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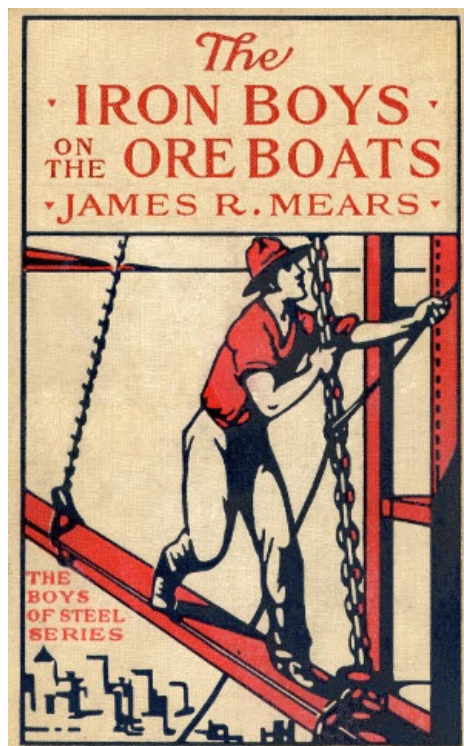
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## **The Iron Boys on the Ore Boats**

OR

## **Roughing It on the Great Lakes**

By

JAMES R. MEARS

Author of The Iron Boys in the Mines, The Iron Boys as Foremen,  
The Iron Boys in the Steel Mills, etc.

Illustrated

PHILADELPHIA

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**Both Boys Were Hurlled Forward**  
*Frontispiece*

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## The Iron Boys on the Ore Boats

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### CHAPTER I

#### TO THE INLAND SEAS

"WHAT are we to do?"

"The first duty of an inspector is to inspect, I should say," answered Steve Rush, with a soft laugh, in answer to his companion's question.

Bob Jarvis made a wry face.

"You think you are very smart this morning, seeing that you have been complimented by the president of the mining company," grumbled Jarvis. "I don't know whether I like this new job or not. We were making pretty good money in the mines and we were bosses at that. Are we going to do any bossing when we get on the lakes?"

"I think not. We shall be ordinary seamen. Somebody else will do the bossing in this instance and we shall be the victims. Mr. Carrhart will tell us all about it in a minute. He is arranging for our work now. It will be a great change, and while we shall be working pretty hard we shall be adding to our store of knowledge, Bob. We are lucky to possess so fully the confidence of our superiors. Let's try to show that we are worthy of their confidence in our new places."

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"When do we start?"

"I don't know. Mr. Carrhart is looking that matter up now."

The lads were sitting in the private office of the president of the mining company, whither they had been summoned from their work at the mines. Mr. Carrhart, the president, stepped briskly into the office at that juncture.

"Well, lads, I have arranged for your transportation."

"May I ask on what ship we are to sail, sir?" questioned Steve.

"The 'Wanderer.' She is not one of our newest ships, but she is a staunch old vessel with about as many conveniences as are to be found on the newer and more modern boats. I sometimes think we are getting further away from what a ship should be—but then, I am not a sailor. I am not supposed to know anything about ships," laughed the president.

"When do we sail?"

"Some time to-night. The 'Wanderer' is not yet in. She passed the Soo nearly forty hours ago and should dock some time this afternoon. She is coming up light this time, for a change."

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"How long does it take to load the ship with ore?" asked Steve, his active mind already in search of knowledge along the line of their new calling.

"Eight hours or so."

"That is quick time," nodded Jarvis.

"It strikes me as being a long time," remarked Rush.

"That is the point exactly," agreed Mr. Carrhart. "If you boys can find a way to shorten the loading time you will have served your purpose well. That is exactly why we are sending you out on this inspecting tour—that is, it is one of the reasons. We want to know where we can save money and time in the shipment of ores to the furnaces."

"But, sir, we know nothing about this branch of the business," protested Steve. "Are there not others better qualified than ourselves?"

"They think they are," answered the president reflectively. "We have tried them out. Most of them are wedded to old methods. What we want is new methods as well as new blood. Besides, you lads have expressed yourselves as being anxious to learn everything about the mining and steel business. I am taking you at your word. You are thoroughly posted on the mining end. I do not believe you could be much more so were you to spend three years more underground. The shipment of the ore is the next step. You have followed the ore down from the mines to the shipping point, here in Duluth. Now I am going to have you spend a few months on the Great

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Lakes."

"That will be a fine experience, sir."

"I think so."

"Is the purpose of our going to sea on the lakes known, or is it not to be known to any one outside of ourselves?"

"Certainly not. The mission might fail of its purposes were such to be the case. To all intents and appearances, you two boys will be plain, everyday sailors. You will find many hardships in the life of a Great Lakes sailor, but then, if I know you, I do not believe you will mind these very much," added Mr. Carrhart, with an indulgent smile.

"We certainly shall not," answered Rush, with emphasis. "The harder the work the better it seems to agree with me."

"But not with me," retorted Jarvis.

The president laughed.

"That doesn't agree with what the reports show. For industry and attention to duty you are a close second to your friend Rush. I presume, Rush, that we shall be losing you one of these days?" [11]

"What do you mean, sir?"

"You will wish to go on to the mills, eh?"

Steve thought briefly.

"Yes, sir; that is our ambition."

"I thought so. You may depend upon me to use my influence to further your ambition, though I shall very much dislike to lose you."

"You are very kind, sir."

"What I hoped you would do was to remain with the mining end of our business, where one of these days you would rise to the grade of general superintendent. Perhaps after you have had your experiences at the other end of the line, you will decide to come back. If I am still president of the mining company you will be well taken care of, should you return."

"Thank you, sir; perhaps we shall be back sooner than you think."

"And now for the subject at issue. Here is a letter to the master of the 'Wanderer,' Captain Simms, stating that you are to be taken on board his ship as seamen. He does not know that it is your first cruise, but I have an idea that he will learn the truth soon enough."

There was a grim smile on the face of the president.

"You will find Captain Simms a gruff old seadog. He is one of our oldest and most trustworthy masters, and after you come to know him I am sure you will like him very much. You have a fairly clear idea of what is expected of you by the company. You boys are both keen and resourceful and I expect a great deal from you. I know that you will see all there is to be seen, and no doubt will see some things that have been overlooked by older heads than yours." [12]

"Have you any further directions to give before we leave you, sir?" inquired Steve.

"None whatever. I wish you success, which I am sure you will have. You need not go to the ore docks until this evening, unless you wish to, as you probably will have some things to do in town."

After bidding the president good-bye, the boys took their leave. It seemed only a few weeks since Steve Rush had first entered the office of the president of the mining company looking for a job. The same office boy with whom he had had trouble at the start of his career was on guard at the door, but Steve had grown away from him. Steve, who with his companion, Bob Jarvis, will be recognized at once as one of the Iron Boys, was tall for his age and muscular. His manner of life had done much for his physical well-being, and he was not the same boy who had fought his way into the president's office, the account of which is set forth in "THE IRON BOYS IN THE MINES." [13]

It was there that Steve Rush and Bob Jarvis first became friends, after they had met and fought a battle in a lonely drift in the Cousin Jack Iron Mine; it was there that both lads proved their heroism by saving the president and several other officials of the company, when the entire company was threatened with death from a burning bag of dynamite.

It was in the Cousin Jack Mine that Steve and his newly found friend saw the need of and invented a new tram railroad system, by which the mining company was saved many thousands of dollars a year.

Again in "THE IRON BOYS AS FOREMEN," was told how the lads proved themselves by saving the powder magazine from blowing up while the mine was burning and the flames were creeping toward the deadly explosives. It will be recalled that it was mainly through the heroic efforts of the Iron Boys that the Red Rock Mine was saved from almost total destruction, and that through their further efforts many lives were undoubtedly saved. From then on they continued to distinguish themselves, playing a conspicuous part in the great strike, in the end exposing and

unmasking a wicked and unscrupulous man who was leading the miners on to commit deeds of violence. [14]

They were the same boys who were now starting out on a new career for the same company. In this instance the lads were to become sailors on the inland seas, known as the Great Lakes. The lads were taking up this new calling for the twofold purpose of learning still another branch of the great corporation's business and they fondly hoped their work would prove of importance to their employers.

The office of the president was located in Duluth, many miles from the Iron Range where the boys had been working for the last two years.

Their first act after leaving the offices was to make their way down to the water front to the ship canal, leading from the harbor out to Lake Superior. Steve pointed out the aerial bridge to his companion. This was a car carried through the air suspended from a giant truss over the river, by which passengers were transferred across to Superior on the other side. Bob had never seen this wonder before and was deeply interested in it. To Steve Rush it was of particular interest, for he had acquired no slight knowledge of engineering during his experience in the mines up on the range.

Boats were moving in and out, huge lake freighters, ore boats and passenger ships, for the lake traffic was in full cry now. After strolling about for a time, Steve took his companion home with him, and the rest of the afternoon was spent with Steve's mother. Supper finished, the lads decided that they would get down to the ore docks, as the ship would likely be in by that time. [15]

Darkness had set in when they reached the docks. These docks, as those who have had the misfortune to have to make their way over them are aware, consist of tiers upon tiers of trestle. Over the tops, high in the air, ore trains rumble in by day and by night, discharging their cargoes of red ore into huge hoppers, from which the ore is loaded into the boats, or Great Lakes ore carriers, as they are called.

Neither boy had ever been out on one of these trestles before, and the task looked to be rather formidable.

"How are we going to do it?" demanded Bob, surveying the great structure apprehensively.

"I guess the only way will be to keep going until we get somewhere or fall off. I don't see the ship, but we shall see it when we get to the top of the trestle."

Both boys narrowly missed being run down by an ore train as it was shunted out on the trestle. The lads were in a dangerous place, but they did not feel at all disturbed about it. Men were flitting about in the dim light of half a dozen electric globes distributed along the top of the trestle that loomed all of seventy-five feet above the water. [16]

"There's a ship down there," cried Steve.

"Yes, and there's one on the other side," answered Bob. "Why, there are ships at all of the docks along here. Are you sure we have hit the right dock?"

"I am not sure of anything, except that we are likely to break our necks if we don't look sharp," answered Rush, with a laugh. "We will ask the first man we meet where the 'Wanderer' is. There comes some one now."

Rush hailed the man, a foreigner. The latter neither answered nor paid the slightest attention to the question put to him.

"Thank you," murmured Rush.

"Mighty sociable lot of men up here," jeered Bob. "But then I suppose they have to keep their minds on their work or fall off the trestle. I prefer to work underground. In the mines, there's no danger of falling down."

Ore was being shot down through the chutes into boats on each side of the great trestle. There was the roar as of a great cataract as the red dirt went hurtling down into the hold of the ships many feet below.

"Let's get down on one of the other levels, Steve. Then we'll drift over to the heading at the other end." [17]

"Anybody'd think you were down in a mine. These aren't levels; they are tiers. You remind me of one of our miners who came down here to Duluth. He went to a hotel, and in telling some of the boys about it, he said: 'We got in a swell cage with looking glasses all around the inside. The cage tender jerked us up to the sixteenth level. We went along this till we came to a crosscut; then they led us into a swell drift an' we struck the heading and sat down.' What do you think of that?"

"That sounds like a lumber-jack more than it does a miner. He must have had a sky parlor. I wonder what hotel he got into."

Suddenly a great shouting was set up far below where the boys were standing, and further on toward the end of the trestle.

"Now what's the matter?" wondered Steve. Two long blasts of a steamship's whistle sounded.

"There goes a ship. They're pulling out. I'll bet that's the 'Wanderer,'" shouted Bob.

"If it is, she will pull out without us. No, it can't be the 'Wanderer,' for she did not come in until after sundown and it is not possible that the ship could be loaded by this time. We'll simply have to find our way down through the trestle somewhere and locate our ship. If we knew which side the boat lay it would be easier for us. Can you see which boat is leaving, Bob?"

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"I think it is a boat from one of the other piers. I don't see anything going away near us."

"Suppose we move out toward the end. Then we shall be able to see where we are and what we are doing."

"And fall off?"

"Certainly not. We will walk along by the side of the track. There is a railing here. No danger at all of falling."

The boys had their suit cases in their hands. They carried little baggage, having been informed that there was no room on board for trunks or luggage. Besides, the lads needed few clothes outside of several suits of underwear.

As they stepped along, walking side by side, Steve pointed up at a bright star.

"I wonder if we had better lay our course by that one—Grab me, Bob—I'm falling!" suddenly cried Steve Rush.

Jarvis stretched out a quick hand, fastening upon Steve's collar. But the movement threw Jarvis off his balance. He, too, toppled forward.

Rush had stepped into an open chute through which the red ore was roaring down into the hold of the ship seventy-five feet below them. Steve struggled valiantly to prevent himself from going in, and Bob tried his best to keep from going in after.

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"Let go, Bob; you'll go in, too!"

The warning came too late. Steve shot out of sight, leaving a fragment of his coat collar in the hand of his companion. Then Bob went in, head first.

Neither lad uttered a cry. They were not of the crying kind, and even had they uttered a shout their voices would have been drowned in the roar of the ore thundering into the hold of the big ship awaiting it down in the slip.

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## CHAPTER II

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### THE IRON BOYS AS CARGO

**T**HROUGH some fortunate twist of his body, Jarvis righted himself while going through the big hopper into which the ore was shooting. He landed feet first at the bottom of the hopper.

In the meantime Steve Rush, with a few seconds' start of his companion, had gone on down through the hopper. He hit the long wooden ore chutes that led down into the ship; he struck the chute with a heavy bump and then went on at a speed that took his breath away. Steve was in a sitting posture. Jarvis followed him at the same rate of speed, lying flat on his back.

There was ore on all sides of them; in fact, they were riding on the swift-moving ore; all about them was darkness, and even had there been lights it is doubtful if the Iron Boys would have seen them, because of the speed at which they were traveling.

Steve's mind was working with its usual rapidity. Had he known exactly what awaited them below he might have been able to plan with more certainty. He did reason, however, that they would probably have to pass through a small opening when they reached the bottom of the chute. In this he was wrong, though right across the chute where it entered the ship was a heavy iron brace dividing the chute in half, which was placed there to give the ship more rigidity.

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"Lie flat!" shouted Rush, with quick instinct, himself dropping on his back. He did not know whether Bob were following him or not. Jarvis was, but he was in no need of the admonition to lie flat. He was as flat as it was possible for him to be and he could not have straightened up had it been to save his life.

Jarvis was close enough, however, to hear the warning cry. He opened his mouth to answer, getting it full of red ore as a result. The ore got down in his throat, sending him into a paroxysm of choking, sneezing and growling that was lost in the noise about him.

Suddenly Steve felt himself shooting through space. He realized, in that instant, that he had left the chute. A few seconds more and he struck heavily on his feet, bounded into the air, then plunged forward head first.

The lad landed on his stomach, slipped down a conical pile of ore to the bottom, his head striking the side of the ship, doubling him up and leaving him stunned and unconscious.

Jarvis, who was not far behind him, went through very much the same experience, save that he

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turned a somersault when he left the chute, landing flat on his back on the pile of ore. His feet drove against the side of the ship with the force of a battering-ram, backed by the full weight of the lad's body. The effect was nearly the same as it had been in the case of Rush. Bob was stunned. He, too, lay still, after curling up against the vessel's side.

"Hey, what's that?" a voice had shouted as the boys disappeared through the hatches.

"What's what?"

"I thought I saw something besides ore go through the chute in number seven hatch."

"You're seeing things!"

"Maybe I am."

"Close number seven hatch!" shouted the second mate, and the two deck hands, after the chute had been hoisted a little above the deck, slid the heavy hatch cover into place. All the ore that was needed had gone in through that hatch. The ship was nearly loaded. All that was now required was a few car-loads at the ends to trim the ship properly, after which she would be ready to sail.

Within the next ten minutes the rest of the ore had been shipped. With loud crashings, interspersed with hoarse shouts, harshly-uttered commands and an occasional toot of warning from the ship's whistle, the hatch-covers were put in place and the ship made ready for her journey down the Great Lakes. [23]

There followed a moment of inactivity; then came a blast of the whistle fully a minute in duration. It was the signal that the ship was about to back out of her slip, warning all other craft to keep clear.

The propeller began to churn the waters of the harbor and the ore carrier, with its cargo of ten thousand tons of iron ore, backed slowly out into the stream.

Bob Jarvis rolled over until he was practically standing on his head and shoulders. He toppled over on his back with a jolt that woke him up. The lad gave a kick and some one grunted.

"Hey, there, take your foot out of my stomach, whoever you are. Is that you, Bob?"

"I—I don't know. Hello, Steve, that you?"

"I guess it's both of us. Ugh! My mouth is so full of ore that I can hard—hardly talk."

"I've got a dark red taste in my own mouth. I've swallowed enough ore to make a steel rail. Do you know where we are?"

"We have fallen into the hold of a ship, and we are lucky that we are not dead."

"Maybe we are and don't know it," jeered Jarvis, pulling himself up. He tried to get to his feet, but the ore slipped from under him, leaving him at the bottom against the side of the vessel again. [24]

"Quit it!" shouted Steve. "Are you trying to bury me?"

The latter was on his feet too, brushing the dirt from mouth, eyes, nose and ears. Bob had sent a quantity of it sliding down the chute.

"I can't help it. What's the matter with you? What do you think about this business?"

"I don't think, I know. We are in a nice fix."

"Think so?"

"I told you I didn't think," retorted Steve in a tone of slight irritation.

"Glad you admit it."

"We have been dumped into the hold of an ore vessel. I don't know whether or not there is any way to get out, and it is sure that the hatches will not be opened again until the vessel reaches her destination."

"How long will that be?"

"That depends upon where they are going. If they are bound for any of the Lake Erie ports I should imagine it would take a week or more."

Bob groaned.

"I'm going to yell."

"Yell, if you can. I've too much ore in my mouth to make much of a noise."

Jarvis raised his voice in a shout. It did not seem to attract any attention. The lad shouted again and again. By this time the ship was trembling from stem to stern under the jar of the propeller that was beating the water at many hundred revolutions a minute. [25]

"Nobody on this ship, I guess," muttered Bob. "Come, suggest something. You've always got something to say," urged Jarvis.

"I was about to say that you might as well save your breath. No one can hear us through the thick decks; in fact, I presume every one has turned in except those on watch forward, and the engine room crews at the rear end of the ship."

"Then I am going to lie down and go to sleep," declared Jarvis.

"Don't do anything of the sort. The ore is likely to slide down and bury you. The less disturbance we make here the better it will be for us."

"Why didn't you think of that before we fell in? I suppose we are pretty deep down in the ship, aren't we?"

"About as close to the bottom as we can get without drowning. We will keep as quiet as possible until we can plan some way of helping ourselves out of this predicament."

Bob grunted unintelligibly. For some time after this the Iron Boys leaned against the side of the ship, Steve trying to plan some way out of the difficulty, Bob growling inwardly over the hard luck that had befallen them. [26]

All at once the ship gave a quick, sudden lurch. Jarvis lost his balance, falling over on his face. The ore came down in a deluge, covering him from head to feet before he had sufficient time to scramble out of the way. Steve, bracing himself against the side of the ship, stooped over and helped his companion to his feet.

"The old tub's going to tip over," gasped Jarvis. "What's the matter with her?"

"Nothing is wrong. We have gotten out of the ship canal and into the open water of Lake Superior. There must be considerable sea. Don't you hear the waves smashing against the sides of the ship?"

"It isn't what I hear, but what I feel," answered Bob faintly. "I feel queer. My head's spinning like a top. Is yours?"

"No; I can't say that it is. Are you getting seasick?"

"How do I know? I have never been seasick. How does it feel to be that way?"

"I have heard that when people are seasick they don't care very much whether they live or die."

"Then—then—I wish I could die right here, if it would make me forget that awful goneness under my belt. Ugh!" [27]

Bob settled down against the side of the ship, moaning.

"Don't be a baby. Get up and be a man."

"I—I don't want to be a man. I—I'd rather be a wooden image, then I wouldn't care what happened. In case the ship went down I could float and—"

Bob's words were lost in an anguished moan. Steve felt far from comfortable, but he set his teeth and made a resolve not to give up.

"The sea is coming up, Bob," announced Rush after a long period of silence.

"The—the sea—? It's my opinion that something else will be coming up soon if things don't stop moving around the way—the way they are doing now."

Steve laughed.

"Remember, Bob, that we are not likely to get anything in our stomachs for some days. Be careful."

Bob groaned.

"If I ever get anything solid under my feet I'll take it out of you for that! That's a mean trick to play on a fellow when he's in the shape I'm in at this minute. How long do you suppose the noise outside will keep up?"

"I don't know. Probably all the way down Superior." [28]

"And how far is that?"

"Let me see. I think Mr. Carrhart said the trip to the—the Soo took thirty-six hours."

"Help!" muttered Jarvis faintly.

"Now, I want you to brace up. Come on, get up. If you don't I'll trounce you and make you forget your troubles."

"Yes, you can talk, but if you felt as badly as I do, you wouldn't spout that way. You; couldn't without—without—"

"Perhaps I *do* feel badly, but I may have the will power to fight it out."

Steve reached down and pulled Jarvis up beside him. The latter protested, but it did him no good, for he was apparently unable to offer any resistance. Rush threw an arm about his companion



and began talking about other subjects in order to divert Bob's mind from his sufferings, for his was a real case of seasickness.

In the meantime the sea seemed to be rising, though as a matter of fact there was little sea on. The short, sharp waves of the lake were moving the big, flat-bottomed steamer almost as roughly as they would have moved a little row boat, for the ore carriers are proverbial rollers.

After a time Jarvis began to feel easier, and the lads, lulled by the motion of the ship, grew sleepy. Steve did not dare allow himself to go to sleep. He knew, full well, that such a thing would be dangerous. A lurch of the vessel might cover their heads with dirt and smother them to death before they were able to extricate themselves. Then again, they might be buried too deeply to dig their way out at all. [29]

"Lean up against me, Bob. No need of our both standing here suffering for sleep. If you get too heavy I'll let you drop; then I guess you will wake up."

Bob leaned heavily on his companion. He would have done so in a moment more at any rate, for his eyelids seemed to weigh a ton. The lad was asleep almost instantly. After a time Steve's eyelids also drooped. He could hold them up no longer. Then he went to sleep, braced against the wall of the hull, his companion sleeping soundly in his arms.

There could be but one result of this. They had been asleep but a few moments before, in a lurch of the ship, Rush toppled over with Jarvis on top of him, a ton or more of ore banked up about them.

"Get up! Get up!" shouted Steve, as soon as he was able to get his mouth free of the red ore.

Jarvis muttered, and Steve was obliged to push his companion off by sheer force. The lad pinched and pounded himself, to awaken his dulled senses thoroughly, then he began to punch Jarvis about with his clenched fists. [30]

"Leggo! Quit that, or I'll——"

Bob tried to strike Steve, but instead, he measured his length on the ore pile.

"I'm trying to get you awake, and if you don't want to be roughly handled you'd better pull yourself together," warned Steve.

"I'll get even with you for this one," growled Jarvis. "What's the use in trying to keep awake?"

"I've answered that question already. Besides, I am going to try to find some way out of this hold."

"You'll have a nice time doing it," growled Jarvis.

"I expect to have. But I know there must be some way. You keep close to me."

"What are you going to do?"

"Feel my way along the side of the ship to see if I can get hold of a ladder or something that we can climb up."

"I couldn't climb a step ladder without falling off, the way I feel now," objected Jarvis.

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## CHAPTER III

[31]

### A SURPRISED SKIPPER

**N**o use!" groaned Jarvis. "There isn't a ghost of a chance of our getting out of this until the old tub gets to some place or other. We're done for, this time. I wish I had stayed in the mines, where I belong, instead of following along after you. You can get into more trouble than any other fellow I ever knew."

"Never mind," laughed Steve. "We're the Iron Boys. Why shouldn't we travel as part of the iron ore cargo? The only thing that troubles me is that we have lost our ship. The 'Wanderer' will sail to-night with two men short, and—but I care more about what Mr. Carrhart will think when he hears that we missed our boat. He will think us a couple of stupid boys, and he will be justified in so thinking."

"I don't care what he thinks," growled Bob. "What's bothering me now is my stomach, and the thought of how I'm going to get out of this."

Steve did not reply. An idea had occurred to him. Gathering up a handful of soft ore he tossed it up over His head. Some of the stuff showered down over Bob Jarvis, causing that young man to protest vigorously. A large portion of the stuff, however, did not come down. Steve heard it drop on metal, roll a little way then stop. [32]

"Quit that, now," protested Jarvis. "What on earth are you trying to do? I can't appreciate a joke to-night."

"This is not a joke," answered Steve, gathering up another handful. "I am saving your life."

"Huh! Pleasant way you have of doing the trick."

Several large chunks of ore were tossed up with the same result. They did not roll back into the hold.

"I've got it, Bob," exulted the Iron Boy.

"You're wrong there. I got most of it myself."

"Listen! There is a platform or passageway running along this side of the ship above our heads. I suspected there must be something of the sort, for surely they have to get into the hold occasionally——"

"Above our heads, you say, eh?"

"Yes."

"Precious lot of good that will do us," grunted Bob.

"That depends upon whether or not you have any spunk left." [33]

"I guess I've got as much of that kind of stuff as you have. But I'm sick—I'm a sick man, Steve Rush!"

"Forget it, and then you'll be a brave man. At all events I'll tell you what I want you to do."

"Go ahead. I can't be any worse off than I am."

"I am going to brace myself here against the side, and I want you to climb up to my shoulders. You ought not to have any difficulty in standing on them, when once you get up, for you will have the side of the hull to lean against."

"Can't do it; can't do it at all. Why don't you do it yourself, instead of trying to make me do so when you know how sick I am?"

"All right, if you want me to stand on your neck. I am offering you the easiest part of the plan."

"I guess you won't stand on my neck! All right; I'll be the goat. What am I to do when I get up to where I can stand on *your* neck?"

"Reach up for the platform. If you can get it, all you have to do is to pull yourself up. Then, after you are once up you can, perhaps, reach over and give me a hand."

"Fine, fine!" jeered Jarvis. "I wish I could talk as easily as you. Why, I'd hire out to spout in a political campaign and——" [34]

"Don't waste breath. I am ready."

Feeling his way in the darkness, Bob finally got hold of his companion. It was not a difficult task for him, strong and athletic as he was, to climb to Rush's shoulders. The difficulty was in staying on the shoulders after he once got there.

Bob didn't stay long. He toppled over backwards with a quick roll of the ship, landing high up on the ore pile, sliding down to the bottom, protesting and growling at the boy who had been the cause of his downfall.

"Do it yourself!" Jarvis shouted after getting to his feet once more.

"Come on, now! You're all right."

After a little urging Jarvis succeeded in reaching his chum's shoulders once more.

"Now, be careful! I will try to hold you," said Steve grasping his companion's ankles.

"I've got hold of it. I've got the platform. It's only a little above my waist. Leggo my legs."

Steve stepped out from under so suddenly that Jarvis was left dangling in the air.

The latter was too busy in trying to pull himself up, to enable him to make any retort. He scrambled to the passageway or platform, out of breath and dizzy. For a few moments Bob lay flat on the support beneath him, groaning. [35]

"Don't be a tenderfoot. What's the matter?" called Steve.

"Everything's the matter. I'm all shot to pieces—I'm all falling apart inside——"

"Take your time. When you feel able give me a hand. Is there any railing around the walk?"

"Yes; how did you know?"

"I just guessed it, that's all."

