

# HARRIE HANCOCK

THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB  
IN FLORIDA: OR, LAYING  
THE GHOST OF  
ALLIGATOR SWAMP

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**Hancock H.**

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# H. Irving Hancock

## The Motor Boat Club in Florida; or, Laying the Ghost of Alligator Swamp

### CHAPTER I A KINK IN THE GULF STREAM

“REALLY, I can hardly believe that it’s winter at all,” declared Mrs. Tremaine, languidly, as she threw open her deck coat. “I find it hard – ”

“Now, my dear, don’t try to do anything hard. It’s sure to fatigue you,” laughed Henry Tremaine, coming up from the cabin companionway, where he had paused long enough to light a pipe.

“But here it is,” argued Mr. Tremaine’s pretty young wife, “well into the month of December. We are out at sea, out of sight of land, save for a few of these horrid keys. There’s hardly any breeze; the sun is warm – so warm, in fact, that I am afraid it will work ravages with my complexion. And, actually, the air is so warm and so full of indolence that I feel more inclined to go below and sleep than to do anything else.”

Though Mrs. Tremaine was not more than twenty-four years of age, her husband was a middle-aged man who had seen many more nooks of the world than she had.

“My dear,” he answered, “you are just beginning to experience the charm of the Florida winter.”

“It *is* delightful,” she assented. “Yet, it is so warm that the feeling one has is almost uncanny.”

“If you’re on deck in a few hours,” broke in Captain Tom Halstead, smilingly, “I’ll promise you much cooler winds, Mrs. Tremaine. You’re in the Gulf Stream, just now, and on an unusually mild day.”

“Don’t we remain in the Gulf Stream all through the present voyage?” asked the pretty young matron, vaguely.

“Oh, no, indeed, madam. We’re almost out of it now, in fact. You see, we’re in the Florida Straits, between southernmost Florida and Cuba, and therefore in the very track of the Gulf Stream. Even at our slow cruising speed we shall soon be past Key West. After that we shall steer in a more northerly direction. It’s four o’clock now. By eleven to-night we shall be between the Marquesas Keys and Dry Tortugas. By then we shall have been for some time out of the warm Gulf Stream, and the air will be much cooler.”

“But the wind is from the south, and has been all day,” objected Mrs. Tremaine, languidly. “It will still be following us.”

“Possibly,” assented Captain Tom Halstead.

“And the south wind is always mild and friendly,” pursued the young woman.

“Is it?” chuckled Halstead.

“Isn’t it?”

“I trust it will be so to the end of the present voyage,” amiably replied the young skipper of the motor boat cruiser “Restless.” “Yet, at this time of the year, some of the worst gales come out of the south.”

As Captain Tom finished speaking he stepped aft to the very stern of the boat. He remained for some moments intently studying the weather.

The “Restless,” a fifty-five foot speedy cruiser, was now going along at the comparatively slow gait of twelve and a half miles an hour. She could go at more than double that speed, but on a long voyage it was wise to travel more moderately and burn much less gasoline in proportion.

Captain Tom Halstead had just come on deck, from a berth in the motor room forward. His chum, Joe Dawson, the engineer of the “Restless,” was now on the bridge deck, where he had taken his trick at the wheel while the young skipper snatched some four hours’ sleep.

Captain Halstead figured on reaching Oyster Bay by four o’clock the following morning, thence proceeding to the mouth of the Caloosahatchee River. This country is on the west coast of Florida, below Tampa Bay.

Though Tom Halstead did not tell his passengers so, he had been called a little ahead of time, just in order that he might look at the weather. Young Halstead – he was but sixteen years of age – had just come aft when he joined briefly in the conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Tremaine.

Now, after gazing to the southward some little time, he turned and went forward.

“Does look nasty, doesn’t it, Joe?” he murmured in his chum’s ear. Joe Dawson, giving the wheel a turn, nodded silently.

“I’m glad you called me, old fellow,” Tom went on.

“Nervous, old chap?” inquired Joe, glancing keenly at the skipper.

“No; not exactly,” smiled the youthful captain. “Yet, in strange waters, so full of keys and reefs, I’m not exactly fond of a storm.”

“Why not change the course, then, and go to the west of Dry Tortugas?” suggested Joe Dawson. “Then you’d have clearer water.”

“And be some hours later in reaching the river,” rejoined Halstead. “Mr. Tremaine has made it clear to me that he wants to eat breakfast on land. I don’t believe there’s much danger, anyway, in the channel between Marquesas and Dry Tortugas. The charts are rather reassuring.”

Tom sighed slightly, though there was the same cheery look in his eyes as he took the wheel from his chum.

Joe Dawson, happening to glance aft, saw a girlish figure come up out of the companionway and sink down into a deck chair beside young Mrs. Tremaine. The new arrival on deck was Ida Silsbee, a dark, really beautiful girl of nineteen, in appearance a decided contrast to blond Mrs. Tremaine. Ida Silsbee, too, was ordinarily active and energetic – another respect in which she differed radically from her friend.

“Now, I can chase Dixon out of the motor room,” muttered Joe, in a low voice. “I don’t like the fellow down there with the motors, yet it isn’t nice to be rude to him.”

Tom nodded. His thoughts were on course and weather.

Joe dropped down into the motor room, the door of which was close to the wheel. Lounging on one of the seats, smoking a cigarette, was Oliver Dixon, a smooth-faced, dark brown-haired young man of ultra-fashionable appearance. His was a handsome face, and the brown eyes could light up most tenderly. The young man’s mouth was far from being weak looking; on the contrary it was framed by thin lips, and had, at times, a wholly cruel look. Yet he was of a type of man that makes friends readily.

