assistant, was handling the big wheel.

"I don't like it, Andy; I don't like it a bit," Mr. Weatherby was saying. "It's going to be a nasty, thick night, and just as we're beginning that risky passage. I've almost a notion to ask the captain to lay-to until morning. There's good holding ground here."

"Oh, I guess we can make it," replied Andrew confidently. "We've done it before, in a fog."

"Yes, I know we have, but I always have a feeling of dread. Somehow, now, I feel unusually nervous about it."

"You aren't losing your nerve, are you?" the young helper asked his chief.

"No—but—well, I don't like it, that's all."

"Shall I ask the captain to anchor?"

"No, he's anxious to keep on. We'll try it, Andy, but we'll both stay in the pilot-house until we're well past the dangerous point, that one where the rocks stick out." [Pg 72]

"But there's a lighthouse there, Mr. Weatherby."

"I know there is, but if this fog keeps on getting thicker, the light will do us very little good."

Nat listened anxiously to the conversation. This was a part of the responsibilities of piloting that had not occurred to him. More than on a captain, the safety of a vessel rests on a pilot, when one is in charge. And it is no small matter to feel that one can, by a slight shift of his hand, send a gallant craft to her destruction, or guide her to safety.

As night came on the fog grew thicker. Mr. Weatherby and his helper did not leave the pilot-house, but had their meals sent to them. Captain Marshall was in frequent consultation with them, and the speed of the vessel was cut down almost one-half as they approached the danger point.

From Mr. Dunn, Nat learned when they were in the unsafe passage, for the purser had been over that route many times.

"We must be close to the point now," said Mr. Dunn, as he and Nat stood at the rail, trying to peer through the fog. "We'll see the lighthouse soon. Yes, there it is," and he pointed to where a light dimly flashed, amid the white curtain of dampness that wrapped the freighter. [Pg 73]

They could hear the lookout, stationed in the bow, call the position of the light. The course was shifted, the great boat turning slowly.

Suddenly there was a frightened cry from the lookout.

"Rocks! Rocks ahead!" he yelled. "Port! Port your helm or we'll be upon 'em in another minute!"

The ship quivered as the great rudder was shifted to swing her about. Down in the engine-room there was a crash of gongs as the pilot gave the signals to stop and reverse.

Would the ship be turned in time? Could her headway be checked? Had the lookout cried his warning quickly enough?

These questions were in every anxious heart aboard the *Jessie Drew*. A shudder seemed to run through the ship. Nat peered ahead, and held his breath, as if that would lighten the weight that was rushing upon the dangerous rocks.

But skill and prompt action told. Slowly the freighter swept to one side, and as at slackened speed she glided past the danger point, Nat and Mr. Dunn, from their position near the rail, could have tossed a biscuit on the rocks, so narrow was the space that separated the ship from them.

SAM SHAW APPEARS

The vessel had not come to a stop, before orders were hurriedly given to let go the anchor. The narrow escape had decided Captain Marshall that it would not be safe to proceed, and, as there was good holding ground not far from the rocks, he determined to lay-to until the fog lifted.

From the pilot-house came the captain, Mr. Weatherby, and Andy Simmon. The pilot was very much excited.

"Those were false lights, or else something is out of order with the machinery," he exclaimed. "The light on the point flashes once every five seconds. The next light, beyond the point, flashes once every fifteen seconds. This light flashed once every fifteen seconds, for Andy and I both kept count."

"That's right," said the assistant.

"And I calculated by that," went on the pilot, "that we were beyond the point, for I couldn't see anything but the light, and I had to go by that. I was on the right course, if that light was the one beyond the point, but naturally on the wrong one if that was the point light." [Pg 75]

"And it was the point light," said the captain solemnly.

"It was, Mr. Marshall, and only for the lookout we would now be on the rocks."

"I can't blame you for the narrow escape we had," went on the commander. "Still——"

"Of course you can't blame me!" exclaimed the pilot, as though provoked that any such suspicion should rest on him. "I was steering right, according to the lights. There is something wrong with them. The lights were false. Whether they have been deliberately changed, or whether the machinery is at fault is something that will have to be found out. It isn't safe to proceed until morning."

"And that will delay me several hours," grumbled Mr. Marshall.

"I can't help that. I'll not take the responsibility of piloting the boat in this thick fog, when I can't depend on the lights."

"No, of course not," was the answer. "We'll have to remain here, that's all. Have the fog-horn sounded regularly, Mr. Bumstead," the captain added to the mate; and all through the night, at ten-second intervals, the great siren fog-whistle of the boat blew its melancholy blast. Nat found it impossible to sleep much with that noise over his head, but toward morning the fog lifted somewhat, and he got into a doze, for the whistle stopped. [Pg 76]

Mr. Weatherby went ashore in the morning to make inquiries regarding the false lights. He learned that the machinery in the point lighthouse had become deranged, so that the wrong signal was shown. It had been repaired as soon as possible, and was now all right. But as the fog was gone and it was daylight, the ship could proceed safely without depending on lighthouses. Nat was up early, and had a good view of the point and rocks that had so nearly caused the destruction of the *Jessie Drew*.

Three days later, having made a stop at Cheboygan to take on some freight, the big ship was on Lake Huron. This was farther than Nat had ever been before, and he was much interested in the sight of a new body of water, though at first it did not seem much different from Lake Michigan.

They steamed ahead, making only moderate speed, for the freighter was not a swift boat, and on the evening of the next day they ran into Thunder Bay and docked at Alpena.

"Plenty of work ahead for you and me," said Mr. Dunn to Nat that night.

"How's that?"

"Well, we've got to break out a large part of the cargo and take on almost as much again. We'll be busy checking up lists and making out way-bills. You want to be careful not to make a mistake, as that mate will have his eye on you. It's easy to see he doesn't like you." [Pg 77]

"And I don't like him," retorted Nat.

"I don't blame you. Still, do your best when he's around. I know you always do, though. Well, I'm going to get to bed early, as we'll have our hands full in the morning."

Nat also sought his bunk about nine o'clock, and it seemed he had hardly been asleep at all when six bells struck, and he had to get up.

That day was indeed a busy one, and Nat was glad when noon came and he could stop for dinner. He ate a hearty meal, and was taking a rest on deck, for the 'longshoremen and freight handlers would not resume their labors until one o'clock, when he saw coming up the gangplank a boy about his own age. The lad had red hair and rather an unpleasant face, with a bold, hard look about the eyes.

"Hey, kid!" the youth exclaimed on catching sight of Nat, "tell me where Mr. Bumstead hangs out. I want to see him quick. Understand?"

"I understand you well enough," replied Nat, who resented the unpleasant way in which the question was put. "You speak loud enough. I know what you mean. Mr. Bumstead is at dinner, and I don't believe he'd like to be disturbed."

"Oh, that's all right. He'll see me. He expects me. Now you show me where he is, or I'll report you."

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"You will, eh?" asked Nat. "Well, I'm not in the habit of showing strangers about the ship. It's against orders. You can't go below until you get permission from the captain, mate or second mate."

"I can't, eh? Guess you don't know who I am," replied the red-haired youth with an ugly leer.

"No, and I don't care," retorted Nat, for his life about the docks had made him rather fearless.

"Well, I'll make you care—you'll see! Now, are you going to show me where I can find Mr. Bumstead? If you don't I'll make trouble for you."

"Look here!" exclaimed Nat, striding over to the stranger. "Don't talk to me like that. I'm not afraid of you, whoever you are. I'll not show you to Mr. Bumstead's cabin, as it is against the rules. You can't go below, either, unless the second mate, who's in charge of the deck now, says you can. He's over there, and you can ask him if you want to. Now, don't you say anything more to me or I'll punch your face!"

Nat was no milksop. He had often fought with the lads on the dock on less provocation than this, and, for the time being, he forgot he was on a ship.

"What's the row?" asked the second mate, who, hearing the sound of high voices, approached to see what the trouble was.

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"Oh, here's a fresh fellow who wants to see Mr. Bumstead," replied Nat.

"He can't until after grub hour," said the second mate shortly. "What's your business, young man? Tell it, or go ashore."

"I want to see Mr. Bumstead," replied the red-haired lad more humbly than he had yet spoken, for the second mate was a stalwart man.

"What for?"

"Well, he expects me."

"Who are you?"

"I'm his nephew, Sam Shaw, and I'm going to make the rest of the trip with him. He invited me, and I'm going to be a passenger."

"Oh, so you're his nephew, eh?" asked the second mate.

"That's what I am, and when I tell him how that fellow treated me he'll make it hot for him," boasted Sam Shaw. "Now will you show me where Mr. Bumstead's cabin is?" he asked of Nat insolently.

"No," replied our hero. "You can ask one of the stewards. I'll have nothing to do with you," for Sam's threat to tell his uncle had roused all the spirit that Nat possessed.

"There's your uncle now," said the second mate as Mr. Bumstead came up the companionway.

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"Hello, Uncle Joe!" called Sam; and as he went forward to meet his relative Nat went below. In spite of his bold words he was not a little worried lest Sam Shaw had come to supplant him in his position aboard the freighter.

CHAPTER XI

[Pg 81]

CAPTAIN MARSHALL IS ANGRY

News circulates quickly on a ship, and it was not long ere Nat heard from some of the crew that the mate's nephew had come aboard to finish out the voyage with his uncle. Sam Shaw was installed in a small stateroom near the mate's, and when the *Jessie Drew* resumed her way that afternoon the red-haired youth stood about with a supercilious air, watching Nat and the others at work.

"Is that all you've got to do?" asked Mr. Dunn, the purser, of Sam, as he saw the youth standing idly at the rail, when every one else was busy.

"Sure," replied Sam, pulling out a cigarette and lighting it. "I'm a passenger, I am. I'm making this voyage for my health. Maybe after a while I'll be an assistant to you."

"Not if I know it," murmured Mr. Dunn. "I like Nat, and I hope I can keep him. He's doing good work."

He passed on, for he had considerable to do on account of taking on a new cargo, while Nat, too, was kept busy.

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"This just suits me," said Sam Shaw to himself as he leaned over the rail and looked down into the blue waters of the lake. "I'm glad Uncle Joe sent for me to join him. He said in his letter there might be a chance for me, after all, to get a place in the purser's office. I thought by that he must mean that Nat Morton was out, but he isn't. However, I'll leave it to Uncle Joe. He generally manages to get his own way. I guess I'll take that fellow Nat down a few pegs before I get through with him."

Sam had received a letter at his home in Chicago from his uncle, the mate, telling him to meet the *Jessie Drew* at Alpena. Sam had done so, as we have seen, and was now established aboard the vessel. But he was a little puzzled as to his uncle's plans.

Mr. Bumstead had said nothing further about providing a place for his nephew where the lad might earn money, and this was what Sam wanted more than anything else. He wanted an opening where there was not much work, and he thought Nat's position just about filled the bill. He did not know how hard our hero labored.

"Wait until I get in the purser's office," he mused as he puffed at his cigarette. "I'll soon learn all there is to know, and then I'll have my uncle see the captain and have me made purser. I don't like Mr. Dunn. When I get his job I'll take things easy, and have a couple of assistants to do the work. Maybe I'll let Nat be second assistant," he went on. "Won't I make him stand around, though!"

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These thoughts were very pleasant to Sam Shaw. At heart he was a mean youth, and he was lazy and inefficient, faults to which his uncle was, unfortunately, blind. Mr. Bumstead thought Sam was a very fine boy.

In one of his trips about the deck, attending to his duties, Nat had to pass close to Sam. He saw the red-haired lad smoking a cigarette, and, knowing it was against the rules of the ship to smoke in that part of it where Sam was, he said:

"You'd better throw that overboard before the captain sees you."

"Throw what overboard?" asked Sam in surly tones.

"That cigarette. It's against the rules to smoke 'em here."

"What do I care?" retorted Sam. "My uncle is the mate."

"That won't make any difference if Captain Marshall sees you."

"I'm not afraid of him. My uncle owns part of the ship. He could be captain if he wanted to. I'll smoke wherever I please. Have one yourself?" he added in a burst of generosity, for since he had had his idea of becoming purser and having Nat for an assistant, Sam felt in a little more tolerant mood toward our hero.

[Pg 84]

"No, thanks, I don't smoke."

"Afraid of being sick, I s'pose."

"No, it isn't that."

"Afraid the captain will see you and punish you, then?"

"Well, that's part of it. I used to smoke when I was about the docks, but I found it didn't agree with me, so I gave it up. I like a cigarette, but I believe they're bad for one's health. Besides, if I did smoke, I wouldn't do it here. It's against the rules, I tell you, and you'd better stop."

"Well, I'm not going to, and you can go and tell Captain Marshall if you want to."

"I don't do things like that," replied Nat quietly, though he felt like punching Sam for his sneering tone. "But I'm advising you for your own good."

He turned away, and as he did so his coat, with an outside pocket showing conveniently open, was close to Sam's hand. Then a daring and mean scheme came into the mind of the red-haired youth.

"If I get into trouble, I'll make trouble for him, too," he thought, and with a quick motion he dropped into Nat's pocket a partly-filled box of cigarettes. "If he squeals on me I'll have something to tell on him," he continued.

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Hardly had he done this than he was startled by an angry voice exclaiming:

"Throw that cigarette overboard! How dare you smoke on this deck? Don't you know it's against the rules? Go below at once and I'll attend to your case!"

Sam started guiltily, and turned to behold Captain Marshall glaring at him and at the lighted cigarette which the youth still held between his fingers. Nat, who had passed on only a few steps, turned likewise. One look at the commander's face told him Captain Marshall was very angry indeed.

"I told you that you'd better stop," Nat whispered to Sam.

"Aw, dry up!" was the ungracious retort. "I guess I can look out for myself."

"Look here," went on the captain, striding up to Sam, "didn't you know it was against the rules to smoke up here? I don't like cigarettes in any part of the ship, least of all up on this deck. Didn't your uncle tell you about it?"

"No—no, sir," replied Sam, who, in spite of his bravado, was startled by the angry manner of the commander.

"And didn't any one tell you that it was forbidden here? Didn't you tell him?" he asked, turning to Nat. "You've been here long enough to know that rule." [Pg 86]

"I did know it, sir," replied Nat respectfully, "and I told——"

"He didn't tell me!" burst out Sam quickly. "He didn't say anything about it. In fact, Captain Marshall, he asked me to smoke here. He gave me the cigarette!"

"What!" exclaimed Nat, astonished beyond measure. "I never——"

"Yes, you did!" went on Sam quickly. "You gave me a cigarette out of a box you had in your pocket, I—I thought it was all right to smoke when he gave it to me."

"Is this true?" demanded the captain sternly.

"No, sir!" exclaimed Nat. "I haven't any cigarettes, and if I had I wouldn't give him any. I haven't smoked in over a year."

"He says you have a box in your pocket now," continued Captain Marshall, remembering his suspicions about the fire in the hold.

"He's telling an untruth," replied Nat quietly. "I don't carry cigarettes about with me. You can ——"

"Then what's this?" asked the commander suddenly, as he stepped toward Nat, and plunging his hand in the lad's pocket he pulled out the box of cigarettes. The captain had seen a suspicious-looking bulge, and had acted on what he considered his rights as a commander of a vessel in searching one of his crew. [Pg 87]

"Why—why——" stammered Nat. "I didn't know——"

"That's the box my cigarette came out of," said Sam, truthfully enough.