"All right; come on."

Bob leaned as far over as he could, without falling, and tried to reach the upraised hands of his companion.

"Can't make it. You've got to grow a little first," Jarvis jeered.

"We are going to make it. I'm going to back up on the ore and take a running jump. You stand by ready to catch me. Better twist your legs about a railing post if there is such a thing handy."

"I'm waiting for you. I hope you bump your nose until it bleeds."

But Steve Rush did not bump his nose. He took a running jump, nearly losing his foothold in starting. By a lucky chance he landed half way up the side of the hold, right against Bob's hands. Bob grasped him about the waist. [36]

"Now, pull me up," commanded Rush.

"I can't. I'm a sick man, I tell you."

"Fudge! Just hang on and I will do the rest, but for goodness' sake don't let go and fall off."

"Why should I let go? You don't think I am so anxious to get down there as all that, do you?"

Steve climbed nimbly up the body of his companion until he found himself able to reach the rail with one hand. It was then but the work of a moment to pull himself up to the platform.

"There, now we're all right," exclaimed Rush triumphantly.

"No, we're all wrong. I tell you I'm a sick man," protested Jarvis.

"If I hear you say that again, I am likely to throw you off. You make me sick."

"Hope I do. Then you'll know how I feel."

"This is better than I had hoped for," said Steve, not heeding his friend's ill-natured remark. "They've got to get up early in the morning if they want to down the Iron Boys, I tell you," he chuckled.

"It strikes me that we downed ourselves pretty thoroughly. Well, are we going to get out of here to-night?"

"We are going to make an effort to do so at once. Keep hold of the rail and follow me. Look out where you step. We don't want to take any more tumbles, or——" [37]

"Oh, that's all right. I couldn't feel any worse if I fell off from a house or the top of a mine shaft."

The two moved along cautiously, Steve feeling his way with feet and hands. They were going toward the stern of the ship, though they were not aware of the fact. The passageway, constructed for the purpose of getting about on the inside of the hull, was narrow, built of metal, but without anything on it to bar their progress.

They made their way around the stern, which, inside the ship, was next to the engine room. Rush felt the throb of the engines near him and knew then that they were near the stern. They were separated from the engine room by a bulkhead and there was no opening into the engine compartment from the cargo-carrying part of the hull.

"We shall have to work our way to the other end," Steve said.

The boys, with Steve in the lead, continued their cautious creeping around the ship until finally they had reached the forward end. Steve's hands came in contact with a door.

"Oh, pshaw, it's locked," he cried. "This is too bad." [38]

"Kick it in," suggested Bob, as the most practical way out of the difficulty.

"I can't; it's locked."

"And after all the trouble we have been put to!"

"At least, Bob, we have found a place where we shall be able to lie down and go to sleep in safety. That is surely worth all the trouble we have been put to, as you call it."

"That's so. I hadn't thought of it in that light before. And I'm such a sick——"

"You know what I told you."

Jarvis did not complete what he was saying.

"Good night."

Bob threw himself down on the hard floor and went to sleep. Steve decided that this was the best thing they could do, so he, too, lay down and was sound asleep at once. Neither lad awakened for hours. Steve finally opened his eyes and yawned. A ray of light that had penetrated between a thin joint between a hatch cover and its frame, hit his left eye squarely.

"Wake up, Bob," he cried.

"Go 'way! Don't bother me. I'm having my beauty sleep."

Steve sprang up, shaking the other boy roughly.

"It's daylight. Come on; we've got to make a break to get out of here now, if we do it at all. I just heard some one tramping along the deck overhead." [39]

Bob sat up rubbing his eyes sleepily. He would much have preferred to sleep longer, but he knew full well that, if he tried it, Steve Rush would fall upon him and make life miserable for him for the next few minutes. So Jarvis got up, grumbling.

"Where does that door lead to?" he demanded, pointing to a door that Steve had not yet seen.

A faint light in the hold made it possible to see a short distance away. Steve glanced at the door, then sprang toward it.

"Hurrah, it is unlocked!"

"And don't forget that I found it. I can see like an owl, even if I am sick——"

Steve had jerked the door open, revealing a dark chamber. It proved to be the chain and anchor room where odds and ends of the ship were stored.

After a little groping about in this chamber, they came upon a companion-way, up which they hurried. There they met with another door, but this one too was unlocked. Rush opened it and stepped into the full light of day.

For the moment the light blinded both. The boys stood there, rubbing their eyes, blinking, and breathing in the fresh air of the lake. [40]

"Great!" exclaimed Steve.

The ship was rolling gently. They glanced about them, but there was no land in sight. Everything was a sea of green, with white-capped combers tracing long lines of white against the deep green.

"Beautiful, isn't it, old chap?"

"It might be, if there were some land in sight. Where's everybody?"

"I don't know, but we will find out."

Smoke was rolling from the funnel of the steamer, a ribbon of white steam from the exhaust pipe trailing off astern and losing itself in the black smoke.

"This is a beautiful sight, even if we have lost our boat and gone to sea on an unknown craft," exclaimed Rush, his eyes glistening.

"Pshaw!" grunted Jarvis.

"I guess it is about time we looked up some one and found out whether we are headed for the Soo, or——"

"Or the North Pole," added Jarvis.

"Well, who are you?" demanded a gruff voice just behind the lads.

The Iron Boys wheeled sharply.

They found themselves facing a thick-set man, whose face, from exposure to wind and sunshine, was almost fiery red. He was surveying the boys from head to foot with a look of stern disapproval. [41]

Steve and Bob, with their torn and soiled clothes, *did* present a most disreputable appearance. Their hair was unkempt and full of red ore, while their linen, white and clean when they left home on the previous day, now also partook of the color of the iron ore in which they had wallowed for several hours.

"May I ask who you are, sir?" questioned Steve politely.

"I am the captain of this ship, and, unless you answer my question pretty lively, I'll have you ironed and thrown into the hold."

"We have just come from there, sir," interrupted Bob.

"That is quite evident from your appearance. You are stowaways, eh?"

"No, sir; we got into the ship by accident, last night, and could not get out. We tried to attract attention, but were unable to do so."

"What were you doing around the ship?"

"We were to ship on the 'Wanderer.' We lost our way on the docks and fell into the hold of this ship. We had a hard time getting out, but here we are, hoping to get to our ship as soon as we get to the next stop."

It was the captain's turn to look astonished.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BOYS STAND THE TEST

You want to get on board the 'Wanderer,' eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"What for?"

"I have told you we were to ship on her—we were to work on board."

"What were you to do on board?"

"We were to work at whatever we were set at."

"Hm-m-m!" mused the red-faced skipper. "Had your breakfast?"

"No, sir; we have not had anything to eat since we ate luncheon yesterday noon."

"Hm-m-m-m. Come with me."

The captain led the way aft over the decks, along a walk at the side of the hatches, which the lads observed were snugly battened down. Their conductor passed on by the engine house, clear to the stern of the vessel, where he entered the door of the deck-house.

"Jake!" he called sharply, poking his head into the room.

A white-capped, white-aproned man suddenly made his appearance.

"Vat iss?" demanded the ship's cook.

[43]

"Give these boys some breakfast."

Jake surveyed the boys critically before replying.

"*Ja*," he said, turning back into his kitchen.

"Sit down at the table. When you have finished eating come forward and I will talk with you."

"Thank you. Where shall we find you, sir?" asked Rush.

"If I'm not in the wheel house I'll be somewhere else."

"I hope you won't take it into your head to meet us in the hold," interjected Jarvis. "We have had hold enough to hold us for the rest of our lives."

"Don't get smart, young man," snapped the master, turning and leaving the room.

"I wouldn't get funny with the captain, were I in your place," warned Steve. "He evidently doesn't appreciate your jokes. Smell that breakfast?"

"You bet I do, but smelling won't help much."

Jake soon brought in a satisfying meal, to which the boys helped themselves liberally. The cook stood about watching them questioningly for a time, but, as the boys seemed too busy to open a conversation with him, he turned back to his galley with a deep grunt of disapproval.

[44]

After having finished their meal the Iron Boys went out on deck, where for a time they stood leaning over the rail looking down into the foaming water slipping past the side of the ship.

"We had better be going forward, Bob," suggested Steve.

On the way forward they passed several deck hands at work. Some were sweeping, others washing down the decks with a hose and a scrub brush.

"That's going to be our job, I guess," grinned Bob.

"Then, it's me for the mines, Steve Rush!"

Inquiring for the captain, they were told that he was in his cabin just under the pilot-house. They hurried there, and, knocking, were told to enter. The captain's quarters they found, to their surprise, to be luxurious. There was an observation room extending across the ship, with eight windows in front, looking out on the sea ahead of the ship. Off from this observation room and to the rear of it were two handsome bedrooms, furnished with brass bedsteads and hung with silk draperies.

Bob looked around for a mat on which to wipe his feet.

The captain, seated at a desk, turned around in his chair, surveying the boys critically.

[45]

"You certainly are not very handsome to look at," was his comment, uttered in a gruff tone.

"No, sir, not very," admitted Steve, flushing as he looked down at his soiled clothes.

"Do we have to dress up on this ship?" demanded Jarvis, with some heat.

"You will have to do one thing—preserve a respectful attitude toward the commanding officer, and take orders without giving any back talk," replied the master, eyeing the boy sternly.

"We aren't working on this ship."

"Perhaps you think you are not, but you are."

"We are working, or going to work, on the 'Wanderer,'" answered Bob.

"That is what I am saying. This is the 'Wanderer.'"

"The 'Wanderer'?" exclaimed the lads.

"Yes."

"Then we did fall into luck, after all."

"It looks that way, though you may change your minds before you've been aboard long. Which of you is which?"

"I am Steve Rush. This is Bob Jarvis."

"Glad to meet you, young gentlemen."

They could not tell if the captain intended the words to be sarcastic, or whether he meant to be polite to them. They were rather inclined to the former opinion. [46]

"When do we go to work?" demanded Jarvis.

"Now; at once. We don't have any lazybones on board this ship. Are you men strong?"

"Yes, sir; I think so," replied Steve, smiling.

"Can you shovel coal?"

"We can shovel anything that we are able to lift."

"Very well, then; I'll put you in the stoke hole."

"What kind of a hole is that?" questioned Jarvis.

"That is the place where the black-faced gang shovel the fuel under the boilers to make the ship move along."

"Oh, you mean the firemen?"

"That's the scientific name. The common name is stoker. I'll send you down to the chief engineer, and he will give you a trick. You'll have to work like sixty, and if you don't you'll get off at the Soo and foot it back home," continued the skipper gruffly.

If Steve were disappointed, or objected to the work that had been assigned to them, he made no comment. Jarvis, however, made no secret of his displeasure. He grumbled under his breath, despite the warning looks directed at him by Steve Rush.

Captain Simms pushed a button, and a few minutes later a short man, clean shaven, red of face like the captain, entered. [47]

"This is Mr. Major, the first mate. He is next in rank to the master. He will take you to the chief engineer for your assignment."

"Where do we sleep?" asked Jarvis.

"I had nearly forgotten that. You will show the boys their cabin, Mr. Major."

The first mate nodded. His was a surly face, and the lads did not approve of him at first. However, upon gaining the deck the first mate spoke to them in a tone that was kind and helpful.

"This is your first time out, isn't it, boys?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied Steve.

"Well, you'll get along all right. Do your work well and you will find that Captain Simms will take to you all right. You will have enough time off to rest and sleep, though the work is pretty steady on the lakes. You will find this is the case when we are in port, even more than when on the move. The loading and unloading keeps all hands at their stations. You have been in the mines, have you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"We were foremen," interjected Bob.

The mate glanced at them in surprise.

"I should think you would have stayed there, then. The pay is better and the hours more regular." [48]

"We wished to learn this end of the business," answered Steve somewhat shortly.

A few minutes later they were introduced to Mr. Macrae, the chief engineer, in whose

department they were to begin their work on a lake steamer. The chief was a man of few words, these words always to the point. The mate explained to him the disposition Captain Simms wished made of the boys.

"Ever fire any?" demanded the chief.

Steve shook his head.

"Nothing more than a cook stove," spoke up Jarvis, with a twinkle in his eyes, at which the chief's face threatened for a few seconds to relax into a smile. Instead, it drew down harshly and his lips set more firmly together.

"Humph! Nice couple to send me, and short-handed in the stoke hole, as it is. Well, you'll fire all right, and you'll find it ain't no six-day stove-firing, either."

"When do we go on?" asked Rush.

"I guess now is as good a time as any. Where's your jumpers?"

Steve glanced at his companion quizzically.

"Did we leave our bags down in the hold, Bob?"

"I guess that's where we left them, sure enough."

[49]

The mate sent a deck hand for the bags of the boys, after which they retired to the cabin set aside for them at the stern of the ship, and began preparing for their new work. They went on duty at nine o'clock, being told that they would take a six-hour trick, with a six-hour lay-off, after which they would report for duty again.

The chief took the boys below, introduced them to the foreman of the fire room, then stood about while the foreman instructed them in their duties. These consisted in keeping the fire up under two boilers. They were obliged to throw the coal in many feet under the boiler, which required both skill and strength.

When the fire doors were closed, the heat was still stifling, but when the doors were thrown open waves of white hot heat leaped out enveloping the stokers. The first time that Jarvis essayed the feat he burned his eyebrows off by getting too close to the door and facing it full.

Bob sprang back with a growl that was half howl. As soon as he could get the door closed he ran to the water barrel, sticking his head clear under. The stoke-room gang howled uproariously.

"A lubber, eh?" laughed one of the stokers. "You'll get all the hotness you want before you get out of this hole. How about you, pretty boy?" turning to address Steve. [50]

"You look out for your own furnaces, old man; I'll attend to mine, and if I get stuck I'll ask somebody who knows."

The gang laughed at this, and the fellow whom Rush had answered so sharply, glared angrily at the tall, slender lad who was throwing coal into the white-hot mouth of the furnace. He was doing his work almost as methodically as though he was used to it, save that his aim was not quite as sure as in the case of the more experienced men.

After having watched the boys at work for a few minutes, Mr. Macrae nodded to himself, then climbed up the ladders to the deck. He met the master soon after.

"Get those boys to work?" demanded Captain Simms.

"Yes."

"Any good?"

"Pretty likely pair. They have the strength of yearling bulls. Where did they come from? I didn't see them when we came out."

"No, they came out of the hold," grinned Captain Simms.

"Out of the hold?"

"Yes; funny thing about that. They boarded the ship with a load of ore."

[51]

The captain went on to explain how the boys came to be on board.

"Doesn't it strike you as peculiar that they are sent down here in this way?"

"Not at all, Mac. They want to learn the business. Mr. Carrhart sent me a line yesterday explaining the case. Said they were a fine pair, and he wanted to see them get along."

"Then why put them in the hole?"

"Don't you think that will try them out as quickly as anything else?" said the captain.

"I guess that's right," admitted the chief engineer. "And we need them just now, too. I'm glad they are on board, even if they are green hands. But young Rush is going to be a winner, and no mistake."

"What's the matter with the other one?"

"Nothing, except that he is a little fresh at times."

"So I already have observed. You will take that out of him, Mac."

"I'll do that all right, or break his back in the trying. The stoke hole isn't any place for weaklings, as you and I know."

"Keep me posted. I want to know about them. If they make good maybe I'll change them, giving them a berth on deck."

"We'd better give them a good try-out first," advised the chief.

[52]

"Certainly."

In the meantime the subjects of this discussion were toiling with might and main far down below the water level. The ship seemed much steadier down there, and there was scarcely any roll perceptible. Had it not been for the terrific heat the youngsters would not have minded the work so much. However, as the day drew on they began to feel the strain.

The gong, announcing the change of watch, sounded loud and startling. They did not give it any heed, but kept right on shoveling.

"Well, are you fellows going to work right through the next trick?" asked the foreman.

"Have we finished?" questioned Bob innocently.

"Until nine o'clock to-night."

The lads put down their shovels with a sigh of relief.

"Is there such a thing as a bath room that we can use?" questioned Rush.

"What? Do you fellows ever wash?" demanded the stoker who had had the words with Steve earlier in the day.

"That depends upon the company we have been in," answered the lad sharply. "Did you tell me about the bath room, sir?"

The foreman could not repress a grin. He pointed up the companion ladder.

[53]

"You will find one on the deck above this. First door to the right."

"Thank you, sir."

Steve began climbing up the ladder, followed by Bob and, a few rungs behind, by the surly stoker who had sought to have fun with the Iron Boys and had got the worst of the argument in each case.

Their first trick on board an ore carrier had been gotten through successfully, but it was about the hardest six hours the lads remembered ever having put in. They hurried out into the air before taking a bath. Never had fresh air smelled so sweet as it did that day. The lads were black, the coating of soot on their faces being streaked with perspiration, and their clothes could have been no wetter had they just come up from the sea.

"This is about the limit!" laughed Bob Jarvis. "Here I am, without any eyebrows and half my beautiful locks burned away, all because you and I have ambitions to get on in the world. Honestly, Steve, is it worth it?"

"You know it is, Bob Jarvis," answered the Iron Boy, gazing straight into the inflamed, soot-framed eyes of his companion.

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## CHAPTER V

[54]

### TROUBLE IN THE STOKE HOLE

"I'll put you to sleep one of these fine days, young feller," greeted the stoker with whom Steve had had the words. The boys had just turned to go to their bath, Bob already having entered the deck house.

"Are you addressing me?" demanded Steve coldly.

"I'm talking to you."

"Forget it," said the lad, brushing past the soot-begrimed stoker and hurrying in to his bath.

That was the beginning of it. Surely Steve had not tried to make an enemy of the man, but he had done so just the same, and an enemy whom he was to hear from ere many days had passed.

Meeting the first mate later in the day Steve asked who the man was.

"The name he gave on coming aboard was Smith. I don't know anything about him. He has never



sailed with us before, but I understand he knows his business—that is, he is a good stoker and has been on ships before. Why do you ask?"

"I wondered," answered Steve evasively.

[55]

"Has he been bothering you?"

"Oh, no; I am not very much bothered," answered the lad, with a smile.

The boys' cabin was on the starboard or right side of the ship. It was a pleasant little room, commanding a view out over the water. There were two berths in the cabin, a little desk and a couple of steamship pictures, the door of the cabin opening out to the deck.

They felt very much at home in their new quarters, and after the first good sleep there they were ready for anything that might be required of them.

The new stokers took their evening trick, each determined to hold up his end of the work with the rest of the men. And each did. Not a man in that hot, fiery pit shoveled more coal on that watch, or shoveled it to better advantage than did the Iron Boys.

The man Smith shoveled at the furnace door next to Steve Rush, and the former lost no opportunity to hurl rough jokes and taunts at the Iron Boy. These were, in most instances, greeted with howls of delight by the other stokers, who seemed to take the keenest pleasure in seeing the two boys humiliated.

Steve took it all good-naturedly, but Jarvis had to exercise great self-restraint to keep himself in check. He could hardly resist taking it out of the big bully.

[56]

Smith was tall and angular, his small, beady eyes setting more closely together than was good to look upon. In addition to this there was a slight slant to them, giving him almost the appearance of an Oriental.

Steve shrewdly came to the conclusion that Smith was a bad man, and furthermore, the boy decided in his own mind that the man had a past, for Rush was a keen observer, few things passing him unobserved.

All at once, Smith's shovel slipped, showering Steve with coal from head to foot. The sharp edges of the chunks of coal cut the boy's head and one cheek until the blood came.

Rush calmly brushed himself off, wiped the blood from his head and face amid the jeers of the stokers. Then he turned to the grinning Smith.

"Did you do that on purpose?" demanded the lad coolly.

"I reckon it was an accident, kid. What would you do if it wasn't?"

"I am not making any threats, but I hope it will not happen again."

"He did it on purpose," volunteered Bob.

"Never mind, Bob; keep out of this. Mr. Smith had a dizzy spell and he couldn't see where he was tossing the coal. He isn't wholly responsible for what he is doing."

[57]

Smith uttered a growl.

"You making sport of me?" he demanded, in a surly tone.

"Oh, no; I couldn't think of that, because I don't see anything funny about you. You are the most serious proposition I ever set eyes on."

Smith was not grinning now. His face had drawn down into harsh, menacing lines, his chin settling close to his chest, his eyes narrowing to mere slits. Rush was watching him as the boy carelessly tossed a shovel of coal into the furnace.

Smith drew a long breath, grabbed up his shovel and began firing once more. The critical stage had been passed for the moment, but Rush knew that sooner or later there would be a clash of some sort, and he knew, too, that when it did come the tough stokers would side with their own companion.

Nothing more of a serious nature occurred in that watch, though the boys kept on the lookout for trouble.

It was in the early morning watch, however, when the ship's company was sleeping, all save those who were on watch at the time, that there came a renewal of the trouble—when the threatened disturbance came to a head.

The boys had arranged that when the back of either was turned to the stoker the other should keep his eyes open. This arrangement they had carried out faithfully until four o'clock in the morning arrived. Day was breaking, but the toilers down in the depths of the stoke hole could not see the coming of the day. They would not have noticed it had they been able to for the reasons that their minds were wholly absorbed with other matters.

[58]

Suddenly a second shower of coal rained over Steve Rush from the shovel of the man Smith.

Steve turned sharply, fixing his eyes on Jarvis. The latter nodded, meaning that Smith had thrown

the coal deliberately.

"That's the time you did it on purpose, Mister man," said Steve in his usual calm voice.

"Well, supposing I did? What you going to do about it?"

"This!"

Whack!

The Iron Boy's fist smote the stoker a powerful blow in the face. Smith toppled over against the hot boiler. Rush saw at once that the fellow would be seriously burned. Leaping forward he dragged the man away, dropping him on the coal heap.

For the moment the stokers were so amazed at the exhibition of strength and skill on the part of Steve Rush that they could do no more than gape and gape. [59]

The knocked-out stoker struggled to his feet. His eyes were bloodshot and his face distorted with passion.

"I would suggest that we put off our dispute until we have nothing else to do," suggested Steve. "You mustn't forget that we are on duty now, and the captain will discipline us if we have trouble here."

With a bellow of rage, Smith rushed his young antagonist. The blow that he got this time spun the fellow around, landing him on his face on the coal heap. The blow had reached him before his own fists were fairly up in position. Steve knew that what was to be done must be done quickly. He loathed such fights, but he was among rough men. He had been among rough men ever since he had started out in the mines, and it was a case of fighting one's battles or going down with serious injuries, or perhaps worse. Experience had told him that the quicker such affairs were ended the better for all concerned, and that the man who landed the first effective blow was more than likely to win the fight.

Steve usually did land first.

Bob was dancing about with glowing eyes.

"Please somebody hit *me*!" he begged. "I've got to get into the row. I've got to punch some of you wooden heads, or you'll never be satisfied; neither will I." [60]

"Give them the coal. Bury them!" roared a voice.

Smith leaped to his feet, and stretching out a hand threw open a furnace door.

"I'll give the little fiend a toasting!" he howled.

"No, no—the coal!" protested the others.

The Iron Boys saw at once that matters had taken a more serious turn than they had looked for. The lads slowly backed up against a bulk head, their hands resting easily on their shovels.

"I would suggest that you men had better get to work," said Rush. "The steam will be going down in a minute or so, then you'll hear from the chief engineer."

He had hoped to call them back to their duty, and thus avoid what was before them.

"The coal, the coal!"

With one accord the stokers thrust their shovels into the coal pile.

Ten shovels of hard coal were hurled at the Iron Boys with unerring aim and at almost projectile speed.

"Down!" shouted Rush.

Both lads dropped to the floor of the fire room, the black chunks of coal passing harmlessly over their heads. [61]

"Let 'em have another! Throw low!"

The stokers sent the next black volley straight out from their hips, which should have reached the mark had the boys adopted their former tactics.

"Dodge between!" commanded Steve.

Jarvis obeyed instantly. In fact, in an emergency, he always looked to his companion for orders.

When they saw that their second attempt had failed the stokers uttered a yell of rage.

"Bat them over the head with your shovels!" advised one.

But Rush had anticipated the suggestion. He was already leaping forward, his shovel cutting the air. He brought its flat side against the side of a stoker's head. The man toppled over, unconscious, and before the men could recover from their surprise two more of their number had fallen victims to the Iron Boy's shovel.

Bob had leaped into the fray by this time. He was swinging his own shovel, uttering a shout each time it came in contact with a head.

"Give ground, Bob!" shouted Rush. "I'll fix them. Just watch out that they don't land on you, or they'll cut your head off with those sharp-edged things."

"I'll hold them! Come on, you black ruffians!"

[62]

Steve had sprung to one side of the fire room, where he began tugging at a wheel, from which he unrolled a long, dark object. One end of this he quickly connected to a four-inch pipe, turned a shut-off and sprang out into the middle of the fire room, carrying one end of the object in his hands.

"Quick! Back off, Bob!"

Bob did so. He saw at once what Rush intended to do.

"Give it to them!" he shouted.

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## CHAPTER VI

[63]

### THE FIRST STEP UPWARD

The Iron Boy held a three-inch fire hose in his hands. A powerful stream leaped from the nozzle. The first man it hit was bowled over like a nine-pin, the man uttering a choking yell as he went down.

Another leaped at Steve with upraised shovel. He shared the fate of his companion. One after another of them went down under the force of the stream from the fire hose.

It was a kind of warfare that none of those tough customers had ever engaged in before. In a moment the men were yelling wildly, now and then Bob Jarvis's voice raised above the hubbub in a howl of joy. The heat in the fire room quickly turned the water to steam, a dense gray cloud hanging over all, obscuring everything in the room. It was with difficulty that the boy could make out the forms of his enemies.

The men were making desperate efforts to break through and escape by the door, to which Rush had slowly backed. As soon as a man sprang forward Steve would let him have the full force of the stream from the hose squarely in the face. The stoker would be on his back instantly; then Rush, would play the stream on the others, swinging the hose from side to side to keep the crew back.

[64]

All the fight had been taken out of them, but the relentless stream still played on and over them with terrific force.

"Quit! We've got enough!" howled a voice.

"I can't hear," answered Steve, playing the hose from one end of the cringing line to the other. "I'm going to turn on the hot water soon, I don't believe this cold water will take all the dirt off."

"Skin them alive!" jeered Jarvis.

There came an interruption. The howls of the men, having reached the upper deck, had attracted the attention of the chief engineer. He had come running down the companion ladder, believing something serious had happened in the engine room. He was met by a cloud of steam.

"What's going on here? Have you blown out a tube?" he shouted.

"No; I'm blowing off some rowdies, that's all. Bob, shut off the water. The fun's all over."

Macrae grasped Rush by the collar.

"What does this mean? I'll discharge you at the end of the cruise."

"I am sorry, sir; but those men attacked us and we had to fight them the best way we could. I thought a shower bath would do them more good than anything else, and cool them off quicker."

[65]

"Get to work there, you lazy lubbers. Your steam is twenty pounds below the mark. I'll fine the lot of you. Rush, come up to the deck, I want to talk with you."

"I would suggest, sir, that you hear what the men have to say first."

"How did this row start?" demanded the chief engineer.

"He turned the hose on us, jest because he got a grouch on against us."

"That's a lie!" exclaimed Jarvis.

Mr. Macrae motioned for Steve to accompany him. The boy followed up to the deck where the chief led the way to his office and cabin.

"Now, I'll listen to the story. You have done a very serious thing; you have imperiled the safety of the ship and laid yourself liable to arrest and ironing. What have you to say?"