From the start of the voyage, at St. Augustine, far up on the east coast of Florida, Joe had taken an unaccountable dislike to the dandyish young man.

“Really wonderful, the way these motors work, Dawson,” observed Mr. Dixon, looking up as Joe entered.

“Yes,” nodded Joe. “A little oil, fed steadily, and they go on turning the propeller shaft day after day, if necessary. Miss Silsbee is on deck, and looks as though she had had a wonderfully refreshing nap.”

Dixon rose, stretched, went up the short steps, tossed his cigarette overboard, then strolled aft.

“Didn’t take long to get rid of that chap,” grinned Joe, talking in an undertone, as he stepped up to his chum’s side once more. Looking out of the corner of one eye, Dawson saw Dixon talking animatedly with Ida Silsbee, who did not seem in the least bored by his company.

“Notice how the wind’s freshening, Joe!” asked the young skipper, two minutes later.

“Yes; and a bad looking haze rising, too,” nodded Dawson. “I don’t like the weather’s looks.”

“No more do I. Joe, we’ll be fighting our way through a southerly gale all night.”

“All gales look alike to me,” laughed the young engineer. “We’ve weathered every other gale in the past. I don’t believe we’ll go down in this one.”

“Oh, the ‘Restless’ is staunch enough, as far as seaworthiness goes,” retorted Halstead. “All that can possibly make us uneasy is the dread that we might hit some uncharted reef.”

From the talk of the chums it appeared plainly enough that, though they spoke easily, they much wished the coming night were through with, and that they had their boat inside of Oyster Bay.

*Their* boat – yes. They owned this handsome craft, did these two boys, and had come into the possession of it through deeds of daring and sterling seamanship.

Readers of the preceding volumes of this series are aware of how Tom Halstead and Joe Dawson, born near the mouth of the Kennebec River, in Maine, came to handle the motor cruiser of George Prescott, a broker of Boston. Aided by their employer the boys went through some rousing adventures in breaking up the crew of Smugglers’ Island. As a result of the fine seamanship displayed by these two youths, Mr. Prescott had conceived the idea of founding the Motor Boat Club of the Kennebec. This club, now deservedly famous, was composed, at first, of Maine boys born of seafaring stock and trained to meet the dangers of salt water life. By degrees boys in other sections of the Atlantic coast, similarly trained to the sea life, and to the handling of motors, had been added to the club.

All this was outlined in the first volume, “The Motor Boat Club of the Kennebec.” In the second volume, “The Motor Boat Club at Nantucket,” was narrated how Tom and Joe, with the help of a Nantucket boy who was soon added to the club, solved the mystery of the abduction of the Dunstan heir, at the same time going through a maze of thrilling adventures. In the third volume, “The Motor Boat Club off Long Island,” we find Tom and Joe, reinforced by a Long Island youth, Hank Butts, serving two financiers, Francis Delavan and Eben Moddridge, through a long sea chase and helping to break up a Wall Street conspiracy. For their loyalty and in recognition of the amazing perils the boys had cheerfully encountered, Francis Delavan had presented the two chums with the “Restless,” while Hank Butts had been rewarded with a smaller motor craft for use along the southern coast of Long Island.

In the volume just before the present one, “The Motor Boat Club and the Wireless,” we found Tom, Joe and Hank all three again at sea, having chartered the “Restless” to one Powell Seaton, for what they thought would be a very quiet cruise. Having the motor cruiser equipped with a wireless telegraph apparatus, which Joe Dawson had fitted himself to operate, our young Motor Boat Club friends found themselves again suddenly plunged into adventures of the most exciting description.

At the close of the engagement with Mr. Seaton, Hank Butts had felt it best to return to his Long Island home and his aged parents, but Tom and Joe had gradually cruised south along the coast, making more than a living in chartering their fine craft to a number of different sailing parties.

At St. Augustine, Henry Tremaine had chartered the “Restless” to take himself and his party southward around the coast of Florida, and then northward again, up the west coast as far as Oyster Bay. The charter was to run for a month, and Skipper Tom understood that there would be considerable cruising along the Florida keys during that period.

Mrs. Tremaine was a bride of a year, being her husband’s second wife. Ida Silsbee was an heiress, the daughter of one of Mr. Tremaine’s friends, now deceased, and was now Mr. Tremaine’s ward. Oliver Dixon was the cousin of a schoolgirl friend of Miss Silsbee’s. The Tremaines, having

met him at St. Augustine, and being pleased with the young man, had invited him to join them on the present cruise.

As for Dixon, he had been greatly attracted to Ida Silsbee from the first moment of meeting.

Captain Tom had understood that Mr. Tremaine owned some sort of winter home along the Caloosahatchee River.

There were but two staterooms aboard the "Restless." One of these was occupied by the ladies, the other by Mr. Tremaine and Mr. Dixon. At night, Captain Tom, when not on deck, converted one of the cabin seats into a berth. Joe slept, when he could find time for sleep, in one of the bunks of the motor room, not caring to be far from his engines.

A third member of the crew, for this run only, was Ham Mockus, a negro in his twenties, who served as cook and steward. He had shipped only in order to reach his home near Oyster Bay.

"Going to turn in, Joe?" asked Halstead, as the two chums stood together on the bridge deck.

"Not so close to supper," laughed Joe. "I may get a little nap afterwards. But –"

Dawson paused, as though almost ashamed to voice his thought.

"You think it's going to be a case of all hands on duty all through the night, eh?" laughed Halstead.

"Pretty likely," nodded Joe. "And I guess I'd better tumble Ham out of his bunk. It's time he was going to the galley."