"It isn't mine!" exclaimed Nat.

"Then what's it doing in your pocket?" inquired Captain Marshall.

"I don't know, unless Sam put it there," said Nat firmly.

"That's a likely story! I don't believe you."

"I never put it there," declared Sam stoutly. Telling an untruth meant nothing to him.

"Then some one else, who wants to injure me, did it," declared Nat. "I never use cigarettes—I haven't for over a year."

"This will be looked into," said the captain. "One of you lads is telling an untruth, and I propose to find out who. When I do I shall take action. Meanwhile I'll hold these cigarettes as evidence. Don't let me catch either of you smoking again aboard this ship. As for you," he added, turning to Nat, "you've been idle long enough. Get on with your work."

CHAPTER XII

THE INVESTIGATION

[Pg 88]

Nat hardly knew what to make of the strange turn of events. It had happened so suddenly that he had no time to prepare himself. He was positive Sam had dropped the cigarettes into his pocket, but to prove it was another matter. He knew the mate would take the side of his nephew, while Nat had no one to stand up for him.

"Unless Mr. Weatherby does," he said to himself. "I guess I'll tell him about it."

"You leave it to me," said the pilot, when Nat had related his story. "I think we can easily prove that Sam Shaw is guilty. Don't worry. I'll stand by you."

Nat felt better after this, and went about his duties with a lighter heart. Nevertheless, he could not help being anxious when he received a message telling him to report to Captain Marshall's cabin.

"If you need any witnesses call on me," said the purser, as the boy went aft. "I saw Sam smoking before you joined him, and I'll testify to that effect." [Pg 89]

"Thank you," said Nat. "I may need you. He tried to play a mean trick on me."

In the cabin Nat found assembled Mr. Bumstead and Sam Shaw, besides the commander of the ship, who, looking very stern, sat in a big chair behind the table.

"I wonder where Mr. Weatherby is?" thought Nat. "He said he'd stand by me. I hope he comes."

"There's no need to state the reasons why we are here," began the captain. "I'm determined to get at the bottom of this smoking business, and put a stop to it. Does your nephew smoke?" he asked, turning to the mate.

"I—er—I think he used to, but he told me he had given it up, I think he has. Haven't you, Sam?"

"Yes, Uncle Joe; but when Nat offered me one a while ago, I took it before I thought of what I was doing. I forgot I had promised you I wouldn't smoke any more."

"I never gave him a cigarette!" burst out Nat.

"That will do!" exclaimed the captain. "You'll have your chance later."

He placed the box he had taken from Nat's pocket on the table in front of him.

"Did you ever see that box before?" he asked of the mate. "Did you ever see your nephew have it?"

[Pg 90]

"No, sir."

"Is that your box of cigarettes?" the captain asked Sam.

"No, sir; it belongs to Nat," which was the truth, as far as it went, since Sam had mentally made Nat a present of it.

"So it's yours, then?" turning to Nat.

"No, sir, it is not!"

"Who is telling the truth here?" asked the puzzled captain.

"I am!" declared Sam quickly.

"You are not!" cried Nat. "I never owned that box."

"I found it in your pocket," declared the commander.

"Because he put it there."

"I have already said I don't take any stock in that story. What object would he have in doing that?"

"I don't know, but he did it."

"I'm sure my nephew would not do such a thing," said the mate. "I know Nat smokes, for I have seen him smoking about the dock when we had occasion to tie up there."

"I used to," admitted our hero, "but I gave it up. If you will call Mr. Dunn," went on Nat desperately, "I think he could give some evidence."

"What kind?" asked the captain sneeringly. "Did you make up some for him?"

[Pg 91]

"No, sir, but he says he saw Sam smoking before I passed him there on the deck, and warned him it was against the rules."

"Hum! Well, I suppose I'll have to send for him," which the captain did.

Mr. Dunn told how he had seen Sam smoking before Nat had occasion to go to that part of the deck where the mate's nephew was.

"Are you sure of this?" asked the mate sternly, before Captain Marshall had a chance to question Mr. Dunn. "Remember you are blackening a boy's character by what you say."

Now, unfortunately for Nat, it so happened that Mr. Dunn had what is termed a very "short" memory. He could recall matters distinctly for only a short time after they occurred, unless he made a note of them. That he had not done in this case. The mate saw his advantage, as the purser hesitated, and he pursued it.

"Wasn't it *after* you sent Nat to that part of the deck that you saw Sam smoking?" he asked. "Wasn't it *after* that?"

Mr. Dunn tried to recollect. His faulty memory went back on him, he hesitated and stammered, he became confused, and the outcome was he had to admit that he might have seen Sam smoking after Nat had met him. The result was he did Nat's cause more harm than good.

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"Well, I hope you're satisfied with your witness," remarked the captain dryly. "I don't see that you've proved anything, whereas the box of cigarettes is very damaging evidence against you."

Nat questioned Mr. Dunn, seeking to have him recall exactly what had taken place, but the purser, much as he wanted to help his assistant, failed dismally.

"I am compelled to say I believe you gave Sam the cigarette," went on Captain Marshall, "and,

much as I regret it, for I think you are a hard-working lad, I shall have to discharge you. You broke a very strict rule of the ship, one on account of which we might, in case of fire, lose all our insurance. It is too flagrant to pass over."

"Then you believe him instead of me?" asked Nat faintly.

"I must say that I do."

"But I never had those cigarettes."

"The evidence is against you. What object would Sam have in putting them into your pocket? That is a question you cannot answer satisfactorily."

"I believe he wanted to injure me because I got this place that his uncle wanted for him."

"Nonsense! I have a better place in view for my nephew," said the mate. "He will take it as soon as this voyage for his health is ended." [Pg 93]

"As for traveling for his health, I wouldn't advise him to smoke any more cigarettes," remarked the captain dryly, "no matter who gives them to him."

"I'll not," promised Sam eagerly, congratulating himself on the success of his plot.

"No, I'll see that he does not," added his uncle.

Poor Nat did not know what to do or say. Mr. Dunn had slipped out of the cabin. The purser was sorry for what had happened, and most of all he regretted his inability to help Nat, for though he could not testify to it in a way to carry conviction, he was sure in his own mind of what had happened.

"Why doesn't Mr. Weatherby come?" thought Nat.

"You will be relieved of your duties in the purser's office," went on Captain Marshall. "Mr. Bumstead, will you, as a favor to me, allow your nephew to help Mr. Dunn for the remainder of the voyage?"

"Yes, sir. I think he will be glad to do it. Will you not, Sam?"

"Certainly," was the answer, and the red-haired youth did not try to conceal the satisfaction he felt.

"Then you may consider yourself discharged," said the commander to Nat. "I will put you ashore at the next port." [Pg 94]

"What's that?" exclaimed a voice, and those in the cabin looked up to see Mr. Weatherby standing in the doorway. "Nat discharged! What's it all about? I tried to get here sooner, but I had to make up some records, and they took longer than I calculated. Is the investigation all over, captain?"

"It is, and I am sorry to say I had to decide against Nat. I believe he had the cigarettes and gave Sam some to smoke in that part of the ship where they are forbidden. I don't know that he smoked himself, but he might as well have done so as to induce another."

"I don't believe Nat did anything of the kind," said the pilot.

"I'm sorry I can't agree with you," responded the commander. "I have relieved him from his duties and put Sam temporarily in his place. He leaves the ship at the next port."

"He does, eh?" said Mr. Weatherby. "Then all I've got to say is that if he goes, I go too!"

CHAPTER XIII MAKING A CHANGE

[Pg 95]

Such a startling announcement as the pilot made could not fail to surprise those in the cabin. Nat wondered whether his friend meant it, and as for Captain Marshall, he believed the pilot was not aware of what had taken place at the investigation.

"Do you mean that you will leave the ship without a pilot?" asked the commander.

"No; at least, not until we get to the next port, where you can hire one. In fact, after we get over this part of the trip you'll not need one, for the lake is well charted, and you can steer as well as I can. But I repeat, if Nat goes, I go too."

"But he broke one of the most stringent rules of the ship," retorted the captain, who did not at all like the idea of losing his pilot.

"I can't agree with you. I know something of this case, and I believe Nat is innocent of the charge."

"Do you mean to say that my nephew is guilty?" asked the mate.

"I don't know that I care to express an opinion," was Mr. Weatherby's answer. "From what I know [Pg 96]

of him I should say I think your nephew might be guilty. I know he smokes cigarettes."

"I used to," interrupted Sam, "but I've stopped."

"Your hands don't bear out that assertion," said the pilot quietly, as he pointed to the tell-tale yellow stains on Sam's fingers. "I am inclined to think you smoke pretty steadily yet."

The red-haired youth had no answer to make to this.

"Do you dare to accuse my nephew?" demanded Mr. Bumstead.

"I said I didn't care to accuse any one," replied Mr. Weatherby. "I only said I believe Nat innocent, and if he is discharged I leave also."

"I think you are taking an unfair advantage of me," said Captain Marshall. "You know I need your services for some time yet."

"Well, you know how to retain them."

"How?"

"By not unjustly discharging Nat."

"I don't think I was acting unjustly."

"I do."

The captain was plainly disturbed. He knew he could not well get along without the pilot, yet he did not like to have to give in to Nat's claim of innocence. To do Captain Marshall justice, though he was quick-tempered, he really believed Nat at fault, chiefly on account of Mr. Dunn's failure to give the proper testimony at the investigation. So with no very good humor he had to change his orders. [Pg 97]

"Very well," he said rather sourly. "I'll not discharge Nat, though I believe him guilty."

"That will not do," insisted Mr. Weatherby. "If you believe him guilty you must discharge him."

"But if I do, you'll go, and I will be without a pilot."

"That is true, but there is another alternative."

"What is it?"

"You can say that at least there is a chance Nat is not guilty. He should, I think, be given the benefit of the doubt."

"Very well. I'll admit that," replied the captain stiffly, for he did not like to be dictated to.

"I believe that is all, then," went on Mr. Weatherby. "I suppose Nat may go back to the purser's office?"

The captain nodded. He was in an exceedingly bad humor. He felt that his position as captain of the ship was at stake. He had incurred the enmity of the mate, who was a part owner, and he felt that Mr. Weatherby, who was a member of the company owning the vessel, had no very friendly feelings toward him. Still, there was nothing else the commander could do. [Pg 98]

"I'll get square with you yet," muttered Sam as Nat passed him on his way out of the captain's cabin. "I'll have your place, too, before a great while."

"Maybe you will—when I'm through with it," replied Nat, quite pleased with the way things had turned out, yet wishing he could completely vindicate himself. "But I tell you one thing, Sam Shaw, if you try any more of your tricks on me I'll give you the worst licking you ever had."

The boys were outside of the cabin now, and on the deck.

"You will, eh?"

"Yes, I will, and don't you forget it! You put those cigarettes in my pocket, and you know it."

"Oh, I did, eh? Then why didn't you prove it?" sneered Sam.

"I will, some day, and when I do—well, look out—that's all," and Nat turned away and went back to his work.

Though the incident seemed closed, there was not the best of feeling between Captain Marshall and the pilot. As for the mate, he was so angry at Mr. Weatherby that he would not speak to him.

The *Jessie Drew* continued on her voyage. Stops were made at several ports in Saginaw Bay, where cargo was either discharged or taken on. Sam kept himself out of Nat's way, but this was not difficult, for Nat found plenty to do, as, since he grasped matters rapidly, the purser turned more and more work over to him. [Pg 99]

Nat was glad of this, since he wanted to learn all he could, and he was rapidly advancing. Mr. Dunn complimented him on his aptitude for the work, and said it would not be long before he could qualify for the position of assistant purser.

"Then I suppose you'll be after my place," he said.

"No, indeed," answered Nat with a smile. "You've been too kind to me."

"I wish I could have done more for you at that investigation. It's too bad my memory is so faulty. I have to make a note of everything the minute it happens, or I'd forget it. I get so used to relying on books and memoranda in this position that I'm lost without them."

"Don't worry about it," said Nat. "It's all right. Some time I'll prove what a mean trick Sam played on me, and then I'll be satisfied."

Mr. Weatherby did not forget his promise to teach Nat all he could about piloting, and many a day the lad spent in learning the different points and studying the lake, its various headlands, lighthouses, buoys and other marks on which navigators have to depend.

"You're coming on well, Nat," said the old pilot one day. "It won't be long before you can qualify for an assistant pilot, and then it will be only a matter of a few years when you will be a full-fledged one."

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"I'll be glad when that time comes. I want to earn some money to pay back Mr. and Mrs. Miller for what they did for me."

"Yes, they were very kind to you, and they felt it more than a family would that had more money. Never forget your friends, Nat. By the way, have you seen or heard anything more about that pocketbook which the mate had?"

"No; I've watched him closely, but I haven't had a sight of it. Probably I was mistaken."

"I think not, yet he may have come by it honestly, even if it was your father's. Sailors often make each other gifts, or your father may have sold it to Mr. Bumstead."

"I don't believe he'd do that. He thought too much of it. But if the mate came by it honestly, I don't see why he acted so queerly. I can't help thinking there is some mystery about it. In fact, father's death was so sudden that little was known concerning it."

"I have a plan in mind, which I am going to put into operation as soon as possible," said the pilot. "It may result in some information."

"What is it?"

"I know a man who was on the lumber barge on which your father was. I am going to write to him, and have him tell me all the circumstances connected with your parent's death."

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"I wish you would. It would relieve my mind to know all the facts."

"That is what I thought. I will write in a few days, but now I have another matter I want to speak to you about."

The pilot's manner was serious, and Nat wondered what his friend was about to say. Mr. Weatherby went to the door of the pilot-house and looked out.

"I just wanted to see that Sam Shaw, or his uncle, were not about," he said in explanation. "They've been hanging around here of late, and I'm suspicious of them."

He closed the door, and coming over to where Nat stood at the wheel said:

"How would you like to come with me on a big passenger steamer?"

"Are you going?" asked Nat in surprise.

"Well, I have the chance. I got a letter the other day from a big firm, that wants another pilot. They made me a very good offer, and I'm inclined to take it. I thought I would ask you if you'd like to go."

"Would I have a chance to learn to be a pilot?"

"Yes, a better chance than you have here."

"Then I'd like to go first-rate. I'm ever so much obliged to you. Do you think you will accept the offer?"

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"I believe I will. I'll tell Captain Marshall that we are going to leave him at Detroit. He can easily get another pilot there, and we'll change to a ship where conditions are more pleasant. I'm glad you want to come with me."

"I don't know what I'd do if it wasn't for you."

"Well, I still feel that I'm in your debt," replied Mr. Weatherby. "I think——"

He stopped suddenly and went to the door. He listened a moment, then quickly opened it. Sam Shaw was hurrying away down the deck.

"I believe he was listening, the young rascal!" exclaimed the pilot.

"Do you think he heard anything?"

"He must have. The windows were open."

"What will you do?"

"Well, it doesn't matter much. I'll inform Captain Marshall at once of my intentions, and so spoil any trick which the mate's nephew thinks he can play on us."

CHAPTER XIV A BLOW AND A RESCUE

[Pg 103]

That Captain Marshall was surprised is putting it mildly when a little later Mr. Weatherby informed the commander that he was going to leave to be a pilot on a big passenger steamer.

"If it is a question of more money, I think you can get it on this steamer," said Mr. Marshall.