"I acted purely in self defense. It was a case of defend yourself or get my head knocked off. I chose the former. I am sorry I was the cause of the steam going down, but we can put on more steam in a few minutes. I couldn't do the same for my head."

"Tell me exactly what occurred."

[66]

Rush did so, omitting the name of the stoker who had been the real cause of the uprising. Mr. Macrae listened with grave face until the story of the trouble had been told.

"Who started it?"

"I would rather not say. I do not think he will start anything else very soon. He got about all that was coming to him."

"I should say he did. However, this is a matter that will have to be laid before Captain Simms. Go back to the fire room. I will accompany you and see that matters are straightened out."

This the chief did.

"The next man who starts any disturbance here will be put in irons!" said Mr. Macrae sternly. "This applies to every one of you. I shall lay the matter before the captain, as it is. He will act as he thinks best, but it is my opinion that the whole gang of you ought to be thrown off the ship at the first stop. You may be, at that."

As soon as the captain rose, the chief told him the story of the battle in the stoke hole.

"What, those two boys did up the whole crew of ten men down there?" exclaimed the master.

"That's about what it amounted to."

"Most remarkable thing I ever heard of! But I will guarantee they never started the row."

[67]

"No, I think not. Both boys refuse to say who did."

"Good for them. I knew they had the right kind of stuff in them. Pity we haven't got more like them."

"What do you think best to do, sir?"

Captain Simms reflected for a moment.

"Being convinced that the stokers are wholly to blame, I shall fine each of them a day's pay. You may so inform them."

"And the two boys also?"

"No. Why should they be fined? You can't blame them for defending themselves. What time do the boys come off watch?"

"Nine o'clock."

"Tell them to report to me after they get fixed up."

"Very good, sir."

Captain Simms went to his cabin, where he related to the first mate the story of the fire room row. Both officers laughed heartily.

"I would have given a month's wages to have seen that fuss," laughed the mate. "I guess the black-face gang has come to the conclusion that it has picked up a couple of Tartars. Evidently it isn't the first time those lads have been called upon to take care of themselves."

Before the stoke hole watch knocked off the captain made it his business to go below and look over the men. Every man save the Iron Boys wore a sullen, revengeful look on his face. But this was not all. There was blood on several of the faces, and the men's clothes and hair still bore traces of the shower bath that Steve Rush had given them.

[68]

Neither lad paid any attention to the captain. They went on with their work as steadily as though he were not present, or nothing out of the ordinary had occurred.

The captain turned away rather hastily and left the compartment. He felt that, if he remained a second longer, he would have to laugh. That would not do at all. And laugh he did, after he had gotten far enough away from the fire room to make wise such a proceeding.

"I'll get even with you for that!" snarled Smith in Rush's ear, after the departure of the master.

Steve made no reply.

"You'll wake up one of these fine mornings wetter than I was after you turned the hose on me, you whelp!"

Smith drove his elbow into the Iron Boy's side with considerable force. Rush slowly faced him.

"Look here, you loafer, I'll knock you down if you do that again. Or, if you prefer it, I'll give you another bath. You are trying to pick a fight with me. I am not looking for it, but if you insist I'll give you what you want. Fight or stop!"

[69]

Smith glanced uneasily at the door leading from the fire room, muttered something unintelligible to the others and began shoveling coal into his furnace.

Shortly after that the watch ended. Steve hurried through his bath. After putting on his clean clothes he called on the captain. The latter looked over the slim, well set-up young lad quizzically.

"I didn't think it of you, Rush."

Steve flushed painfully.

"You wish to see me, sir?"

"Yes. Be careful. In this instance let me say very frankly that I am glad you cleaned out that lot. The only trouble is that you ought to have thrown the whole gang overboard. We can't spare them, or I might have done it myself before this. I'm going to take you two boys off the stoke hole watch."

"What do you wish us to do, sir?"

"I will promote you to the deck."

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## CHAPTER VII

[70]

### THE IRON BOYS ON DECK

THE lads began their work above decks on the following day. It was a welcome relief to be out in the open air, with the wind blowing over them, the soft odors of the inland seas mingling with the faint perfume of the land drifting out from the unseen shores.

The first work of the Iron Boys was to remove the hatches that the sun might penetrate the hold and dry out the ore, which had been put in very damp. Ore in that condition did not handle easily, taking up time and costing considerably more to handle than when dry. Steve pondered over this all during his first forenoon's work. Here was something that ought to be remedied. His fertile brain was at a loss to solve the problem. He talked the matter over with Jarvis after luncheon, that day, and asked his companion's opinion.

"That's easy," answered Bob promptly. "Put a stove in."

"Where?"

"In the ore pockets on the trestles."

"That would be fine," grinned Steve. "But you have given me an idea. I will think it over. There is a point that it will pay us both to think over very carefully. Have you seen anything of our friends from below decks this morning?"

[71]

"No; I guess they must be sleeping."

"Look out, Bob. We haven't heard the last from Smith. He is a vengeful fellow and he will try to get even with us. I hope he doesn't ship with us on the return trip."

"I'll punch his head for him if he gets funny with me."

"I don't like the man's looks at all. It is my opinion that he is a desperate character."

"Well, so are we, for that matter," replied Jarvis with a mirthless grin.

"I am beginning to think so myself, old chap. It seems almost impossible for us to keep out of trouble. I, for one, am going to stop it. Next time any rough argument is started I'm going to run."

Jarvis laughed uproariously.

"I think I see you doing it! Why, you wouldn't run if you saw a herd of elephants charging you. No, sir—not Steve Rush!"

At about four o'clock in the afternoon the boys were ordered to assist in replacing the hatches to make all snug for the night. The vessel was slipping down Lake Huron, now, at an eleven-knot gait. There was a gentle roll on the sea, but neither lad minded that. Neither would suffer further from seasickness, they felt sure.

[72]

The hatches having been made secure there was nothing more to be done for the rest of the afternoon. The lads were free to go where they pleased and do as they pleased. They repaired to their cabin, where they remained until supper time. They now ate with the ship's officers, the stokers and oilers having a mess-room by themselves. The officers' mess-room was a roomy apartment at the extreme stern of the ship, and the food served there was excellent. The boys did not remember ever to have had better.

Mr. Major, the first mate, occupied the lower end of the long table, while the captain sat at the head. There was little conversation. The principal business was eating, sailors having a habit of shoveling in their food as fast as possible when it is placed before them.

The result was that Steve and Bob, being accustomed to eat slowly and chew their food well,

were not half through when the others rose from the table.

"Going to eat all night?" demanded the captain, with the suspicion of a smile on his face.

"Oh, no," laughed Rush. "Not quite so long as that, I hope."

"How about you?" questioned the master, nodding at Jarvis.

[73]

"Well," answered Bob reflectively, "as nearly as I can figure it I am about amidships between soup and pie. If I don't fall through the centre hatch before I reach the pie end I'll be on deck about seven o'clock."

The officers laughed heartily.

"Do we go on duty this evening, sir?" questioned Rush.

"Certainly," replied the captain. "You take your regular tricks just the same. You two will take the forward watch at nine o'clock."

They had never been on watch before, and did not know what their duties were to be. So, after finishing their supper, they hunted up Mr. Major and asked him to explain their duties to them. He told them that all they had to do would be to watch out for lights ahead and either side of the ship, ring the hours on the ship's bell just forward of the bridge, at the same time glancing back at their own ship's running lights to see if all were burning brightly. The mate told them how to report this, giving them some other suggestions at the same time.

"This is fine," glowed Bob. "We're going to walk the bridge at midnight, aren't we?"

"Rush will have the bridge watch," explained Mr. Major. "You will take the deck just forward of and under the bridge. It is not hard work in good weather, but it gets to be rather lonesome at times. I shall be on duty in the pilot-house during your trick. If you are in doubt at any time be sure to call out to me."

[74]

Both promised that they would. It was with keen anticipation that the lads made their way forward from their cabins a few minutes before nine o'clock.

"Second watch changed," called the watch who was on the point of retiring.

"Aye, aye," answered the officer in charge in the pilot-house. All was dark in there so the men could see ahead, the windows of the captain's cabin having the shades pulled tight so that not a single ray of light could shine out ahead to blind the eyes of the lookouts.

"All clear ahead. Steamer heading up the lake off the starboard bow."

"All right," answered Steve as he took his place at the rail of the bridge. "I guess she won't run into us."

"Watch for that steamer's red light off to starboard," warned a business-like voice from the blackness of the pilot-house.

"I will," replied Steve.

"Say, 'aye, aye, sir.'"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"That's right. We observe all the forms on board these ships just the same as they do on the high seas."

[75]

"What's all that talk about up there?" called Bob Jarvis, from his post in the bow on the deck below.

"You are to keep watch of that fellow off to starboard," answered Rush.

"Starboard? Let's see—that's the left side, isn't it?"

"No, the right."

"Oh, I guess that's right."

"Tell the watch below to 'tend to his business,'" warned the mate in the pilot-house.

"Forward watch, knock off talking," called Steve.

"Don't get funny up there or I'll come up and straighten you out."

"Bob," called Steve softly, "the officer will be down there in a moment if you don't stop your nonsense. This is business. Keep your eyes on the water and call out whenever you see a light. I \_\_\_"

"Ship, ho!" sang out Jarvis suddenly, interrupting what Steve was saying.

"Lower watch reports a ship, sir," sang out Steve.

"Where away?" demanded the mate.

"Where away?" repeated Steve.

"Oh, 'bout a mile off the right-hand side," answered the lower watch nonchalantly.

[76]

"He means the vessel off to starboard, sir," Rush informed the officer in charge.

"Has that wooden-head just discovered the ore carrier over there?"

"I guess so, sir."

"Pshaw! You keep your eyes open."

"He will be all right after he gets settled down to it, sir," said Steve apologetically.

"We're likely to be sent to the bottom before that time, if we wait for him to keep us out of trouble."

The ship sailed on. Now and then Steve's keen eyes would sight a green or red or a white light, and under the instruction of the mate he quickly learned to determine the position of the boat from her lights, enabling him to say instantly which way the other ship was traveling. After a while the captain entered the pilot-house.

"Who's on the forward watch?" he demanded.

"Rush on the bridge, Jarvis in the forward peak."

"Keep a sharp lookout. They are new men."

"Aye, aye, sir. Rush is all right. He has eyes like an owl at night. Trust him for not letting anything—"

"Red light dead ahead," called Rush.

[77]

"What do you make of her?"

"Nothing more, sir."

"That's one of the Wyckoff coal fleet," announced the captain, leaning from the pilot-house window. "She's headed for Shoal Island."

"How in the name of all that's good does he know all that?" muttered the boy on the bridge. "I can't see a thing but the red light, and that means that her port beam is almost across our bow. I don't see anything else."

"I suppose you are wondering how I know that, eh?" chuckled the captain, nodding to the lad pacing the bridge just below him.

"Well, yes, sir; I was wondering," admitted Rush.

"Do you make out her white lights!"

"No, sir."

"That's where I have you. There is a bank of fog or mist settling over the lake. If you will raise your eyes a little to the right of the red light you will make out two faint blurs—"

"I see them, sir."

"Those are her masthead lights. I know the set of the masts of the Wyckoff boats, that's all. So will you, after you have been at sea long enough. It is all a matter of experience. I have been drilling up and down these lakes for the past thirty years. I ought to know a few things about them and the fellows who are navigating them. It's going to storm."

[78]

"Yes, sir," agreed the lad, but he did not see any signs of rain. The stars were bright overhead and the moon was shining brightly. "I see I have a few things to learn about the weather," he muttered.

A few minutes later Steve discovered that the moon and the stars had suddenly disappeared. The captain knew they would, for the wind had veered to the southeast and he had seen the fog bank settling down since the first moment he entered the pilot house. The rain started in shortly afterwards in a thin drizzle.

"Hey, up there, it's getting wet down here!" shouted Bob. "Hand me down an umbrella or something."

"Keep a sharp lookout, lads," warned the captain. "Remember we've got a load of coal across our bows."

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Steve. "I think I can see quite a way ahead of us."

"That is a mistake. You can't see a ship's length ahead. Keep your eyes open."

"I will, sir."

"Where is your raincoat?"

"I am afraid I have none. I never thought to bring one with me."

"Tell your friend Jarvis to go to my cabin and ask the steward for two coats."

[79]

Steve did so, and a few minutes later the lads were well protected from the storm, which was now upon them in full force. The rain was coming down in blinding sheets by this time, beating into the faces of the Iron Boys.

Suddenly Steve leaned over the edge of the bridge, shading his eyes with his hand. Something that he thought he had observed in Bob's position had attracted his attention. He gazed more keenly, then uttered a little gasp. Jarvis was standing with his head down, facing away from the storm toward the stern of the ship. He looked very comfortable and contented.

"Bob!"

Steve's tone was stern.

"Bob!"

"What do you want?"

"Turn around and be quick about it!" Steve was speaking too low for the officers in the pilot-house to hear. "Don't you know that the safety of the ship depends largely on our watchfulness at this minute, and——"

"Clang, clang, clang, clang, clang clang," interrupted the ship's clock in the pilot-house.

Steve grasped the cord attached to the clapper of the big bell in front of the bridge, giving it six steady jerks.

"Six bells, eleven o'clock. All lights are burning brightly, sir," Rush called in the singsong voice of the sailor. [80]

"Aye, aye," answered the deep voice of the mate from the darkness of the pilot-house.

"Reduce speed to one-half," commanded the captain, in a low voice. He usually gave his commands calmly, no matter how great the stress or emergency. "Do you see anything of that coal carrier, Rush?"

"No, sir; she must be some distance away from us by this time."

"She ought to be, but she isn't."

"May I ask how you know that, sir?"

"I get her smoke."

"I don't make it out, sir."

"Neither do I, by sight, but I see it through my nose. I smell it."

"Well, doesn't that beat all!" muttered Rush.

He bent every energy toward piercing the black bank ahead. For the first time Steve Rush experienced a sense of uneasiness, and for the first time he realized what the perils of the sea meant. Before, it had seemed to him that, unless a ship were laboring in a great storm, there could be little danger. Once a minute the siren far back in the darkness, near the engine superstructure, would wail out a long, dismal blast which, a moment later, was answered by the ship out there somewhere ahead. The sound of the other boat's siren did not seem to Steve Rush to be getting any nearer, but to the experienced ears of Captain Simms quite the contrary was plain. [81]

"Look steady, down there!" he warned in a sharp tone which told Rush there was something that he did not know about was likely to happen.

"Look sharp!" he repeated to Bob Jarvis.

"I'm looking. I'm——"

Steve Rush's voice cut in quick and sharp, though there was little trace of excitement in it.

"Sheer off! Ship dead ahead!"

"Hard a-port!" commanded the captain, at the same time sounding a long wailing blast on the siren.

A deafening crash followed almost upon the command.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CRASH IN THE FOG

STEVE was thrown flat on his face on the bridge, while Bob Jarvis doubled up, wedged into the forepeak of the boat on the deck below.

"Full speed astern!" roared the captain.



The chains of the pilot-house telegraph rattled ominously and the propeller, nearly six hundred feet aft of the bridge, began whirling the other way at tremendous speed.

"Hey! What—what—what's happened?" shouted Bob Jarvis. "Have we hit the shore?"

"Close the water-tight bulkheads!" commanded Captain Simms. The mate threw over the electric switch that gave the signal for the closing of all water-tight doors and bulkheads.

"Sound the general alarm!"

Gongs began to ring all over the ship.

"Order the engine and stoke room crews to stand by their tricks. I'll give them warning in time in case we have been badly hit."

The mate obeyed quickly and without a single lost motion. By this time Steve had leaped to his feet. Ahead of him, it seemed almost on top of them, loomed a great black hull. Lights shone dimly through the heavy pall of fog. He understood without having to be told what had happened. The "Wanderer" had come into collision with another ship, presumably the same one whose lights the bridge watch had been watching off to starboard earlier in the evening. Even in the excitement of the moment Rush did not understand how this thing could have happened, if the other boat had held to the courses she was on when he last saw the other boat.

[83]

"Make ready the lifeboats!" commanded the captain of the "Wanderer." Then, raising his megaphone to his lips, the master bellowed through it:

"Are you hard hit?"

"We have a hole punched in our side big enough for you to go through. Stand by until we can find out whether we'll float or not."

"Aye, aye, we'll stand by. We want to find out how much of a smash we have got. Mr. Major, get down there and examine the nose of our boat, and see how much of a bang we got. It's lucky for us that we hit the other craft in the position we did."

The mate hurried down to where Bob was still on watch. Even after the crash had come, and he had picked himself up, Jarvis stuck to his post, though he believed the ship to be sinking. And, besides, Bob being right at the point of the collision, so close in fact that woodwork from the other boat showered over him in a perfect rain, got the full force of it. He was bruised and battered, he had lost his hat and he was greatly shaken up by the terrific impact.

[84]

The "Wanderer" had backed away to a safe distance, and the first mate was now making an examination of her wound.

"We've broken our nose off," he called up to the bridge.

"Is she taking in any water?"

"Yes, sir; but I think the bulkhead will hold it so we won't go down."

"Good! Ahoy, coal carrier there."

"Aye, aye," came the reply from the deck of the stranger.

"Who are you?"

"The 'James Macomber,' coal laden, bound for Shoal Island."

"Well, I must say you are doing some fine steering. What are you doing over here?"

"We got out of position in the fog."

"I should say you did. How are you?"

"Listing badly to port and settling by the stern."

"Better get your boats over while you have the time. Shall we put over a boat?"

"No; we can manage to get away if she goes."

"I tell you, you're going down! Get away while you've got the time."

[85]

"All right; stand by."

"Can I do anything, sir?" asked Steve.

"Yes; go aft and take two men with you. Take the boat and cast off. Lay well away from the ship and give me a hail, so I'll know where you are. Stand by and, mind you, don't drift away and get lost. We'll never pick you up in this fog if you do. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Order Jarvis up to the bridge."

"Bob, come up here. The captain orders you to take the bridge."

Steve ran down the ladder to the forward deck, then on down to the main deck, where all hands

not otherwise engaged had assembled. They were leaning over the side peering into the darkness to see what had happened. Steve was beset by questions. He explained briefly what had happened, repeating the captain's orders for himself and two men to man the life-boat and put off to pick up any one needing assistance.

The second mate, then in charge of the deck, assigned two strong oarsmen to go with Rush. The latter was to be in charge of the boat, so the captain had said, though Steve was dubious about his ability to fill that office. Of course he was interested in boats, but he was much more familiar with drifts and levels than he was with navigation of the lakes. [86]

"Man the boat," ordered the second mate.

The men took their places in the life-boat, which already had been hauled up ready for launching, the Iron Boy taking his place in the stern by the tiller.

"Are you ready?"

"All ready."

"Cast off!" came the hoarse command from the second mate.

Steve instinctively grasped the gunwales of the life-boat as the craft dropped toward the water. He thought the boat had broken loose from the davits and was falling into the sea, so swift was its descent. Yet he might have known from the sound of the groaning, creaking block and tackle that he and his companions were still safe.

The life-boat struck the water with a loud splash, rocking perilously as Steve, still gripping the sides, stood in a crouching position ready to jump should the boat tip over. Then the little craft righted itself, though it lay rising and falling, rolling and tossing perilously on the long lake swell. Rush had no idea that the water was so turbulent.

"Cast off!"

The two oarsmen quickly unhooked the blocks from the rings at the extreme ends of the small boat. [87]

"Are you ready?" they asked.

"Yes," said Steve, though he was not certain whether he was ready or not. His mind worked with its usual quickness, however. He knew that he was expected to get off somewhere near the steamer "Macomber."

"Give way!" he commanded.

The sailors pushed the life-boat away from the side of the ship with their oars; then, placing the oars in the locks, fell to pulling steadily. Steve turned the tiller the wrong way the first thing. The nose of the life boat hit the hull of the "Wanderer" with such force as to throw the three men to the bottom of their boat.

"Lubbers!" bellowed the second mate from the deck of the ship. "What are you trying to do—run us down?"

Steve's face was burning with mortification. Fortunately the night was too dark for any one to see this.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded one of the oarsmen.

"I turned the tiller the wrong way," answered Rush truthfully. "Pull away."

The men growled as they fell to their oars once more. A few swift strokes and they were clear of their ship, Rush this time handling his tiller with more skill than before. He tried the rudder cautiously and found that it responded readily to the least movement of the tiller. [88]

"Now I'm all right," he muttered. "That is if I don't run something else down."

Swinging out in a wide circle the lad steered around the bow of the "Wanderer," heading for the spot where he thought the distressed ship lay.

"Lifeboat there!" bellowed the captain through his megaphone.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Where you heading?"

"For the other ship."

"No you're not. You're heading for the shore. Pull to port a little more. There, that's better. Look where you are going, now."

The captain's tone was stern and commanding. Steve leaned well forward, peering into the thick fog ahead. He could not make out the other ship as yet, though he could hear the shouting and the hoarsely uttered commands on her deck. It was a scene such as he had never imagined before, and it thrilled Steve Rush through and through. He felt that he was ready for deeds of valor if he should only get the chance to perform them.

"Steady, men," the boy warned. "We must be near the other ship now. I can hear their voices more plainly. It is curious we can't see their lights, though." [89]

"That's because of the fog, cap'n," volunteered one of the sailors at the oars.

"They're——"

"Look out! We're under the stern of the ship now!" cried Rush, throwing his tiller hard to port.

The life boat hit the stern of the ship, far down under her counter, with a resounding crash. There followed the sound of breaking woodwork, as the gunwale of the lifeboat crashed in. The little craft shipped a heavy sea, drenching all hands.

The sailors had dropped their oars and were preparing to jump.

"Sit down!" commanded the young skipper.

"We're sinking!"

"Well, if we are, let's get in a better place to do it. We don't want to be floundering in the water under the stern of this sinking ship, do we? Get to your oars and pull away!"

The Iron Boy's voice had assumed a tone of command. The men, recognizing that he was not alarmed, bent themselves to their oars and pulled quickly from their present dangerous position.

"Have we anything in the boat with which to bail it out?" [90]

"No."

"Then we will sit in the water. I guess we can't be much wetter than we are."

The men grumbled.

"Lay to, till I find out how badly we are injured."

A brief examination of the side of the boat that had come in contact with the ship, showed that the gunwale had been smashed in, but the gash did not extend far enough down to place the little boat in great danger unless perhaps the sea rose high enough to wash over the side. As yet the lake was rolling lazily as is usually the case in a fog, for a breeze would quickly dispel the heaviest bank of fog and drive it away.

"We're all right," decided the young coxswain. "Pull around slowly."

Standing up in the stern of the life-boat with the tiller between his legs, Steve hailed the disabled ship.

"Ahoy, there!" he called.

"Ahoy! Who are you?"

"Life-boat from the 'Wanderer.' If you want any help, sing out."

"We'll need it all right."

"Are you sinking?"

"We don't know. We're settling some."

"Got much water aboard?" [91]

"More'n we need to drink. Come in closer, so we can get you if we need to."

"How about your own boats?"

"Life boat smashed in the collision. Ship's raft is safe. That'll carry most of us, perhaps all of us, if necessary."

"Better get it ready, then, in case anything happens," advised the lad, who was rapidly becoming a seasoned sailor. "Pull in a little closer, boys, but look sharp because we may have to get out in a hurry, in case anything happens over there."

The boat drifted slowly in toward the injured ship. This time the little craft had worked around abeam of the coaler, the latter's lights showing dimly in the thick fog.

"Keep your siren going to warn off other ships, why don't you?" shouted Rush.

The suggestion was a good one. It was instantly acted upon by the master of the "Macomber." Then the "Wanderer" started her siren going, the hoarse voices of the whistles sounding dull and unreal through the fog.

Steve grinned appreciatively.

"At least I have made one good suggestion," he muttered. "There will be no excuse for any other ship hereabouts running into us. That would be a nice mess."

Suddenly there arose a commotion on board the damaged coaler. The shouts grew louder. The crash of a steel hatch falling into place could be heard here and there. A loud splash sounded [92]

between the life-boat and the ship.

"Somebody's overboard!" cried Steve. "Pull in!"

"Life-boat there!"

"Aye, aye!"

"We're sinking by the stern!"

"Pull in quick, lads!" commanded Steve Rush.

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## CHAPTER IX

[93]

### A TRAGEDY OF THE LAKES

**T**HERE followed a sound as though the wind were suddenly rising. The sound grew to the roar of a gale.

Rush did not understand the meaning of it. He did understand, however, that there was a man in the water near by, and that there was a human life to save.

"Where are you?" he called.

"Here! Be quick!"

Rush had the fellow by the collar, in short order, and with some difficulty, hauled the man into the life-boat.

"The ship's going down. Get out of here!" cried the rescued sailor.

"Pull out, boys!" commanded Rush, grasping the tiller and swinging the bow of his boat about.

"There she goes!" shouted the sailor from the "Macomber."

The huge coaler's lights suddenly went out as the sea flooded her dynamo room. The hatches began blowing off with loud explosions as the water was forced up under them.

"What is it?" cried Steve.

"The hatches."

[94]

Boom!

"There goes the main bulkhead. It's all up with her now."

Yells and cries rent the air. Men were leaping into the sea from the doomed ship, and though the men in the life-boat could not see, they could hear.

"I can't stand this!" gritted the Iron Boy, jamming the tiller hard over.

"What are you going to do?" demanded one of the sailors.

"I'm going in there after those men," answered Steve Rush.

"It's sure death!"

"We'll go, just the same."

"No we won't; we'll pull out of here like lightning."

Steve grabbed up a boat hook.

"Pull, I tell you; pull for all you two are worth, or I'll knock your heads off with this hook. Now—GO!"

The oarsmen pulled. They were used to obeying orders, and they realized that the young coxswain of their craft was no weakling. He meant exactly what he had said. Besides the men, after all, were as anxious to save those of their own calling, now struggling in the water, as Steve could possibly be.

The bow of the life-boat sent the water spurting into the air as the craft cut through the sea. Another man was hauled aboard.

[95]

"Where's the rest of them?" demanded Rush.

"The water's full of them," gasped the rescued sailor.

"Ahoy, there, men—swim this way if you can. We're waiting for you. We'll——"

With a sickening roar that Steve Rush would never forget as long as he lived, the "Macomber" dived stern first under the surface of the water. Her engine and boiler rooms, being at the stern, were flooded instantly.

Then came a report as if the universe had been suddenly rent in twain, an explosion that seemed

to rend the air, the earth and the sea.

"The ship's blowing up!" cried one of the men in the boat. He knew what the sound meant. Steve did not, but he caught his breath sharply when he heard the words.

"Pull out!"

Instead, the life-boat was lifted out. It seemed to rise right up into the air, and when the Iron Boy at the helm sought to throw the rudder over there was not water to push against—only thin air.

"Hang on! We're going over!" shouted the boy.

Cries for help were heard on all sides of the life-boat now. But Steve was powerless to aid the drowning ones. He was concerned with saving himself and those with him just at this time. [96]

The boat continued to go into the air; then, suddenly, it swung bottom side up, spilling its human freight into the lake.

As the men of the life-boat fell into the water they were caught by the suction of the sinking ship and borne struggling about in the great eddy that swirled with the speed of a mill-race.

Steve fought valiantly to save himself by trying to swim out of the whirlpool, but even his great strength was not equal to the task. He was tossed to the centre of the eddy; then he felt himself being drawn downward by some invisible force. Even then the Iron Boy did not lose his presence of mind. He caught and held his breath as the waters were closing over him.