"Yes," nodded Skipper Halstead. "Tell Ham to get the meal on as early as he can. It's going to be rough weather for serving a meal."

As Joe stepped down the short flight of steps to the motor room, a loud, prolonged snore greeted him.

"Come along, now! Tumble out of that!" called Joe, good-naturedly, bending over the bunk in which the colored steward, lying on his back, was blissfully sleeping.

"E-e-eh? W'ut?" drowsed Ham Mockus.

"Get up and get your galley fire going. You want to rush the supper, too," added Joe, half dragging the steward from his berth. "It's just as well to wake up, Ham, and to be in a hurry. You needn't tell the ladies, and scare 'em, but there's going to be a hard blow to-night."

"A stohm, sah?" demanded the negro, showing the whites of his eyes.

"A big one, unless I miss my guess."

"Fo' de Lawd's sake, sah!" gasped the colored steward. "An' in dis little bit uv a gas-tub, at dat!"

"Avast there!" growled Joe. "I'll kick your starboard light overboard if you call this craft names. You'd better understand, Ham, that the 'Restless' is as good as a liner."

"Huh! It sho' ain't much bigger dan a rowboat, an' nuffin' but dem two peanut roasters to keep pushin' de propellers 'gainst monst'ous waves," snorted Ham, pulling on his shoes and standing up to fit on his white canvas coat. "Fore de Lawd, ef Ah done t'ought Ise gwineter git inter a hurricane in dis yere lobster smack –"

"Will you quit calling our boat hard names, and get your fire started?" demanded Joe Dawson, scowling, and taking a step toward the negro.

"Yes, sah! Yes, sah!" exclaimed Ham, moving fast. But there was a wild look in his eyes, for Ham was a sea-coward if there ever was one. Though he started the galley fire, and made other moves, the steward hardly knew what he was doing.

"Er stohm comin' – a reg-lar hurricane, an' dis yere niggah ain' done been inside er chu'ch in a month!" Ham groaned to himself.

As Joe Dawson returned to the bridge deck he noted some increase in the haze to the southward. The wind, too, was kicking up a bit more, though as yet the sea was running so smoothly that a landlubber would never have suspected that the "Restless" was moving in the track of dire trouble to come.



“Can you take the wheel just a moment, old fellow?” requested Tom Halstead. “I don’t want to bother our passengers, but, now that both ladies are on deck, I want to go below and make sure that the stateroom port-holes are tightly closed.”

Mr. Tremaine was now talking to the ladies, Dixon having vanished. Tom went through the passage connecting the motor room with the cabin. As he went he stepped as softly as usual. Even in turning the handle of the door into the cabin he made no noise. And so, quite unexpectedly, the young skipper came upon Oliver Dixon.

Dixon stood at the cabin table, facing aft. In one hand he held a vial of water, or what appeared to be water. Now, he lifted a paper containing whitish crystals, all of which he emptied into the vial, corking the container and giving the mixture several shakes.

Holding the bottle up to the light, in order to make sure that all the crystals had dissolved, Dixon happened to turn enough to see Captain Halstead.

“Confound you, boy, what are you doing there?” gasped Dixon, becoming suddenly so excited that he dropped the bottle to the soft carpet.

Tom flushed at the use of the word “boy.” On his own craft he was wholly entitled to be called “captain.” But he replied, steadily:

“Pardon me, Mr. Dixon, but I saw you doing something with the bottle, and I waited so that I wouldn’t take the risk of jogging your elbow in passing you.”

Oliver Dixon, a little pale about the mouth, and with a suspicious look in his eyes, stared at the young sailing master.

“Well, what are you doing here, anyway?”

The tone and manner were so offensive that Halstead flushed in earnest this time, though he answered, quietly enough:

“Pardon me, Mr. Dixon, but as commander and part owner, I don’t have to explain my presence in any part of this craft.”

“You were spying on me!” hissed the other, sharply.

Tom Halstead opened his eyes very wide.

“I might ask, Mr. Dixon, whether you are in the habit of doing things that would interest a spy?”

Dixon drew in his breath sharply, first flushing, then all the color leaving his face. But the young man was quick to feel that he was making matters worse.

“Don’t mind me, Halstead,” he begged, quickly. “You startled me, and I hardly know what I’m saying. I – I – I – am South for my nerves, you know.”

“No; I didn’t know,” replied Skipper Tom, quietly. He felt a good deal of wonder at the statement, for Oliver Dixon looked like anything but a nervous wreck.

“You – you won’t mention this?” begged the young man, bending to pick up the vial, which he thrust into a vest pocket.

“Why, I don’t see anything either to tell or to conceal,” remarked Captain Halstead.

“I – I don’t want Miss Silsbee – or the Tremaines, either, for that matter, to know that I’m so – so nervous,” almost stammered Oliver Dixon.

“I’m not in the habit of carrying tales of any kind,” retorted the youthful skipper, rather stiffly.

He passed on to the staterooms at the after end of the cabin. Dixon followed him with a scowl full of suspicion and hate. Could Halstead have seen that look he would have been intensely astonished.

By the time he had attended to the stateroom portholes and had come out again, Halstead found Ham in the cabin, spreading the cloth for the evening meal. So as not to be in the steward’s way, Tom went up by the after companionway. As Tom stepped to the deck the clatter of dishes came up after him.

“The steward isn’t setting the dinner table so soon, is he?” asked Mrs. Tremaine, in her usual languid voice.

“Yes, madam.”

“But I thought we had made it plain that we didn’t want dinner served, any night, earlier than seven o’clock.”

“There’s a reason, to-night, Mrs. Tremaine,” replied Skipper Tom, standing there, uniform cap in hand. “It is best to have the meal over early because – well, do you see the sky to the southward?”