"No, it isn't altogether that. The freight runs are too long to suit me. I am getting along in years, and I like to spend a little time on shore. By taking this position on a passenger vessel I will have considerable time between trips. Then, again, conditions are not as pleasant here of late as I'd like to have them. Nat and I will leave you as soon as you reach Detroit."

"Nat! Is he going with you?"

"Yes. After what has occurred I should think you would be glad of it."

"I don't know that I am," replied the captain. "At first I believed him guilty of having those cigarettes, but since then I have been informed by one of the crew that Sam Shaw smokes in secret, though not in forbidden places. No, I can't say that I am altogether pleased that Nat is going. He is a good boy, and though he is a trifle slow in some things I think I will prefer him to Sam."

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"Then Sam is going to have his place?"

"If Nat leaves. I have promised Mr. Bumstead that I will give his nephew the position."

"I hope you don't repent of it. I am sorry this little trouble has occurred, but I'll stick to Nat every time."

"I wish I was sure that Sam and not Nat was at fault," went on the captain. "I confess I do not altogether like Sam, but I am under obligations to his uncle."

"Well, Nat and I will soon be leaving you," continued the pilot. "Of course, until I go, I will do all I can to help you, and so will Nat."

Though Captain Marshall was a little sorry to lose Nat, yet, on the whole, he was not ill-pleased that the boy to whom, in a measure, he had had to admit himself in the wrong was going to leave. He would have been better pleased to get some one else besides Sam in his place, but he could do nothing, as he had given the mate a promise.

As for Nat, he was delighted at the prospect of a change. He had always wanted a place on a passenger steamer, for though he might be kept busier, the work was of a pleasanter character. The wages, too, were higher, and there was a better chance for advancement.

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Several days went by, and the freighter made a number of stops of small importance.

"Well, Nat," said Mr. Weatherby in the evening, after the boy had spent nearly all day in the pilot-house perfecting himself along the lines of his chosen calling, "we'll be at Detroit to-morrow morning, and then we'll bid farewell to the *Jessie Drew*. I suppose you'll be glad of it?"

"Partly, yes, though it was very nice before Sam showed up."

"I, too, will be a little sorry to go," added the pilot. "I have been on her a number of years now, and it seems like home to me. But I think a change will be best."

"Is the passenger steamer at Detroit?"

"No, but it is expected there in a few days. We'll lay off on shore until she arrives. I have been in communication with the owners, and the boat is to pick you and me up at that port. You'll have a chance to make a few excursions on shore."

"Oh, I'm not tired of work so soon."

"No, I should hope not. But I have a little business to attend to in Detroit. I may say it affects you."

"Affects me? How is that?"

"You remember I told you I was going to write to a man who was on the lumber barge with your father?"

[Pg 106]

"Yes."

"Well, I did so, and I have an answer from him."

"Who is he? What does he say?"

"His name is George Clayton."

"Why, I have often heard my father speak of him."

"Yes; well, I had a letter from him the other day. It was forwarded to me from Chicago."

"What does he say? Does he recall anything out of the ordinary concerning my father?"

"That's what I can't tell. He doesn't say anything, except that he will meet me in Detroit. So he may know something, and, again, he may not. I suppose you haven't learned anything more from Mr. Bumstead?"

"No. He hasn't said much to me since the trouble over the cigarettes."

"Did you ask him any more about the pocketbook?"

"I started to speak to him about it, intending to inquire if he couldn't possibly be mistaken, but he refused to talk about it and turned away, saying the wallet was his, and had been for a long time."

"A good deal depends on what he calls a long time," murmured Mr. Weatherby as he went to his cabin.

"I wonder what Mr. Clayton can tell me?" thought Nat. "I don't believe there was anything suspicious about father's death, or it would have been brought out at the time. The captain of the barge said he had fallen overboard while at work during a storm, and that they had a hard time recovering his body. Poor father! If he was only alive now he and I could be on some vessel and both earning a good living."

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Nat was a little sad at the thoughts of his dead parent, but he did not dwell long on this gloomy side. He had his work to do, and work is one of the best things in the world to make us forget our griefs.

The *Jessie Drew* tied up at the wharf in Detroit early the next morning. Mr. Weatherby had his baggage all packed, and Nat at his suggestion had done the same. Nat had been paid off by Captain Marshall the night before, but the pilot received his money in the form of a check every month.

"I hope you do well in your new place," said Captain Marshall as he bade Nat good-by.

"Thank you. I hope to be able to prove some day that those cigarettes were not mine," replied Nat.

"If you do I will always be ready to beg your pardon," was the commander's reply, somewhat stiffly made.

"Well, Nat, are you all ready?" called the pilot as he stood at the head of the companionway.

[Pg 108]

"All ready," replied the boy, coming up on deck. Near the gangplank, over which he had to pass to leave the vessel, stood Sam Shaw. Though Sam had said little to his uncle about it, he was quite envious over Nat's rise in life. To be a helper to a pilot on a passenger steamer was much better than to be an assistant to the purser of a freighter. Sam had hinted to his uncle the advisability of Mr. Bumstead seeking a berth on a passenger boat, but the latter had replied he did not care for that sort of a place. The truth was the mate was not competent to take such a position, as he was not a first-class officer.

"Good-by, Nat," called Mr. Dunn to the lad who had been such a help to him. "I'll miss you."

"Oh, I guess I can do as well as he did," spoke Sam quickly. "I'll not make any mistake checking up the cargo lists, and I'll not go to sleep in the hold and say a bale fell on me." For his uncle had told Sam of these two circumstances, giving his own version of them.

"That'll do you!" exclaimed Nat. "Don't you get too fresh!"

"And I'm not going to have any cigarettes, either," went on Sam, determined to do all he could to blacken Nat's character.

This last taunt was too much for Nat. Dropping his valise he sprang for Sam.

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"You take that back!" he demanded.

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" was Sam's retort.

"Then I'll punch your head!"

"You don't dare! I'm not afraid of you. Get away from me, or I'll land you one on the nose!"

The two boys stood glaring at each other. Nat was thoroughly angry, something that was rare with him, and Sam felt a desire to strike the lad who had managed to get ahead of him.

"Are you going to get away from me?" demanded Sam.

"Not until I get ready."

"Come, Nat, don't have anything to do with him," advised Mr. Weatherby, for he did not want to see a fight.

At the sound of his friend's voice Nat involuntarily turned his head. Sam meanly took advantage of this, and drew back his arm for a blow. His fist shot out, but Nat turned aside in time so that he only received a light blow on the shoulder. He had been hit, however, and he was not the lad to stand that without taking some action.

"There! If you want to fight!" he cried, and his left shot out, straight for Sam's face. Sam tried to dodge, but he was too late. The blow caught him full on the chin, and so powerful was it that he reeled backward, vainly clutching the air for support. [Pg 110]

He had been standing with his back to the little space between the ship's rail and the rail of the gangplank. Nat's blow sent him reeling backward, and a moment later Sam fell into the water between the vessel and the dock.

"Man overboard!" sang out a sailor who had witnessed the fight and its outcome. "Man overboard!"

He ran to the rail, and threw a life-preserver down into the narrow space. But with the realization of what he had done Nat was in action.

He threw off his coat and vest with a quick motion, and with his knife cut the laces of his shoes, kicking them off in a trice. Then, running to the rail, he peered down to where a swirl in the water indicated Sam's position. Over the rail leaped Nat, to rescue the boy whom he had knocked into the water.

At the sailor's cry Captain Marshall and the mate came running out on deck. They were told by the pilot what had happened.

"I'll have him arrested for this!" cried the mate. "He tried to murder my nephew."

"Your nephew hit him first," replied Mr. Weatherby.

"Yes, and now he's trying to drown him!"

"Not a bit of it. Sam had no business to be standing where he was. Let Nat alone and he'll get him out. He rescued me from a worse place than that." [Pg 111]

The three men rushed to the rail, and peered down. Neither boy was in sight.

"Sam's drowned! Oh, Sam's drowned!" cried the mate, helplessly.

"Nonsense!" replied the pilot. "He hasn't been in half a minute. There! Nat's got him!"

Nat had reappeared on the surface, with one arm about his enemy.

"Throw me a rope!" he cried. "He's unconscious! Must have hit his head!"

"Can you hold him?" asked the pilot.

"Yes. I've got hold of the dock."

The rope was hastily lowered, and Nat placed the loop of it about the shoulders of the unconscious Sam. Then those on deck hauled him up.

A few seconds later, with the aid of the same rope, Nat was pulled on deck.

"Is he—is he all right?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes," answered the pilot. "That was a plucky rescue."

"Well, I couldn't do any less, seeing I knocked him overboard. I was afraid I couldn't get him. He's quite heavy."

"This is a dramatic farewell," commented Mr. Weatherby. "I suppose you can't go now, until you have changed your clothes."

"I don't want to go until I know whether he is all right. I'm sorry I struck him so hard." [Pg 112]

"He deserved it, for he took an unfair advantage of you."

"Yes, that's so; but I didn't think it would end this way."

"Better go to the engine-room, and change your clothes," suggested Mr. Weatherby. "I'll wait for you."

CHAPTER XV

NAT HEARS SOME NEWS

Nat took off his wet garments, and donned some others, while the damp ones were put to dry over one of the boilers. In the meanwhile Sam had been revived. He was not much hurt, but he had swallowed a quantity of water, which made him quite ill.

"I'll have that Nat Morton arrested for assault and battery," declared the mate.

"No—no—don't!" begged his nephew.

"Why not? Didn't he hit you?"

"Yes—but—but I hit him first, and—and Mr. Weatherby saw me."

"Oh," said Mr. Bumstead. "Well, we'll get even with him some way."

"That's what I will," declared Sam, with as much energy as possible under the circumstances. "I'm glad he's going. Are you sure I'm to have his job?"

"Yes, and you'll get more money. I made Captain Marshall agree to that, though he didn't want to. But you'll have to be very careful. Don't you dare smoke any cigarettes." [Pg 114]

"How do you know I do smoke 'em?"

"Oh, I've got a good nose for tobacco," replied his uncle. "I'm warning you; that's all. I don't like this Nat Morton any more than you do, and I'm glad he is going."

The mate did not say why, but it was because he had hidden away a certain wallet, with a name erased from it, and this wallet he did not want Nat to see.

Owing to the fight between Nat and Sam, it was not until noon that Mr. Weatherby and our hero were able to leave the *Jessie Drew*. By that time Nat's clothes were dry, and then, without Sam looking on, for he was below in his bunk, the pilot and the lad whom he had befriended went ashore.

"We'll go to the Imperial Hotel," spoke Mr. Weatherby. "That's where I usually put up, when I'm here, and we'll wait there until the *Mermaid* docks."

"Is that the name of the ship we are going on?" asked Nat.

"That's her. She's a fine steamer, and Captain Turton is a fine man. I shall like to work for him, and I believe you will too."

"Maybe he doesn't want me," suggested Nat, for he had been thinking of that contingency.

"Oh, I've arranged all that. But I wonder if George Clayton will be here?" [Pg 115]

"Where did you expect to meet him?"

"At the hotel. There's the place, just ahead," and the pilot pointed down the street. "Yes, and there's George, like a lookout in the bow on a foggy night. There, he's signaling us!"

Nat saw a stout, jolly looking man, standing on the hotel steps, waving his hand to Mr. Weatherby.

"Ahoy there!" called Mr. Clayton, when they were within hailing distance, "how goes it?"

"Very fair. How about you?"

"Oh, I've had pretty good weather, and I managed to keep off the rocks and shoals. But is this Nat Morton, whom you were telling me about?"

"That's Nat," replied the pilot.

"Hum. Looks like his father," commented Mr. Clayton. "Shake hands, young man," and he extended a big one, roughened by many years of toil aboard lake steamers.

"Did you know my father?" asked Nat, with deep interest.

"Indeed, I did. He and I were messmates on many a trip. I was on the same barge when a big wave washed him overboard. My! but that was a rough night!"

"I thought maybe, George," said Mr. Weatherby, "that you could tell Nat something about his father's affairs. There seems to be something wrong somewhere, but I can't get a clear passage to what it is. The signals don't seem to be right, and we're navigating around in a fog. Maybe you can put us on the right course, and we'll get into some sort of a harbor." [Pg 116]

"I'll do my best, though I don't know much about his affairs," said the stout sailor. "But come on in. I'd like to talk to you."

Nat felt a little strange at meeting one who had known his father so intimately.

But George Clayton was not one to let one feel sad for very long. When they were in his room at the hotel, drinking lemonade, for the day was hot, he told Nat all he knew about his father's last voyage.

"And so you're learning to be a pilot," he said to Nat at the close. "I thought your father was going to set you up in some business. He was afraid you would meet with some accident if you

followed the same calling he did."

"Set him up in business? What do you mean?" asked Mr. Weatherby.

"Well, I don't know exactly what business, but I know Jim—I always called your father Jim," he explained to Nat—"I know Jim was talking what he was going to do with the profits of the load of lumber—I mean his share."

"Did Mr. Morton have a share in the load of lumber on the barge from which he was drowned?" asked the pilot. [Pg 117]

"Of course. Didn't you know that? Didn't you get his share when he died?" he asked of the boy.

"I got nothing. Father left nothing, as far as I know."

"Why, he certainly left something," insisted Mr. Clayton. "We all got our share out of it, and I always supposed his went to his heirs. You're the only one, I understand."

"This is getting to be quite a puzzle," declared Mr. Weatherby. "Suppose you explain."

"Well, you certainly surprise me," went on Mr. Clayton. "And Nat didn't get anything after his father died?"

"Not a cent. How could he? Mr. Morton left no papers of any kind."

"Well, he certainly did, for I saw 'em. There was a whole walletful, and among them was a certificate of his share in the lumber deal."

"What lumber deal? What wallet?" asked Nat excitedly.

"I'd better begin at the beginning," said Mr. Clayton, "and tell it all regularly—that is, as much as I know. But first I must have some more lemonade."

He filled his glass from the pitcher, drank a goodly draught of the beverage, and began:

"Jim and I and several others formed a syndicate on that lumber. That is, we all put our money together and purchased the load. It was good timber, and the price was high, and we stood to make considerable. Jim had five shares, and each share was worth in the neighborhood of three hundred dollars. I had two shares." [Pg 118]

"Then my father had fifteen hundred dollars in that lumber deal," said Nat.

"That's what he had, my boy, and where it went to is a mystery."

"Did you get your money out of it?" asked the pilot.

"I certainly did, and so did the others. After that storm, when your father was lost overboard, we had a hard job getting the lumber to port, but we managed to do it, and sold it for a good price."

"What was done with the money?" asked Mr. Weatherby.

"It was divided among the members of the syndicate."

"What about Mr. Morton's share?"

"His was laid aside, and the second mate of the barge said he would take it to his address in Chicago. He got it off Mr. Morton's dead body."

"I never received the money," said Nat.

"That's queer," spoke Mr. Clayton.

"Who was the second mate, who agreed to take Mr. Morton's share to his heirs?" inquired the pilot. [Pg 119]

"He was Joseph Bumstead," was the startling answer, "but I don't know where he is now. He cleared out after we sold the lumber, taking his share, and Mr. Morton's, and I haven't seen him since."

CHAPTER XVI JUST TOO LATE

[Pg 120]

Such was their surprise over this announcement on the part of Mr. Clayton, that neither Mr. Weatherby nor Nat knew, for a moment, what to say.

"Are you sure Bumstead had Mr. Morton's share?" asked the pilot.