Down and down shot the body of Steve Rush until he believed he must be near the bottom of Lake Huron. Hours seemed to have been occupied in the descent, whereas it had been a matter of seconds only. He had made no resistance, calmly deciding to save his strength until action would count for something.

Steve had no thought of giving up. While his heart was filled with a great dread he was not excited, because he would not permit himself to be. [97]

"I'll die game, if I do die," he kept repeating to himself.

At last the pull from beneath seemed to be lessening a little. There was not the same terrific force tugging at his feet. Steve kicked out and the effort, he thought, raised him a little.

Thus encouraged he began kicking with all his strength, treading water and working his hands as fast as he could. There could be no doubt about it now. He was shooting toward the top at a good speed.

Suddenly he gave a great gasp as he felt the warm, damp air strike his face. His lungs were almost at the bursting point, and he felt that he could not have held his breath a second longer.

Steve lay over on the water, on his back, moving his hands listlessly to help keep him afloat. Thus far he had had no thought of the ship to which he belonged. He was too much exhausted to do more than lie still, which he did, drawing in long, deep breaths of the fresh air. Nothing had ever tasted so sweet to Steve Rush and he felt an overpowering desire to go to sleep.

All at once he threw himself over on his stomach as the long, shrill blast of a steamer's whistle smote his ears. [98]

"It's the 'Wanderer'!" he cried. "And they must be miles away."

The ship was not very far away. It was the blanket of fog that had smothered the sound of the whistle and made it seem many miles off to port of him.

Rush raised his voice and shouted. His voice, of course, carried for a very short distance, for the same reason that had made the ship's whistle sound a long way off. Again and again did he shout, but not a response did he get, save the long wail of the siren. Not a light was to be seen anywhere, nor were there any signs of the other men who had been in the life-boat with him at the time it was lifted from the water and turned bottom side up.

A great feeling of lonesomeness came over the Iron Boy when he realized that he was far out in the lake alone. He, of course, did not know how far they were from shore, but he believed it to be at least twenty miles.

He reasoned that his ship would not sail away without him unless the captain were reasonably certain that Steve had been drowned. The lad decided to swim in the direction from which the whistle sound had come. He had taken but a few strokes when he became entangled in a mass of wreckage. At first he thought he was going to drown before he could extricate himself, then he discovered that he could not if he tried.



**Steve Clung to the Door.**

Pieces of floating wood were all about him, some of them the lad recognized as part of a deck house. He fastened to a door that had been split in half, probably by the explosion, and stretching out full length upon it, lay still to rest. He was reasonably safe now, though, of course, unless he were rescued very soon he would become chilled and slip off into the sea. [101]

The wind began to stir up out of the southwest a little. Steve took courage from this.

"It will blow me toward the ship," he exclaimed. "That is, if the ship is where I think it is."

He began paddling with might and main, steering with his feet as well as he could, shifting his weight this side and that from time to time as a swell threatened to upset him.

The siren blew several long blasts.

"That's queer," muttered Steve. "She seems to be getting farther and farther away from me all the time."

The reason for this was that Rush was getting farther and farther away from the ship. He was propelling himself along in the wrong direction. As the fog began to race on ahead of him he took a look over the waters that now showed white ridges as far as the eye could penetrate. Not a light could he see, save one bright light dead ahead of him. The light winked, went out, then suddenly appeared after a few seconds interval. [102]

"There's the ship!" he cried. "But, oh, how far off it seems to be."

What Steve could not understand, was that he did not see more than one light. Both masthead lights, at least, should have shown. He decided that the side light, the red and the green, were too low down for him to catch a glance at over the tops of the rising waves.

"I'll swim for it anyway," he decided, settling to his work with all the strength that was in him. It would be useless to waste breath in calling, because those on the ship could not hear him at that great distance.

Suddenly the wind abated, the fog rolled back over the lake, again enveloping the swimmer in a dense black mantle. The sea was still running with him, however, and would continue to do so for some time to come, thus helping him along.

After a couple hours of paddling and drifting, during which Rush made considerable headway, the lad realized that he was getting tired. Further than this he was cold and chilled. The chills extended from his head to his feet. [103]

"This won't do," Steve cried, confusedly. "If I get much colder I shall fall off my ship and drown."

He began paddling with renewed vigor, but, work as he would he seemed unable to throw off the chill. He realized, too, that his body was getting numb. The Iron Boy fought desperately, but the more he fought the more drowsy did he become. His efforts grew less and less and his progress slower.

Steve wrapped both arms about the door and with cheek pressed close to it, resigned himself to what he thought would be a few minutes' rest. His heavy eyelids closed slowly; his breathing grew regular, but faint and his legs stretched out full length, being in the water up to his knees.

Steve had given way to the languor that was creeping over him. He was adrift and alone far out on the treacherous water of the great lake.

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## CHAPTER X

[104]

### TOSSED UP BY THE WAVES

THE light that Steve Rush had seen, the winking, twinkling light came from the lighthouse on North Point. The North Point light was a revolving affair, which accounted for its vanishing and then reappearing at stated intervals.

A few hours passed, though they were as seconds to the unconscious boy on the slender raft. At last he began to feel a glow spreading over his benumbed body. He moved a little, took a long breath then settled back into his former stupor. But the warmth continued to spread. Steve felt a sense of being on fire. After a while he realized that the support under him was no longer moving, though he could hear the roar of the waves in his ears. He found himself dimly wondering why they did not break over him and drench him and chill him to the marrow.

Steve tried to raise one hand to his head, but the hand was pinioned so that he could not move it. His curiosity was becoming aroused. Rush opened his eyes. Before him and above him was a rocky, precipitous coast. Then in a rush of understanding he realized that he was lying on the rocky shore of the lake coast. Both hands were still under the door, which accounted for his inability to raise one of them a few minutes since.

[105]

The sun was beating down hotly, warming the Iron Boy's blood, sending it more rapidly through his veins.

With a cry of thankfulness Steve Rush got unsteadily to his feet. He was so stiff that he could hardly stand, though the numbness of a few hours since was fast passing away.

"I have been carried to the shore and I'm saved!" he shouted. "This is the most wonderful thing that ever has happened to me. But I wonder where I am."

It was early in the morning, that was certain. He judged the hour must be about seven o'clock. His watch had stopped at midnight. Turning quickly the lad glanced out over the green waters of the lake that sparkled in the morning sunlight, a gentle ripple ruffling the surface. Here and there a huge ore carrier was observed, working its way up or down the lake. Far in the offing thin ribbons of gray smoke told where other vessels were steaming along.

"I wonder if any of those ships is the 'Wanderer'?" mused the Iron Boy. "And I wonder something else, too—I wonder whether I am going to get any breakfast or not. It is useless for me to try to signal a ship in here. They probably would not come in even if they saw me, as I imagine this is shoal water all around here. There must be some one living about here somewhere. I'll start on a little exploring tour for breakfast."

[106]

Steve turned away and began climbing up the rocks. This being his first passage over the lakes, he was not at all familiar with the coast and consequently had no idea where he was.

In the meantime the ship had sailed away. The "Wanderer" had lain to until the first gray dawn of the morning. A few of the men had been saved, including two of the sailors in the boat Steve had set out in. All the others in that craft had been lost, as were the greater part of the crew of the lost steamer. The men rescued from the life-boat were of the opinion that Steve Rush had gone down with the others.

Bob Jarvis said not a word. His face was pale and drawn. He went about his duties methodically, speaking to no one, but listening to every word that was said about the tragedy.

After cutting wide circles for a full two hours the "Wanderer" was put about on her interrupted course.

"South south-west one half," announced the skipper in a low tone.

The words meant to all who heard them, that he had abandoned the search—that the missing men had been given up for lost. Their names would be added to the list of fifty thousand souls who have lost their lives on the Great Lakes during the last fifty years.

[107]

Captain Simms' face was grave. He had taken a great liking to Steve Rush. He had lost, as he thought, three men, the first loss of life on a ship commanded by him since he had been in the service of the company as a sailing master.

"Mr. Major, you will report the accident and the loss of the men as soon as we reach the St. Clair River," he said.

"Aye, aye, sir."

Captain Simms left the pilot-house, from which point of vantage he had been sweeping the waters of the lake with his glasses, and went down to his own cabin to turn in for a few hours' sleep.

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In the meantime the object of the thoughts of nearly every man on board, Steve Rush, was climbing to the top of the rocks that lined the coast. Reaching there he sought the highest point attainable and looked about him.

"I am on an island!" he exclaimed. "From the looks of things I am the only person here. Well, this *is* cheerful, but it is much better than being out yonder," he added with a gesture toward the rippling waters of Lake Huron. [108]

Rush decided to investigate his island the next thing he did. So he climbed down to the beach again and began following the coast line. As he went on he found traces indicating that some one had been there. There were chicken bones and the charred embers of a recent fire in one spot. Steve came to the conclusion that fishermen had been on the island not long since. If this were so there were hopes that they or some of their kind would visit the place again. Steve walked the greater part of the day. On one side of the island he saw a large bay. Across a point of what he judged to be the mainland, he could see another bay and beyond that a cloud in the sky that looked like smoke.

"There must be a large town or a city over yonder, but I don't know what it is. I do not even know whether I am in the United States or Canada."

All day long the lad tramped. When night came he was hungry, stiff and weak. Had it not been for his splendid constitution and great endurance he would have given up long before that.

Just before dark he caught sight of a small sailboat slipping easily along, headed, he thought, for the larger bay on beyond the narrow point of land. [109]

Steve hailed the craft. One man in the stern of the boat stood up and gazed shoreward through a glass. Rush swung his arms and shouted that he wanted to be taken off the island. The man in the stern calmly closed his glasses and sat down, while the boat held steadily to her course.

Steve sat down, too. He was not so much discouraged as he was angry and disgusted.

"Why couldn't he have sailed somewhere so I wouldn't have seen him, instead of drifting by so tantalizingly near me?" he cried.

There being no answer to the question, Rush began looking about for a place to sleep. The best he could do was a spot just under a ledge of rock. The boy went down to the beach and brought back his life raft, the piece of a deck house door on which he had floated ashore. This he carried up to his bedroom under the ledge and stood it against the rocks.

"That will do very well, in the absence of something better," he decided grinning as broadly as the drawn muscles of his face would permit him to do.

Then Steve crawled under this rude shelter, drawing his coat as closely about him as possible and went sound asleep.

Steve was exhausted bodily and mentally, and it was not to be wondered at considering what he had gone through in the last twelve hours. Besides this he had had nothing to eat since supper on the previous day. [110]

The following morning Rush did not awaken until the sunlight warmed his bedroom. He crawled out, rubbed his eyes and looked about him.

"Well, if it isn't morning! But maybe it's the next morning; maybe I slept a day and a night."

He had now lost all track of time. Steve sat down to think matters over calmly. His position was a serious one and he understood that full well.

"If I remain here another day I shall be unable to get away," he mused. "Then I shall in all probability starve to death. That won't do. I don't propose to give up as long as I have any strength left in me, and I guess I have a little, even after what I have passed through."

Rush sat studying the narrow stretch of water separating him from the slender neck of land that he had observed the day before.

"It can't be more than three miles across there. If I had had a good meal this morning I believe I could swim across to the other shore. That looks to me like the mainland. There is surely something on beyond there several miles away. I wonder if I dare try to swim it?" [111]

A little reflection convinced the lad that such an attempt could end but one way—he would drown before he reached the neck of land.

His eyes roved about, after a while resting reflectively on the piece of deck-house door that had served his purpose so well after the sinking of the steamer. A look of new-found intelligence gradually grew in his eyes.

"The very thing! Hurrah!" he cried, springing up and dancing about, forgetful for the moment, that he needed all the strength he had left. "I swam on the door all night. Surely I can stand a few hours more on it in the bright sunlight. Why didn't I think of it before?"

Rush lost no time in acting upon the suggestion that had come to him. He grabbed up the cabin door and began staggering down the rocks with it. The door was heavy and he was weak. Once he stumbled and fell. The door went clattering down over the rocks, Steve bringing up in a heap



some distance above it.

"There, I'll bet it's broken. If it is I'm done for."

But the door was not broken. It was tough enough to stand the hard usage to which it had been subjected. Steve was after it with a shout as soon as he saw that it had not been split.

After that he proceeded more carefully; within a few minutes he reached the beach with his burden. There the lad paused to think over the best way to go about his own rescue. He took off his coat slowly, folded and placed it on the door, then removing his suspenders he tied the coat fast to his raft. [112]

"There, I think that's all I had better take off or I shall get chilled again."

After a final, sweeping glance at the sea, the lad shoved the raft, or rather one end of it, into the water and sat down on the beach to rest and gather courage for the great undertaking before him.

"It beats all what a man will do for the sake of a meal," he grinned. "I might stay on this island all summer, and have a pretty good time, were it possible for me to get along without food. But, no; I've got to eat or I'll die. Well, here goes."

He shoved the door out into the water, pushing it along ahead of him until the water was up to his shoulders. Rush then slid his body up on the raft and began paddling with his hands and kicking his feet, pushing himself along, heading around a curve of the island, for the extreme narrow point of land jutting out into the lake.

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## CHAPTER XI

BY PLUCK ALONE

**A**FTER half an hour of steady paddling, Rush shoved his coat up for a pillow and lay flat on the slender raft to rest himself. He was breathing hard from his exertions; in fact, he was well nigh exhausted. But the Iron Boy's pluck was of the same quality as ever. Nothing could weaken that, no matter how dire his predicament.

"I could make better time swimming," he mused, raising his head a little and gazing longingly at the shore that now seemed farther off than before, "if I only dared. I don't mean that; I do dare, but it would not be prudent. I want to get to the mainland, and I think my present method is the best one to get me there. Well, I must start the engines going again," decided the lad, grinning at his own humor.

Had any one chanced to be looking in his direction from the shore, that person probably would have thought he was gazing upon some strange creature from the deep, for Steve was making the water foam all about him. His head and the end of the board were all that were visible above the surface. Once he paddled so fast as to cause him to lose his balance. His raft turned turtle, landing Rush on his back in the water. Laughing almost gleefully at his own misfortune, the lad, in a few swift strokes, regained the door. [114]

"That was just so much effort wasted," he remarked. "I must remember that I am not running a race. I ought to be in pretty good trim for one, though; if I get through with this one I shall be fit for most any kind of an old race that I come across."

For the rest of the journey Steve made no attempt to spurt. He paddled along steadily, making slow but sure progress toward the goal on which his eyes were continually fixed.

The sun was at its zenith when, slipping from the board, he found solid rock under his feet. Steve tried to shout, but he was too worn to raise his voice. He clung to the door until it grounded with a grating sound on the beach. Steve lay there for a few minutes. Then he staggered to his feet, making his way up the beach a few feet from the water, there to throw himself on the ground exhausted.

For nearly two hours he lay resting, having fallen into a deep sleep. Then he awakened, sat up, resting his head in his hands for one last little wink, the wink that was to give the lad the strength and courage to take up his journey.

"Hello, what's the matter?" [115]

Rush started up suddenly. He saw before him a boy somewhat younger than himself, dressed in rough clothes. The boy was carrying part of a fish net.

"Say, I'm glad to see you, and don't you forget it," exclaimed the Iron Boy, striding forward and grasping the hand of the other lad, much to the latter's astonishment. "Who are you?"

"I'm Billy Trimmer. I am a fisherman—me and my father."

"Do you live near here?" asked Steve eagerly, with visions of a meal before him.

"Nope. We live over yonder," pointing to the cloud of smoke that was now much more plainly in evidence than before.

"Is that a town over there?"

"Yes."

"What is the name of the town?"

"Alpena."

"Oh! And what do you call that little island over yonder?"

"That one with the stones sticking up all over it like a porcupine's back?"

"That describes it. Some of them are sticking into me yet."

"That's Little Gull Island."

"How far is it to Alpena?" questioned Rush.

"'Bout ten miles."

[116]

Steve uttered a long, low whistle.

"What's the easiest way to get there?"

"Hoof it. Ain't no other way."

"That's too bad. Is there a house anywhere near here where I could buy something to eat?"

"Nary a house. But you kin git all you want over to Alpena."

"Thank you very much. I think I will be going."

"Say, where'd you come from?"

"From the lake—out of the lake. I was drowned out there last night, or pretty nearly drowned. A steamer went down and I was carried under——"

"A steamer?"

"Yes."

"Which one?"

"The 'Macomber,' I think it was. Coal laden and——"

"I must tell Pa," and the fisher boy was off on the run.

Steve gazed after the lad reflectively.

"I'd give a ten-dollar bill to anybody who would tell me how to run like that now. Poor Bob, I'll bet he's eating his big heart out for sorrow over my disappearance." Steve paused. "They think I'm drowned, of course, they do, and I ought to be. It must have been intended that I should be, but somehow I didn't arrive on schedule time."

[117]

Chuckling to himself, the lad started on toward the city, ten miles away. He tried to make himself forget his weariness by whistling and singing. Coming to some willow bushes, he cut the stiffest small branch he could find, from which he trimmed the nubs, then started on, whipping his legs with it.

This seemed to start the circulation, and at the same time to take his mind from his own weariness. After a time the wet, swollen shoes began to chafe his heels, and it was not very long before the skin had been worn from both heels. Then a blister suddenly bobbed up on the ball of the right foot.

The boy took off his shoes and tried to doctor the sore spots, but there was nothing he could do save tear up his handkerchief and bind up the affected parts.

"A boil on my nose, now, would just about complete my misfortune," Rush grinned. "I'm going to carry my shoes in my hands."

This did not work very well, for Steve's feet were sore and the rocks over which he was walking made his feet more tender than ever, so he put the shoes on again. They had shrunk, of course, and the putting on was attended with a great deal of pain. Steve Rush did not even grunt. He drew them on almost roughly, stamped in them and jumped up and down.

[118]

"There, I guess that'll fix that blister, anyway. I wish I could jump on the sore spots on my heels and cure them as easily."

He started, and kept on without another stop until three o'clock in the afternoon, when Rush halted for a drink of water at a little creek that crossed his trail.

It was a sore and very much dilapidated young man who crawled into the town just before supper time that evening. Realizing that his appearance was far from prepossessing, Rush sought the back streets, following them in so far as possible, keeping an eye out for a hotel that he thought might be respectable.

He found such a place after some searching about, during which the policemen he passed had

eyed him suspiciously.

Steve entered the place, which proved to be a farmers' hotel, and asked if he could get supper and lodging there. The man behind the desk eyed the lad narrowly.

"You've made a mistake young fellow," said the clerk.

"How so?" inquired Steve innocently.

"You should go out and see the hostler. Maybe he'll put you up. We don't keep your kind in here."

Several bystanders laughed at the boy's expense. But Rush never flinched.

[119]

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir; I thought I was in the stable. This must be where you herd the other lower animals. I see they are all here."

Before any one could recover his wits sufficiently to make a retort, Steve had stepped out of the place.

Next the boy tried a restaurant. He got no further than the desk when he was held up by the proprietor.

"Hold on; where are you going?"

"I wish something to eat," answered the boy politely.

"You're in the wrong place, and——"

"No, I am not. That's what the fellow told me the last place I called at. They can't both be the wrong place, so this must be the right one."

The proprietor of the place stepped out from behind his desk, laying a firm hand on Steve Rush's shoulder. A peculiar glint shot into the eyes of the Iron Boy, but he stood still.

"We can't serve you here. This is a gentlemen's restaurant. Perhaps you will find something that will suit you down on the south side."

"I have money, sir. I am willing to pay for what I get. I have been in a shipwreck and am not very presentable——"

"I can't help it; you'll have to get out."

[120]

"See here, sir, I shall not get out until I have had my supper. I have had nothing to eat in twenty-four hours, and I'm hungry."

"Go on, go on; don't raise any disturbance here."

Steve walked over and laid a five-dollar bill on the desk.

"There's your money in advance. Give me the change after I have finished my supper——"

"I said I couldn't serve you here. I——"

"Oh, yes you can, and what's more you're going to."

"I'll call a policeman and have you put out."

"Look here, Mister Man, unless I get some supper here quickly, I'll have the law on you. You are keeping a public house, and you have no right to turn me out."

Steve didn't know whether he were right or not, but he took a long chance. He saw at once that he had made a good point, so he pressed it further.

"I am going to sit down at that table over there, and I shall expect to be served at once."

The proprietor's hand fell from the Iron Boy's shoulder as the latter strode to the nearest table and seated himself. A waiter stepped up to him asking what he would have, at the same time thrusting a bill of fare on the table in front of the boy.

[121]

"I think I'll take about five dollars' worth of ham and eggs," answered Rush without a trace of a smile on his face.

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## CHAPTER XII

[122]

### ON THE ROAD TO CONNEAUT

STEVE had no further difficulty at the restaurant, though he noticed that the proprietor of the place was watching him and scowling at him all through the meal.

"I usually get what I go after," thought the boy. "In this case it is food."

After paying his bill he hunted up a clothing store, where he fitted himself out with a new suit, shirt, necktie, straw hat and a suit of underwear, for everything that Steve had on was practically ruined. This, with a pair of shoes purchased at another store, made him look quite like his usual

self.

Arrayed in his new suit Steve had no difficulty in getting into one of the best hotels in the city. He left a call for six o'clock that he might catch a train to Detroit, where he hoped to catch the "Wanderer."

He nearly missed the train next morning, because of his longing for a cat nap. Arriving at Detroit he visited a newspaper office and inquired if the ship had been sighted.

"Passed down during the night," was the discouraging answer.

"Where for?" questioned the boy, as the ships usually got their destination orders when they passed Detroit. [123]

"Conneaut. See here, you are not one of the men who were on that ship are you?" questioned the newspaper man.

"Thank you, sir. I will be going. Can you tell me what time I can get a train for Conneaut?" answered Rush, avoiding the question.

Steve felt that he would be called upon to make a report of his share in the disaster, and his good judgment told him that he should not make a first statement to any one outside the company.

The next train out did not leave until late in the afternoon, so Rush employed the time in going about the city. He visited all the places of interest, getting his luncheon at a large hotel on the hill. The hotel was named after a famous Indian Chief, but the prices asked for the luncheon made Steve gasp.

"My wages would keep me here about three days," he muttered.

Later the lad boarded a train and hurried toward his destination. He did not know whether he should find his ship in port or not, reasoning that the craft would have to proceed under reduced speed the rest of the way down on account of the smashed-in bow.

Shortly after dark the boy arrived. Inquiring his way to the ore docks, he hurried down toward the inlet. This was a narrow canal, leading up into the lower part of the town for some distance. [124] Ships were packed in the inlet, side to side, like sardines in a box. Most of them were lying with anchor lights up; others with their running lights still lighted, showing that they had just arrived in port. On either side of the inlet loomed the dark trestles, from some of which the rattle and roar of unloading machinery arose in a deafening chorus.

"This is about all a man's life is worth to face," decided Steve, as he dodged a swiftly moving car that towered above him loaded with ore. Then he narrowly missed being ground under a traveling crane that was in operation unloading a ship.

"Can you tell me, sir, if the 'Wanderer' has arrived?" asked the boy of a yard policeman who approached the lad to find out what he was doing there.

"She's outside the harbor now. I heard her whistling for a tug a few minutes ago. But we don't allow strangers in the yards here. It is too dangerous."

"I belong on the 'Wanderer,'" explained Steve.

"Oh, you do, eh?"

"Yes."

[125]

"Then what are you doing here?"

"Waiting for her."

"When did you leave her?" questioned the officer suspiciously.

"A couple of days ago, somewhere about the middle of Lake Huron. I went down when the wreck occurred."

The story of the wreck and the sinking of the coaler had by this time been spread all over the country. The policeman gazed at the boy with wondering eyes.

"You don't say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me about it."

"I am sorry, but I think I had better say nothing until I have talked with Captain Simms. Do you know where the 'Wanderer' is going to berth?"

"See that pig there, just shifting her position?" referring to a whaleback, the latter style of boats being known to sailors on the lakes as "pigs," because of their pig-like bow.

"Yes."

"The ship you want is coming into that berth. See, there's a crowd of reporters waiting around there now to interview the captain."

"I guess I'll keep out of their sight, then," laughed the lad.

Steve paced up and down the dock keeping well in the shadow, watching the channel with eager eyes. He could hardly wait until the ship got in, so anxious was he to relieve the anxiety of his companion, Bob Jarvis. [126]

"There she comes," announced the policeman.

Steve shaded his eyes and gazed intently. Yes, sure enough it was the "Wanderer." He could make out her broken nose now and the peculiar set of her sticks. The lad had never before realized the size of the ship. She seemed to loom up in the air higher than any of the buildings on the opposite side of the inlet. All was dark on board her, no light save her running lights showing; but up there in the darkened pilot-house Steve knew, keen, cautious eyes were watching out for the safety of the boat as well as for the safety of others in the harbor.

Rush heard the rasping sound of the bridge telegraph as the signal was given to reverse. The spring-rope came whirling through the air and a moment later the big hawser struck the water with a splash, being quickly drawn to the dock by the dock hands.

All this was very interesting to Steve Rush, for it will be remembered that he had never watched the docking of an ore boat before. The figure of Mr. Major, the first mate, was faintly outlined at the rail, looking down and giving orders to the men on the dock in a sharp, business-like tone. [127]

"Put out the ladder!" the mate commanded.

The ladder came over the side, and was let down carefully until it rested on the dock. Before any of those on board had an opportunity to go over the side Steve had sprung to the ladder, up which he ran nimbly, swinging over the rail to the deck of the "Wanderer."

"See here, young fellow, what do you want?" demanded the mate. Then he leaned forward, gazing keenly at the newcomer.

"Wha—what—"

"Steve!" screamed Jarvis, rushing across the ship and throwing his arms about young Rush. Jarvis was so overcome with emotion that for the moment he found himself unable to utter another sound.

"Rush!" cried the mate, fairly pulling the boy away from his companion and wringing both Steve's hands. "Why, why, we thought you went down with the coaler."

"I did. I guess I'm too tough to die. I surely have had plenty of opportunity to do so."

"Wait till I get through docking the ship, and then tell me all about it."

"I must see the captain first. Is he up in the house?"

"No; I think he just went down to his cabin." [128]

"Were any of our men lost?"

"Two of them. Jarvis here leaped overboard and saved four men from the other ship, who were drowning while trying to swim out to us."

"Good boy, Bob," said Steve as he patted his companion affectionately. "You must tell me all about it when we get to our cabin, by and by. I have had some experiences, too, some that will make you laugh."

Others of the crew were pressing forward to shake the hand of the plucky Iron Boy, for both boys were popular with all hands save the stoke-hole crew.

"I must see the captain, Bob. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Steve hurried up to the forward deck, rapped on the door and was bidden to enter. Captain Simms looked, then blinked rapidly as his eyes fixed themselves on the boy framed in the cabin doorway.

"Hello, is that you, Rush?"

"Yes, sir."

"I thought there wasn't water enough in Huron to drown your kind."

"No, sir."

"Come in and sit down. I want to talk to you."

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## CHAPTER XIII

**B**EFORE Captain Simms would permit the lad to leave him, he had to hear the story of Steve's experiences. The story was frequently interrupted by grunts of approval on the part of the skipper. The latter was not an emotional man, as was evidenced by his greeting of Rush after the boy had, as it were, risen from the lake.

Rush's story finished, he asked the captain to tell him all about what had occurred after the accident.

"It isn't what did occur so much as what's going to happen," answered the master gloomily.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I shall lose my license."

"What, and you not to blame? Impossible."

"Yes, but how am I going to prove that I am blameless?"