The haze at the lower horizon had spread into a darkening cloud that was overtaking the boat.

“Are we going to have a storm?” asked Mrs. Tremaine, in quick apprehension.

“Well, a bit of a blow, anyway,” admitted the young captain. “It may prove, Mrs. Tremaine, to be just a little kink out of the Gulf Stream, which we are now leaving.”

“Is it going to be one of the ugly, southerly December gales which I’ve read cross the Gulf of Mexico with such violence?” asked Ida Silsbee, turning around quickly.

“We’ll hope it won’t be much,” replied Captain Tom, smiling. “You can see that I don’t look very worried.”

“Oh, you can’t fool me, Captain Halstead,” cried Mrs. Tremaine, rising from her chair with what was unusual haste for her. “You know more than you are telling! Things are going to happen to-night!”

More things, indeed, than Captain Tom Halstead yet dreamed!

Before Skipper Tom had turned to walk forward a long, rolling wave, a foretaste of the weather to come, had rolled in from the south, causing the “Restless” to take a plunge. A shorter wave followed, rocking the craft noticeably. In an instant the colored steward’s head was poked up through the companionway.

Ham took a look about him at the weather, and an eerie glint flashed in his eyes.

“Fore de Lawd, dere’s goin’ ter be wedder dis night!” he muttered. “Don’t Ah know?”

“Ham,” called Ida Silsbee, laughingly, “if it rains this evening, and keeps us below, you’ll have a fine chance to tell us that story about the Ghost of Alligator Swamp.”

“On sech a night like as dis’ll be?” demanded Ham Mockus, rolling his eyes. “’Scuse me, Missy Ida. Ah don’t talk ’bout ghosts *on deir night!*”

“What’s going to be the matter with to-night, Ham?” inquired Mrs. Tremaine, showing signs of listless interest.

“Ter-night?” repeated the colored man, slowly. “’Scuse me, Mis’ Tremaine, but dis is gwine ter be der berry – ’Scuse me. Ah mean, ole Satan is shuah gwine ter be in de gale ter-night!”

## CHAPTER II

### HAM TURNS OUT TO BE A PROPHET

“YASSUH! yassuh! Dat’s de story ’bout de Ghost ob Alligator Swamp,” declared Ham Mockus, solemnly.

It had been hard work to get the yarn out of the colored steward. The meal was over, and the howling of the wind through the rigging of the signal mast made a dismal sound that was enough to get on any timid person’s nerves. But the electric lights were turned on brilliantly in the cozy, snug little cabin of the “Restless.” All being light and warmth there, and the four passengers being in merry mood, Ham had gotten his courage together. As the two men lighted their cigars at the end of the meal, after having secured the permission of the ladies, Mr. Tremaine had pushed the cigar box toward the steward, intimating that Ham might remain and indulge in a cigar if he would tell them, truthfully and without holding back any part, the story of the ghost in question.

“For you know, Ham,” Mr. Tremaine had explained, “I haven’t been near my place in these parts for three years, and I’ve heard only the faintest rumors about the ghost. I want a real, true account.”

So Ham, with many mutterings under his breath, with many sharp indrawings of air and much rolling of his eyes, had told the startling tale. Not all of it need be told here, as the Ghost of Alligator Swamp was destined to appear to all now on board. According to Ham Mockus the spectre could take the form of either man or woman, or even of any of the better-known beasts. Water was no barrier; it could travel at sea. Distance meant nothing to this grisly apparition, which, at need, could travel fifty miles in a second. Ham told tale after tale about the ghost. The others listened mostly in amused silence; but the narration caused the hair of Ham himself to stand on end.

“Why, then, Ham,” suggested Mr. Tremaine, taking a few thoughtful whiffs of his cigar, “there’d be really nothing to prevent the ghost from coming on board here to-night in the midst of the storm, if we have one.”

“Yassuh! yassuh! Dat ghost can done come, ef it wanter.”

“I wonder if it will?” asked Miss Silsbee, musingly.

“Don’ say dat, Missy! Don’, fo’ de lub ob hebben!” begged Ham, growing terror-stricken. “Many time dat ha’nt done go wheah it been asked ter go. Don’ ’vite it heah! Ole Marse Satan, he shuah ter ride in de gale dis night, an’ ole Marse Satan, he am ernuff, fo’ shuah! ’Scuse me, now, ladies an’ gemmen. I gotter finish clearin’ offen de table.”

With that, the steward began to remove dishes and other things in a hurry, his feet sounding constantly in the passage forward of the cabin. Then, at last, he appeared to inquire:

“Is dat all fo’ me, now, ladies an’ gemmen?”

“Yes; we shan’t need you any more, Ham,” replied Mrs. Tremaine.

Ordinarily, Ham would have gone to the galley, where, with hot water ready, he would have cleaned up all the dishes.

“But Ah ain’t so shuah dere gwine ter *be* any mawnin’,” he muttered to himself, after he had bobbed his head up into the open for a long look at the threatening sky overhead. So Ham came out on deck, to walk about as long as he could still find it safe to do so.

Following the early winter twilight an increasing darkness had settled down over the waters. Every few minutes Captain Tom, once more at the wheel, turned on the electric searchlight, swinging it around in an arc of a circle before the boat, seeking to inform himself of any danger that might lie in their path. For the rest, the young skipper was content to steer through the darkness, having only the binnacle light upon the compass for a guide, and carrying the chart memorized in his mind.