"Of course. He took charge of everything that was found in poor Jim's pockets. There was a little money, and some other papers. One, I recall, was a promissory note for about four hundred dollars, for money Jim had loaned to Bumstead. I remember there was some question about letting him take that, but he said he would pay the money due on it to Jim's heirs, and we let him

have the whole business."

"What sort of a looking man was this Bumstead?" asked Mr. Weatherby, while he and Nat waited anxiously for the answer.

Mr. Clayton accurately described the mate of the *Jessie Drew*.

"It's the same man," murmured the pilot. "There can be no mistake about that."

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"Why, do you know him?" asked Mr. Clayton.

"I have every reason to believe that he is mate of the freight steamer Nat and I have just left," was the reply.

"Then let's get right after him, and make him give up that money!" exclaimed Mr. Clayton. "He's got it. Probably he turned the lumber shares into money as soon as he got ashore, for he could easily do that."

"Then with the money due on the note he has about two thousand dollars belonging to——"

"Belonging to Nat!" interrupted Mr. Clayton, "and I'll see that the boy gets it. Come on, don't lose any time. Bumstead may skip out. I didn't like the man when I was in the same crew with him, but I never supposed he was a thief."

"This explains why he did not want Nat to come aboard to work," said the pilot. "He was afraid Mr. Morton's son would discover something."

"And I *did*, too," put in Nat. "I saw him have my father's wallet."

"That's so; I forgot about that for the moment," cried Mr. Weatherby. "Do you recall that pocketbook, with Mr. Morton's name on it in gold letters?" he asked, turning to Mr. Clayton.

"Indeed, I do. Jim thought a lot of that. Has Bumstead got it?"

"We have every reason to think he has."

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"He's a thorough villain," commented Mr. Clayton. "Now don't let's delay any longer, or he may skip out. Let's get a policeman, or a detective, and have him locked up. I'll be a witness against him."

"I guess that's our best plan," assented the pilot. "Well, Nat, you're better off than you thought you were. Two thousand dollars is a neat sum for a lad like you."

"I haven't got it yet."

"No, but we'll see that you do get it," replied Mr. Weatherby's friend. "We'll have the law on that rascally mate. No wonder he wanted his nephew to have your place."

"Shall we go down where the *Jessie Drew* is tied up, and see if the mate is aboard before we get an officer, or stop at the police station first?" asked Mr. Weatherby, as he, Nat and Mr. Clayton left the hotel.

"Let's get a policeman, or a detective, first," was Mr. Clayton's answer. "We can't take any chances with a man like Bumstead. To think of him having that money more than two years, since poor Jim was drowned, and Nat suffering for what was really his own!"

"Oh, I didn't suffer so much," was our hero's answer. "I managed to get along, and Mr. and Mrs. Miller were very good to me. Then I had a good friend in Mr. Weatherby."

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"No better than I had in you," replied the pilot, who had told his friend of the plucky rescue.

A stop at the police station, and a recital of part of the story to the sergeant in charge, readily procured the services of a detective. In order to excite no suspicions, it was arranged that the officer and Mr. Clayton should go on ahead to the dock where the freight steamer was tied up. They could go aboard, and if Mr. Bumstead saw them he would not become alarmed and escape, whereas, if he saw the pilot and Nat returning he might take the alarm.

Accordingly, when they were part way to the dock, Nat and Mr. Weatherby walked down a side street, while the others went on.

"I wonder if he'll put up a fight?" mused Nat, as they paced slowly up and down, waiting.

"Very likely. He is a desperate man, and I haven't the slightest doubt but what he pushed that bale on you in the hold."

"I think so myself," agreed Nat.

It seemed quite a long time that Mr. Clayton and the detective were gone, and Nat grew impatient.

"Something must have happened," he said.

"I hope so," answered the pilot. "I hope they got him, and that he had your money with him."

They resumed their pacing up and down. About ten minutes later they saw Mr. Clayton and the officer coming toward them, unaccompanied.

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"They didn't get him!" exclaimed Nat.

"Maybe he gave up the money."

"I hope he did. I shouldn't like to go to court over it."

"Well?" asked the pilot, as the two came nearer.

"We were just too late," answered Mr. Clayton dejectedly.

"Too late?"

"Yes, the vessel has sailed for Buffalo. We have been trying to find another ship bound for the same port, that might get in ahead of the freighter, but we couldn't. I guess Bumstead has escaped us for a time, but you can follow him. His ship will tie up in Buffalo for a week."

"But Nat and I have to go aboard the passenger steamer in a few days," said Mr. Weatherby. "We'll have to stay on Lake Huron for a month or more, cruising about. I can't go to Buffalo, and I don't believe it would be safe for Nat to go alone."

"I wish I could," said Mr. Clayton, "but I've got to ship for a trip to Duluth and other ports tomorrow. Even if I didn't have to go, I would have no right to make a complaint against the mate. It would have to be done by Nat, as it's his money." [Pg 125]

"That's right," said the detective. "The person whose property is stolen has to make the complaint. But we might wire the Buffalo police to hold the man until one of you can get there. The only trouble is you'd have to swear out a warrant here, and as I understand it, there is only a suspicion against Bumstead."

"We are practically sure he has Nat's money," replied the pilot, "still, there may be some difficulty in causing his arrest, when he is so far away. If we could only send some one to Buffalo, who understood the case, and would know what to do, we could manage. It is out of the question for me to go, and I don't believe Nat could manage matters. The mate would probably get some criminal lawyer, and effect a release, even if he was arrested. It's quite a puzzle."

"I don't see what we can do," added the detective. "If we had been half an hour sooner we could have nabbed him."

Nat, who had hopes of recovering the money that was rightfully his, began to feel discouraged. It looked as if the rascally mate had the best of them.

As the four stood in the street, undecided what to do, a voice hailed Nat, calling out:

"Well, well! If there isn't the lad who saved my boat for me! I'm glad to see you again. How are you?" [Pg 126]

Nat looked up, to see advancing toward him two men. The younger was John Scanlon, whose craft the boy had saved from being stove in at the dock in Chicago, some weeks before.

CHAPTER XVII

PLANNING A CAPTURE

[Pg 127]

"Glad to meet you again," said Nat cordially, as he shook hands with young Mr. Scanlon. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, we're on a little trip, my father and I. By the way, I don't believe you have met my father. Dad, this is Nat Morton, whom I was telling you about. He saved our rowboat."

"Humph, I haven't quite forgiven you for that careless piece of work, John. But I'm glad to meet Nat," and Mr. Peter Scanlon shook hands with the lad.

"What are you doing here, Nat?" asked John.

"I'm learning to be a pilot."

"This is a queer place to learn that calling—ashore."

Then Nat explained that he was about to make a change of craft, and he introduced his companions to John and the latter's parent. He also told of the money due him and their fruitless efforts to capture the mate.

"Why, that's quite a romantic story," commented John Scanlon. "To think of your having money all this time, and not knowing it!" [Pg 128]

"And I'm still without it," said Nat, "and likely to be for some time, unless something happens."

"What a story that would make for the newspapers," went on John. "I once thought of becoming a newspaper reporter. This would be a dandy yarn."

"Hold on there, young fellow!" exclaimed the detective.

"What's the matter?" asked John.

"Don't go to tipping off the papers about this. We're going to have a hard enough time as it is to capture this chap, and we don't want him to know we're after him. If he sees something about it in the papers, he'll take the alarm and leave Buffalo before we can land him."

"Buffalo? Is he headed for Buffalo?" asked John Scanlon excitedly.

"Yes. Why?" asked Nat.

"Why, that's where we're going! My father's steam yacht leaves for Buffalo to-morrow. We're going to make the trip all the way to New York, by way of the St. Lawrence River, and we're going to stop off at Buffalo. Maybe we'll see this Bumstead."

"Say, if you only could catch him!" cried Nat eagerly.

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"There are several legal difficulties to that plan," objected the detective.

"Perhaps I can suggest a way out," put in Mr. Scanlon, who had been listening with interest to the story of Nat's newly discovered possessions. "I am a lawyer, and if I can help the lad who saved my son's boat from destruction, I'd be only too glad to do so."

"That might be the very thing," went on the officer. He explained the mix-up that would ensue if some unauthorized person attempted to cause the arrest of the mate in Buffalo.

"I think we can get around that difficulty," said the lawyer. "According to your story the mate is guilty of embezzling money belonging to another, with which he was entrusted. Then there is the promissory note, which would come under a different head. Nat can make a complaint in this city, charging the mate with embezzlement. A warrant can be sworn out, and I can be duly authorized to prosecute the case for Nat."

"That would answer first-rate," commented the detective.

"Only I'm afraid it will put you to a good deal of trouble, Mr. Scanlon," said Mr. Weatherby.

"I don't mind that in the least. I am in no hurry. In fact I am on a pleasure trip, and it does not matter when I get to New York. I had planned to stop at Buffalo, and spending a few days longer there than I calculated on will make no difference."

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"But will your boat get to Buffalo ahead of the freight steamer?" asked Mr. Clayton.

"I think so," replied John Scanlon, with a smile. "It is one of the fastest small yachts afloat. I fancy we will be at the dock waiting for this Bumstead when his ship gets in."

"Yes," agreed his father. "I will be waiting for him there with a warrant. But we must lose no time. Supposing we go to the police station and draw up the complaint?"

This was soon done, and with the proper papers in his pocket, Mr. Scanlon and his son prepared to set out on their voyage to capture the rascally mate. The lawyer promised to telegraph Nat the result of his efforts, as soon as possible, and the pilot gave Mr. Scanlon a list of the ports at which the *Mermaid*, his new vessel, would call.

"In case anything happens, you can notify us," said the pilot.

The lawyer and his son bade the others good-by, as, now that they had an object in view, the Scanlons wanted to begin their trip at once.

"Good luck!" called Nat to his new friends. "I hope you get him."

"Oh, we'll get him," replied John confidently.

"Well, Nat, there's been quite a change in your prospects since you jumped overboard, a few hours ago, and rescued Sam Shaw," remarked Mr. Weatherby as, with our hero and Mr. Clayton, they went back to their hotel.

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"Yes, I seem to have more friends than I thought I did."

"And one or two enemies. Don't forget that. You've been through some perils already, and I hope they're at an end."

But there were yet more dangers ahead of Nat Morton—dangers of which he did not dream, for indeed, as the pilot had said, he had at least one relentless enemy who would have been well satisfied to see Nat out of his way.

Two days later the *Mermaid* arrived at Detroit, and the pilot and Nat went aboard. Mr. Clayton had previously sailed on his trip to Lake Superior, to be gone some time, but he promised to come, whenever wanted, to testify against Bumstead, in case the mate was brought to trial.

The *Mermaid* was a fine passenger steamer, which called at all the principal ports on Lakes Huron, Michigan and Erie. She carried passengers chiefly, but also took some freight. Nat, however, found he had nothing to do with that department. He was assigned to the captain's cabin, where he would have certain light duties to perform, but it had been arranged, by Mr. Weatherby, that his young *protégé* was to receive more instruction in piloting than had been possible aboard the freighter.

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So the most of the day, and part of the night, found Nat with his friend in the pilot-house. The *Mermaid* steered by steam, and instead of an immense wheel, there was only a small one. A simple turn of it, with one hand, would send the great steamer on any desired course.

"This is another reason I wanted to change," remarked Mr. Weatherby, as he explained to Nat how the steam steering gear was operated. "That big wheel was getting too much for me to handle, especially in a storm. We'll have it easier now, and it will be more pleasant."

There was no doubt about this. The *Mermaid* was a new steamer, and was handsomely furnished. And it was much nicer to be among passengers, than delving away in a dark, dirty hold, checking up long cargo lists. Nat began to feel that his life had changed very much for the better. He had a new suit of clothes, and made a good appearance.

For about a week the *Mermaid* cruised on Lake Huron and Lake Michigan, taking on passengers, and some freight at one port, and leaving them at another. Nat was rapidly progressing in his chosen calling, and several times he had steered the vessel all alone, with no one in the pilot-house but himself, for Mr. Weatherby wanted the lad to acquire confidence.

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Captain Turton was an agreeable man, and readily consented that Nat should have all the privileges possible, in order to learn more rapidly.

"I was young once myself," he said with a smile. "I had to pick up my knowledge of ships as best I could, and if I had had half a chance I would be a better navigator than I am now. In fact, I could have learned piloting among these many islands in Lake Huron, and that would have saved me hiring you, Weatherby."

"Well, if Nat keeps on, he'll soon be able to take my place," said the pilot with a smile. "He did nearly all the work to-day. I'm getting lazy, I guess. For the last few days I haven't felt like myself."

"Maybe you're getting malaria," suggested the captain.

"I'm getting something. Guess I'll take a big dose of quinine to-night."

"Better not to-night," spoke the captain.

"Why not?"

"Well, I don't like the looks of the weather. There seems to be a storm coming up, and you'll want all your wits about you if it comes on to blow much."

"Oh, I guess I can steer, even if my ears do ring with the quinine, and my head buzzes," answered Mr. Weatherby. "I must break up this languid feeling."

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The *Mermaid* stopped at a good-sized city that evening, preparatory to making an all-night trip. As the boat touched the dock Nat saw on the end of the pier a telegraph messenger.

"Anybody named Nat Morton aboard?" the boy called, as soon as the ship was made fast.

"That's me," replied Nat.

"Well, I've got a telegram for you. I've been waiting three hours, and you've got to pay for my time."

"That'll be all right," said Mr. Weatherby, who was standing at the rail, beside Nat. "It's probably from Mr. Scanlon," he went on. "I was wondering why we didn't hear from him."

He paid the messenger boy, and Nat tore open the yellow envelope. The message was from Mr. Scanlon, and it was short. It said:

"Freighter arrived. Bumstead and nephew not aboard. They shipped on another vessel before arriving at Buffalo. Wire me what to do."

CHAPTER XVIII

NAT'S PLUCKY PILOTING

[Pg 135]

"Well, if that isn't tough luck!" exclaimed Nat.

"I suppose Bumstead thinks just the opposite," remarked the pilot.

"I wonder if he heard of our plan, and made the change of boats to escape us?"

"I think not. He could not know that we were after him. I fancy the mate and Captain Marshall had some disagreement. I know the mate did not like Mr. Marshall, who, in fact, was rather afraid of Bumstead. Very likely they had a quarrel, and the mate got aboard the first vessel he met."

"Then we can't have him arrested."

"Oh, I guess we can. It will take a little longer, that's all. He's sure to stick around the lakes, as

he doesn't know enough of navigation to get a job anywhere else. News travels pretty well among those engaged in business up here, and we'll get on his track sooner or later."

"I hope so, for I want that money. When I didn't know I was to get any I was pretty well satisfied, but now that I have heard of this legacy, it seems as though I ought to get it." [Pg 136]

"And so you shall. But I must telegraph to Mr. Scanlon. I don't believe we can ask him to do any more for us. He probably wants to continue on to New York. Besides, we can't inform him where to look for Bumstead. I'll just wire, thanking him, and tell him we'll look after the rascal now."

"I guess that's the only plan."

A message was sent to Mr. Scanlon, and by that time the *Mermaid* was ready to proceed. The indications of the storm became more pronounced, but it did not break that night.

Day after day slipped by and Nat kept steadily at work, learning all about piloting that was possible. It was wonderful how quickly he acquired the art of navigation.