"The authorities will believe what you say, will they not?"

"They have just as good a right to believe the captain of the other boat. He will say it was my fault, and perhaps I shall say it was his fault, and there you are. Both of us will lose out in the end. The other skipper was saved and I am glad of it. It seems too bad that, after all these years on the lakes without a blemish on my record, I have to be knocked out at this time. My wife and little girl will be heart-broken."

[130]

"Perhaps it will not be so bad as you think, sir. Of course, we are all deeply grieved over the loss of life. That cannot now be helped. It is our business to find out where the blame is and fix it there, no matter whom it hits. I know one whom I am pretty sure it will not hit."

Captain Simms squinted at the lad.

"Who?"

"Yourself."

"Rush, you're a fine fellow. I like you," announced the skipper, with something approaching enthusiasm in his voice as he stepped forward and grasped the hands of his deck man in a grip of iron. Steve thought he had a pretty good grip himself, but his own was as nothing compared with that of the captain of the "Wanderer."

"I reported the accident from Detroit, and was ordered to proceed to destination if able. I haven't heard anything from headquarters yet. I shall hear something in the morning, as soon as our arrival here is reported."

"When do we unload?"

"They begin in about an hour."

[131]

"Then I must get into some old clothes and get ready for work."

"You need not go on duty to-night, unless you wish to."

"I prefer it. You see, I have been idle for a couple of days and I shall get out of practice," replied the boy, with a good-natured laugh.

"Idle! Humph! After swimming half way across Lake Huron, being drowned into the bargain, walking almost across the state of Michigan, going without food for twenty-four hours, not to speak of a few other little things—then to talk about being idle. Go back and tell the cook to set up the best on the ship. After you have had a good meal you may go to work, if you wish. I suppose you'll not be satisfied unless you do. Go on with you. Tell the first mate I want to see him."

An hour later found Steve in his working clothes. The cranes for unloading were just being moved into place when he reached the deck. These were huge affairs, each provided with a giant scoop that gulped a little mouthful of some fifty tons of ore every time its iron jaws were opened.

There was a rattle and a bang as the hatch covers were being ripped off and cast to the far side of the deck; men on the trestles were shouting, whistles were blowing in the harbor, gasoline launches conveying ship's officers to and from the other side of the inlet, were exhausting with vicious explosions. Steve thought he had never seen such confusion before, yet he knew full well that there was in reality no confusion about it. Everything was being worked out in keeping with a perfectly arranged system.

[132]

"Rush, you get down in the hold and take charge of the unloading," ordered the mate.

Steve hurried below. The hold was dimly lighted by an electric light at either end. He did not know exactly what he was expected to do. The great scoop dived down, swallowed a mouthful of ore and was out with it like some huge monster, almost before Rush realized what was going on.

"Whew! That's going some!" he exclaimed. "There comes the thing again. Hello, up there!" cried the boy, with hands to mouth. "Hadn't you better take out some from the other end so as to unload the boat evenly?"

"Yes, that's what we've got you down there for, to watch things," shouted a voice from the deck. "You're all right. Keep it up!"

"I don't know whether I am, or not," muttered the boy making his way over the ore to the stern of the hold. "This strikes me as being a dangerous sort of spot."

He watched the huge steel lips of the scoop as it felt about like the lips of a horse gathering the oats from its manger, quickly grabbing up its fifty tons of ore then leaping for the trestle some fifty feet above, where it dropped its burden into cars waiting to transfer the ore to the furnaces. [133]

Load after load was scooped up. The rattle and the bang of the unloader was deafening. It made the Iron Boy's ears ache.

"According to the speed at which we are unloading, now, we should be finished in about four hours," he said. "This is the most wonderful mechanism I ever saw!"

There came a lull, during which the ship was moved further astern, in order that the unloader might pick up ore from the forward part of the hold. By the time this had been done, and the huge crane shifted to its new position, nearly an hour had been lost.

The boy pondered over this for some time. It seemed to him like an unnecessary loss of time.

"Why, so long as they have one crane at an unloading point, should they not have more?" he reflected. "This is worth looking into."

He thought he saw where a great improvement could be made, and he decided to think it over when he had more time. Perhaps he could suggest something to the officials that would be of use to them after all. [134]

Steve and his companion, while working as ordinary seamen, were drawing the same fine salaries that they had received in the mines. Therefore the boys felt it was their duty to earn the money being paid to them by doing something worth while. They were getting three times as much as was paid to the other men doing similar work.

As Rush was thinking all these things over the lights in the hold suddenly went out, leaving the place in absolute darkness.

"Lights out!" he shouted.

A rush of air fanned his cheek. He raised a hand to brush away some object that seemed to be hovering over him. It was as if invisible hands were groping in the dark, feeling for the Iron Boy's face to caress it. Steve instinctively crouched down as low as he could on the ore. There was little of it beneath him, the greater part having been removed by the giant shell of the unloader.

Suddenly with a groan and many creakings the object whose presence he had dimly felt now closed over him.

"The unloader!" cried Steve. "It's caught me! It's caught me!"

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## CHAPTER XIV

 [135]

### STEVE SAVES THE CAPTAIN

**F**ORTUNATELY for Steve Rush the load scooped up by the unloader, chanced to be a light one, only a few tons being in the scoop itself. That left him head room so that he was not crushed against the upper side of the giant shell. Still, his quarters were cramped and the sensation was, if anything, more trying than had been that when he found himself alone in the waters of Lake Huron.

"I'm done for this time, I guess. Hello, there! Stop the machine! I'm caught!" he shouted.

In the groaning and creaking of the great crane his cries for help were unheard. Steve felt himself being borne swiftly through the air. Up, up swung the great shell, swaying dizzily from side to side after it left the deck of the ship. As it passed out of the hold Steve uttered a shout louder than the others. He was not frightened, but, as was quite natural under the circumstances, he wanted to get out of his unpleasant predicament.

Bob Jarvis, who was at the rail, heard the cry. He divined the truth instantly. Springing to an open hatch he leaned over, bellowing out the name of his companion into the hold. There was no response. Bob did not believe there would be. [136]

"Stop it! Stop it!" he shouted.

It is doubtful if the crane man heard, and if he did he failed to understand, for the big shell kept on mounting to the top of the trestle.

"What's the matter!" demanded the mate. "You're enough to raise the dead."

Jarvis did not stop to answer. He sprang for the side of the ship, leaped over the rail, and, catching the sides of the ladder, shot down to the pier without touching a single rung of the ladder. The instant his feet touched the pier the lad darted off to the trestle. A cleat ladder

extended up the side of the trestle to the top. Bob ran up it like a real sailor and rushed over the ties to the place where the train was being loaded for the furnaces.

In the meantime, Steve Rush had been hoisted to the top. He knew what was coming. The lad braced his feet and shoulders against opposite sides of the scoop, hoping thereby to hold himself in place. He had forgotten that the shell would open up at the proper moment in order to discharge its load—would open up so wide that not even a fragment of anything would be left within it.

Suddenly the great jaws of the shell opened with a crash and a bang. There followed the roar of rushing iron ore as it dropped into the waiting ore car on the track. [137]

Rush dropped like a stone. He landed in the railroad car, half buried under the ore, dazed and bleeding from the sharp pieces of ore that had hit him on the head during his descent.

"Hey there, stop it, stop it!" shouted Jarvis, running toward the spot as the crane was swinging the scoop off toward the ship for another load.

"Stop what?" demanded the foreman of loading.

"You've dumped a man from that scoop! Which car was it?"

The foreman laughed easily.

"I guess you must be crazy."

"Which car is it, I say? Answer me quick. He may be killed, or——"

"That's the car right there, the last one filled and——"

But Bob was bounding toward the place with desperate haste.

"Steve! Steve!"

"Ye-yes, I'm IT again," answered a muffled voice, dragging himself from the ore, shaking the dirt from him.

"Look out for the shell! It'll be on you again before you know it," warned Jarvis. He had heard the creaking and groaning of the machinery, sounds, which told him the big scoop was on its way upward again with still another load of the red ore. [138]

Rush staggered to the edge of the car.

"Jump!" commanded Bob.

Steve did so, not knowing where he would land, but with perfect confidence in his companion's presence of mind. No sooner had the lad cleared the car than a load of ore was dumped on the spot where he had been standing but a few seconds before.

Bob grunted as the heavy body of Steve Rush landed full in his arms, causing the former to sit down heavily on the trestle with the dirt from the dumping shell, showering over them.

"Good for you, Bob! You saved my life. Let's get out of this place."

"I am perfectly agreeable to that. How do we get down?"

"There are two ways. One is to jump off and the other is to go down the ladder. The latter is the way I'm going. Perhaps you prefer the other, judging from your past performances as the horsemen would say. You have made some pretty good records as it is."

Bob made for the ladder, followed by Steve. When the two boys climbed over the rail to the deck of the ship, the first mate gazed at them in astonishment. [139]

"I thought you were down in the hold, Rush."

"So I was," laughed the boy.

"What did you come out for?"

"I couldn't help myself. I went up in the scoop, which caught me when the lights went out down there. Something is the matter with your electric arrangements down there, I guess."

Mr. Major gasped.

"You don't mean you went up in that thing?"

"I guess I do."

"He got dumped on an ore car," added Jarvis by way of explanation. "And he lives to tell the tale."

"Get down in the hold. The ship is listing to port. They are taking too much out on that side. Jarvis, you run back and tell the engineer to have his electrician find out what is the matter with the lights in the hold. Look out for yourself, Rush, this time. I am beginning to think you are a hoodoo."

"And I am beginning to hold the same opinion," answered the Iron Boy.



"If you keep on we won't be able to get a sailor to ship on the same craft with you."

"I don't know that I should blame them much for feeling that way. Trouble is tied to my heels, but somehow I manage to get through on a pinch," laughed the boy, hurrying for the stairway that led down into the entrance to the ore hold. [140]

The ship was fully unloaded at midnight. All hands were dirty, dusty and tired when they started aft to wash up and get ready for bed.

"Where's that soogy barrel?" yelled one of the deck hands, meaning the receptacle holding hot water, well soaped, from which the men filled their basins for washing.

"It's down in the engine room being steamed out. There's another one down in the lazaret. We'll fetch it up and have it filled before those lubbers down below get the old one ready."

"We'll help," cried Steve. "Come along, fellows. I guess the whole crew ought to be able to get the barrel up without calling any of the dock hands to help us."

They started away, laughing, and the barrel was hoisted from the lazaret or storeroom near the stern of the vessel, quickly filled from a hot-water pipe and a good portion of the contents distributed among the men.

In another hour all hands save the anchor watch were sound asleep, the captain with the stoicism of the sailor, sleeping as soundly as the rest, notwithstanding the fact that he might wake up in the morning shorn of his command, a disgraced man. [141]

Instead, on the following morning the "Wanderer's" master received a message from Duluth ordering him to report immediately for a hearing. He was instructed to bring with him certain men of his crew. There was no time to be lost. Without waiting for breakfast the captain ordered Mr. Major, the first mate, the Iron Boys and the wheelman on duty at the time of the collision to make ready to accompany him to Duluth at once. The message further stated that the ship would be taken to Duluth for survey and repairs by a master who was then on the way to Conneaut.

The party got away within a few minutes, the second mate being left in charge, and thirty minutes later they were on their way to the north.

The examination took place that evening immediately after the arrival of the officers and men from the "Wanderer."

The examination was to be a strictly company examination, but the government officers in charge of the licensing of pilots on the Great Lakes were on hand to listen to the testimony and to decide whether further investigations were necessary. Mr. Carrhart and the superintendent of the line of steamships belonging to the company were present to take an active part in the investigation. [142]

Captain Simms was the first witness called. He gave his version of the accident, explaining the position of the ship, the course it was sailing on at the time and all other facts in his possession. The fact that he was on duty at the time, and that the ship was sailing under reduced speed, was a point in his favor, though it did not by any means serve to relieve him of the responsibility for the accident.

"Who was on the bridge at the time of the accident?" asked Mr. Carrhart.

"Stephen Rush. Jarvis was on watch in the forepeak."

"We will hear Rush next," said Mr. Carrhart.

The Iron Boy was called in from an adjoining room, where the witnesses had been placed. When a witness finished his testimony he was permitted to sit down in the room and listen to the proceedings. This Captain Simms did. Steve took his place in the witness chair.

"You were on the bridge watch on the night that the 'Wanderer' collided with the 'Macomber,' were you not?" asked the superintendent, who was conducting the examination.

"Yes, sir."

"State what occurred."

Steve, in a clear, firm voice that carried conviction with it, related briefly and tersely all that he knew of the collision. He omitted his experience in drifting ashore, but a few questions from Mr. Carrhart served to draw out that most interesting recital. All hands listened attentively. [143]

Each face, as the narrative proceeded, expressed silent admiration for the wonderful pluck and endurance of the Iron Boy. But his hearers did not feel surprised at what he had accomplished after they had studied the firm set of the lips, the square-cut jaw and the clear, steady eyes.

"You had sighted the side lights of the 'Macomber' some time before the collision, had you not?"

"Yes, sir; about half an hour before the crash came, I should say, roughly speaking."

"What was the position of the two ships?"

"I don't know that I can explain it so that you would understand. I can draw a diagram of it if you wish."

"Do so."

Rush quickly outlined the position of the two ships on a pad of paper and handed it to his questioner.

"Do you know what the course of your ship was?"

"Not so that I could name it. I would know if I had a compass—I mean I could point it out." [144]

The superintendent called for a compass card, which a clerk brought from his office. Steve studied it a moment, turning the card around until he had placed it in the desired position.

"This is where we were, up to the time the fog came down and we couldn't see anything more," he said, placing a finger on a point on the card.

"But you were on the bridge. How could you know this?" demanded the questioner.

"I was watching the bridge compass, trying to learn something about it. You see, this is my first experience on a ship and I was anxious to learn all I could."

"Then your course was south-south-west-one-half?"

"I don't know, sir. The little mark on the compass rim was on the point that I have indicated, previous to the time the fog settled."

Thus far the lad's testimony had corroborated all that the captain had said.

"Have you had any talk with Captain Simms as to what you should testify to?" interrupted one of the government representatives.

"Certainly not, sir," answered the boy flushing. "Captain Simms is not that kind of man. He expects me to tell the truth, and that is what I am trying to do." [145]

"We understand that, Rush," interposed Mr. Carrhart, soothingly. "You are giving us some valuable information. The gentlemen merely wish to get at all of the facts."

"Now, Mr. Rush, let me understand this clearly. You say that the course was south-south-west-one-half just before the fog settled?"

"Yes, sir, if that is the course indicated by that point," again placing his finger on the compass card.

"Am I to infer then that the course was changed after the fog came down?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah!"

The spectators straightened up at this. Their faces were grave. An important piece of evidence had been brought out. It might be against Captain Simms, or it might be in his favor. All depended upon the boy's further testimony.

"What was the course after the change?"

Steve again pointed to the card.

"We swung over to this point."

The superintendent and the government representatives examined the point indicated by Steve very carefully.

"South-south-west flat?" [146]

"If that is it, yes sir."

"Captain, you may answer where you are. Did you change your course as indicated by Rush?"

"I did. The boy is right. He hasn't eyes in his head for nothing. He sees more than any one else on my ship does."

"Did you think what the reason for that change of course was?" demanded the superintendent, again turning to Steve.

"I thought it was to make sure that we should clear the other ship."

"Yes; according to the position of both vessels, the 'Macomber' had the right of way," interjected the captain. "I changed the course to clear them, and I should have done so. I don't understand, yet, why I did not."

"Why did you not tell us of this in your testimony?"

"I did not think of it."

"Even though it was in your favor?"

The captain nodded.

The captain of the lost "Macomber" was called in.

"What course was your ship steering when the collision occurred?" he was asked.

"I supposed it was the course as indicated on the report made by me."

"You were in your cabin asleep?"

[147]

"Yes, sir."

"Who was on duty in the pilot-house?"

"The mate and the wheelman."

"They were lost?"

"They were."

"You know of no reason why they should have changed their course so as to throw your ship squarely in front of the 'Wanderer'?"

"No earthly reason."

"They were thoroughly capable and experienced men?"

"Yes, so far as my observation went."

"You admit that the course of your ship was changed, do you not?"

"If what the young man and Captain Simms say is true, our course must have been changed. I cannot but think the mate must have lost his head, or else failed to note the position of the compass while he was busy peering ahead. That is probably the explanation, the wheelman forgetting himself in looking ahead also. He knew there was a ship under their bows; both knew it and they were naturally anxious."

"You would not have mentioned this had not the young seaman Rush brought it out?"

"I might not have, because I did not know it. It puts the matter in an entirely new light."

"You admit, then, that your vessel was in the wrong?" interposed one of the government officials.

[148]

"I am obliged to, granting that the statements we have heard are correct, and I have no idea that they are not. While I am responsible for the safety of my ship, I do not see how I can be held accountable for the disaster. I did not know there was a fog and no word was brought to me to that effect. A man must get sleep at some time, and what better time than when the skies are fair and the sea is calm?"

The officials cleared the room, after which they went into executive session with the government men. Their discussion lasted little more than half an hour. The two captains were then sent for, the witnesses being allowed to enter the room also.

"Captain Simms," announced the superintendent of the steamship line, "we find you free from all blame in this matter. You did all that you could. You let your ship swing off sufficiently to have cleared the 'Macomber'; you were under reduced speed, and you were at your post where you should have been under the circumstances. Besides this, you and your crew did heroic service in rescuing the men of the ill-fated ship. You lost two of your own men in so doing and nearly lost a third. Especial credit is due to Seaman Robert Jarvis, who bravely saved several lives at the risk of losing his own. As for you, Captain," he added, addressing the master of the "Macomber," "I am sorry to say that we shall have to lay you off for sixty days. While you were not physically responsible for the loss of your ship, you are morally responsible. Had you been at your post, and had there been no errors of judgment on your part, you would have been freed from blame. At the expiration of your suspension you will no doubt be assigned to another ship. The government officials here concur in both decisions. They agree that Captain Simms is wholly blameless for the disaster."

[149]

Captain Simms did not smile. His face was grave. He was sincerely sorry for the other captain. He knew how easy it was for a man to lose his place in the line through no immediate fault of his own. Simms himself might have been in the position of the other man had it not been for one keen, honest, observant boy.

"Gentlemen, I wish to say a word," announced Mr. Carrhart, rising. "I wish to say that this board owes a vote of thanks to Seaman Stephen Rush."

"We do," assented several voices at once.

"I know Mr. Rush and his friend Jarvis very well, and I have watched their careers for the last two years. They always do well whatever is set before them to do. Had it not been for Rush's very explicit testimony—for his keen observation, we probably should not have gotten at the facts, and a great injustice might have been done to Captain Simms, though that would have been largely his own fault. Captain Simms, you will proceed to Detroit in the morning and take charge of the 'Richmond,' our new steel, ore-carrying steamer, which is ready to go into commission at once. I presume you will take these two young men with you on the new boat?"

[150]

"I certainly shall if they will ship with me," answered Captain Simms promptly. "I wish I had some

more men like them. Even half as good men would do very well."

The captain stepped across the room and grasped Steve by the hand.

"I owe this whole business to you, Rush, and you bet I won't forget it!"

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## CHAPTER XV

[151]

### AT THE WHEEL

"ISN'T she a beauty!" said Steve admiringly, as, with Jarvis and Captain Simms, he stood on the dock at the shipyards in Detroit, gazing up at the new steamer, the finest ship of her kind plying the lakes.

"She is," agreed the master proudly, "but I'm not forgetting that I might not have had her if it hadn't been for you. Let's go aboard and look her over."

All hands climbed the ladder to the deck. Besides the usual two deck-houses, fore and aft, there was another house just aft of the forward house. This was the guest or passenger dining room where the guests of the line would be served with their meals. After admiring this the men went forward. The captain's quarters were handsomer than anything the men ever had seen before.

"The only trouble with this outfit up here is that it's bigger and I'll be lonesome up here," laughed the captain.

"We'll come up and visit you," returned Jarvis.

"I hope you will, at that," answered the skipper heartily. "I don't know of any men I would rather have in my cabin. I'll tell you what you do. You both come in every evening when we are not otherwise engaged, and I will teach you navigation." [152]

"Thank you very much, sir," replied Rush. "That is exactly what I wish to learn. Of course, I cannot learn it all while I am on the lakes, but I shall be able to get a general idea of it."

"You will learn it quickly enough. After you have been on these lakes one season you'll know more about these waters than a whole lot of men who have been drilling up and down here for the greater part of their lives. We will go back and look over your quarters now."

The room assigned to the boys was even more attractive than had been their quarters on the old ship. The room was large and cosily furnished, and the Iron Boys were delighted with it.

The next thing was the selection of a crew. Captain Simms, with the authority of the officials of the line, decided to ship his old crew, which was done as soon as the "Wanderer" reached Detroit on the following day. The new ship was under orders to proceed to Duluth for a cargo of ore.

The up trip was uneventful, the efforts of all hands being devoted to shaking the new vessel down and getting acquainted with her. The "Richmond" proved herself to be all that was expected of her. She handled easily and well. [153]

During the three days' trip up the lakes, the boys began their study of navigation. Their first work was to learn to box the compass; that is, name every point on the compass. Steve, with his usual aptness, committed the card to memory in one night. Bob was not very far behind him. Then they took up the study of the theory of navigation, working out positions by moon, stars and sun, all requiring more or less mathematical proficiency. Rush proved himself an apt pupil, and he had made a good start by the time they reached the ore docks in Duluth.

The lads found a few hours time in which to run home to see Steve's mother, and at daylight on the following morning the "Richmond" backed from her slip and turned her trim bow toward the waters of Lake Superior once more.

"I am going to put you two men on the wheel," announced the master, on the morning of the second day out.

"Steering the ship?" questioned Jarvis.

"Yes. You will find it easy work, but you will have to pay strict attention to business."

The eyes of the Iron Boys glowed with pleasure. They took a trial watch early that forenoon under the direction of the captain, who first explained the operation of the wheel. Unlike the old style steering wheels, this one was operated by crude petroleum instead of by ropes and chains running over pulleys. Turning the wheel forced the oil through a little half-inch pipe. The pressure thus obtained opened a valve in the engine room and set the steam steering gear at work. The ship, by this modern method, could be steered with a single finger. [154]

"Wonderful, wonderful!" exclaimed the boys, when they fully understood the operation. Their knowledge of it was not complete until they had made a journey back to the engine room to watch the steam steering gear work there as the wheel was turned in the pilot-house.

Then there was another wonder that they were instructed in, the electrical equipment of the ship. All the running lights were lighted by electricity from the pilot-house. Then there were three

methods of blowing the whistle situated aft of the pilot-house. First, there was the usual whistle cord; then there was a lever some two feet in length, that pulled the wire attached to the whistle valve. But the most remarkable of all was an electric button whistle. A pressure on this blew the steam whistle. A long pressure blew a long blast and a quick pressure a short blast.

"Electricity plays an important part in the world's affairs to-day," said Captain Simms, noting their keen interest. "You see we have wireless equipment, too." [155]

"Why isn't it working?"

"It will be when we get some one to operate it. I understand that the line is going to ship an operator at the Soo. I don't know whether it is a good thing or not. Too handy for the officials to say, 'Why did you do that?' or 'Why didn't you do this?' Well, it's always possible that the thing won't work when you want it to. I guess we can see to that."

The boys nodded. Steve was at the wheel. He soon got the knack of keeping the vessel on her course, but found that watching the compass card so steadily made his head ache. Still, it was fascinating work. The helmsman sat on a high stool, both arms resting on the wheel between the spokes, his eyes looking over the wheel and down into the binnacle. A glance up showed miles of sea ahead with the gently rising and falling bow of the ship in the foreground. There was a consciousness of power as the helmsman gently turned the wheel this way or that. The great ship obeyed his slightest pressure. Glancing back through the rear windows of the pilot-house the stern of the ship swung in response to the turn of the wheel with a crack-the-whip motion.

The skipper, noting Steve's glance at the swinging stern, nodded. [156]

"That is what you must look out for when in close quarters. You see, you are so far forward here that you can scarcely believe what a wide circle that other end will make—I should say sweep. It doesn't necessarily cut circles. In entering harbors you must measure your distance with your eyes and know how far you can turn your wheel without having the stern of the ship smash into a breakwater, or crash in the side of some other vessel to the right or left of you."

"There is much to learn. I can see that."

"Sailing the lakes is done by instinct largely. If a man's cut out for the business he makes a go of it. If he isn't, some dark night he misses his way and lands on a hidden reef somewhere. Then, presto, he's out of a job, and maybe worse."

"When do we reach the Soo?" interrupted Jarvis.

"This evening. Rush will be at the wheel about that time, and you had better be up here, too, Jarvis. You can't become too familiar with the ports and the lights. Do you know how to read buoys?"

"No, sir," answered the boys.

"It is very simple. When you are entering port red buoys, with even numbers, are left to your right hand or starboard. Black buoys with odd numbers are left to the left hand or port. That's the rule the world over." [157]

"But," objected Jarvis, "suppose it's night and you can't see the buoys. What are you going to do then?"

The captain laughed heartily.

"Lights, my boy. Channels are lighted at night, so you can't go wrong; but a good navigator will take his ship through any place without a light to guide him. I want you boys to learn every one of the ranges——"

"What is a range?" interrupted Bob.

"Guide lights," spoke up Steve quickly. "They are the lights on shore, either lighthouses or buoys, to show you how to lay your course."

"That is the idea," agreed Captain Simms. "Let's hear you box the compass while we are here alone, Jarvis."

Bob went over, taking a look at the compass.

"Why do you do that?"

"I wanted to see whether we were at the north pole or the south pole."

"I guess you would know it if you were—that is, you would be pretty certain that you weren't navigating the Great Lakes. Go ahead now."

Jarvis shut his eyes and began reading off the points of the compass, making only one error in his reading. [158]

"That is fine," announced the skipper. "I'll guarantee there isn't a man in the ship's crew, outside of the first mate, who can do it so well. Of course, I am excepting Rush and myself. Rush does everything well."

That night Steve took his regular trick at the wheel at eight o'clock. Of course, Jarvis was there,

too, as were the captain and the first mate. They were nearing the Soo, as they could see from the lights.

"Let's see, you boys have not been through here, have you?"

"We were below decks the other time, sir."

"Oh, yes, I remember. We will take the Canadian locks this time. The Canadian locks are on the left and the American locks on the right, but the latter are too short to hold a boat as long as this one, so we are obliged to take the Canadian side."

"Why do we have to lock through?" questioned Jarvis.

"To get around the rapids, and for the further reason that Huron lies lower than Superior. This is Whitefish Bay. The light that we have just dropped to starboard is Whitefish Point Lighthouse. Rush, do you see that red light yonder?"

"Yes, sir."

[159]

"Point on it."

"I can't see the bow of our boat so as to tell whether I am pointing on the light or not."

"I'll fix that."

The captain pressed a button and a ray of dull, ghostly light appeared just beyond and over the bow.

The lads uttered exclamations of amazement.

"What is it? How did you do it, sir?"

"That, lads, is a guide light on the end of the pole that answers for the bowsprit. The light is there for the purpose of giving you a guide to steer by in narrow places."

Lights began to spring up ahead, until there was such a confusion of them that neither boy could make anything out of them, but the steady eyes of the captain picked out the lights that he wished to find without the least difficulty.

"Do you hear the roar of the rapids in the St. Mary's River?"

"Yes; we hear them."