For the last hour the waves had been crested with white-caps. Every now and then a mass of foam leaped over the bulwarks of the bridge deck, the water retreating through the scuppers. The wind was blowing at nearly twenty-five miles an hour. Yet, so far, there was nothing in the actual weather that could make a capable captain's mind uneasy. Joe, after a look out into the black night, and after wetting his finger and holding it up in the breeze, had gone below, where he found his motors working satisfactorily. So he had turned into his bunk, hoping to catch an hour or two of sleep ere the call came for duty on deck all through the night.

The "Restless" was rolling and pitching considerably, but as yet the motion was no more than was agreeable to those who love the sea and its moods. As Ham came up on deck, however, he saw that the life-lines had been stretched. That had been Joe Dawson's last work before turning in.

"You'll want to keep awake to-night, Ham," called Tom, when he saw his dark visage.

"Yassuh! yassuh!" came willingly from the colored man, who, however, could go to sleep standing up anywhere.

Though none of the passengers below was exactly afraid, none cared to turn in early that night. After the men had smoked as much as they cared to, the quartette in the cabin started a game of euchre.

Tom, who had last been relieved at seven o'clock, in order that he might go below for supper, kept at the wheel alone, until eleven o'clock. Then, catching sight of the steward's head through the doorway of the motor room, he shouted the order to call Joe Dawson on deck.

Joe came with the promptness of a fireman responding to an alarm. He took a look about him at the weather, then faced his chum.

"Between Marquesas and Tortugas?" he asked.

"Yes. Look!"

At just that moment the red eye of the revolving light over on Dry Tortugas, some miles away, swung around toward them.

"I'm glad the gale has held off so long," muttered Joe. "This is the nastiest part of the way. Half an hour more, if a squall doesn't strike us, and we'll be where we'll feel easier."

"It's queer weather, anyway," said Skipper Tom musingly. "I figured we'd be in the thick of a souther by eight o'clock."

"Maybe the storm has spent itself south of us," ventured Joe Dawson, but Halstead shook his head.

"No; it's going to catch us. No doubt about that. Hullo! Feel that?"

The first drops of rain struck the backs of their necks. Nodding, Dawson dived below, coming up soon in his oilskins and sou'wester. He took the wheel while Tom vanished briefly for similar clothing and headgear.

Swish-sh-sh! Now, the rain began to drive down in great sheets, illumined by two faint flashes of winter lightning. Immediately afterward came a rush of wind from the south that sang loudly through the rigging on the signal mast.

"Now, we'll soon be in for it in earnest," muttered Tom Halstead, taking the wheel from his chum and casting an anxious look for the next "red eye" from the revolving light over on Tortugas.

Voices sounded on the after deck. Henry Tremaine was calling to his wife and ward to get on their rain coats and come up for a brief look at the weather.

"Joe," muttered the young skipper, sharply, "go back to those people and tell them the only place for them is going to be below. Tell Mr. Tremaine he'd be endangering the ladies to have 'em on deck, even for a minute or two. Push 'em below and lock the after companionway, if you have to!"

Joe easily made his way aft to carry out these instructions. Hardly had Dawson returned when another and greater gust of wind overtook the "Restless." Her nose was buried deep in the water, as she pitched. Then, on the crest of the following wave, the little craft's bow rose high. The full gale

was upon them in five minutes more – a wind blowing fifty-five miles an hour. Running before the wind the cruiser steered easily enough. Tom could manage the wheel alone, though Joe stood by to lend a hand in case of accident or emergency.

Up onto deck stumbled Ham Mockus, clutching desperately at the deck-house and life-lines.

“Fo’ de Lawd’s sake, dis shuah gwine finish us!” yelled the steward in terror. He was so badly frightened, in fact, that both boys felt sorry for him.

“Don’t you believe it,” Captain Tom bellowed at him. “We’ve been out in a heap sight worse gales than this.”

“In dis boat?” wailed Ham, hoarsely.

“Right in this boat, in one worse gale,” replied Halstead, thinking of the September northeaster experienced on the other side of Florida, as told in “The Motor Boat Club and the Wireless.”

“But Ah reckon ole Marse Satan didn’t gwine ride on dat gale,” protested Ham Mockus.

“Nor on this gale, either,” rasped Halstead, sharply.

“Den yo’ don’ know,” retorted the steward, with an air of conviction. “Yo’s all right, Marse Tom, but yo’ ain’t raised on dis west coast like Ah wuz.”

“Get below,” counseled Joe Dawson. “You’ll drown up here, Ham.”

For, by now, the decks were awash, and there was a threat that, at any moment, the great combers would be rolling fairly across the bulwarks. Dawson drove the black man below, forcing him to close the motor room hatch.

Five minutes later, however, the hatch opened again, and Oliver Dixon appeared in rain coat and cap.

“I thought you might need an extra hand up here,” volunteered Dixon, speaking in a loud voice to make himself heard over the howling gale. “So I told the ladies I’d come on deck for a while.”

“No, we don’t need anyone, thank you,” Tom shouted back at him. “We’ll soon be past Tortugas, and then we’ll be in open waters for hours to come.”

Yet Dixon showed no intention of returning below. Tom Halstead did not like to order him below decks. Dixon, making his way to where he could lean against the cabin deck-house, was not likely to be at all in the way.

“There’s no accounting for tastes,” muttered Joe, under his breath. “If I were a passenger on this boat, and had a snug cabin to go to, that would be good enough for me. I wonder why I dislike this fellow so?”

By the time that they had the Tortugas light well astern Captain Tom jerked his head slightly, backward, then glanced meaningfully at his chum before looking straight ahead.

“Yes; we’re in the open,” nodded Joe. “Good!”

Yet the gale, if anything, was increasing in severity. Staunch a craft as she was, the “Restless” creaked almost as though in agony. Timbers will act that way in any heavy sea.