"The boy was born to it," declared the old pilot to the captain. "He knows as much about it already as many assistants who have been at the wheel for ten times as long."

Mr. Weatherby was far from well, and Nat noticed that he could not keep at the wheel as steadily as before. One evening when a heavy storm was brewing the old pilot said every bone in his body ached.

"Guess I'm in for a spell of sickness, sure," he remarked. [Pg 137]

"Can't you take some medicine?" asked Nat, sympathetically.

"Yes."

Mr. Weatherby took a large dose of quinine, so large that he was unable to remain in the pilot-house after midnight, but as the route was over a course he had previously traveled, Nat had no difficulty in steering the big vessel, with occasional help from Captain Turton.

"Well, Nat, how did you make out?" Mr. Weatherby asked him the next morning.

"Pretty well. I was a bit frightened at first, and I was afraid I would forget some of the signals, or read the lights wrong, and pile the boat up on an island or a bar, but I didn't."

"Glad to hear it. I was a little anxious about you. Now whatever you do, when you're in the pilot-house, don't lose your nerve. Just say to yourself that you're going to succeed, and bring the ship through, and you'll do it."

"There's more responsibility here than on a freighter."

"Indeed, there is! Think of all the human lives entrusted to your care. That will make you keep your nerve in case you get in a critical place. But you did very well, and I'm proud of you."

"How are you feeling this morning?"

"Pretty well. I can take my trick now. You'd better turn in and get some sleep. You may have to take part of the watch again to-night." [Pg 138]

Nat did go to his bunk, after breakfast, but he did not stay there long. One of the cabin stewards was injured by a fall down a companionway, and Nat had to turn in and do this man's work. The result was the boy was kept busy nearly all day, occasionally taking a turn at the wheel.

Once, when he relieved Mr. Weatherby for a few minutes, while the pilot went below to take some medicine, he remarked to his benefactor:

"You don't look very well."

"And I don't feel very well, Nat. But I'm trying to stick it out. We've got a hard part of the lake ahead of us, a part where there are more islands than you can shake a stick at, and I don't like to go through there. But we've got to do it."

"But how can you, if you're sick?"

"Pilots, as well as other persons, can't always do as they would like to. I guess I'll be all right. But I don't like the weather. The longer this storm holds off, the worse it's likely to be. However, there's no use worrying. I'll be back in a few minutes. Keep her about as she is."

Left alone in the pilot-house Nat glanced at the compass, noted the course marked on the charts, and by moving the small steam steering-wheel slightly, found that the ship answered readily to the helm. [Pg 139]

Off to the west there was a big bank of slate-colored clouds, from which, now and then, came low rumblings of thunder.

"I guess it won't be long before the storm reaches here," thought the young pilot.

Almost before the boy realized it, an hour had passed. He was so interested in steering the boat, and recalling the different points that had been impressed on him by the pilot, that he did not notice that Mr. Weatherby was gone much longer than he had said he would be away.

"It's taking him a good while to get his medicine," murmured Nat. "I hope he isn't going to be sick again to-night. I don't want to have to steer the vessel among a lot of islands."

He was now anxiously awaiting the return of Mr. Weatherby, for the storm seemed to be approaching more rapidly, and the darkness of the coming night was added to by the black clouds, that now covered the entire sky.

Nat shifted the wheel, to keep the vessel on the prescribed course, and was looking ahead through the fast-gathering gloom, when some one came into the pilot-house. He looked up to see Captain Turton, whose face wore a worried look.

"I'm afraid we're going to have trouble," he said.

"How so, captain?"

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"Mr. Weatherby is very sick. I was just in his cabin, and I found him in a semi-conscious state. He had tried to take some medicine, but before he could get it he was seized with a sudden fit of sickness. I called in the doctor, and he said the pilot would not be able to take charge of the vessel to-night. I don't know what we're going to do, unless you can steer. Do you think you can?"

Nat hesitated. He had taken the freighter over this same course, when Mr. Weatherby was in the pilot-house with him, but that was in calm weather and daylight.

Could he steer the big passenger steamer over the same course after dark, and with a storm coming up? It was a question grave enough to make even an older person than Nat hesitate.

"It's a pretty big contract for a lad," said the captain. "I'll help you all I can, but the rules require me to have a pilot in charge. I can't do it, unless you feel that you can steer the ship, with such help as I can give you. Otherwise, I shall have to put into the nearest port, and I dislike to do that, as it will disarrange the passenger schedule, and the owners object to that."

"I—I think I can do it—at least I'll try," said Nat, determined to "keep his nerve" as the pilot had advised him. "I'll do my best."

"That's the way to talk, Nat! I guess you'll make out all right. Now I'll have to go to help look after Mr. Weatherby. He is in a bad way."

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"Do you think he will—die?"

"Oh, no, it's not as serious as that, but he's quite sick."

As the captain turned away the rumbling of thunder grew louder, and there came fitful gleams of lightning from the black clouds.

Nat drew a long breath, and prepared himself for what he felt sure was coming. Then, almost as calmly as if it had been Mr. Weatherby himself, he gave his orders. The lookout was stationed in the bow, and the great searchlight, on a mast back of the pilot-house, and some distance above it, was set aglow. This was to disclose, during the storm, any vessels or other obstructions in the path of the *Mermaid*. This done, Nat prepared for his difficult task.

It grew darker, but with the blackness came the flashing of the beacon lights on dangerous reefs and islands. Nat was able to pick out his position fairly well, and he began to feel less nervous.

Suddenly, with a furious burst of wind, and a dash of rain, the storm enveloped the vessel. Great waves arose on the lake, and the ship began to pitch and toss. In fact, a storm on one of the great lakes is almost as bad as one at sea, if not worse, for it does not take long for the comparatively shallow water to become very much agitated.

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"The storm enveloped the vessel"

Nat signaled for full speed ahead, as he knew he would need all the steerageway possible to take the vessel through the waves that, every moment, were becoming larger.

He had his supper in the pilot-house, for he would not leave to go to the cabin for it. Captain Turton came in during the evening to report that while Mr. Weatherby was resting easily, he was still quite ill.

"Do you think you can stick out through the night?" the commander asked.

"I'm going to," was Nat's plucky answer, though the boy was very tired from his long vigil the night previous, and his lack of sleep during the day. But Nat was not going to give in.

After the first outburst the storm settled into a steady blow, with torrents of rain, and an occasional brilliant flash of lightning, and loud peals of thunder. Through it rode the ship, urged on by her powerful engines.

The night wore on. Wearily, Nat clung to the small wheel in front of him, shifting the course of the vessel now and then, as he picked out the route on the chart, or made a quick shift to avoid some bar or island. His arms and legs were weary. His eyes were hot and smarting from lack of slumber and rest. But he stuck it out. Captain Turton offered to relieve him, but the boy did not want to give up. Even had he done so, the relief would have been short, as, while the commander was proposing it, word came that the ship had sprung a small leak, and the captain's presence was needed to see that the pumps were set going.

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"We're depending on you, Nat," he said as he left the pilot-house.

"I'll stick it out," again came the plucky reply.

About three o'clock in the morning the wind shifted. The lake became choppy, from the cross seas, and a second section of the storm seemed to make its appearance. Nat, who in spite of his efforts to stay awake had caught himself nodding—in fact almost asleep once—started up suddenly. He peered out of the windows.

There, right in the path of the vessel, illuminated by the powerful searchlight, was a mass of foam. At the same moment the lookout yelled:

"Breakers ahead! We're headed for a reef!"

With a quick motion, while his heart almost stopped beating, Nat spun the little wheel around. The ship quivered. It seemed to hesitate, as if debating whether or not to rush to destruction on the sharp rocks, just hidden under the treacherous water, or to glide to one side.

Then, slowly, so slowly that Nat's heart almost ceased beating lest she should not change her course quickly enough, the *Mermaid* swung around, and her prow was pointed away from the dangerous reef.

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Nat's plucky piloting had saved the vessel!

Into the little pilot-house rushed the captain. He had heard the lookout's cry, and had guessed what had happened.

"We were almost on Dagget's Point reef!" he exclaimed. "How did we escape it?"

"I saw it in time," answered Nat modestly.

"Thank God!" cried the captain, as he grasped the young pilot by the hand. "There's deep water all around us, and if we'd struck it would have meant a terrible loss of life."

At that instant there was a hoarse scream from a siren whistle, and, peering out of the windows of the pilot-house, Nat and the captain saw, looming up in front of them, but some distance away, another steamer. Nat blew a caution signal, and it was answered from the other vessel, which quickly turned aside, and then disappeared in the mist of rain.

"I believe they were headed right for the reef, too," said the captain. "You warned them in time. Well, we have a good course from now out. I'll take the wheel, and you go lie down."

But Nat would not. He insisted on remaining in the pilot-house until morning, and when daylight came, he saw that the other vessel was not far from them, both ships being headed for the same harbor. The other ship was the *Spray*, of much smaller tonnage than the *Mermaid*. [Pg 145]

"She must have turned back after meeting us," thought Nat, "as she was headed in the opposite direction when we met near the reef."

CHAPTER XIX THE ACCUSATION

[Pg 146]

Captain Turton decided to lay over for some hours, as, during the storm, his vessel had suffered some minor damage, which he wanted repaired.

"How is Mr. Weatherby?" asked Nat, as soon as there was no longer any need of him remaining in the pilot-house.

"He is much better this morning," replied the commander, "but he is still quite weak, and will probably stay in his bunk all day. He says he would like to see you."

"I'll go at once."

"Hadn't you better get your breakfast?"

"No, that can wait."

"But you have been on duty a long while, and it was a great strain on you."

"I know it was, captain, but I'm so glad I brought the ship through safely, that I'd be willing to go without breakfast and sleep for a long time yet."

"You are a plucky lad, and I wish more like you were learning to be pilots." [Pg 147]

Nat found Mr. Weatherby quite ill, but, in spite of that, the pilot warmly congratulated his *protégé* on the nerve he had displayed during the storm.

"You have proved your worth, Nat," said Mr. Weatherby, "and I am proud of my pupil."

Nat turned in for a sleep, soon after breakfast. There was little for the crew of the *Mermaid* to do while the repairs were being made, and those passengers who were not yet at their destination strolled about the town while waiting for the trip to be resumed.

The vessel that Nat had brought so skilfully through the storm, which had ceased with the first appearance of dawn, was tied at the same dock as that at which was the steamer they had met near the reef. One was on one side, and one on the other, and when the dock between the ships was not occupied by wagons and trucks, laden with freight, Nat could look across and see the crew of the other steamer, the *Spray*, busily rearranging the cargo that had shifted during the storm. She was a freighter, but smaller than the *Jessie Drew*.

The appearance of one lad in the crew of the *Spray* attracted Nat's attention, when the young pilot arose early in the afternoon. The lad had red hair, and his figure seemed familiar. [Pg 148]

"If I didn't think he was a good way off from here I'd say that fellow was Sam Shaw," mused Nat. "He looks a good deal like him."

He tried to watch, to determine if it was his former enemy, but, as the lad kept moving to and fro, it was impossible to be certain.

"If I saw Mr. Bumstead I'd know it was Sam who was with him," went on Nat, as he stood at the rail nearest the dock. "It might be possible they transferred to that ship. I wonder if I hadn't better speak to Mr. Weatherby, and ask his advice? No, he's sick, and I don't want to bother him about my affairs. I guess I'll just take a stroll over there and see for myself. Captain Turton won't care, as we can't sail until late this evening."

Nat started down the gangplank, but, when he was half way down, he met a man in uniform, who asked him:

"Is this the *Mermaid*?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am looking for a young man, named Nat Morton. Can you tell me where I shall find him?"

"That is my name," replied our hero. He thought perhaps it might be an officer from police headquarters, with some message concerning Mr. Bumstead.

"Then you are just the person I want," the man went on. "You will have to come with me."

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"Come with you? What for? Is it about Mr. Bumstead?"

"Yes," replied the man. "How did you guess?"

"Well, I've been expecting a message regarding him."

"Then what you will hear will be no news to you."

"Has he been arrested?"

"Arrested? No. Why should he be arrested?"

"Why, I thought you said——"

"Perhaps I had better not say anything more until you get to headquarters," the man went on.

"Then it surely must be about that rascally mate," thought Nat. "Mr. Weatherby will be glad they have him."

He followed the man off the pier, and along a street on the water front.

"I understand you piloted that boat through the storm last night," said the man.

"Well, I did, but I guess it was more by good luck than anything else that enabled me to do it. Who told you about it?"

"Oh, it is pretty generally known. The crews of vessels talk more or less when they are in dock."

They walked along in silence a little longer, and then the man stopped in front of a small building.

"This doesn't look like police headquarters," thought Nat. "I wonder if there's a mistake."

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"Go right that way," said the officer, keeping close behind the boy. "The harbor master is in that room."

"The harbor master?" repeated Nat. "What have I to do with the harbor master? I don't want to see him."

"No, but he wants to see you."

A moment later Nat was ushered into a room, where at a large desk sat a stern-looking man, and on either side of him were two men, each one with several books and papers before him.

"Ah, so this is the young pilot, eh?" remarked the man in the middle. "How old are you—er—Nat Morton? I believe that is your name."

"I will soon be sixteen."

"And you piloted the *Mermaid* past Dagget's Point reef last night—in that storm?"

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose you have a license."

"A license? No, sir. I am studying under Mr. Weatherby. He was taken suddenly ill last night, and I had to steer the boat. There was no one else."

"I am sorry, my lad," said the harbor master, "but I shall have to place you under arrest."

"Arrest? What for?"

"For piloting a passenger steamer without a license. A complaint has been lodged against you with this board—the board of control in charge of harbors and pilots."

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"A complaint? Who made it?"

"Bumstead is the name—er—Joseph Bumstead, mate of the freighter *Spray*," replied the harbor master, reading from some documents before him. "He says he met your boat off the reef last night, that you were in charge, without a license, and that you nearly ran him down. He made the complaint about an hour ago. His boat had to put back here for some repairs. He says your boat damaged the one he is mate of."

"That's not so—I mean that part about nearly running him down!" exclaimed Nat. "I saw him in plenty of time, and if it hadn't been for my warning whistle the *Spray* would have gone upon the reef herself!"

"I am sorry, my lad, but the complaint is made in regular form, and I shall have to hold you for a hearing. However, we will have it at once. I have sent to summon this Bumstead. Do you wish to

notify any friends?"

"Mr. Weatherby is ill, and cannot come, but I would like Captain Turton to come."

"Very well, we will send for him. Officer, bring Captain Turton here. In the meantime you may sit down until we reach your case," the harbor master motioned Nat to take a chair on one side of the big room.

CHAPTER XX OFF AGAIN

[Pg 152]

"This is a queer turn to affairs," thought Nat, as he awaited the arrival of Captain Turton. "I never thought a thing about not having a license, when I steered the boat, and I don't believe Mr. Weatherby did either. I suppose I did wrong, but it was unintentional, and I don't see what else I could have done under the circumstances.

"But I'll have a chance at Bumstead now. As soon as I get out of here I'll cause his arrest. Hold on, though, maybe I'll not get out of here. I wonder what the punishment is for piloting a boat without a license?"

This was another phase of the queer affair. He realized if he was held on the charge, he would have no chance to make an accusation against the rascally mate.