"Those green lights way over yonder are on the American locks. Now port your helm and steer for that white light standing high above the rest. Are you on it?"

"On the mark, sir," answered Steve.

They continued on this course for ten or fifteen minutes, when the captain ordered the wheelman to starboard his wheel. This threw the bow to the left, sending the boat across the bay on a diagonal course.

[160]

"Why don't you go straight in?" asked Jarvis.

"We should land high and dry on the rocks if we did," answered the skipper, with a short laugh. "Others have tried that very thing. The hulls of some of their ships are down there under the water now."

The boys began to realize that navigating the Great Lakes required a great deal of skill and knowledge.

"There is a ship in the locks now," announced Captain Simms.

Both boys gazed into the night, but they could see no ship. The master signaled the engine room to slow down, explaining, at the same time, that they would have to drift in slowly and stop until the other boat got out.

The channel began to narrow as the master directed the wheel this way and that until they found themselves in a walled-in channel that led directly to the locks themselves.

"Snub her!" commanded the captain, leaning from the pilot-house window. A ladder was shoved over the side of the moving ship, a man on either side of it on deck pushing it along so that it might not be dragged. Quick as a flash a sailor sprang on the ladder, and, grasping the side pieces, shot down to the dock on that side, a distance of some twenty feet. Following came others, all getting down in the same manner. It was a dangerous thing to do and excited the wonder and admiration of the two boys in the pilot-house.

[161]

"If I were to try that I would be in the water," laughed Rush. "It is a good thing for me that I am at the wheel, for I wouldn't be able to resist trying that experiment."

Hawsers were cast over from the deck, and these, the men who had gone over the side, twisted about snubbing posts. At the same time the ship's propeller began reversing slowly at a signal from the captain. The ship came to an easy stop. The skill with which it had all been done, made a deep impression on the Iron Boys.

A few moments later the gates of the locks opened and the other steamer moved slowly out. So close did they pass the "Richmond" that some of the men reached out and shook hands across the gulf, while the two captains held a brief conversation. Then the "Richmond" let go her moorings and moved slowly into the Canadian locks. The gates swung to behind them, the water began rushing from the other end of the locks and the ship rapidly settled until her decks were level with the dock beside which she stood. The men who had gone over the side now stepped aboard and hauled in the hawsers after them. [162]

"Marvelous!" breathed the Iron Boys.

"Slow speed ahead," commanded the skipper. "We are now on the Huron level. Here comes your relief. I hope you boys get a good night's sleep."

"Thank you, sir; good night," answered the lads, starting for their cabin. It had been a most interesting evening for them.

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## CHAPTER XVI

[163]

### THROUGH THE ROCKY CUT

**F**OUR long and two short blasts roared from the whistle of the "Richmond."

It was the private signal of Captain Simms. The ship was bearing down on Port Huron and was at that moment at the mouth of the St. Clair River. The skipper stepped to the door of the pilot-house with megaphone in hand.

"This is where I live," he explained. "My wife always comes out to see me as we pass. See the light there, in that cottage on the river bank? Well, that's where I live when I'm not steamboating. There she comes."

Through the moonlight Steve saw a woman running down to the edge of the water.

"How are you, John?" called her pleasant voice through a megaphone.

"I'm well; how are the folks?"

"They're all well."

"Any news?"

"Nothing except that Betty has six pretty white chickens and she's terribly cross."

"Put her in the soup," suggested the captain.

Just then a little white-robed figure appeared at an upper window of the captain's home. In her hand the little one also held a megaphone. It was the captain's twelve-year-old daughter, Marie, the apple of his eye. [164]

"H-e-l-l-o P-Pa-pa-a-a," came the greeting in a childish treble.

"Hello, Marie!" bellowed Bob Jarvis from the rail aft of the bridge.

"Who are you? I don't know your voice."

"I'm Bob Jarvis, but you don't know me."

"Hello, Bob. Yes, I do. My papa wrote to me about you. Where's Steve?"

There was a laugh that rippled from one end of the deck to the other.

"Never mind him; he is steering the ship. When are you coming out with us? Come along and we'll have a lot of fun."

"I don't know. When Papa says I may. When may I come, Papa? And you haven't said a word to me yet. You'll be gone in a minute."

"How could I? You haven't given me a chance to get a word in edgeways. Port your helm a little," he added, in a lower voice to Rush.

"Port a little," answered Steve.

"When, Papa?"

"Perhaps the next trip. I will send you a letter from down the line. Jennie, can you go back with us if I stop for you on the up trip?"

"I'll see. If I can do so I'll run up the red flag on the staff. If you see that you may stop. If not, you will know we can't get away that trip. I've got to attend to my early canning, you know." [165]

Captain Simms grumbled something outside the megaphone, that sounded something like, "Shoot the canning!"

"Good-bye," came two voices, sounding faint and far away on the soft night air, one being a

woman's voice, the other the thin, childish treble of a little girl.

"Head on that bright light low down there," directed the skipper, with a last lingering look back toward his home. "That's the worst of this business. A fellow gets about a five-minute look at his home and family, once a month or so. I'd rather be sitting on my front porch to-night than steering a ship through this rocky river."

"Is that a light-house that I am steering for?"

"No; that's an inspector's cabin. Starboard some."

"Starboard some," repeated the helmsman.

"All ships have to report as they go by. You will hear him call when we get abreast. Those fellows never seem to sleep."

"It must be a lonely life for a man out there."

"It is, and——"

"Ship ahoy. What ship is that?" bellowed the inspector through his megaphone. [166]

"'Richmond' from Duluth with ore."

"The what?"

"'Richmond!'" roared Bob from the lower deck.

"I don't catch it."

"Six o'clock," howled Jarvis with his hands to his mouth, at which there was a loud laugh from the ship's company.

"Steamer 'Richmond,'" shouted the captain. "Why don't you open your ears? Think we can stand here yelling like wild Indians all night?"

The inspector did not answer. From past experience he realized the futility of an argument with a lake captain.

"This is the most dangerous navigating of any place on the lakes, Rush," said the skipper. "The bottom of our ship is only three feet from the bottom of the cut at this minute. Swerving six feet either to the right or left out of our course would put us hard and fast on the rocks. We should block the channel besides running the risk of breaking the ship's back. Steady!"

"Steady, sir."

"Remember, I am talking to the rudder. I keep that rudder in my mind every second of the time. I can see its every movement. I don't know there is such a thing as a steering wheel when I'm navigating like this. Port a little." [167]

"Port a little, sir."

"Now head for that range light up on the hill there. This cut, known as Rock Cut, was built by the government at great expense. Hold your course as you are until you round the bend in the cut there, then head on a red light that you will see high up on the rocks. Get your funnel back there in range with the white light on the hill you see to the left. You will be exactly in the channel then. Keep in the middle. I have to go to my cabin for a moment. I think I can trust you. Remember, the channel is narrow and you must keep well within it."

"I will, sir."

Steve was left alone in the pilot-house. As he was steering by range guides alone, now, he did not have to watch the compass. All the windows of the pilot-house had been let down so that he had an unobstructed view all around.

"I'm running the ship," breathed the lad. "I don't know who's taking the biggest chance, myself or the captain."

Though the Iron Boy felt the responsibility of his position, he could not help the little thrill of triumph that ran through him. He was far up in the air with no one save the watch down in the forepeak near him. The night was bright and glorious, the most peaceful scene he had ever gazed upon. But Rush did not devote much thought to the peacefulness of his surroundings. His mind was too thoroughly centred on his work. [168]

The "Richmond," sailed majestically around the bend in the cut, Steve glancing back over the decks to see that his funnel was coming in line with the range indicated by the captain. As Rush looked ahead through the open pilot-house window again his heart fairly leaped into his throat. Two eyes, one red the other green were blinking at him right in his path dead ahead.

"It's a ship!" he exclaimed. "I don't dare pass it here. I don't know whether there's room or not. What shall I do?"

The Iron Boy's quick mind solved the problem in a flash. Springing to the pilot-house telegraph he swung the indicator over to the words, "Half speed astern."



The ship began to tremble under the impact of the reversing propeller. Grasping the whistle lever Steve blew five short, sharp blasts, then taking his place at the wheel he calmly kept the vessel in her course, the other ship bearing down on him whistling as if the whistle lever had been wired down.

The reversing of the propeller had not been lost on Captain Simms. He knew instantly what it meant when he felt the trembling of the vessel. Then came the danger signal—five sharp blasts on the whistle. [169]

The captain was out of his cabin on the run taking the stairway to the bridge three steps at a time. By this time Rush had thrown the telegraph indicator over to "full speed astern." He was watching the stern to see that it did not swing out of the channel, then turning to see what the vessel ahead of him was doing.

What had caused him to so suddenly reverse the propeller was not so much the narrowness of the channel, but rather a light that was placed well out from the shore line on his side. It was a white light, and, while he did not understand the meaning of it, he knew that it had been placed there as a warning to ships to keep well outside of it.

The other boat was coming to a stop also, but by the time Captain Simms reached the pilot-house the bows of the two ships were so close together that it seemed as though they might crash together. One swift, comprehensive glance told the captain everything. He noted that his vessel was reversing, that the pilot was keeping her in the channel and that the other ship was coming to a stop.

Without a word to Steve he grasped his megaphone and sprang to the window. [170]

"Choke her down, you fools! Do you want to run us under?"

"Get out of the way yourself! Why didn't you blow your whistle? You saw that buoy there. You have seen it for the last half hour. You knew you ought to have given warning before you got into the cut here."

"What does that buoy mean?" demanded Captain Simms.

"A coal barge was sunk there this morning."

The two vessels met with a heavy bump that set everything rattling on board both ships, but the shock was not sufficiently severe to do any damage to either.

"Back up, you fellows, unless you want us to push you out!" commanded Captain Simms.

In the meantime, after the shock, Steve had stepped to the telegraph and swung the indicator to the word "Stop!"

The two captains hurled language at each other for the next two minutes, but the other skipper grew tired of it first. He gave the order to reverse propeller. The up-bound boat began to retreat slowly.

"Slow speed ahead," commanded Captain Simms.

The master was leaning from the pilot-house window, megaphone in hand, ready to roar at the other skipper at the first opportunity. But there was no good excuse for him to do so. After backing down stream sufficiently to make passing safe, Captain Simms gave his whistle lever a jerk, sounding one sharp blast, meaning that he would meet and pass the other vessel on its port side. [171]

The "Richmond" slipped by at a little higher speed than was safe, her sides scraping the paint off the other boat in spots.

"I ought to report you, you lubber!" roared Captain Simms in passing. "You ain't fit to command a mud scow. I've got a kid on this boat who's a better captain, after half a cruise, than you'll be if you cruise all your life."

The captain jerked the telegraph indicator to "three-quarter speed ahead" with such violence that it threatened to tear the indicator chains from their hooks. Then he turned to Rush.

"Steve, much obliged," he said. "That's the second time you saved the ship. I owe you another one for that. Unless I am greatly mistaken, you'll be trotting around with a master's license in your inside pocket by the time you are twenty-one. Steady there."

"Steady, sir," answered the boy at the wheel.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### THE BLOW IN THE DARK

THEY had passed out through Lake St. Clair as eight bells rang out. Steve relinquished the wheel to the next watch and bidding good night to the captain started back toward his quarters. [172]

The lad made his way back over the deck, strolling slowly along, enjoying the night and thinking over the events of the evening. As he reached the after deck-house he halted, leaning against it looking forward and watching the gentle rising and falling of the upper works forward.

"It is almost fascinating enough to make one want to spend his life on board a ship," mused the Iron Boy. "Well, I must turn in. I——"

He did not finish what he was about to say. A crushing blow was dealt him on the back of the head, coming from the deep shadows on the starboard side of the after deck-house.

Steve staggered forward, then fell face downward on the steel deck of the "Richmond."

Sailors found him there, half an hour later, unconscious. No one knew what had happened. The captain was notified at once and he, after an examination of the boy, decided that Steve had fallen against a steel hatch and had given his head a severe bump. They worked over the lad for nearly an hour before getting him back to consciousness. He had been put to bed, and Bob was detailed to sit by and watch his companion, which he did with solemn face. Steve fell into a deep sleep from which he did not fully awaken until morning. [173]

He was lame and sore from head to feet. Bob was asleep on the edge of the berth and the ship was rolling heavily. Without waking his companion, Rush got up after much effort, dressed himself, and, supporting himself by keeping his hands on the woodwork, made his way outside. Day was just breaking.

Steve leaned against the deck-house in the same position that he had been occupying on the previous night when he was struck.

The captain, at that juncture, came along on his way to breakfast.

"Hello, Rush," he greeted, halting. "How do you feel?"

"All knocked out."

"That's too bad. Come in and have some breakfast. You will feel better after that."

"I do not think I want any breakfast, sir."

"Pshaw! Come along. By the way, you had a nasty fall last night, didn't you?"

"I should say I did." [174]

"How did you happen to slip?"

"I didn't slip, captain."

"You didn't?"

"No, sir."

"Then how did you happen to crack your head on a hatch cover?"

"How was I lying when you found me?"

"They said you were lying on your face."

"If that was the case, I couldn't very well have bumped the back of my head on a hatch cover, could I?"

"That had not occurred to me before. See here, didn't you lose your balance or stumble and fall?"

"I fell, but it was through no fault of my own."

"Will you tell me what did happen?" questioned the captain with a puzzled expression on his face.

"I think I was struck," answered Rush calmly.

"Knocked down?"

"Yes, sir."

"Impossible! Who—what——?"

"I do not know any more about it than you do, sir. I was standing here just as I am now, when I got a terrible blow on the back of my head. I didn't know it was a blow then, but as I think it over I remember very well. Everything grew dark about me. The next I knew I was in my cabin, with you and Jarvis working over me." [175]

"What you are telling me is a very serious matter, Rush."

"It was serious enough for me at the time."

"Who was on the deck at the time?"

"No one, so far as I observed."

"But, it would have been impossible for any one to approach close enough to hit you, without your either hearing or seeing him."

"It would seem so. Yet the fact remains that I was hit. It takes considerable to knock me out, sir, but I got enough last night."

"Do you suspect any one?"

"Not a person. I cannot understand it at all."

"Well, you just keep your eyes open. If you find out who struck that dastardly blow I'll deal severely with him. He won't be in condition to strike any one else for some time to come."

"I think I shall be able to take care of the man myself when I meet him and know him," replied the lad, with a faint smile. "I shall report for duty on time this morning, so please do not put any one in my place."

"Very well; perhaps it will do you good to be busy. Well, I'm going to breakfast. Let me know if you get a line on this mystery."

Steve did not answer. He stood leaning against the after deck-house, thinking. Finally he turned with a sigh intending to go forward. As he did so a man came out of the stokers' dining room and started to go below. Rush halted sharply. [176]

"Hello, Smith," he said. "When did you come aboard the 'Richmond'?"

"When did you think I came aboard?"

"That's what I am asking you."

"Mebby I'm a fish and swam out," answered the stoker. Smith was the man with whom Steve had had the trouble on the first disastrous cruise.

"I shouldn't be surprised. You are equal to most anything that's out of the ordinary. Where were you last night?"

"Stoking from six to twelve—eight bells. But——" Smith checked himself.

"So you came off at twelve, eh?"

"I did. But how's that your business?"

"Perhaps it may be my business. At least, I am going to make it my business."

"See here, young feller, be you trying to pick a row with me?"

"No; one doesn't have to pick a quarrel with you. You're always quarreling. If I wanted to have a fight with you all I should have to do would be to look at you and the fight would be on. I'm looking at you now, Smith."

The stoker uttered a half-suppressed growl of anger, started toward the Iron Boy, then halted, opening and closing his fingers nervously. [177]

"I'll—I'll——"

"Out with it. You will feel better after you have said it," urged Steve in an encouraging voice.

"I'll break your blasted head for you——"

Smith made a jump for the Iron Boy.

Steve stepped lightly to one side, putting out his foot as the stoker shot by him. Smith's head hit the edge of a hatch, then he sprawled forward on the deck.

"So you're the fellow who gave me that blow in the dark last night, are you?" demanded the lad in a stern voice.

"I—I'll kill you for this!" roared the stoker, raising a vengeful face to the Iron Boy.

"You'll do it some dark night, then. You haven't the courage to face a man in broad daylight and meet him man to man—no; I won't put it that way, for you are no man. You're just a common tough, that's what you are. Now get up and take your medicine, for you're going to get a wallop that ought to last you longer than the hose bath did."

Smith sprang to his feet and rushed at his young antagonist. He did not reach Steve, however. The fellow suddenly received a blow under the ear that sent him spinning and tumbling over among the hatches that extended above the deck some two feet at their highest point. [178]

But Steve had not delivered the blow. He had not even raised his hands, though he was standing in position ready to meet the charge of the tough stoker.

"Get up, you hound!" roared Captain Simms.

It was he who had delivered the blow. He had emerged from the mess room just in time to see the stoker's enraged face over Steve Rush's shoulder. The captain understood instantly what Smith was about to do. The skipper took two quick strides forward and his powerful fist smote the other man a terrific blow.

The stoker leaped to his feet and went for the captain, now enraged beyond all control. But he

had reckoned without his man. The skipper knocked the angry stoker down almost before the latter could raise his fists.

"Never mind, Captain; I can take care of him," urged Steve.

"Stand back! This is my circus. What was he going to hit you for?"

"I was to blame. I goaded him into it. I——"

"Wait a minute. He hasn't got enough yet. He's coming for me."

[179]

The captain suspended conversation long enough to give Smith a right and left swing on either side of the head that sent the fellow to the deck with all the fight knocked out of him, and which put him out of business for the next ten minutes.

Captain Simms turned calmly to Rush.

"Now, what was it you were saying, my lad?"

Rush could not repress a smile.

"Nothing very much. You know Smith and myself had some trouble on the last cruise?"

"Yes, I remember."

"He never has gotten over being angry at me. He began saying disagreeable things to me, and I suppose I helped the matter along by tantalizing him. I was as much to blame as Smith was. But—but I'm sorry you didn't let me give him what he was spoiling for."

"He got it, that's all that is necessary," growled the master. "See here, Rush, he isn't the fellow who hit you last night, is he?" demanded the captain suddenly, shooting a quick, suspicious glance into the face of the Iron Boy.

"I didn't see who hit me," answered Steve, truthfully even if somewhat evasively.

"Call the first mate!"

Rush did so.

"Put that man in irons and keep him on bread and water until he is ready to go to work and mind his own business. I've half a notion to turn him over to the authorities for mutiny," said the skipper reflectively.

[180]

"Don't you think he has had punishment enough, sir?" urged Steve.

"Yes, I suppose he has at that. Iron him, Major. It will do him good."

The stoker woke up just as the steel bracelets were being snapped on his wrists. Protesting and threatening, he was dragged to the lazaret, where he was destined to remain for the next twenty-four hours in solitary confinement, with nothing more substantial to live on than bread and water.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

[181]

### VISITORS ON THE "RICHMOND"

THE ugly stoker was liberated on the following day after having promised to behave himself in the future. But he held his head low when showing himself on deck, which was seldom. He never permitted his shifting eyes to meet those of Steve Rush, nor did Steve make any effort to address the man. The lad was confident, in his own mind, that Smith was the man who struck him that night by the after deck-house, but the drubbing that Captain Simms had given the fellow made Rush feel that they were now even.

On the way back the ship picked up Mrs. Simms and little Marie at Port Huron. The "Richmond" was on its way to South Chicago with a cargo of coal. This took them around into Lake Michigan, and many were the happy hours spent by the captain's little daughter and the Iron Boys. They played games on deck between watches, as though all three were children. Rush and Jarvis had constituted themselves the special guardians of the little girl, and she queened it over them, making them her willing subjects.

At South Chicago the ship was held up for a week because the company to which the coal was consigned was not ready to receive it. Steve considered this to be bad business policy on the part of the steamship people, and another memorandum went down in his book, to be considered in detail later on.

[182]

While at South Chicago the lads made frequent trips into the city, which they had never visited before. One afternoon they took the captain's wife and daughter to a matinee, then out to dinner at a fashionable restaurant.

It made a pleasant break in the lives of each of the four, and helped to cement the friendship between little Marie and her new-found friends.

At last the coal was unloaded. After filling the tanks with water ballast, the "Richmond" started

away for the northward to take on another cargo of ore and once more to drill down the Great Lakes.

The water ballast did not draw the ship down to its load level, with the result that she rolled considerably.

"The glass is falling," announced the captain as the craft swung into Lake Superior two days later. "I shouldn't be surprised if we had quite a jabble of a sea before night."

"We don't care, do we?" chirped Marie, to whom a rolling ship was a keen delight.

"Not as long as the dishes stay on the table," answered Bob, with a merry laugh. "When are you going to bake that long-promised cake for me?" [183]

"Just as soon as the cook will let me. He's always cooking something for the night watch when he isn't getting the regular meals. My, but that night watch must have an awful appetite!" she chuckled.

"Yes, I've noticed that," agreed Bob. "But you can't lay it to me. I've a feather-weight appetite. I didn't have any at all when I first went aboard an ore carrier. It beats all how quickly a fellow will lose all interest in life the first time out."

The wind blew hard all the way up Superior, raising, as the captain had promised it would, "quite a jabble of a sea." But the blow was nothing like a heavy gale. It was just a sea, a nasty, uncomfortable sea. The boys and Marie were in great good humor all the way up. Marie's mother was ill in her stateroom and the assistant cook had had an unexpected attack of seasickness.

"Nice crew of lubbers," growled the captain, when informed of the assistant cook's indisposition.

The ship reached Duluth at night and immediately was shunted into the slip at the ore docks for loading. After the hatches were down a huge crate was hoisted aboard with a crane. A section of the deck was opened up and the crate was let down into the lazaret. The crate was consigned to one of the company's officials in the East. No one paid any attention to the crate, and it is doubtful if any one save the captain and the first mate knew what the contents of the crate were. [184]

Hatches were battened down and long before daylight the "Richmond" was on her way again. By this time the "jabble" had increased to a full gale. No other ship ventured out, but Captain Simms was not a skipper to be held back by the weather. He knew his ship was seaworthy and he knew full well how to handle her safely in any sea that the lakes could kick up. A full northwester was raging down from the hills and the glass was falling all the time. The "glass" is the sailor's name for barometer.

Steve took the wheel as they passed out, and he was obliged to give up the wheelman's stool because he could not keep it right side up under him. He dragged a platform over to the wheel. It was made for the purpose, having cross-cleats on it to enable the helmsman to keep his footing when the ship was cutting up capers.

"There," he announced, "I'll stick here until the wheel comes off."

Waves broke over the vessel continuously, striking the deck with reports like those of distant artillery. Superior was a dreary waste of gray and white. The air seemed full of the spume of the crested rollers, while the clouds were leaden and threatening. [185]

"Look at the rainbow!" cried Bob, pointing off to the westward.

"That ain't a rainbow you landlubber," jeered a companion.

"Well, if it isn't I never saw a rainbow."

"No, it's a dog."

"A what?"

"Sundog."

"Bob, you certainly are a lubber," laughed Mr. Major. "Didn't you ever see a sundog before?"

"Never. What are they for?"

"I don't know what they are for. I know what they do—they bring gales and storm and trouble all along the line. That's what the dogs do."

"I think the other ships saw it before we did, for there doesn't seem to be another boat on the lake."

"No; at least, the little fellows have taken to harbors along the coast. It wasn't the sundog, however, but the glass that warned them. You know the glass has been falling for the past twenty-four hours. We know what to expect when that happens, but we don't know what to expect when the storm strikes us. These lakes are the most treacherous bodies of water in the world. Twenty miles beyond here is the graveyard of Superior, where the hulls of more than fifty ships lie rotting on the bottom. Some of them went down in weather no worse than this. This is bad enough." [186]

Bob listened attentively.

"Do you ever get seasick in any of these storms?"

"Always," answered the first mate, in a matter of fact tone. "If this keeps on you won't see me at mess to-day noon. You'll have to eat your dinner standing up, but not for me."

The weather grew more tempestuous as the forenoon wore on. The scuppers were running rivers of green lake water and there was not a dry spot on the decks; even the upper works standing high in the air, were dripping with the spray that had been showered over them.

"Let her off three points," commanded the captain.

Almost instant relief from the incessant pounding was noticeable. The waves came aboard only occasionally, though the sea was running the same as before and the ship was rolling almost down to her rails.

"That is better," nodded Steve, his voice echoing in the silence of the pilot-house.

[187]

"Did it make you dizzy?" smiled the skipper.

"No, sir. I got all over that after I fell in the hold that time. It isn't a comfortable feeling to have the floor rolling around beneath one's feet, but I am getting so that I do not mind it much. Is that a boat ahead of us there?"

"Yes," replied the captain, placing the glasses to his eyes. "It's a pig, and she's having a pretty hard time of it. All you can see of her is a smother of foam in the place where the ship is. The smoke from her funnel seems to come right out of the lake."

"Are those whalebacks safe, Captain?" asked the pilot.

"Yes. I commanded one for two seasons. They are perfectly safe, so long as nothing happens to them."

Steve laughed.

"That goes without saying."

"But they are the wettest boats in the world, as you can judge by watching that fellow beating his way against the sea. They have a very thin skin and the least puncture will go through. Next thing you'll hear the hatches blowing off, and down she goes like a meteorite shot from above."

"I don't believe I should care for them. I prefer to be high above water like this, rather than under it all the way down the lakes. If I wanted to travel on a submarine I'd ship on a real one."

[188]

The gale was playing tunes on the braces, and the life-span running from the forward to the after deck-house was swaying back and forth. Steve gazed at it a moment then turned to the skipper.

"I never could see the use of those life-spans. If the ship goes down, I don't understand how a life-span from one end of the ship to the other, is going to help any."

"They haven't been on long. A good many lives would have been saved if they had been. You see, the span is a rope on which travels a little swing just large enough to hold a man. Then there is a free rope running through a ring in the top of the swing by which to pull one's self along."

"Yes, I have figured that out."

"Then suppose that to-night, in the darkness, we were to miss our way. The compass might go bad, we might be driven out of our course and all that sort of thing, you know—and all of a sudden we might drive our bow full speed on one of those low-lying Apostle Islands!"

"Yes, sir."

"The stern of the ship would sink low and there she would pound to pieces. That's where the men astern would find use for the life-span. By it they would be able to pull themselves to the bow of the boat and perhaps make their escape before the stern finally went down under water. They are a good thing, and you should see to it that the spans are always in working order. I have those on my ship examined every day. I—"

[189]

The captain was interrupted in what he was saying by a yell from the deck. The skipper took a quick look aft through the pilot-house windows, then sprang to the pilot-house telegraph.

"Full speed astern!" crashed the message to the engine room.

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## CHAPTER XIX

[190]

### IN THE GRIP OF THE WAVES

"S OMEBODY overboard!" said the captain sharply.

"Who?" demanded Steve, in an equally sharp tone as his relief took the wheel from his hands.

"I don't know."

Just then the figure of a man was seen to leap from the top of the after deck-house into the raging sea.

Bob Jarvis had been clinging to a ladder that the chief engineer was holding up against the whistle pipe, the valve of the whistle having worked loose. The engineer had asked Bob to help him as a favor, which the lad was glad to do, though that was not his department. It was a ticklish position in which to work, and at any moment a lurch of the ship might throw the ladder over and throw the Iron Boy into the sea. He gave no heed to the danger of his position, for he was rapidly becoming a true sailor.