“Take the wheel, Joe!” shouted Skipper Tom, presently. “My arms ache.”

And well they might, as Joe knew, for, with such a sea running, the wheel acted as though it were a thing of life as it fiercely resisted every turn.

As Dawson stepped into place, bracing himself, and with both strong young hands resting on the spokes, Tom Halstead, holding lightly to one of the life lines, started to step backward to the deck-house. Just then a great, combing wave broke over the boat, from astern, racing the full length with fearful force. Joe Dawson, hearing it come, partly turned to meet it. Halstead was caught, lurching as he let go of the life line to clutch at the deck-house. Dixon’s foot shot out, tripping the young skipper. Losing his footing and deprived of grip at the same instant, Tom Halstead rose on the billow as it swept along.

Over the port side went the great mass of water. It would have carried Skipper Tom with it, all in a flash, but Joe, dropping the wheel and diving to hit the port bulwark, threw his hands upward, clutching desperately at his friend's leg.

Then Dawson held on – how he gripped!

A moment more and the force of that invading billow was spent. Joe, panting under the strain of that fight against tons of water in motion, drew Halstead to him in safety.

But the “Restless,” with no hand at the wheel, was lurching around into the trough of the sea. The next wave might engulf her.

Sure that his friend was safe, Joe Dawson sprang to the wheel. While he was still fighting with the steering gear, Tom Halstead stood at his side. Between them, not without effort, they put the bobbing little cork of a cruiser on her course, once more, on that seething, boiling stretch of waters.

“Can you hold her, Joe?” panted Tom, huskily, in his friend's ear.

Dawson nodding, Tom stepped back to Dixon, who regarded the young captain with curiously blazing eyes.

“I think you'd better go below, sir,” shouted Halstead.

“Why – why – do you mean – ?”

“I mean nothing,” retorted Tom, dryly, “except that the deck is no place for you in this weather. We can handle the yacht better if all passengers are below.”

“But – ”

Captain Tom's eyes gleamed resolutely.

“Will you go below, sir, or shall I have to call the steward to help me put you below? I mean it, Mr. Dixon. I'm captain here!”

Gripping at the lines, Dixon sullenly made his way to the motor room hatch. Halstead swung it open, gently but firmly aiding his passenger below.

“Did he trip you?” asked Joe, when the hatch had been closed and his chum stood beside him.

“It's an awful thing to say, and I guess he didn't, but I almost thought so,” Halstead shouted back.

“He's bad, I think,” growled Joe, which was a good deal for that quiet young engineer to say. “Yet I can't see any earthly reason for his treating you like that.”

“Nor I, either,” admitted the youthful sailing master. “Oh, of course he didn't mean to. The whole thing is too absurd!”

Ten minutes later, feeling that it would be better to go below and see how the hull was standing the severe strain, Halstead called to Ham to stand by Joe on deck. Then Tom went below.

Once down there, it struck him to step through the passageway. There was a peep-hole slide in the door opening into the cabin. Halstead stood there, shifting the slide so that he could look beyond.

“If the ladies are still up,” he told himself, “I can see how they are bearing the excitement. If they look very scared, I'll go in and try to put some courage into them.”

As Halstead looked through the small peep-hole, he saw Tremaine and that gentleman's wife and ward seated at the further end of the cabin table, bending over a book that Tremaine held open. At the sideboard stood young Dixon.

“Now, what's he doing?” wondered Halstead, curiously.

With the water bottle in one hand, Oliver Dixon was pouring into it a few drops from the vial he had placed in his vest pocket in the late afternoon.

In the meantime, up on the bridge deck, Joe Dawson at first waited for the return of his chum without any feeling of curiosity. Yet, after many minutes had passed the young fleet engineer of the Motor Boat Club began to wonder what his comrade was doing below.

“Ham,” ordered Joe, at last, “go below and find Captain Halstead. See if anything has happened.”

Glad enough to get away from the deck, where the billows were pouring over and threatening to carry him overboard, the colored steward made his way, clutching at the life-lines, to the motor room door.

“Get that hatch shut!” roared Joe. “Don’t leave it open for a five-ton wave to get down in there at the motors!”

Ham shut the hatch with a bang, then ran through the passageway to the cabin door.

“‘Scuse me, ladies an’ gemmen,” begged Ham, poking his head through the doorway. “Any ob yo’ done seen Cap’n Halstead?”

“Why, no,” replied Mr. Tremaine, looking up. “He hasn’t been through this cabin – at least, not within the last hour. Isn’t he on deck?”

“No, sah. Marse Dawson, he-um up at de wheel. He gwine sent me heah to look fo’ de cap’n.”

“You were forward, a while ago, Dixon,” spoke Mr. Tremaine. “Did you see Halstead?”

“Not even a glimpse of him,” replied that young man.

“Is the captain lost?” demanded Mrs. Tremaine, a tremor in her tone.

“I’s spec he must be,” declared Ham, solemnly. “He-um ain’ forrard, an’ he-um ain’ on de bridge. He-um ain’ here, neider.”

“Don’t alarm the ladies, Ham,” spoke Mr. Tremaine, sharply. “If Captain Halstead came below, then of course he didn’t go overboard. Look forward. If you don’t find the captain promptly, come back for me, and I’ll help you.”

Ham departed, going back through the passageway. Then, emitting a frenzied yell, shaking in every limb, Ham half lurched, half tottered back into the cabin. His appearance of utter fright was such as to cause the ladies to rise, holding to the table for support while the boat rocked and dipped.

As for Ham, he fell against the sideboard, holding on there, his eyes rolling wildly, until little more than the scared whites of them could be seen.