"I know what I'll do," said Nat to himself, while he anxiously waited. "If Bumstead comes here I'll tell Captain Turton to go out and get a policeman. Then I can make a new complaint, charge Bumstead with keeping money belonging to me, and he'll be arrested. That's what I'll do."

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While Nat sat in the office of the harbor master, he listened to several cases that were being disposed of. Captains of tugs and other boats were arraigned on charges of violating rules of the harbor; such as displaying wrong lights, crossing the course of other boats at the improper time, failing to give warning signals, colliding with other craft, or not filing the proper reports.

Some of the men were fined, others were suspended for a certain length of time, and one or two had their licenses revoked.

"I wonder what he'll do to me?" thought Nat. "There doesn't seem to be any case just like mine."

He was interrupted in his musing by the entrance of Captain Turton.

"What's this I hear?" asked the commander wonderingly, after he had greeted his young pilot. "Are you in trouble, Nat?"

"It seems so," and the boy told the circumstances.

"Don't worry," advised Captain Turton cheerfully. "I'll stand by you, and we'll have that mate arrested as soon as he leaves the place."

"Is the Morton case ready?" asked the harbor master, looking about him, after he had disposed of all the other matters before him.

"The mate Bumstead isn't here yet," replied an officer who was in charge of the court. "Young Morton is here, and Captain Turtle——"

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"I beg your pardon, my name is Turton," interrupted the commander of the *Mermaid*.

"Turton, I should say," corrected the court officer.

"Where is the person who made the charge—Bumstead the mate?" asked the harbor master.

"I have sent Officer Jenkins for him, sir. He'll be here directly. Ah, here is Jenkins now."

"Well, Jenkins," said the harbor master, "did you bring the mate back with you? This case has been delayed long enough."

"No, sir, I didn't bring him."

"Why not?"

"Because, sir, his ship has just sailed, and he's gone with her."

"I'll commit him for contempt of court!" exclaimed the harbor master. "Make out the papers at once," he added, turning to his clerk. "I will now take up this case, however, and proceed as far as possible. Give me the written accusation."

He looked over some papers, and, at a nod from him, Nat walked forward and stood in front of the big table. Then the harbor master read the complaint as made by Bumstead. It set out in a number of legal terms and phrases, that Nat Morton had, in violation of the regulations, piloted a vessel without having a license. The mate, it appeared, had heard of Nat's feat early that morning while the two vessels were docked, and had lost no time making his accusation, for mere spite.

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"How do you plead to that?" asked the harbor master.

"I guess I did it," answered Nat.

"Perhaps you had better explain," suggested one of the other men present. "We will mark you 'not guilty' until we have heard the case."

Thereupon, Nat told all the circumstances connected with the sudden illness of Mr. Weatherby, the storm, the leak in the ship and the necessity for keeping on. Captain Turton was called and verified all that Nat said.

"Hum," remarked the harbor master. "There seems to be some justification here. I will consult with my colleagues on this. We will let you know our decision shortly. You may wait here."

He motioned to the men on either side of him, and they all retired to a rear room.

"What do you suppose they'll do to me?" asked Nat.

"Nothing very serious, I think," replied the captain, for he had been through such cases before, and he knew that harbor masters were disposed to stretch a point wherever possible.

"And Bumstead has got away again," went on Nat. "He stayed just long enough to file his complaint, and then skipped out. I wonder if he knows I am after him?"

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"I think not," remarked Captain Turton, who had been told the circumstances of the lumber deal. "If he did he wouldn't venture to stay in the same port with you long enough to make a charge against you. Probably he wants to make all the trouble he can for you, in the hope that you will give up this ship life, and go somewhere so that he will not have to worry about you finding out about him."

"Perhaps," agreed Nat.

The harbor master and his colleagues filed back into the room. Nat tried to gather from their looks what disposition they had made of his case, but the men gave no indication, seeming to be as grave and serious as when they had gone out.

"Hum," mumbled the harbor master, in his deep voice. "We have considered your case, Nat Morton, and we wish to ask you a few questions."

Thereupon, Nat was put through a brief examination in relation to matters connected with piloting and the management of boats. The harbor master and his colleagues asked him a lot of questions, some of which Nat answered to his own satisfaction, at least. To others, more technical, he replied as best he could.

Fortunately his life about the docks, and his instructions at the hands of Mr. Weatherby, stood him in good stead. He showed a good practical knowledge of piloting, though some of the questions puzzled him, and his answers seemed to afford mirth to the harbor master and his associates.

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"Well," remarked the harbor master after a pause, "what you did, Nat, may have been irregular—in fact it was irregular, and against the rules—but, under the circumstances, we cannot blame you for it. You are doing very well, and you know more, now, than many pilots who have a license. Still, you are under the age. When you reach the proper limit you will have to appear for an official examination. Until then you can go on as you have been doing, only don't try to handle a boat alone in a storm. Wait until you have had a little more experience. Then you can come up for examination, and get a full license. This case is laid over indefinitely."

"Does that mean I can go?" asked Nat.

"Yes, you can go," answered the harbor master with a smile. "And don't worry. We'll pass you, as soon as you are of the proper age. I congratulate you on your pluck," and then, to the surprise of his colleagues (for the harbor master was a somewhat gruff sort of a man), he leaned over and shook hands with Nat.

A little later Nat and Captain Turton were aboard the *Mermaid*. They found Mr. Weatherby much better, and when the repairs were completed, and the freight and passengers aboard, the ship steamed out of the harbor to resume her voyage.

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CHAPTER XXI

NAT INTERVENES

[Pg 159]

One of the first things Nat did, when he had a chance to talk to Mr. Weatherby, was to repeat some of the questions that had been asked by the board of pilots, which queries the lad had not been able to answer properly.

"Those are the points I'm weak on," he said to his friend. "I must study up on them, so I'll be ready for my examination."

"That's right, Nat, and I'll help you all I can. There is a text book I want to get for you, and I will, at the next stop we make. Meanwhile, I think you can take charge in the pilot-house for a few days, until I get my strength back. I'll look in on you, every once in a while, to see that you are doing all right, and we're not likely to have another storm soon."

So Nat resumed his place at the wheel, being relieved now and then by Captain Turton or Mr. Weatherby, who took short shifts. In a few days the old pilot was entirely better, and then he and Nat divided up the work, the lad learning more about the points on which he had been puzzled during the examination. [Pg 160]

The *Mermaid* had a large number of passengers this voyage, and Nat was kept pretty busy, in addition to his duties in the pilot-house. Some travelers, specially favored, occupied seats at the captain's table at meal times, and this made additional work for the lad, as he had to help the cabin steward. But Nat liked it all, and no task was too exacting for him to perform to the best of his ability. During his leisure moments he used to watch the passengers, and in this way he learned much about the life of the comparatively wealthy travelers.

One afternoon, when the ship was within a few hours of reaching port, Nat, going along the upper deck, passed a German youth, standing by the rail, looking down into the water, as it swept away from the bows of the *Mermaid*. The youth, whom Nat had noticed on several other occasions, because of his well-fitting clothes, appeared to be in rather low spirits.

"We're making pretty good time," said Nat pleasantly, for he often addressed the passengers, many of whom had formed a liking for the lad.

"Oh, yes, ve go fast enough," replied the German, who spoke with quite an accent. But he answered so gloomily, that the vessel might as well have been going backward, for all the satisfaction he derived from her speed. [Pg 161]

"We'll soon be in port," went on Nat. "I suppose you'll be glad to get on shore. It's quite rough on account of the wind."

"Oh, it makes not so much difference to me," was the answer, and the youth did not smile. Indeed, he hardly lifted his face to glance at Nat, yet he did not seem to resent being spoken to.

"It's a nice day," went on the young pilot.

"Yes, I suppose for dem vot likes der vedder," came the answer. "But, *ach*—" and then the German murmured something to himself in his own language.

"I guess he doesn't feel well, or else he doesn't want to talk," thought Nat, as he passed on. "Maybe he's a bit seasick, though there's hardly any motion to-day."

Nat passed on, to attend to some of his duties. When he came back, about an hour later, the German youth was in the same place, moodily staring down into the water.

"I wonder what ails him?" thought Nat. "He acts queer. But that's the way with some Germans, the least little thing makes them moody, and then, again, they're as jolly as can be. But I suppose we are all queer, in one way or another."

He was half-tempted to speak to the youth again, as he passed him, but he did not want to be thought too forward, so he said nothing, nor did the German appear to notice our hero. [Pg 162]

The vessel would arrive at port in about an hour, and would tie up there for the night. It was just getting dusk, and Nat was going from place to place on the ship, getting certain records of which he had charge, in shape for filing at the dock office. Several times he passed by the German, who stood in the same spot, and in the same position.

"He certainly is ill," mused Nat. "I guess I'll tell him we have a doctor aboard. Maybe he doesn't know it."

Nat was about to put his idea into execution, when Mr. Weatherby called him to perform some duty, and it was half an hour later when the young pilot made his way back again to where stood the youth in whom he had begun to feel considerable interest.

"I'll just tell him where to find the doctor," thought the boy, as he approached the place where the silent figure had been leaning over the rail. But, to his surprise, the youth was not there.

"He must have gone below," mused Nat. "Probably he feels better."

An instant later he saw a strange sight. In a sheltered corner, formed by an angle of a deck-house, stood the German youth, and in the dim light from a lantern Nat saw that he was removing his collar, tie, coat and vest. He was neatly folding his garments in a pile on the deck. [Pg 163]

"He must be crazy!" thought Nat. "I'll call the captain."

As he watched, the youth finished putting his clothes in order. Then, with a deliberate step, the German approached the rail, placed his hand on it, and prepared to leap over.

"Suicide!" was the instant thought that came to Nat. "He's going to commit suicide! I must stop him!"

To think, with Nat, was to act. He sprang forward with a cry of warning.

"Here! Stop that! Come back!"

The German paused, hesitated an instant, glanced at Nat rushing toward him, and leaped. But he was a second too late. The young pilot grabbed him around the legs, and held on like grim death.

"What are you doing?" Nat cried. "Don't you know you'll be swept right into the propeller and be cut to pieces!"

"Let me go! Let me go!" insisted the youth in a low, intense whisper, as though he was afraid of being heard.

"Not unless you promise not to jump."

"I vill not make promises! I haf no use for to live! I vant to end it all! Let me go!"

He tried to escape from Nat's hold, but the young pilot had no gentle grip, and his arms were strong.

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"Let me go! Let me go!"

The German was pleading now.

"Not much!" panted Nat. "You can't commit suicide from this boat."

The German continued to struggle. Nat felt the legs slipping away from him.

"If you don't give up I'll call for help, and the captain will put you under arrest!" threatened the young pilot. That seemed to quiet the German. He ceased to struggle, and became calmer.

"Vell," he said, in a voice that was choked with tears, "I gif up. I vill not jump overboard—now."

"Nor at any other time," insisted Nat.

"I cannot promise dot, but I promise you dot I vill not jump from dis boat. I care not to live longer."

Nat released his hold. The German was panting from his exertions, as he donned his garments. The affair had taken place in a secluded spot, and no one had seen Nat's intervention in the tragic episode.

"What's the matter?" inquired the young pilot, when the German was fully dressed again. "Are you sick? Why did you want to end your life?"

To his surprise the young fellow burst into tears, and sobbed pitifully.

"Come to my cabin," proposed Nat gently. "Perhaps I can help you."

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"I—I like not to go vere der peoples see me."

"That's all right, I can take you to it by an outside companionway, and we'll meet no one. Come, and maybe I can help you. You seem to be in trouble."

"I am—in bad troubles," was the choking reply, as the youth followed Nat below.

CHAPTER XXII AFTER BUMSTEAD

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"Now then," said Nat cheerfully, when he and the youth he had saved from suicide were safely in the young pilot's cabin, "what is the matter? I don't want to pry into your affairs, but I would like to help you. If I can't, perhaps I can get some one who can. I know Mr. Weatherby or Captain Turton would be glad to aid you."

"You are of much kindness to me," replied the other, while he tried to regain control of his feelings. "My name is Hugo Kesterberg. I used to live in New York, where I did work in a German importing house. I have been in dis country not long, so I speak not der language so goot."

"I can understand you very well," said Nat.

"I haf a good place, und I am learning der business," went on young Kesterberg, "ven an uncle of mine, in der Vaterland, he die, und leave me vat you call legs—legs easy."

"Legacy," put in Nat.

"Yes, dot is him, legacy. Your American vords are so hard to speak right. Vell, he leaves me some money, but I am a such foolish fellow. Instead of putting my legs easy—I mean legacy—in der bank, I start in to have a goot time—I am vat you call a sport. I treat all my friends, und I get in vid a sporty crowd. I buy goot clothes, und I have lots of fun."

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"Pretty soon, not long after I gets my legacy, der head of der firm vere I work, he say dey no longer needs me, for you see I am foolish, und I no longer look after my vork. But dot I lose my job make me not for to care. I still haf plenty of monies left, und I haf more good times."

"Then what is the trouble, if you have plenty of money?" asked Nat. "The trouble with most people is that they haven't got enough."

"Dot's me—exactly!" exclaimed Hugo. "I got to gambling und playing der races, und yesterday I found I haf not enough left, after I had been traveling about for some time, to pay my board for vun veek, in a decent place. I buys me a ticket on dis boat, for as far a distance as I haf money, und I decide I will end it all. Und so I would, only you stop me."

He added the last bitterly.

"Yes, I'm glad I stopped you, and you'll be glad too, before long," declared Nat firmly. "Why, you're no worse off than you were before. You had a lot of money, and you had a good time with it. Now you'll have to go back to work again."

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"Ach! Dot's vat you Americans call der rubber," said the German.

"The rubber?" repeated Nat, a bit puzzled.

"I mean der rub—dot's vere der shoes nabs me—I mean pinch. I can't go back to my old place, und I don't know how to get vork in any odder place. Dere is no use for me to live. I makes an end to myself, ven ve gets to der port."

"No, you won't!" declared Nat. "If you don't promise not to try to commit suicide, for at least a week, I'll inform the police about you, as soon as we land, and they'll lock you up. It's against the law to take your own life or attempt it. If you wait a week you'll be all over the notion."

"A man's life iss his own—he can do vat he likes mit it."

"The law doesn't say so," replied Nat, who had gained his information from the newspapers.

"Vell, der law is wrong! I takes my own life!"

"Then you'll be arrested as soon as the boat lands."

"Arrest a Kesterberg!" exclaimed the German. "Dot would be a disgrace."

"So would committing suicide."

The youth started. Evidently he had not thought of it in that light before.

"Vell, I promise you—for vun week."

"That's all right," said Nat briskly. "I'm satisfied. I know if you wait that long you'll be in a better frame of mind. Besides, I think I can help you. I'll speak to the captain and to Mr. Weatherby about you."

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"But not about—not about—what I——"

"Oh, no, I'll say nothing about that," promised Nat. "But I know they can help you. Captain Turton is acquainted with lots of firms, and maybe he can get you a place with one of them."

"Den my troubles would be ofer," declared Hugo. "If I gets me a place to vork, nefer again vill I be so foolish again. If my people in Germany heard of vot I did, dey would nefer forgive me."

"They're not likely to hear of it," said Nat. "Now you stay here until you feel better. We're going to land pretty soon, and I'll be busy. This evening I'll speak to the captain about you."

"But my ticket only takes me to dis port, und I haf no more money. I can't stay aboard."

"I'll fix that all right," declared the young pilot, who was beginning to feel quite important over what he had done, which, indeed, was no light matter, for he had given hope to a hopeless youth.