Suddenly, as though some instinct had told him to do so, Bob turned his head and glanced over the deck to the forward deck-house. As he did so he uttered an exclamation. Little Marie had just descended the steps from her father's quarters, and was already on the main deck. In her arms she carried several parcels. [191]

"Go back!" roared Jarvis.

The words were driven back down his throat by the wind, and if the child understood his gestures she did not heed them.

Bob groaned.

"Let me down, quick! The child is trying to get aft and she'll never make it."

With rare presence of mind, Jarvis gave the whistle lever five quick, short jerks, sending forth as many blasts, the signal of danger. Instantly some one shouted a sharp warning.

By this time the lad had slid down the ladder and was making for the edge of the deck-house to drop down to the deck. He halted all of a sudden. Bob tried to cry out, but the words would not come. He felt a sickening sensation sweep over him, and a sudden dizziness took possession of him.

A white-crested wave had risen up out of the sea right alongside of the big steel ore carrier. For a moment it hung trembling over the ship like an avenging monster. Then suddenly it swooped down. It reminded Jarvis of a steam clam shell scooping up ore. He was thinking calmly now, and he was planning what he should do an instant later.

The green scoop dipped, lifted the little Marie clear of the deck, then raised her high above the steel hatch covers. [192]

A faint cry floated back to where the Iron Boy was standing as the captain's daughter was carried over the opposite side of the ship and dropped into the sea.

A great shout escaped Bob Jarvis. Lifting himself to his toes he took a long curving dive from the deck-house. He cleared the ship's rail with plenty of room to spare, entering the water head first just at the base of a huge swell.

In an almost incredibly short time his hatless head bobbed up on the other side of the swell, leaving him struggling alone on the rough waters. The ship had slipped quickly by. But already her propeller was beating the water with all the force of the steam power behind it, turned on full, in an effort to start the ship going astern.

Steve had rushed out on deck the instant he was relieved. Unmindful of the seas that were again breaking over the deck as the ship shifted her position, he dashed aft, drenched to the skin and battered this way and that by the angry combers as they roared curling aboard.

A sailor ran panting up the stairs to the pilot-house.

"It's the little girl!" cried the sailor. "Your daughter's overboard and Jarvis has gone after her. They'll both be drowned!" [193]

"Port your helm a little," said the skipper in a calm, steady voice, as he turned to the wheelman. "Steady!"

Springing to the telephone he called up the after deck-house.

"Have boat Number 6 manned and swung out ready for launching. Have men stand by with life-lines and rings ready to cast if we come up with them. You stand by and watch out astern."

The commands were delivered in quick, sharp accents, but there was no trace of excitement either in the captain's tone or on his features. He was every inch the commander, cool, calm, resourceful. Years of commanding had taught him that to be a master of others one must first be the master of himself and of his own emotions.

"Where are they? Do you see them?" shouted Rush, as he dashed to the after rail of the ship where a number of men were standing with pale, frightened faces.

A hand pointed astern where, a second or so later, Steve caught sight of the bobbing head of his companion.

"Has he got the child?" Rush cried.

"Yes. Leastwise, he had a minute ago. It was a lucky chance. You see, he jumped just in time and [194]

the girl was fairly swept into his arms."

"It was not chance," retorted Steve. "Bob knew what he was doing."

Steve was pacing up and down the after deck, scarcely able to restrain himself from leaping into the sea and going to his companion's assistance. He knew, however, that the chances were that he would never be able to reach the struggling figure off there. At any rate the ship, which was now beating its way astern at a very fair rate of speed, would get to the spot before he could possibly hope to do so, even if he were able to make it at all.

Far up above the decks in the pilot-house with glasses to his eyes, stood the skipper, calm, stern, alert, now and then giving a brief command to the man at the wheel in a voice in which there was still no hint of nervousness or excitement.

The first mate gazed at his commander in wonder. There were Iron Boys in that ship's company and there was a master who was also iron.

"I think you had better go aft, Mr. Major," directed the skipper. "Take charge back there. We are going to have difficulty in getting them aboard, even if they keep up until we get to them. The boy is making a great fight of it."

"Aye, aye, sir. Has he the girl still?"

[195]

"Yes. He is trying to keep her head above water until we get to him, but I'm afraid she'll drown before we can help them."

The first mate hurried from the pilot-house, starting aft at a run. He began shouting out his orders before he reached the stern. He found Steve Rush with coat and shoes off, poised on the rail of the plunging stern, the water dashing over him as he clung with one hand to a stanchion.

"You are not going to try to go over, Rush?" he shouted.

"There's no need now," answered the boy, not for an instant taking his eyes from the two figures off there in the water.

The ship was drawing near and it was observable that Jarvis was not battling as strongly as he had before. They knew that he was becoming exhausted from his desperate struggle with the great seas that were sweeping him.

"Man boat Number 6 and put it over!" commanded the mate.

"No use to do that," called Rush. "It will not live. Better put over the lines at the proper time."

"No; it is the captain's orders to launch Number 6 boat. I want two men."

Nearly every man there stepped forward. They glanced at Rush. He was still on the rail. He had made no effort to volunteer for the dangerous service. They wondered at it, but they knew the boy's courage too well to think for a moment that he had been deterred from offering to go out in the life-boat through fear. There were those present who would have resented such an imputation.

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Steve cast a disapproving glance at the mate who was then superintending the launching of the craft. The men who were to go out in it already had taken their places in the boat, that had been provided with ropes, life rings and life preservers.

At command the boat was swung out, the men standing up and steadying their craft by pressing their oars against the sides of the ship itself.

"Careful that you do not fall out!" warned Mr. Major. "I will give the command to let go. When I do so drop to your seats and out oars."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Shut off!" shouted Rush. "You'll run them down!"

The mate made a signal to the captain, but the latter had timed the progress of his vessel too well to need the signal. Already the propeller had ceased revolving and the captain was giving his directions to the wheelman so as to throw the stern to one side of the struggling boy.

Captain Simms' plan was to drift down on Jarvis and the child, with the sea. Perhaps it was not the best thing to do, but it was the quickest and seconds were golden at that critical moment.

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"Let go!" roared the mate.

The life-boat struck the water with a splash. Instantly it was picked up on the crest of a giant roller, lifted high in the air, and hurled against the side of the ship with terrific force.

With a sickening crash the life-boat was crushed into splinters, precipitating the crew into the rough sea.

Rush leaped from the rail to the deck. He had been ready to do so when he saw what the mate proposed to do. He foresaw the end of the life-boat, and perhaps of the men who were manning her, even before they made a start to obey the orders of the mate.

Grasping a life ring to which a long line had been attached, Steve hurled it over the side of the



ship.

"Grab the line!" he shouted to one of the men next to him. "Watch out and haul in when you get your man hooked."

Another life ring dropped over the side of the ship and the line to this Steve passed to another man. Both struggling sailors in the water fastened to the life rings that had been dropped within easy reach of them, thanks to the careful aim of the Iron Boy. [198]

Steve saw that the two were reasonably safe; then, grabbing up another ring, he sprang to the rail on the port side.

Bob Jarvis and the girl were drifting in, buffeted this way and that by one huge wave after another. The girl's head was drooping over Bob's left shoulder.

"Can you make it?" bellowed Rush.

"I don't know." Bob's voice sounded far away.

Steve was watching him with keen, steady eyes. The lad felt sure that they never would get aboard without at least serious injury.

"Kick the ship ahead a couple of turns!" shouted Rush in a tone of command.

The word was transmitted to the captain in the pilot-house by gestures.

The captain gave the signal, but not quite quickly enough to accomplish what Rush had hoped for. He wanted the ship advanced a few feet so that Jarvis and his burden would drift past the stern where they could be pulled up without the danger of being crushed against the side of the ship.

Before the propeller had made one complete revolution the stern of the "Richmond" was hit by a giant wave and then by another. The vessel it seemed was literally lifted from the water and thrown to one side. That was the side where Bob Jarvis was struggling to save himself and the captain's daughter. [199]



**Another Figure Dived from the Rail.**

Bob saw what was going to happen. The plucky lad held the child off at arm's length, as far away from the oncoming ship as possible, while with the other hand he sought to break the force of the blow. [201]

The side of the ship hit Jarvis a tremendous blow. The lad's arm doubled under him and his head drooped forward on the water.

"He's killed!" cried the watchers.

Splash!

Another figure had dived from the rail. It was Steve. His dive took him right under Bob and his burden. Rush came up the other side and struck out for the couple with long, powerful strokes.

## CHAPTER XX

### AN EXCITING RESCUE

WITH him Rush had carried a life ring attached to the end of a rope, the other end of the rope having been, with rare presence of mind, made fast to the rail by him before leaping.

He reached his companion just as Bob's head drooped over and he lost consciousness. Still, Jarvis kept his grip on the arm of the child. Rush had to tear the girl's dress in order to wrench Jarvis's grip free of her. In so doing Steve lost the life ring. It was carried away from him in a twinkling. Now he had two persons on his hands with the seas rolling over him almost mountain high, though the ship, being on the windward side, protected them somewhat.

"Haul in and cast the ring!" Steve managed to shout, just before he was jammed choking under a heavy wave.

Rush threw himself on his back with his head toward the ship, one arm under Marie and the other arm supporting Bob, who was making desperate efforts to help himself, though unable to do much in that direction. Then Rush began kicking himself slowly toward the vessel, which had been shifted about and was once more drifting down on them. [203]

"Cast your lines before you get close enough to hit us!" Steve cried when he could do so without getting a mouthful of water.

Unfortunately those on deck were not very good shots at this sort of target work and their life rings went far wide of the mark. The ropes on all but one of them slipped through the hands of the casters and dropped into the sea.

"Lubbers!" roared the captain from the pilot-house window.

Steve caught the third ring. Twisting the rope about the body of Marie just under her arms, he tore the ring loose.

"Haul up, quick!" he shouted, swimming along with the child after having thrust the life ring over the head of Bob Jarvis. Steve held to the girl so that she should not be thrown against the ship head first, which would have seriously injured her at least, and perhaps killed her then and there. Possibly the little girl was dead already. Rush did not know, but he thought he had detected life when he first grasped her.

"Hurry, hurry!" he cried.

The girl was hauled free of the water, and, limp and lifeless, she was tenderly lifted over the rail. Captain Simms, after hurling some brief directions at the man at the wheel, dashed from the pilot-house, down the steps and along the deck to the stern, where Marie lay on the deck. The father lost no time in getting at work on her. [204]

"Save those boys if it costs the ship to do it!" he roared. "Major, use your wits! Get them out, I tell you. I'll hold you personally responsible for their rescue!"

"Rush is hit!" shouted a voice excitedly.

Looking over they saw Steve striking out blindly to where Bob was floating away helplessly on the sea. It was plain that Rush had been stunned by being thrown against the side of the ship. Still, by sheer pluck, he was keeping himself up and swimming, but with evident effort, toward his companion. Bob was in a helpless condition and every second the life ring was slipping up and threatening to bob out from under his head. Were that to happen there was little chance that he would be saved.

Steve tried to shout to them, but his voice would not come. He swallowed enough water in these attempts to drown the ordinary person. His eyes were so full of water and he was so dazed from the bump he had sustained, that he could not make out where Jarvis was.

"Port! Port!" roared a voice from the deck.

Steve caught the direction and veered a little to port.

"More port. Can you keep it up?" [205]

Rush did not answer, for he was beyond answering. Only his wonderful pluck and endurance were keeping him from throwing up his hands and sinking under the surface.

With a final burst of speed he reached his companion. Steve threw out one hand and fastened on the other Iron Boy. As he did so the ring slipped from Jarvis's head and floated away.

Rush realized at once what had happened, and began upbraiding himself for his carelessness. The knowledge seemed to give him new strength. His body fairly leaped from the water as he took several powerful strokes toward the drowning Bob.

"Wake up!" cried Steve, shaking his companion roughly.

Jarvis mumbled in reply, and tried feebly to help himself, but he was too weak and too full of water to accomplish anything.

Steve, by a great effort, twisted his companion about and began swimming toward the ship with him.

Shouts and suggestions were hurled at him from the ship, but he did not hear them. The Iron Boy was making the fight of his life. At last, after mighty struggles, he managed to get near enough to the "Richmond" to catch a line that was tossed to him. This he quickly made fast about Jarvis's waist and waved a hand to indicate that the men above were to haul away. [206]

Steve lay over on his back on the water with a great sigh of relief as the men began hauling the other boy toward the deck.

"Get a line over there to Rush!" thundered the captain. "Don't you see the boy is drowning?"

But Steve missed every line that was tossed to him. He was making powerful efforts to pull himself together sufficiently to save himself, but he could not do so.

"Take care of the child, Major. Keep pumping the water out of her. She'll be all right in a moment," cried the captain. "Give me a line, quick!"

Before the brave skipper could carry out his purpose of climbing over the rail preparatory to dropping into the lake, another man swiftly leaped to the rail and let himself drop feet first. He carried two lines with him.

"It's Smith, the stoker!" cried a chorus of voices.

It was indeed the stoker, the enemy of the Iron Boys, who had determined to avenge himself on them for the insults he believed they had heaped upon him.

What sudden revulsion of feeling led the stoker to risk his life to save that of Steve Rush none ever knew, nor would he ever afterwards discuss it. Smith was a powerful fellow, a man who feared nothing and besides, he was a strong swimmer. [207]

He pounced upon Rush as if he were about to do him bodily injury. It was the work of but a moment to make fast the line about the boy's body.

"Get him up, and be quick!" yelled the stoker.

A cheer rose from the deck; two men at this time were working over Bob, while the captain, having returned to his daughter, was ministering to her.

Steve was hauled aboard, where he settled down in a heap. The sailors turned him face downward, and then some one happened to think of the stoker. Smith was keeping himself from being jammed against the side of the ship by holding both hands against the side of it and hurling angry imprecations at those on deck who had apparently forgotten his existence.

"Smi—Smith—Get him!" muttered Steve.

"Put a ladder over the side! Lash it to the rail and give the man a line with which to steady himself!" commanded the captain. "Come, come! Have you all lost your senses?"

His orders were carried out with a snap, and a moment later the dripping figure of Smith appeared above the level of the deck. [208]

"You're a fine lot of lubbers," growled the stoker. "You let a man go overboard and then forget he's there. I ought to throw the bunch of you overboard."

"Take those boys to their cabins as soon as you get the water out of them," ordered Captain Simms.

"No, no; I'm all right," protested Steve, pulling himself together and staggering away from the men who were thumping him with their closed fists, hoping in that way to bring him back to himself.

The stoker had betaken himself to the fire room to dry off. His face had once more regained its surly, hang-dog expression, and he made rough answers to the few questions that were put to him by his fellow-workers in the stoke-hole.

At last the workers succeeded in shaking most of the water out of Bob Jarvis. He had swallowed a lot of it and was so weak that he could not stand.

At Steve's suggestion they carried Bob around on the lee side of the after deck-house. The steward came running out with a bottle of brandy, some of which he sought to pour down between the boy's blue lips. Jarvis thrust the bottle aside, half angrily. [209]

"None—none of that horrible stuff for me! I—I'd rather be full of Lake Superior water and—and *that's* the limit—"

Steve stooped over, and placing his hands under the other boy's arms, lifted him to his feet.

"Brace up! You're all right now," encouraged Rush.

"Yes. I'm all right, *only*—"

The sailors laughed at this; then they shouted, more from relief from the strain under which they had been laboring than because of the humor of Jarvis's reply.

"Want to go in and lie down now?" questioned Steve, barely able to keep his feet.

"No!"

"Then we'll walk and see if we can get our sea legs," proposed Steve, slipping an arm about his companion's waist and starting slowly toward the stern. The boys could hardly keep their feet, they were still so weak. They staggered from one side of the passage to the other, but their iron grit kept them up.

"How is little Marie?" demanded Jarvis, suddenly turning to Rush.

"Come; we will go and see. We were forgetting our duty," muttered Steve, starting for the cabin, where the little girl had been taken.

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## CHAPTER XXI

[210]

### A NEW HAND AT THE WHEEL

**M**ARIE had entirely recovered consciousness when the lads entered the steward's cabin. But the child's face was chalky white, her lips colorless and her eyes dull.

Captain Simms had sent for his wife, who, ill in her stateroom, had not known of the exciting events that were taking place at the other end of the ship. Mrs. Simms forgot all about her seasickness when summoned and told what had happened.

Marie's eyes lighted up when they rested on the dripping forms of the Iron Boys.

"Hello, kiddie," greeted Jarvis. "How'd you like your swim?"

"Come and kiss me," answered the child simply.

Jarvis blushed, but braced himself. Then, stooping over, he gently kissed the little one on the cheek.

"You, too, Steve," she nodded with compelling eyes.

Then Steve Rush kissed her, patted her cheek and straightened up to meet the arms of the captain's wife.

"You saved her life," she murmured.

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"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Simms; it's Bob Jarvis whom you should thank. He's the real hero this time. I'm only a sort of assistant hero," said Steve with a laugh.

The captain tried to speak, but something seemed to stick in his throat. He gulped, swallowed, then grasping both boys by the shoulders thrust them from the cabin.

"Get out! Get out you young rascals before I give you a sound thumping!" he exploded, as the Iron Boys, laughing heartily, were ejected to the deck.

"That's a fine way to show a fellow's appreciation," snorted Bob. "Do you know where that kiddie was going when she was swept overboard? I mean, before she was swept over?"

"Coming aft?"

"Yes; she was coming aft. She was coming aft to make a cake for you and me, that's what she was doing. She told me she was going to bake one for us to-day and she had the stuff in her hands that she was going to put into the cake. It's a shame," added Jarvis, his voice pitched a little higher than usual.

"Yes, but not half so bad as if we hadn't saved her, old man. I'm proud of you, Bob Jarvis."

"You needn't be. I was the easiest kind of a mark. I would have drowned if it hadn't been for you."

[212]

"And both of us would undoubtedly have gone down had it not been for the stoker, Smith. What do you make of that, Bob?"

Jarvis halted reflectively.

"I think," announced the lad wisely, "that he was—was—what do you say a fellow is suffering from when he goes dippy up here?" tapping the top of his head.

"Temporary aberration?"

"That's it. I wish I could think of things ready-made, the way you do. Well, I believe he must have been suffering from that. He'll be wanting to lick us again the minute he sets eyes on us."

"Here he comes now. He's just come up from his watch. Oh, Smith!"

The stoker halted, then started on again. Steve grasped his arm. The fellow shook the lad loose.

"See here, we want to talk to you."

Smith halted reluctantly.

"I want to take back every unpleasant thing I have ever said to you. At the same time I want to apologize for what I have done. I've been in the wrong all the time, I guess. Will you shake hands?"

The stoker hesitated, shifted uneasily, all the time avoiding looking into the eyes of the Iron Boys. Finally he thrust out a reluctant hand. [213]

Steve grabbed it and Bob caught up the other. The stoker, muttering half sullenly, broke away and ran into the deck-house, leaving the boys standing outside looking at each other.

"Well, that beats anything I ever saw," growled Bob.

"Do you know," said Steve reflectively, "I believe that fellow has been a criminal of some sort. The way his eyes avoid yours, his shifty, hang-dog manner, reminds me of certain other gentlemen whom I have seen. However, after what he has done for us, it is not for you and me to try to get him into any further trouble. He saved our lives and that's all there is about it so far as we are concerned. I don't believe he will try any more tricks on us. He is the man who hit me on deck here the other night. I'm just as sure of it as I am that we are standing here now. Captain Simms gave him an awful walloping. Maybe that's what beat some sense into the fellow's head."

All the rest of the day Marie remained in bed. The captain, who had gone back to the pilot-house after carrying the child to his own quarters, made frequent trips below to see how she was getting on. She was doing so well that she wanted to get up and play.

The rest of the day passed without incident, though the gale, if anything, grew worse. The air was filled with flying spray that reached high up on the masts. The wireless operator picked up messages from other ships that had sought safe harbor on the lee side of the islands along the lake, but thus far there had been no reports of disasters. The captain had warned the operator to be on the sharp lookout for appeals for help. To the satisfaction of all no cries for help came. [214]

The boys went about their duties, Rush taking another trick at the wheel late in the afternoon, leaving it along toward eight bells, midnight. Bob, in this instance, relieved him.

The night was starless and intensely dark and the hurling spray made necessary a sharp lookout ahead. Two men were stationed on the bridge and another in the forepeak to watch for lights, though the captain did not look for many that night. He knew that at least all the timid skippers, had scudded for calm water at the first signs of a big blow. Believing that all was safe he went to bed, and the ship went rolling and plunging, lurching and tumbling on her way, creaking and groaning as though the effort caused her great pain.

Shortly before daylight, Bob fancying that he heard some one entering the pilot-house, glanced at the open door on the lee side. At first he saw nothing. Then all of a sudden a huge, shadowy form seemed to rise from the floor at that point. [215]

Bob gazed in amazement.

"What's that, Mr. Major?" he asked sharply.

"Where?" demanded the mate, leaning out and looking forward.

"There, there, at the door?"

"I don't see anything."

"Neither do I, now, but I did a moment ago. I——"

Bob received a blow from a huge paw that tipped him over sideways, tumbling him over.

"Help!" yelled the boy, bolting for the door.

About this time the first mate, who had run around to the rear of the steering wheel, got a blow on the side of the head that laid him low. He, too, scrambled to his feet and dashed for the door, slamming it shut after him.

"What's the trouble in there?" shouted one of the bridge watch, poking his head in at the window. He had heard some sort of disturbance in the pilot-house, he thought, but the wind being so strong he was unable to decide what the disturbance was about.

There was no answer to his question.

"I say——" he shouted; then something happened to him.

A huge paw was stretched out through the forward pilot-house window. It came down on the head of the watch with a whack, laying him flat on the deck. [216]

The second watch ran to where his companion had fallen.

"Here, here, what's the mat——"

The watch did not finish the sentence. A cuff on the ear, and a mighty cuff at that, sent him clear to the end of the bridge, and had the weather cloths not been in place he would undoubtedly have been knocked through between the rails and into the sea.

Both men set up a wild yell of fear.

"It's some kind of animal!" shouted Bob. "Send for the captain. I'm going back to the wheel."

Summoning all his courage the lad opened the pilot-house door, peering cautiously in.

He got a blow that knocked him over backwards and Bob Jarvis tumbled all the way down the stairs to the main deck.

Captain Simms came rushing out of his cabin in his pajamas.

He had heard the running on the deck above him and surmising that something had gone wrong, rushed out to the deck.

"What's wrong? What's wrong?" he bellowed, casting a quick glance ahead, almost expecting to see another ship bearing down upon them. "I say, what's happened?" [217]

"Help!" howled the distant voice of Bob Jarvis from the lower deck.

"Help, help!" yelled the two men on the bridge watch in chorus.

"Captain!" roared First Mate Major, bounding down the stairs to where the captain was standing.

The skipper grabbed the mate by the arm and shook him violently.

"Here, here! What's wrong? Have all of you lubbers gone mad?"

"It—it's in the pilot-house!" gasped the now thoroughly frightened mate.

"What's in the pilot-house?" demanded Captain Simms angrily.

"Nobody—I mean I don't know. It's a——"

But the skipper waited to hear no more. He rushed up the stairs, two steps at a jump. Reaching the bridge deck he sprang for the door of the pilot-house and jerked it open. As he did so his keen eyes caught sight of a huge, shadowy figure at the wheel. The strange, uncouth shape was twirling the wheel merrily, while the ship was diving this way and that in a most unusual and erratic manner.

The figure at the wheel suddenly bolted forward, making a grab for Captain Simms. Quite a portion of the skipper's pajamas were left in the grip of the strange object, causing the captain to retire hastily, slamming the door as he did so. [218]

"It's the bear! The bear has escaped!" he shouted.

"The bear?" yelled several voices.

"Yes, the bear in that crate in the lazaret. We were taking it down for Mr. Carrhart, to be shipped to a friend of his in Pittsburgh."

"Wow!" cried Jarvis, who had been creeping up the stairs. He turned and bolted down again with all speed.

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## CHAPTER XXII

 [219]

### LEADING A LIVELY CHASE

"THE bear has escaped!" shouted a voice down on the main deck.

"What bear?"

"The one that was in the lazaret."

"Didn't know there was any bear there. You're kidding," answered the doubting sailor.

"Go up and take a peep into the wheel-house, if you don't believe it. You'll get a bang on the side of the head that will make your ears ring eight bells for the rest of the night."

"I—I guess I'll take your word for it." The sailor turned and ran for the deck-house.

Steve Rush, aroused by the shouting, got up and poked his head from the cabin window.

"Hey, what's happening?" he called.

Jarvis was on his way back to tell his chum the news.

"Old Bruin has escaped."

"Who's he?"

"An old party we had cooped in a crate in the lazar——"

"A bear?"

"You bet he's a bear. He waved a paw at me that knocked me clean out of the pilot-house."

"Wait, I'll be out in a minute."

[220]

Steve hurried into his clothes, and a few minutes later was out on the rolling deck. He could barely make out the lights of the forward deck-house through the mist of spray that hung over the ship like a cloud.

"Where is he?" cried the Iron Boy.

"Up there in the house."

"But who is steering the ship?"

"I guess the bear is. Nobody else up there except the captain, jumping around the bridge-deck in his pajamas, mad as a hatter."

Steve, deciding that he would like a closer look, hurried to the bridge. There he found Captain Simms in a plight if anything more ludicrous than had been painted by Bob Jarvis. Rush saw that the ship was reeling about like a crazy sailor.

"Do something, somebody!" roared the skipper.

"What would you suggest?" questioned Steve, taking a peep through an open window and narrowly missing getting his eyes scratched out as a hairy paw reached through the window with a downward, raking sweep.

Captain Simms forgot his anger long enough to laugh at the agility with which Rush leaped backward, falling over a steel cleat, coming up grinning but very red of face.

"That's what the beast did to me, only he got too much of my clothes for comfort," remarked the skipper. [221]

It was Steve's turn to laugh, which he did uproariously.

"Maybe you think it's funny, but you wouldn't if you were in my place. The next question is how are we going to get that beast from the iron range out of the pilot-house?"

"I'll tell you," said Bob, who had followed his companion up to the bridge. "We'll coax him out with a chunk of fresh meat."

"Will you hold the meat?" answered the master sharply.

"No, thank you," laughed Jarvis.

"Your idea isn't half bad. I believe I will get a piece of meat and try it," replied Rush reflectively.

"See here, young man. Not quite so fast. What do you propose to do with the beast when you get him out?"

"I—I—hadn't thought of that," stammered Rush.

"I suppose you'd let him dance about the decks and run us all overboard, eh? No, sir. He stays where he is. You keep watch of him while I go down stairs and get some clothing on. This summer costume is a little too airy for this kind of a night."

The two boys watched the pilot-house from a safe distance while the captain went below. Day was beginning to dawn, and by the faint light they could see Mr. Bruin spinning the pilot-wheel this way and that. He seemed as pleased as a child with a new toy. The compass card, with its dim white spot showing the position of the ship, attracted his attention. Brain scratched on the glass over the compass card and getting no satisfaction from so doing, returned to the wheel. [222]

Such steering probably never had been seen on the Great Lakes before. All at once five shrill blasts sounded dead ahead.

"There comes a steamer!" yelled Bob.

"We'll run it down!" shouted Steve. "Hey, Captain!"

The up-coming steamer knew that something was wrong and her deck officer was sounding a danger signal. It looked as if a collision could not be avoided. Steve ran around to the front of the pilot-house, and rang in the signal "full speed astern" on the bridge telegraph. Then the "Richmond" did cut up. Bruin was still steering as fancy dictated, the bow of the ship wobbling this way and that.