“What do you mean, you black idiot?” roared Mr. Tremaine, darting at the steward and clutching him, administering a sound shaking.

“Cap’n Halstead, he ain’ on board!” wailed Ham Mockus. Then, in a greater outburst of terror, he screamed hoarsely:

“Dat ain’ de worst! De Ghost ob Alligator Swamp *am* on board – Ah done seen it so close dat Ah s’pec it reach out an’ grab me!”

Though none of the passengers believed in ghosts, this information, at such a time, was enough to make them gasp.

“Wut Ah done tell yo’?” roared Ham, his voice deepening in the frenzy of his terror. “Ah tole yo’-all dat ole Marse Satan gwine ride on dis great wind ter-night! He sho’ is doin’ dat. Oh, Lawdy!”

Slipping from the grasp of Henry Tremaine, Ham Mockus sank groveling to the floor.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MYSTERY OF THE NIGHT

“COME, get up, you imp!” roared Mr. Tremaine, angrily, as he bent over. He seized the steward by the collar, and dragged that frightened individual to his feet.

“Ham, you simpleton, there’s no such thing as a ghost,” uttered Mr. Tremaine, sharply.

“Oh, ain’ dere, den?” demanded Ham, in high disgust at such ignorance. “Yo’ go out an’ meet it, den!”

“I will,” agreed Henry Tremaine, gripping the negro tightly by the arm. “Where did you see that ghost?”

“In de passageway, sah.”

“Then come along and show it to me.”

Mr. Tremaine spoke with such an air of disbelief and firmness that Ham Mockus began to gather some courage from such leadership.

“But, den, sah, mebbe dat ghos’ don’ show himself to white folks ob de quality kind,” suggested the steward.

“If we don’t see the ghost, then you’ve all the less reason to be afraid,” retorted Henry Tremaine. “But come along and see whether you can show the ghost to me.”

As Tremaine marched the badly scared steward out into the passageway, the ladies started to follow, out of sheer curiosity. So badly was the yacht rolling that Dixon went with them, to steady them and save them from being pitched headlong.

“It was right erlong in dis passageway, sah,” Ham offered solemn assurance. “An’ Ah done heard a feahful sound – o-o-o-oh!”

Ham suddenly gave a bound that took him out of Tremaine’s clutch. He darted to the forward end of the passageway, then halted, crouching, his eyes rolling almost as fast as the propeller shafts could revolve.

Unquestionably there *had* been a sound. Henry Tremaine, far from superstitious, thought he had heard the same sound. As he halted, rooted to the spot, he heard a distinct knocking.

“There’s something at the other side of this closet door,” spoke Tremaine, with a positive air. Reaching out, he drew out the hook by which the door was secured in place. As he pulled the door open, Tom Halstead, looking more than half dead, lurched out of the little compartment in which he had been a prisoner. Tremaine caught him and steadied him.

“What’s the matter, lad?” demanded the charter-man.

“Air,” whispered Halstead, hoarsely. “Nearly died in there!”

“Your fans – quick, ladies,” cried Mr. Tremaine.

Out where the ventilators were working, the youthful sailing master was quickly revived. Then Mr. Tremaine led him back to the cabin, and dropped him into a seat, while the ladies plied their fans vigorously.

“Oh, I guess I’m all right, now,” protested Skipper Tom, looking up with a smile.

“But how came you in that place?” questioned Mr. Tremaine.

“Why, one of our air compartments is in that place,” muttered Tom. “I stepped in there, just to make sure that all was right. While I was there the yacht lurched and the door slammed to. The hook on the outside must have been standing up. Then it dropped, fitting just into place. I made an awful racket, hoping to attract someone’s attention. Then I began to get dizzy for lack of air.”

“That was what that idiot, Ham, thought was the noise the ghost made,” grimaced Mr. Tremaine. “But, good heavens, Halstead! What a fearful accident to have happened. And, here in the cabin, we couldn’t hear your clatter on this night of all nights.”



“Joe could have brought you through, I guess, sir,” Tom smiled. “Yet I’m glad I didn’t smother in there to-night. It’s much safer, in a gale like this, to have two men on the bridge deck. I’m going back there now.”

“Are you steady enough?” asked Mrs. Tremaine.

“Oh, I’m all right,” vaunted Halstead. “I’ll go up on deck, now, and feel better for the air.”

Mr. Tremaine insisted on going forward with him as far as the motor room hatch, seeing the young skipper safe out on deck. Then the charter-man turned upon Ham, whose eyes were rolling at a more furious rate than ever, and dragged him back to the cabin.

“Ham, you infernal scared-cat!” roared Tremaine, as he stood the steward up by the sideboard. Then the charter-man explained what really had happened.

“Yet you said you saw a ghost!” finished Mr. Tremaine.

“Ah done t’ought Ah did, we’en Ah heahed dat awful noise,” chattered Ham Mockus.

Tom Halstead’s condition rapidly improved as he groped his way to Joe’s side on the bridge deck, and stood gulping in great draughts of the air that was blowing so forcefully about him. Next, he shouted, in his chum’s ear, an account of what had happened to him.

“Mighty curious,” Joe bawled back, with a shake of his head. “About one chance in a million, I should say, that the door could close and hook itself.”

“How else could it have happened!” Halstead demanded.

At that, Joe had to admit that he had no theory of his own to fit the case. While they were still talking about it, Henry Tremaine, in rain-coat and visored cap, opened the hatch, and came out onto the deck.

“Keep hold of the life-ropes, sir,” Tom yelled at him. “Look out for this wave coming!”

Such a great weight of water rolled in over the low stern, flooding swiftly forward, that the “Restless” went low in the sea ere the salty ebb went out through the running scuppers.