Captain Turton readily agreed to do what he could for Hugo Kesterberg, when, that evening, after all the freight and passengers had been discharged, Nat told as much of the case as it was necessary for the commander to know.

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"I think I know a firm in Detroit that would be glad of his services," he said. "I'll give him a letter of recommendation to them, when we reach there, which will be at the end of the week."

"But—er—he hasn't any money left to pay his fare there," said Nat.

"That will be all right," replied Captain Turton. "I guess it won't break the company to give him a pass and his meals for a few days. Besides, I'm not going to let you get ahead of me in doing him a good turn."

Three days later, when the *Mermaid* reached Detroit, Hugo Kesterberg bade Nat, and his other friends aboard the ship, good-by. With a note of recommendation to a big firm, he could face the future in better spirits. Some time later Nat had a letter from the German youth, stating that he had a better position than the one in New York, and was doing well. The missive was full of thanks to Nat and Captain Turton.

Detroit was as far as the *Mermaid* was to go on the present voyage, and after taking on a big cargo, and quite a number of passengers, she turned about and began to traverse her way over Lake Huron again.

Captain Turton went ashore at the first port they made, after leaving Detroit, and when he came aboard again, he sought out Nat. The captain's manner betrayed some excitement.

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"I have some news for you," he said to the young pilot.

"Am I going to be arrested again?"

"Not exactly. This concerns your enemy, Bumstead."

"Have they got him? Did he give up the money?"

"No, but I heard from a captain friend of mine ashore a little while ago, that the *Spray* is docked at Cove Point, about fifty miles above here. She had to lay up for repairs. She's an old boat and her engines are continually getting out of order."

"Are we going to stop there?" asked Nat eagerly.

"No, but I know what you are thinking of. There is a chance to cause the arrest of the mate, and here is my plan. You can take a train from here to Cove Point. The railroad runs quite near there. You have the warrant, made out by the police. Take that with you, and the authorities in Cove Point will make the arrest, I'm sure."

"But how can I get back to this boat?"

"I'll tell you. There is a train that leaves here at midnight, which will get you to Cove Point about two o'clock in the morning. The police are up at all hours. You can get them to serve the warrant at once, for Bumstead will probably be aboard the *Spray* at her dock. Then, after he is safe in jail, you can hire a boat to take you out, and I'll pick you up as I pass. I'll be on the watch for you to-morrow morning."

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The plan was very feasible, and Nat thanked the captain for his thoughtfulness. He made his arrangements hurriedly, and began to have visions of recovering the money that was rightfully his.

"Be out about two miles beyond the point at about nine o'clock to-morrow morning," the captain called to him, as Nat left. "That's the time I'll pass, and as close in as I can run."

"I'll be there waiting for you," promised Nat.

"Good luck!" called the pilot. "I hope you get him. That Bumstead is getting to be as slippery as an eel."

"I'll get him, if he's there," declared the lad.

Then he hurried to the railroad station to get his ticket, for it was after ten o'clock, and the depot was some distance from the water front.

CHAPTER XXIII BUMSTEAD ESCAPES

[Pg 173]

When Nat found himself in the train, speeding toward Cove Point, he had a chance to think how he should proceed after he arrived. He anticipated no difficulty in getting a policeman to go to the boat and arrest the mate.

"Maybe Sam Shaw will want to take a hand, and fight me," thought Nat. "Well, if he does, I'll give him all that's coming to him."

The train was a slow one, and made a number of stops. When about half way on the journey there was a delay, caused by the wreck of a freight train, and it was nearly three o'clock when Nat arrived at the railroad station in Cove Point. This was a small town, depending for its existence on what traffic passed up and down the lake, and what little patronage came to it over the railroad.

"Where's the police station?" asked Nat of a sleepy man at the depot.

"They don't allow tramps to sleep in it any more," was the rather queer answer.

"Tramps? Who asked anything about tramps?" replied Nat. "I don't want to sleep there."

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"Oh, excuse me," said the agent, opening his sleepy eyes a bit wider. "I didn't take a good look at you. I thought you were a tramp. Lots of 'em come in on our trains, and want to spend the night at the police station. They'd let themselves be arrested because the sheriff used to get so much a prisoner. But the county authorities put a stop to it. What's the matter? Some one rob you?"

"No," replied Nat, determined to keep his affairs to himself.

"Some crime been committed?" persisted the agent, for he thought it was rather unusual for a boy to be asking his way to the police station at three o'clock in the morning.

"I want to see a policeman," replied Nat, "and I thought the best place would be the station

house."

"There used to be a policeman stationed here nights," went on the agent. "But he's gone now. If it was anything about the railroad I could attend to it for you."

"No, thank you. If you'll tell me where the station house is, I'll be much obliged."

The agent seemed disappointed, but he gave Nat the directions.

"I don't see what harm it would have done him to have told me," murmured the man, when Nat had gone off down the dark street. "It would help to keep me awake, if I had something like a crime or an arrest to think about. Well, I might as well doze off; it'll be two hours before the down freight is in," and he composed himself as comfortably as he could in his chair in the telegraph office. [Pg 175]

Meanwhile, our hero managed to find the police station. Inside there was a sergeant on duty, who looked up inquiringly as Nat entered.

"Well?" he asked.

"I have a warrant for a man's arrest."

"Are you a detective from some other city? Where's your badge?" asked the sergeant suspiciously.

"No, I'm not a detective. I'm the person who made the complaint on which this warrant was issued," and Nat showed the one which had been returned by Mr. Scanlon.

The sergeant seemed impressed by the boy's business-like manner.

"Come inside," he invited, opening a gate in a railing that shut off the part of the room behind the desk. "Now tell me about it."

Nat told his tale as briefly as possible.

"And you want me to send an officer out to the ship with you, and arrest the mate?" inquired the sergeant when the young pilot had finished.

"If you will." [Pg 176]

"Guess we'll have to, under the law. I'll be glad to help you out. It's a mean trick to take money in that fashion. Hey, George! I say, George! Get up, here's a case for you."

"What's that?" inquired a sleepy voice from a room back of the sergeant's desk.

"You've got to go out and arrest a man."

"Oh, can't somebody else go? I arrested a feller last night. I ain't going to do all the work in this police station."

"Look here, George Rosco!" called the sergeant, getting up, and going to the door of the room, where, evidently, the only policeman on duty was asleep, "you've got to get up, and go and arrest this man. There's a warrant for him, and he's charged with embezzling fifteen hundred dollars. He's mate aboard that freight steamer that's tied up here for repairs."

"Fifteen hundred dollars! Why didn't you say so at first?" exclaimed the policeman, appearing in the doorway, half dressed. "That's worth while arresting a man for. I thought it was another one of them chicken-stealing cases. Fifteen hundred dollars! I'll be ready in a jiffy! Whew! Fifteen hundred—"

The rest of what he said was lost to Nat and the sergeant, as the officer closed the door, while he dressed. When he came out he greeted Nat cordially. [Pg 177]

"I don't mind being woke up for a case like that," he explained. "I thought it was some measly tramp case. For the last three nights I've been woke up by people whose henroosts have been robbed. I'm getting tired of it, and when the sergeant called me a while ago, I thought it was another one. You see, we've only got two policemen here, and I don't mind telling you that I do most of the arrestin' that's done. The other one—Tom Duncan—he's too lazy to arrest many. I do two to his one. I'm on night duty and he takes the day trick."

Nat could not help thinking that the night man had the easier time of it, even if he did make the most arrests.

"Now here's the warrant, George," said the sergeant. "Bring that fellow in, and we'll lock him up."

"Oh, I'll bring him in all right. He'll not get away from me. Let's see, I've got my revolver and my club. Guess I'm all right."

"You go right along with him," the sergeant directed Nat. "Point out the man you want and he'll bring him in."

"Yes, I'll get him," declared George. He started from the police station, followed by Nat. When he reached the door, the officer suddenly turned back. "Come near forgetting my badge," he said, in explanation. "It wouldn't do to arrest a man without my badge. He might think it was only a bluff. [Pg 178]

Give me my badge, sergeant."

"First you know, you'll forget your head," murmured the sergeant, as he passed over a big tin star.

"I take it off when I lay down for a nap of an evening," the policeman said to Nat. "Some of the points might stick me, and I'd get blood poisoning. You can't be too careful in this business. I knowed a policeman once——"

"Say, if you're going to arrest that man you'd better get a move on," advised the sergeant. "That boat's due to leave at daylight, I heard, and it ain't far from it now."

"All right, I'm going now. I'll be back in a little while with the prisoner. Get a cell ready for him."

"Oh, the cell will be ready when you are."

"Fifteen hundred dollars," murmured the policeman, as he and Nat went out into the night. "This will be a fine arrest. Tom Duncan will wish he made this one."

"We'd better hurry," suggested Nat. "He may escape."

"Don't worry about that. No prisoner ever got away from me," boasted the officer.

It was not far to the dock where the *Spray* was tied up. Even in the darkness Nat knew the boat. He wondered if the mate was aboard. Once he reached the ship, the officer's manner changed. He proceeded cautiously, and seemed to know what he was about. [Pg 179]

"Do you know which his cabin is?" he asked of Nat, in a whisper.

"No, but I know where the mate usually sleeps aboard these boats."

"You go ahead then."

The young pilot led the way. Though he had never been aboard the *Spray* he thought he could find where Bumstead slept. Fortunately, they did not meet the anchor watch, who was probably asleep.

"This ought to be his cabin," said Nat, indicating one in the same relative position as that occupied by the mate aboard the *Jessie Drew*.

"Then I'll go in and get him," said the officer.

It was beginning to get light, a streak of dawn showing in the east. The policeman pushed open the cabin door, which was not locked.

"Is Joseph Bumstead here?" he asked in loud tones.

"That's me. What's wanted?" was the answer, and Nat recognized the mate's voice.

"Come out here," said the officer.

He backed out of the cabin, and in the growing light Nat saw that he had his revolver drawn. Wondering what could be wanted of him, Bumstead jumped out of his bunk, partly dressed. [Pg 180]

"You're my prisoner!" suddenly exclaimed the policeman, throwing back his coat to display the big star. At the same time he grabbed the mate with one hand, and in the other leveled his weapon at him.

"What's the trouble? Is this a joke?" demanded the mate.

"You'll find it quite different from a joke," replied the officer. "I have a warrant for your arrest, sworn out by Nat Morton, charging you with the embezzlement of fifteen hundred dollars. You'll have to come with me."

At that moment the mate caught sight of Nat, who stood to one side.

"So! This is your work, eh?" he cried. "Well, I'll not go with you! You haven't got me yet!"

With a sudden motion he broke away from the officer.

"Hold on or I'll shoot!" threatened the policeman.

"Shoot then!" cried the mate.



"Shoot, then!" cried the mate (*Page 180*)

He ran to the rail. An instant later he had mounted it, poised on the top a moment, and with a shout of defiance he leaped over the side. A splash in the water told that he had landed in the lake.

"Stop! Hold on!" yelled the officer, as he rushed to the side. "Come back or I'll shoot!"

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He peered down into the water. There was no sign of the mate. By this time several members of the crew were aroused and were on the deck.

"What's the matter?" cried a voice that Nat recognized as Sam Shaw's.

"Prisoner escaped!" exclaimed the policeman. "Can you see him?" he asked of Nat, who stood beside him, in the early dawn.

The boy shook his head in disappointment.

"He's got away, I guess," he said.

"Get me a boat!" cried the officer. "I'll find him if it takes all day. Come on!"

CHAPTER XXIV IN A COLLISION

[Pg 182]

With the increase of daylight, objects on and about the freighter became clearer. But looking over the side Nat and the policeman could see nothing of the mate. Members of the crew who had hastily leaped from their bunks began asking what the matter was. Soon the captain came from his cabin.

"They've killed my uncle!" exclaimed Sam Shaw. "That's what they did! I heard them throw him overboard. That mean Nat Morton did it! I'll have him arrested for murder!"

"Oh, dry up!" exclaimed Nat, quite put out with the unexpected turn of events.

"I'll lick you; that's what I'll do!" cried Sam, advancing on Nat with outstretched fists.

"Keep away from me!" retorted Nat. "I whipped you once, and I can do it again!"

"He didn't push your uncle overboard," said one of the crew. "He jumped."

"That's what he did," added the policeman. "He got away from me, too. Somebody get me a boat." [Pg 183]

"What for?" asked the captain.

"Because I'm an officer of the law, and a prisoner has escaped. I had him a prisoner, all right, for I had my hand on him, but he went so sudden he got away."

"There's a boat moored alongside," said the captain, when matters had been briefly explained. "But you want to hurry. I can't lay here all day, though how I'm going to sail without a mate is more than I know."

"I'll get him for you, but I'll have to take him right away again," said the officer. "He's a criminal and a fugitive from justice."

The mate might have been almost anything, as far as any denial on his part was concerned, for not a trace of him had been seen since he jumped overboard. Sam Shaw, mean as he was, had a genuine affection for his uncle, and he was much distressed about his relative.

"He's drowned! I know he's drowned!" he exclaimed, as he walked about the deck, half crying.

"Oh, dry up!" advised Nat savagely, for he knew the mate was a good swimmer, and he had no doubt but that Bumstead had managed to reach shore, under cover of the semi-darkness, and was far enough away by this time.

Meanwhile, the policeman got into a boat and rowed about, but all to no purpose. The mate had disappeared as completely as if he was at the bottom of the lake. [Pg 184]

"Well," said Nat, much disappointed, "that's done with. It's a failure. I guess I'd have done better if I'd gone alone, and not taken the policeman with me, though he meant well enough. Now I'd better get some breakfast and then arrange to have some one row me out to meet the *Mermaid*."

He told the officer that he would have to leave.

"Very well," replied the policeman. "You may go, but I'll never give up hunting for my prisoner. It's the first time one ever got away from me, and I'm not going to stand it. I'll keep hunting until I find him, if it takes all day or a whole year. You had better leave me your address, and as soon as I arrest him, I'll let you know."

"I don't believe that would do any good. I travel about so, on the boat, that I can't tell just what my address will be. You had better give me the warrant; I may run across him at some other port."

Rather reluctantly the policeman gave up the legal document.

"I wish I had handcuffed him at first," he said. "Then he couldn't have gotten away, and if he jumped in the water he would have been drowned."

"I wouldn't care about having that happen," said Nat. [Pg 185]

"Me either, though I hate to let a prisoner get away. But I'll catch him yet, you see."

And when Nat had gone ashore, eaten his breakfast in a little restaurant, and was being rowed out to be picked up by the *Mermaid*, the policeman was still searching about the dock and adjacent shore for the missing mate.

Captain Turton and the pilot sympathized with Nat over the failure of his mission, but they said Bumstead was sure to be arrested sooner or later.

"He'll probably transfer to some other boat, now," said Nat.

"Very likely," answered Mr. Weatherby. "He knows you are after him, and it's going to be harder to arrest him."

The *Mermaid* proceeded on her way, and for some time Nat was so occupied with his work, for there was a great increase in passenger traffic, that he almost forgot about the rascally mate and the stolen money.