[223]



**A Huge Form Stood at the Wheel.**

In the meantime the captain of the other steamer was trying his best to get his craft out of the way of the wobbling "Richmond."

"Sheer off! Sheer off!" bellowed the skipper of the up-boat. "You'll cut us in two."

[225]

The boys thought so as well, but there was nothing they could do save wait for results and trust to luck.

Bang!

The nose of the "Richmond" caught the other boat a glancing blow and bounced off. The sides of the two ships bumped together, then the stern of the "Richmond" side-swiped the stranger with a smash that sent everything jingling on the two ships, while the skipper of the up-craft was dancing up and down the deck of his vessel, heaping abuse upon Captain Simms and his "fool crew."

"We must get that beast out, at all costs," raged the master of the "Richmond."

Just then Bruin leaned back from the window and against the whistle lever. Instantly a roar, accompanied by a cloud of steam, burst from the whistle at the after end of the boat. The roaring of the siren did not cease. It kept right up and Mr. Bear glanced about uneasily as if suspecting that the noise was directed against him.

About this time the chief engineer rushed to the deck.

"Stop that blowing. You'll blow all the steam out of the boilers!" he commanded, shouting up to the bridge.

"Suppose you come up and stop it yourself," suggested Jarvis, grinning over the rail.

[226]

"We shall have to try that meat plan, I guess, boys," decided the master. "How shall we do it without playing the part of the meat?"

"I have a plan," answered Steve. "Bob, if you will get a piece of meat I will see what I can do in the meantime."

Bob hurried aft for the fresh meat while Steve busied himself by preparing a rope which he placed at the foot of the stairs on the lower deck. By this time, Jarvis had returned with the meat, the captain having watched the arrangement with nods of approval.

"Please have some men stationed under cover of the deck-house below us and have a tarpaulin, one of the canvas hatch covers, handy, will you?" asked Rush.

"Certainly. Jarvis tell the mate to do as Steve suggests. I will open the door of the pilot-house when you are ready."

In the meantime Bruin had left the whistle lever and lumbered to the starboard window where he stood observing the preparations for his capture. His nose was upraised sniffing the air, for he smelled the fresh meat.

"Look out that he doesn't jump out of the window," warned Bob.



"I hardly think he will. It is quite a drop," answered Rush. "Now, Captain, if you will open the door, I think we are ready," he added, taking the meat from the hands of his companion. [227]

"You don't need me now, do you, Steve?"

"Well not just this minute," laughed Rush.

Bob ran up the rope ladder of the foremast, and from this point of safety he grinned his enjoyment of the scene. Captain Simms threw open the pilot-house door; then he also shinned up the ladder. The bear was ambling toward Steve at a rapid gait. But the Iron Boy did not appear to be at all frightened. He slid down the stairs to the forward deck, waited until the bear was almost upon him, then dropped to the main or lower deck.

Bruin was after him without loss of time. Reaching the lower deck, Steve dropped the fresh meat in the big loop of rope that he had spread out on the deck, and quickly darted behind a hatch.

The bear seized the meat with an ugly growl. Steve gave the rope, one end of which was in his hands, a violent jerk and the next second the bear was floundering about the deck, fighting, pawing and uttering fierce growls, with the noose of Steve's rope drawn down tight over one of the animal's fore-legs.

Steve took a twist around a stanchion.

"The tarpaulin!" he shouted. [228]

Not a man made a move to do the lad's bidding.

"Bob! Come down here. I want you! Quick!"

"I'm coming."

Jarvis was down the ladder in short order.

"What shall we do now?"

"Grab hold of this canvas and help me throw it over the beast."

"But he'll bite," protested Bob.

"He will if we do not get him secured pretty soon. Hurry, there!"

Each taking hold of a corner of the big, heavy canvas the lads approached the big beast with caution.

"Now, he-o!"

They swung the tarpaulin back and forth to give it momentum, Bruin stretching out quick paws in an effort to grab the canvas, at the same time showing his teeth and uttering fierce growls.

"Let go!" shouted Rush.

The canvas fell completely over the beast, the centre of the covering dropping directly on his head. Mr. Bear began to claw and roar, but the more he clawed the more entangled did he become.

The crew uttered a cheer.

"Hurry up, men! Give me a hand or he'll get away from us yet!" [229]

Steve threw himself upon the writhing heap, with Jarvis a close second. But no sooner had the boys landed on the canvas than they were tossed off. Back they sprang, making plucky efforts to twist the canvas into position where the animal could not throw it off.

By this time Captain Simms was down the ladders and stairs, making for the writhing heap on the jump.

"Get in there, you lubbers!" he roared.

The men obeyed his command, though they did so with reluctance.

"Fall on the heap!"

After a lively battle, consuming some twenty minutes, the escaped bear was hopelessly entangled in the tarpaulin, the corners of which were tied securely, thus imprisoning him beyond the possibility of his getting out.

"The next question is, what are we going to do with him, now that we have him?" inquired the captain.

"Is his crate broken so that it cannot be fixed?" asked Rush.

"No; it can be fixed up," interjected the chief engineer.

"Hurry up and attend to it, Macrae."

In a few minutes the crate was ready. Steve engineered the following efforts, as he had those that had gone before. The bear was dragged back to the stern. There the men waited while Steve put [230]

another large chunk of meat in the cage.

"All ready, men. Throw him down the stairs. Be sure that you get him down, or he'll be after us and then we shall have our hands full," shouted Steve.

"It strikes me we already have," muttered the captain, gazing admiringly at the efforts of the Iron Boy.

"You ought to join a menagerie," suggested Jarvis.

"All ready now," warned Steve.

"All ready," answered the men.

Steve cast a final look about, taking careful note of the knots which were ready to be unfastened at the word.

"Let go!" he shouted.

With a roar Mr. Bruin went rolling, bumping and scratching down the stairs into the lazaret.

Steve crept down the stairs.

"Everyone stay back," he warned.

None needed the advice. None of the ship's company felt the least inclination to climb into that dark hole where the angry bear was floundering about.

"Throw on a light," called Rush.

A solitary light gleamed in the darkness of the lazaret. About that time the bear smelled the fresh meat in the cage. With a grunt and a growl he went in search of it, nosing here and there. At last he found it. [231]

Steve, crouching on the stairway was watching the beast with keen eyes. The bear entered the cage. With a bound Rush dropped to the floor of the lazaret.

Bang! The door of the cage swung to, the padlock securing it, quickly slipped through the staple and locked.

Mr. Bear was a prisoner.

"There, you may all come down now, children," called the Iron Boy.

"Is he in?" demanded a voice at the head of the stairs.

"He is. Bruin is having the rest of his breakfast now."

"Three cheers for Steve Rush," cried the captain, pulling off his cap.

"Hip-hip-hurrah!" yelled the sailors. "Hip-hip-hurrah! Hip-hip-hurrah! T-i-g-e-r!" added Bob Jarvis.

Steve came up from the lower deck, his face flushed with triumph.

"Well, we got him, didn't we?" he demanded.

"You mean *you* got him," answered the captain.

"We all got him." [232]

"It is my opinion," added the skipper, "that you ought to be the captain of this boat. You've got more horse sense than all the rest of us together."

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## CHAPTER XXIII

 [233]

### THE WIRELESS MESSAGE

**F**OR the rest of that day the ship had a measure of quiet, just for a change. The storm kept on with its former severity and there was more or less discomfort. Meals had to be eaten standing up, and life lines had been run along the deck to support the one who ventured along the decks forward or aft. Marie was not allowed to leave her father's cabin again while the storm lasted. Considerable time had been lost, owing to the trouble caused by the bear, so the ship was put to full speed.

Of late the boys had taken the keenest sort of interest in the wireless outfit with which the ship was equipped. They spent much of their leisure time with the wireless operator. Steve had learned part of the Morse alphabet and occasionally he tried to operate the key.

Two days later, as they were sitting in the wireless room, where the operator, with feet on his desk, was telling them a story of a wreck that he had been in on the Atlantic when he was operator on a liner, a flash from the switchboard told them that they had picked up a wireless from another ship or station.

The operator quickly adjusted the receiver over his head, listened a moment then threw his key [234]

open. A few quick sentences were crashed forth, the aërials above the deck of the ship snapping out the message in sundry vicious cracklings.

Steve tried to catch the drift of what was being said, but it was too fast for him. He could not hear what the operator was receiving, but after a while the operator picked up his pencil and began writing industriously.

Glancing over the man's shoulder Steve's eyes caught a few words that caused him to lean forward with renewed interest. Then he sat back, possessing himself in patience until the message should have been finished.

"That's strange," said the operator, laying down his head piece.

"What is it?" questioned Bob.

"Nothing much. It is just a message I picked up about some fellow that the police want."

"Well, it isn't I, that's sure," said Jarvis with a confident laugh.

"It is—but here, read it for yourself."

Steve read the message out loud.

"Wanted: One, Gus Collins, for complicity in a post-office robbery at Elgin on the night of June third. Collins has been a sailor and is said to be on one of the ships on the lakes. About five feet ten in height, gray eyes, blonde hair. Has a peculiar stoop to his shoulders, and a habit of peering up suspiciously, but not meeting the eyes of the person he is talking to. Five hundred dollars reward offered for his capture by the post-office department."

[235]

"I'd like to make that five hundred," laughed Jarvis.

Steve did not reply at once. His face was serious. He was thinking.

"Well, there is one thing certain, Mr. Gus Collins isn't on this ship," announced the operator, hanging up his headstall. "Funny message to send out. Skippers of these boats have something else to do besides hunting down criminals for the post-office department."

Rush nodded thoughtfully.

Somehow, the description of the man seemed to strike a familiar chord in him. He could not help feeling that he had seen some one who in a measure answered that description.

"Ever seen him, Bob?" questioned the lad.

Jarvis shook his head.

"Wouldn't have recognized him if I had seen him. Say!"

"Well?"

"Maybe the bear is Collins in disguise."

There was a laugh at this. Rush read the message over again.

"Shall I take it up to the captain?"

[236]

"Yes, if you will."

Steve did so. Captain Simms read the alarm message through twice.

"Pshaw!" he grunted. "Let the government find its own criminals. It doesn't hire me to be a policeman. How's the bear?"

"I haven't heard him complain any since we put him back," answered Steve with a grin. "How did he get out, do you think?"

"The cage tipped over in a roll of the ship. No more wild animal shows on this ship. Are you going to try to earn that five hundred dollars?" demanded the skipper, changing the subject abruptly.

"I had not thought of doing so. You do not think he is on your ship, do you?"

"If he was you'd catch him, even if you had to bait him with raw beef. Say, are you going to stay with me?"

"Why, I am not thinking of leaving, Captain Simms."

"I don't mean now. Of course, you wouldn't leave me in the middle of the season. You're too square for that. I mean at the end of the season?"

"Of course, we shall have to work during the winter. We can't afford to lie around in idleness."

"Yes, of course. But what about next season?"

[237]

"That is a long way off," smiled Rush.

"Will you come back with me next year?"

"I could not promise. Frankly, Captain, I wish I might stay with you. I like the life and I should be happy to spend the rest of my days on the water, were it not for one fact."

"What is that?"

"There isn't much of a future to the lake business."

Captain Simms nodded.

"Nothing beyond being a captain. That's the stone wall we butt against sooner or later, if we are lucky enough to get that far. I don't blame you, but I am sorry. I was in hopes you would stay with us another season."

"This season is young yet. Perhaps you may be glad to get rid of me before the end of it," laughed Rush.

"No danger of that. But I am going to make it worth your while to stay, you see if I don't. Tell the operator to send back word, to the man that sent out this message, that we haven't got any safe crackers on board the 'Richmond.'"

"Very well, sir."

Steve picked up the message and left the cabin. He walked thoughtfully aft to his own state room, where he found Jarvis getting ready to go on duty. Rush sat down to study the description of the much-wanted criminal. [238]

"I can't get it out of my mind that I know that man," he muttered. "I know I have seen him somewhere. But where? Pshaw! Why should I trouble myself about the matter? I'm no policeman, and I don't want to earn any money at the price of another man's liberty."

"What's the matter—gone crazy?" demanded Jarvis, eyeing his companion suspiciously. "They say it's a sure sign, when a fellow gets the habit of talking to himself."

Rush laughed heartily.

"Then both of us must be in the same boat, for I heard you mumbling to yourself this very day."

"When?"

"At the time the bear was chasing you."

"Huh!"

"Bob, listen."

Steve read out the message, slowly, giving emphasis to that part describing the man wanted by the government.

"Think hard, now. Isn't there some one whom you have seen that answers that description, the stooping shoulders, the peculiar way of glancing up from under the half-closed eyelids——"

"Nobody but Smith."

"Smith!" Rush gazed at the other boy blankly. [239]

"That's so; he does rather answer the description."

"Of course he isn't the man."

"Perhaps not."

All the rest of the day Steve thought over the contents of that message and the suggestion made by Jarvis. He did not see the stoker, however, until the following morning, just as Steve was coming off duty.

"Morning, Smith," greeted the lad, bending a scrutinizing gaze on the surly fireman.

"Morning," mumbled the other.

"By the way, old chap; were you ever in Elgin?"

Smith gave the lad a quick, sharp look.

"What are you getting at?"

"Do you know a man named Collins—Gus Collins?" persisted the Iron Boy.

"Co—Co—Collins?"

"Yes, a fellow who was interested in cracking a post-office safe out in Elgin——"

"It's a lie!" exploded the stoker, straightening up suddenly, his face flushing and his features working convulsively.

"Ah! Then you do know something about this man, Collins, eh?"

"Ye—no, I don't know anything about him. I've heard of him, that's all. Now you let me alone, or [240]

—"

"Smith, you saved my life. I'm not such a cur as to forget that. I think you have something to say to—"

"I ain't got anything to say to you."

"Oh, yes, you have. Come with me to my cabin, where we can talk without interruption. It may be worth your while."

"I won't go!"

Smith raised a hand as if he would strike the boy whose finger-tips were resting on the stoker's shoulder.

"You come with me!" commanded Steve, placing a firmer grip on the shoulder of the stoker. In that way, and without further resistance, Steve led him to his own stateroom.

"Sit down! Now tell me all about it."

The fireman's face was sullen and rebellious.

"There—there ain't nothing to tell," answered the man in a low, half-angry voice.

"You are Gus Collins! I know you, now. I was sure I had seen the man whose description was sent out by the police and the government officials."

The stoker's face went ghastly.

"Yes, I am. Now what are you going to do about it?" he demanded, rising to his full height, standing over Rush in a threatening attitude.

"I am going to talk with you for the present. I think I have a right to do that, and see if there isn't something I can do for you after all you have done for me. Sit down, Gus." [241]

With a bewildered look on his face, the stoker sank into the chair.

"Tell me the whole story, Gus," urged Rush gently. "You need not be afraid of me. I am your friend, no matter what you have done."

For a full five minutes Collins did not speak. It was plain to the keen-eyed boy before him that the man was battling with himself and was trying to decide what his course of action should be.

"Did you have any part in the robbery of that post-office?" urged Steve.

"No!" fairly shouted the stoker.

"Then you have nothing to fear."

"Yes, I have, too. I've got everything to fear. I'm a bad man, and—"

"Perhaps you were, but you have wiped that all out by your heroic act in—"

"Boy, I've served time in Joliet. I'm an ex-convict. I stole something once when I didn't know what I was doing. They put me away for five years for that little job. While I was in prison my temper got the best of me one day, and I hurt a man, and—"

"You don't mean you—"

"No, I didn't kill him, but I was used worse than a little yellow dog after that. What little good there was in me was beaten out of me, and—never let your temper get the best of you, boy. It's an awful thing to have a temper like mine." [242]

Steve nodded.

"Well, I got out. My time was up."

"When was that?"

"This spring. I was dogged from the time I left the prison until one day I managed to give them the slip, and—"

"You mean the police were following you?"

"Yes; spotting me."

"What for?"

"To see that I didn't get into any mischief. The last time they saw me I was in Elgin. I left on the six o'clock train, after throwing the spotters off. That night the post-office there was cracked. I read about it in the papers next day, and I knew they'd put it on me. I got clear of the place as soon as possible, shipped up the lakes from Chicago; then got in with this crowd. Now I'll be sent back to Joliet again."

"Perhaps not; not if you are innocent."

"I am as innocent as you are, Steve Rush. Help me, boy! Help me to get away. They'll nail me this

time, sure. They've got the line drawn on me fair and square. They sent out that alarm you've got in your hands there. Help me to get away in the small boat to-night and I'll make shore and disappear. I'll fool them. I did you a good turn. Do a great one for me, now!"

[243]

"Yes, Gus; I will do you a turn, but I won't help you to escape. That would be a foolish thing to do. The police would get you sooner or later, and your flight would be the very worst thing possible for you when they did get you."

"You won't help me?"

"No, not in that way."

"How then?"

"I shall have to think it over, but if you are innocent, have no fears, for you shall be freed of the accusation. I must talk with the captain——"

Collins started to protest.

"No one else on board shall know of it except my friend, Jarvis, and he is true-blue. When we have you freed I will see to it that you get a berth on this or some other boat, for life, if you want it."

Collins shook his head.

"No; they'll fire me when they find out I've done time. Nobody wants an ex-convict. They drive a man to the dogs after once he's fallen——"

"Here's one man who won't drive you, Gus Collins. Here's one man who's going to stand right back of you and see that you get fair play. Then you're going to hold your head up and be a man with other men. You leave it all to me, will you? Will you promise to do so?"

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Collins eyed the bronzed, manly face before him, for a full moment; then he stretched out an impulsive hand.

"Put it there, little pard! I'll stand up, even if I do time for it, if it'll please you any. You're the pluckiest, the squarest bunch of muscle that I've ever come up with!"

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## CHAPTER XXIV

[245]

### CONCLUSION

STEVE RUSH had told the whole story to Captain Simms, to all of which the captain listened in deep interest.

"Well, what do you propose to do about it?" questioned the skipper, with a quizzical smile.

"If you will give me a leave of absence, I think I should like to go back to Elgin with Collins and help to get him free," announced Steve.

"Don't monkey with fire. A crook's a crook, and——"

"This one *will* be, if he is sent up again. I propose to get him out, even if it takes all the rest of the summer to do it."

"All right. Go ahead, lad, but for goodness' sake wait until we get the bear out of this ship," laughed the captain.

The result was that as soon as the "Richmond" reached its destination on Lake Erie, Steve and the stoker, both dressed in their best, slipped ashore and took a train for Chicago. Early the next forenoon they presented themselves at the police station in the town where the robbery had occurred, Steve acting as spokesman and stating that Collins had heard he was wanted and had come to give himself up, prepared to prove his innocence.

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Of course the stoker was locked up. The man was sullen once more, and when the iron doors clanged behind him he gave up all hope.

"They've got me! I was a fool!" he muttered.

Shortly after that Steve visited him, and when the boy left the man Collins was in a better frame of mind. Rush got to work at once. He must find some one who would remember to have seen Gus leaving town. Suddenly an idea occurred to the boy. He visited the railroad station. From one official to another he traveled, asking questions and getting scant courtesy. Everyone's hand appeared to be against him when the owner learned the object of Rush's mission.

It was not until the next day that he found the man for whom he was looking. That was the conductor of the train on which Collins had taken passage when he left the town the evening of the robbery, and several hours before it occurred. He had obtained from Collins a description of the clothes the latter wore on that night, and where he sat in the train, establishing the fact that the man's soft hat, tipped up behind, was pulled well down over his face, and that he wore a red necktie.

Armed with this description, Steve visited the conductor at the latter's home. At first the conductor did not seem to remember, but when Steve mentioned the felt hat, the red necktie and the stoop of the man's shoulders in connection with the furtive glancing up from beneath the eyelids, the railroad man, slapped his thigh violently.

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"Of course I remember him. I'd know him if I saw him. He had a scar on his right cheek——"

"That's the man," cut in Rush triumphantly. "Come over to the station with me and identify him. You will prevent a grave injustice being done if you will assist me in this matter."

The conductor readily picked out Gus Collins as the man whom he had seen on his train proceeding the robbery. A few days later the conductor was summoned before the Grand Jury, at Steve's instigation, where he repeated his story in detail. Steve gave evidence also as to what he knew about the man, repeating the interview he had had with the stoker on board the ship.

The result was that Gus Collins stepped from his cell a free man that evening. He said little, but he seemed unable to keep his eyes from the face of the boy who had saved him from prison. Collins knew that nothing could have saved him had it not been for the Iron Boy, but somehow he could not find it possible to express his thankfulness.

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"We will go back to Duluth," said the lad. "We shall not be able to catch the ship down this way I guess. Anyhow, a few days' layoff will not hurt us in the least."

"What are you going to do with me now?" demanded the fireman, finding his voice at last.

"I shall take good care of you. Forget all that's past. You are a man now, and you are going to be a man henceforth. Quit brooding over your troubles. You haven't any. They were all washed out of you in the lake the day you went in after me. I have something in mind for you that I think will please you."

Reaching Duluth, Steve sought Mr Carrhart at once and to the president the lad told the whole story.

"What do you want, my lad—what do you wish me to do for your friend?" asked the president kindly.

Rush told him in a few words. The result was that Mr. Carrhart gave the boy a letter to the superintendent, telling Steve to return for an interview after he had finished with the Collins' business.

It was a proud and happy Steve who sought out Gus Collins an hour later, at the hotel where the man and the boy were stopping.

"Well, what about it?" demanded the stoker, without the least trace of hopefulness in his tone.

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"You are to report for duty on the 'Richmond' as soon as she gets in."

"Oh!" Collins' face brightened.

"Here's your appointment," added Steve, handing over a document with the imprint of the steamship company at its head.

Collins read it through, changed color then stared at Steve.

"Is this some kind of a joke you're playing on me?"

"It is no joke, Gus. You are appointed foreman of the stoke-room of the ore carrier 'Richmond,' and you'll save more coal for the company than any other stoker who ever bossed a fire-room."

Collins sat down heavily. The tears were blinding his eyes. Steve did not try to stop them. He realized that they marked the turning point in what had been a hard life, a life that had bidden fair to be wholly wrecked in the name of justice. But what Steve Rush in his unselfishness did not realize, was that he had saved a human soul.

The interview with Mr. Carrhart took place that afternoon.

"Yes, sir; I think I have a few suggestions to make," answered Steve in reply to a question from the president. "But first I should like to ask some questions of you."

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"Proceed."

Steve asked the average cost of operating the ships of the fleet per month; what the ships earned by carrying coal for other concerns on the return trips, together with a number of other shrewd and pointed questions. All of these Mr. Carrhart answered freely, knowing that the boy's reasons for asking them were in the interest of his investigations.

Rush made some rapid calculations on a pad on the president's desk.

"You have some two hundred ships in the line, I believe, sir?"

"Yes; two hundred and ten."

"Would it be any saving if you could save an hour in the unloading of these ships—two hundred and ten hours, in other words, every time the whole fleet made a trip down the lakes?"

"Well, I should say it would."

"That is easy."

"Explain."

"Simply put on an extra unloader for each dock, so that both may work at the same time."

Mr. Carrhart considered. He, too, made some calculations.

"Yes, that is an excellent suggestion. It will mark a very great saving in the transportation cost. Candidly, the idea never occurred to me. You have earned your salary for one year at least," added the president with an indulgent smile. "I felt sure you would dig up something of value to us, to say nothing of the value the experience would be to you." [251]

"I'm not through yet," laughed the Iron Boy. "I'm going to show you how you can save something like thirty thousand dollars a year more on the carrying proposition."

"Why, Rush, you amaze me. It cannot be possible, after figuring down all transportations the way the experts of this company have done and been doing for years."

"The old saying is to the effect that figures never lie. Perhaps mine do. If so, you will be able to discover the untruth at once."

"May I ask how you propose to work this great saving?" asked the president good-naturedly.

"Send your boats back light."

"Send them back light?"

"Yes, sir; in water ballast."

"But, my boy, don't you understand that it will mean the loss of a lot of money to do that? The ships earn a great many thousands of dollars a year by carrying freight for pay on the return trips."

"Yes, sir; I understand that. Their cargo is mostly coal, is it not?" [252]

"It is."

"For ports all along the Great Lakes?"

"Certainly."

"And through carrying this coal your ships lose from a week to ten days and some times two weeks' on every round trip."

"How do you know this?" interrupted Mr. Carrhart.

"I have asked questions," smiled Steve. "Call it a week's loss of time on each trip. Do you know what that means?"

"I begin to see," answered the president reflectively.

"It means that every time your fleet makes a round trip, carrying coal back with them, the company loses their services to the enormous total of two hundred and ten weeks, more than four years, Mr. Carrhart. If you will glance over these figures of mine you will observe that, by this method, the company is losing about the figure stated by me a few minutes ago, over and above what you get in freights for carrying the coal."

The president made a few brief calculations. He went over his figures and Steve's several times, his forehead corrugated with deep wrinkles as he did so. At last Mr. Carrhart glanced up, gazing steadily at the slightly flushed face of the Iron Boy. [253]

"Rush you are a very remarkable young man," he said. "Of course, I knew that before, but what I did not know was that you had a head for finance, such as you have just demonstrated. This is really a most remarkable showing. I shall bring it before the board at the next meeting. There is no doubt about your suggestions being adopted. I think it will come in the nature of a revelation to the board. My boy, I am proud of you. I can't tell you how proud I am, especially so because I picked you out, feeling from the first that you would prove a winner."

"Thank you, sir."

"And, in this connection, I received a long letter from Captain Simms from Cleveland yesterday. He made certain suggestions regarding yourself and your friend Jarvis, which it gives me great pleasure to act upon. You have been appointed second mate of the steamer 'Richmond'; Jarvis, first wheelman. You will be called upon to pass a government examination for a license, which you will take to-morrow morning. You will have no difficulty about it, if you are as good a navigator as Captain Simms says you are, and I have no doubt you are. If you remain on the lakes we'll be making a captain of you some of these days. However, I have an idea you do not intend to be a sailor." [254]

"No, sir, not permanently."



And so Steve Rush began as a watch officer on the Great Lakes. He proved that the confidence of his superiors was not misplaced, and for the rest of the season he remained on the "Richmond," distinguishing himself in many ways. Gus Collins, with his fresh start in life, had dropped his hang-dog expression. When he talked to a man, now, he looked that man squarely in the eye, and from the moment of his return to the ship he was a daily worshipper at the shrine of Steve Rush.

At the close of the season Steve found the foreman a place with a manufacturing firm, with the help of a letter from Captain Simms. Then, bidding good-bye to their friends, the lads gathered up their dunnage and went home for a few weeks' rest before taking up the new life that they had about decided upon. What happened to them in their new calling will be related in detail in a following volume entitled, "THE IRON BOYS IN THE STEEL MILLS; Or, Beginning Anew in the Cinder Pits." In the great steel mills the boys were to work among the roaring furnaces, the swiftly moving cranes and the moulding mills, where the metal that they had helped to mine ran in rivers that turned into gold. There the boys were to be called upon to face death many times, and in many forms, as they toiled among the rough men of the mills and laughed at the thousand and one perils of their new life.

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THE END.

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#### Transcriber's Note

Obvious spelling and punctuation errors have been corrected, missing words have been added.

The Advertisement of The Boys of Steel Series contains the numbering as presented in the book.

Differing spellings used throughout the book for:

life boat, lifeboat and life-boat

light-house, lighthouse

layoff, lay-off

hatch cover, hatch-cover

are retained as used by the author

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