Meanwhile, as my young readers have probably surmised, Bumstead had safely reached shore and had arranged to keep out of the way of officers of the law. The sudden appearance of the policeman in his cabin had been the first intimation that there was a warrant for his arrest, and that Nat knew of his appropriation of the fifteen hundred dollars belonging to Mr. Morton. [Pg 186]

It is true the mate had fancied Nat was suspicious, after the lad had seen the wallet, and questioned him about it, but, when some time passed, and nothing resulted, the scoundrel thought that Nat either had his suspicions lulled, or did not know how to go about recovering the money. That a previous plan to arrest him had failed, by his shift of vessels, the mate never dreamed.

Now he knew he must make another change. It would not be safe to remain aboard the *Spray*. Accordingly, when he had reached shore, after his sensational leap for liberty, he sought refuge with a man he knew at Cove Point. He remained there until he heard that Nat had left, and that the policeman, very reluctantly, had given up the search.

Then the mate sent for his nephew, and the pair took what money was coming to them and left town. About two weeks after this the mate secured a place on the freighter *Liberty Bell*, which plied up and down Lake Huron.

"Uncle Joe, what did that officer want?" asked Sam Shaw of his relative, one day, when he happened to mention their former place aboard the *Spray*. "Was it in connection with that charge you made against Nat before the pilot board?"

"Well—er—yes—that was it. They wanted my testimony." [Pg 187]

"Why don't you give it to them? I'd like to see that Morton chap locked up. How did he escape

being sent to jail on your charge?"

"I don't exactly know," replied the mate. "I guess he is only out on bail."

"I hope they send him to prison for a long time. I can't bear him, he's so stuck up, thinking he's a regular pilot."

"Well, I'll fix him," murmured the mate. He did not want his nephew to know about the accusation Nat had made, for he was afraid Sam might, unconsciously, betray him. Nor was the mate altogether easy regarding the charge he had made before the pilot board. He had read in the papers about that case, and how he was wanted for contempt of court. He thus had to face two charges, and he knew he must be very careful when he went ashore, lest he be arrested.

"We'll meet the vessel that Morton fellow is on, this trip, Uncle Joe," went on Sam.

"How's that?"

"Well, we're going to Bay City, and the *Mermaid* is coming to Detroit, according to the papers."

"Is that so?" asked the mate, suddenly interested. "I wonder where we'll pass her?"

"About Ludlow's Island," answered Sam, who was developing a good knowledge of the lakes. [Pg 188]

"Ludlow's Island," repeated the mate. "The channel there is quite narrow. We'll have to pass quite close."

"Do you think he'll see you, Uncle Joe?"

"No—of course not. What does it matter? I'm not keeping out of his way. I had certain reasons for not wanting that officer to take me to court; that's why I leaped overboard that time."

"Oh," answered Sam, who had not heard the explanation given by Nat and the policeman.

"So we'll pass his vessel quite close," murmured the mate, when his nephew had left him. "That's my chance. If I can be left in charge of the wheel I think I can make Nat Morton wish he had never interfered with me. Let's see, we ought to get to Ludlow's Island to-morrow night. I hope it's dark or foggy."

Meanwhile, all unconscious of the perils in store for him, Nat was, that same day, guiding the vessel of which he was now officially the assistant pilot toward Detroit.

"It's going to be a thick night," said Mr. Weatherby, as Nat relieved him in the pilot-house, the evening of the day after the conversation set down above between Sam Shaw and his uncle. "I think there will be quite a fog before morning. Don't take any chances. If you're in doubt call me, but I'd like you to try your hand at taking the ship past Ludlow's Island. It's one of the worst places in the lake, and when you've been through that, in a fog, you're almost entitled to a pilot's license." [Pg 189]

"I'll try it, Mr. Weatherby."

"That's the way to talk."

As the night came on the fog increased, until Nat decided he would slow down to half speed. The bell and whistle were kept going at regular intervals, and two men were stationed in the bow as lookouts.

It was close to midnight when Nat, who had decided to ask to be relieved, for he was a little doubtful of his ability under such bad conditions, saw through the haze another vessel approaching. He was in the narrowest part of the channel.

"There isn't time to send word to Mr. Weatherby now," he thought. "I'll wait until I pass that ship. Then I'll go below, for I'm getting nervous here."

The two vessels were approaching nearer and nearer to each other. If Nat had been aware that the ship he was about to pass was the one on which was his enemy, the mate, doubtless he would have been more nervous than he was.

"He seems to be crowding too close over this way," thought Nat. "Guess I'll give him a caution signal."

He pulled the whistle wire sharply. Short blasts came forth from the *Mermaid's* hoarse siren. To Nat's surprise the other vessel, instead of keeping away from him, in the narrow channel, seemed to be coming closer. [Pg 190]

"Doesn't he know enough to keep away, and on his own course?" said the young pilot half aloud.

He waited with an anxiously beating heart, and at the same time looked around to see if anybody else was near.

"Oh, if only Mr. Weatherby was here now!" he told himself. Never had he missed the old pilot so much as at this moment. For one instant he thought of yelling for assistance, but knew it would be useless, for his voice would not carry far enough. He was in sole charge and must do the best he could.

"Perhaps that other pilot is drunk," he murmured, and then shut his teeth hard. He was "up

against it good and hard," and he realized it only too well. He trembled in spite of himself, and an icy chill began to creep up and down his backbone.

He gave another signal. Then, as he watched, he saw the prow of the other vessel turn toward him.

"He's going to ram me!" exclaimed Nat.

Quickly he gave another signal, and then he rang for full speed astern. But it was too late. With a crash the other vessel was upon him, though the result was different from what might have been expected. [Pg 191]

The *Mermaid* was a steel boat, while the *Liberty Bell* was an old wooden one. Instead of the bow of the latter crashing into the hull of the passenger steamer, the bow of the freight boat crumpled up like paper, being smashed into kindling wood up as far as the pilot-house, part of which was demolished.

There was a confused ringing of bells and blowing of whistles, and then both vessels came to a stop.

CHAPTER XXV BUMSTEAD'S ARREST—CONCLUSION

[Pg 192]

With the first sound of the crash Captain Turton and Mr. Weatherby were out of their berths, and on deck. The searchlight of the *Mermaid* showed plainly what had occurred. Neither boat was dangerously damaged, the passenger steamer hardly suffering at all.

Captain Turton took this in at a glance, and then, with the assistance of the mates, he quieted the frightened passengers.

"How did it happen, Nat?" asked Mr. Weatherby gravely.

"That fellow went wrong!" exclaimed Nat, in his nervous excitement. "Whoever was steering that boat gave the wrong signals. I'm positive of that. Twice I warned him to keep away, but he kept crowding me closer, until he rammed me. It was his fault."

"There will have to be an investigation," said the pilot. "I'm sorry this happened."

"Ahoy the *Mermaid*!" came a hail from the other boat. "What's the matter with you fellows, anyhow? Can't you keep on your own side of the channel? My bows are stove in, and you've injured one of my men!" [Pg 193]

"Who are you?" called back the pilot.

"Captain Carter, of the *Liberty Bell*."

"It was your steersman's fault," shouted Mr. Weatherby. "Are you in any danger?"

"No, but I'm going to lay-to until morning, and then I want to know who's going to settle for my damage."

"We'll see you in the morning, then," was the pilot's answer.

Nat passed an uneasy night. Though he knew the fault of the collision was not his, he worried lest he might not be able to prove it. There might be an old pilot in the other vessel—a pilot up to all sorts of tricks, who, even if he was wrong, could so make matters appear as to throw the blame on Nat.

"If he does, that ends my career as a pilot," thought our hero.

Soon after breakfast Captain Turton, with the pilot and Nat, went aboard the other vessel. Her bow was quite badly damaged, but the break did not extend below the waterline.

"Did you say some of your men were injured?" asked Captain Turton, when he had greeted the commander of the *Liberty Bell*.

"Yes, sir, my mate, Joseph Bumstead. His leg is broken." [Pg 194]

"What?" cried Nat and the pilot in the same breath.

"Bumstead is his name. I don't see anything peculiar in that," replied Captain Carter, looking at the two in surprise.

"Well, as it happens, there is something peculiar about it," went on Captain Turton. "We have a warrant for his arrest on a serious charge. However, if his leg is broken, he isn't very likely to get away, and I think we can proceed with the investigation. I want to find out who is to blame for this."

"Your steersman, of course," was Captain Carter's quick answer.

"It's natural you should say that. But we'll see."

Several members of the crew of both vessels were called as witnesses. Nat told his story, of how he had tried to warn the other vessel away, and how the steersman of it had persisted in crowding him.

"By the way, who is your pilot?" asked Mr. Weatherby. "I haven't seen him since I came aboard."

"I have no regular pilot," answered Captain Carter. "My mate, Mr. Bumstead, whom I recently engaged, was steering when the collision occurred. He told me he could qualify as a pilot."

[Pg 195]

"Hum," remarked Mr. Weatherby. "I think it will be a good plan to question Bumstead."

"He's in his bunk."

"Then we'll go there. Come, Nat."

The rascally mate started when he saw the boy, and his face, that was flushed with a slight fever, grew pale.

"Well, you've caught me, I see," he fairly snarled. "But luck is against me."

"Yes, we've caught you in more ways than one," said the pilot.

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that you gave the wrong signals last night, either intentionally or through ignorance, and that you caused this collision."

"Who says so?"

"Half a dozen witnesses. Members of your own crew, for that matter."

"My own crew?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe it."

"It is true, nevertheless."

"Name the men," growled Bumstead. He was suffering considerably, yet he still had some fight in him.

For reply two of the deckhands were called in, and each, after much urging, told his story in detail.

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"That ain't true," growled the mate, but his voice sounded weak and uncertain.

"It is true," cried one of the men. Bumstead had treated him roughly the day previous, and he was glad of a chance to "square accounts."

"So it is—every word," put in the second deckhand who had been summoned.

"You are all against me," muttered the mate. "It's a plot, I reckon."

"No plot at all," cried Captain Turton. "We are simply bound to get at the bottom of this affair."

To this Joseph Bumstead made no reply.

"I'd like to know why you told me that you could qualify as a pilot," put in Captain Carter, and his voice had anything but a pleasant ring to it.

"I can qualify."

"I don't believe it."

"He is no pilot, and never was," said Nat. "He has done very little steering."

"You don't know what I've done," growled the mate.

"Yes, I do know!" exclaimed the boy quickly. "I know a good bit more than you think I do."

"Ha! What do you mean by that?"

"You'll find out later. We'll settle one question at a time."

"See here, Bumstead, you might as well own up that you were responsible," said Mr. Weatherby. "If you try to stick it out you'll only make matters worse. To my way of thinking, you ran into us on purpose."

[Pg 197]

"No! no! I—I—" The mate hesitated, not knowing how to proceed.

"Come, out with it."

"Well—er—if you must know the truth, I—er—I got confused."

"Confused!" roared Captain Carter.

"Ye-es. I—er—I had a headache, and I got a sudden spell of blindness. I—er—I wanted to put the wheel over, but before I could get straightened out the damage was done."

"I don't believe a word of that!" exclaimed Captain Turton. "He is a rascal!"

"No! no! I was confused—I swear it!" groaned the mate. All the remaining courage was oozing out of him. "I did my best to clear your vessel, but I simply couldn't do it."

Captain Carter turned to one of his hands.

"Did he act confused, so far as you know?" he questioned.

"I don't know about that," answered the man. "He sure didn't steer the boat right."

"I sometimes get those dizzy spells," said Bumstead. "They come on me without warning. When they do come I don't know what I am doing for the minute."

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"You should have told me of this before," said Captain Carter.

"I—er—I was afraid I'd lose my job if I did. But I was confused, I swear I was. Otherwise, I should never have run into that other boat."

They had to let it go at that, since there was no direct proof of any intentional desire to smash into the *Mermaid*, and the charge was too grave to take any chances on. But it was satisfactorily proved that the mate did give the wrong signals, and that Nat was not to blame.

"Now that is over, we have another matter against you," went on Mr. Weatherby. "I presume you know what it is, Bumstead."

"Yes," said the other in a low voice.

"Nat, go ashore and call an officer," said the pilot.

"Don't do that!" begged the mate. "I'll confess everything, and I'll pay the money back with interest."

"Then you admit that you kept the fifteen hundred dollars you were to deliver to Mr. Morton's son?"

"Yes. It was a great temptation, after I cashed the lumber certificates. I needed the money badly, and I kept it. I meant to pay it back, but I—I couldn't."

"And will you pay back the money on the note?"

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"Every penny, with interest, if you don't have me arrested."

"What do you say, Nat?" asked Mr. Weatherby.

"I have no desire to see him arrested, though I think he tried to injure me in other ways than by keeping this money from me. But I forgive him," answered the boy.

"I think that is the best way," went on the pilot. "You have been punished almost enough, Bumstead. I hope it will be a lesson to you."

"It will. Mr. Morton was kind to me, and I treated his son very wrong. I'm—I'm sorry," and the mate turned his face away, so they would not see him weeping.

Nat was glad to get away from the sad scene. On his way out he passed Sam Shaw, but that youth had nothing to say, and he turned aside.

"I feel that I owe you an apology," said Captain Carter to Captain Turton. "I'll discharge that rascal of a mate and his red-headed nephew, too."

About two weeks later, through the efforts of Mr. Scanlon, the lawyer who took charge of the case for Nat, the entire sum appropriated by the mate, together with interest for two years, was recovered, and turned over to the young pilot, who also received his father's wallet, which he prized very much. Bumstead and Sam lost their places on the *Liberty Bell*, and at last accounts they were working as laborers aboard a grain barge, for the mate had to sell his shares in the *Jessie Drew* to pay Nat what was coming to the boy. Sam confessed his trick about the cigarettes, and Captain Marshall, when he heard about it, begged Nat's pardon in a letter.

[Pg 200]

"Well," said Mr. Weatherby to Nat one day, "since you have come into your inheritance, I suppose you'll give up learning to be a pilot?"

"Indeed, I shall not. I'm going to spend a couple of terms at school, and then I'm coming back with you again. I want to see my old friends, Mr. and Mrs. Miller, and do something for them, in return for their kindness to me. I'm going to be a pilot yet, and, I hope, a good one."

"There is no question but what you will, if you keep on as you have been going," returned Mr. Weatherby.

Nat used part of the money to better his education, and he gave a goodly sum to his kind friends, so that they were able to live in better circumstances. Then the young pilot resumed his work aboard a big passenger steamer, Mr. Weatherby coaching him, until the aged man said Nat knew as much as he did, if not more.

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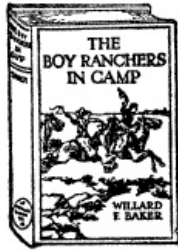
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In Chapter V, "shaking his first" was changed to "shaking his fist".

In Chapter VIII, "He knew it would take him several years engineer set in operation the powerful pumps, to be a capable one, but he determined to get a good ground work or the higher branches of it, and so he listened carfully to all that Mr. Weatherby told him." was changed to "He knew it would take him several years to be a capable one, but he determined to get a good ground work or the higher branches of it, and so he listened carefully to all that Mr. Weatherby told him."

In Chapter XI, a missing quotation mark was added after "I never put it there".

In Chapter XVI, "let him have the whole business" was changed to "let him have the whole business".

In Chapter XVII, "the Sanlons wanted to begin their trip" was changed to "the Scanlons wanted to begin their trip".

In Chapter XVIII, "the other vessed" was changed to "the other vessel".

In Chapter XX, an extraneous quotation mark was removed after "No, sir".

In Chapter XXIII, "throwing back his boat" was changed to "throwing back his coat".

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