“The weather’s growing stiffer, isn’t it?” demanded Mr. Tremaine, after the deluge had passed.

“Not growing any better, sir, anyway.”

“I’ve just told the ladies the weather is moderating a good deal,” Tremaine went on, talking at the top of his voice, in order to make himself heard. “They haven’t lost their courage yet, and there’s no sense in their being allowed to get scared. They won’t turn in, though. Say they’d rather sit up until the boat pitches a good deal less. Do you consider that there’s any real danger to-night, Captain?”

“Yes,” admitted Tom, honestly.

“What is it?”

“Why, the ‘Restless,’ I believe, sir, is fully staunch enough to weather such a gale if she can be kept going ahead. Yet the force of the rolling water to-night is something terrific. If our propeller shafts snapped, under the strain, and we drifted in the trough of the sea, I don’t know how long we *could* keep afloat.”

“That’s the only danger?” asked Henry Tremaine, eyeing the young sailing master keenly.

“That’s the greatest danger, sir.”

“What are the others?”

“Why, sir, some of the hull timbers might be forced so that a leak would be sprung, or, of course, we might go onto some uncharted reef or rock. This is a mean bit of coast to sail on with no local pilot aboard.”

“You’re not afraid of disaster, are you, Captain Halstead?”

Tom’s smile was swift and reassuring.

“I expect, sir, to land you at some point in Oyster Bay by breakfast time,” answered the young commander.

For some moments Henry Tremaine studied the clean, clear-cut face and steady, resolute eyes of Captain Tom. Then he glanced at the sturdy, unflinching figure of Joe Dawson at the wheel.

“Halstead,” the charter-man shouted back, “since I have to be out here on rough waters, and in the big blow, I am glad I’m with you two. I couldn’t be in braver hands. When I *do* turn in to-night it will be to sleep soundly.”

How true the latter part of his prediction would come Tremaine could not guess as he groped his way down below.

This night of hurricane *was* full of dangers, even though the propeller shafts should hold and the motors continue to work under the strain. A score of times, at least, each of the young navigators had to fight the grave danger of being lifted and carried overboard on the curling crest of one of the many huge, combing waves that piled over the stern of the “Restless” and dashed thunderously along the low deck of the yacht.

Every now and then, while Tom was at the wheel, Joe went below to look over his motors. Once he found them becoming overheated. It was necessary to slow the speed down to seven miles, and at this lessened gait the boat rolled more than ever. Yet Joe had to fight it out with the motors, even though headway was lost.

When, at last, late in the night, the speed had been put up to nine miles, Joe came up on deck and Skipper Tom went briefly below. He found all his passengers still up in the cabin.

“I just came below,” smiled Captain Halstead, “to assure you all that it will be wholly safe for you to turn in, if you wish. I wouldn’t say that if I didn’t believe it. Mr. Tremaine, we’ve had to slacken the speed for quite a while, to cool our engines, so we won’t make Oyster Bay as early as I had expected.”

The ladies, who could hardly hold their eyes open, expressed a desire for sleep. Tremaine and young Dixon assisted them as far as their stateroom door, then came back.

“I believe I’ll turn in, Tremaine,” yawned Oliver Dixon, just as Tom Halstead, in his sou’wester and oilskins, departed. “Are you going to do the same?”

“After my bed-time glass of water, yes,” nodded the charter-man, groping his way to the sideboard and reaching for the water-bottle.

Ham, still wholly of the opinion that he had seen a ghost, had long ago crept into his bunk in the motor room, covering up his head. He had fallen asleep. Muffled snores from that berth greeted the young skipper as he reached the motor room.

“That reminds me,” muttered Halstead. “I forgot to lock the cabin door into the passageway.”

Retracing his steps, he used his key. This he had done regularly on the cruise so that Ham Mockus, a stranger to all on board, could not, if so tempted, prowl in the cabin after the others had retired. Then Halstead returned to deck.

Through the long night he and Joe, strong and fearless as they were, wrestled with exhaustion, for the physical strain was enormous. They met the duties of the night as only Americans, born on the sea-coast and bred to the salt water ways, can meet such problems. There were times when they believed the pounding seas must snap one of the propeller shafts. With one shaft gone, the other shaft could not long have done double duty on such a night and in such a sea.

At last Captain Tom sternly ordered Joe Dawson below for a rest. Joe came up on deck again, after a nap of an hour and a half, when it was within an hour of daylight.

“Now, you get below,” begged Dawson. “I feel as strong as a horse, Tom. And go back to your berth in the cabin, at that. You know, I have the electric signal to your berth, if I need you.”

Captain Tom stood for some time, regarding the weather and the running sea. But it seemed to him that they had reached a point where the gale was much less severe, and he was aching in every muscle and sinew.

"I'll go below for a little while," he assented. Stopping in the motor room long enough to shed oilskins and headgear, and hearing Ham still snoring luxuriously, the young sailing master trod through the passageway, unlocking the cabin door, then locking it again after him.

Captain Tom drifted off into slumber the instant his head touched the pillow in his berth. Nor did he waken. Joe, glad that his chum might rest at last, fought it out all alone on the bridge deck. Daylight was flooding the cabin from the transom overhead when Captain Halstead was roused by hearing Mrs. Tremaine's voice. Poking his head sleepily through the berth curtains, Tom beheld both ladies fully dressed, while Oliver Dixon was just coming out from the other stateroom.

"We're riding in much easier water, now, ladies," was Dixon's greeting.

"Yes; I noticed that," replied Ida Silsbee. "And I can't tell you how glad I am, either. I tried to be brave last night, but I'll admit I was worried. I'd have been more alarmed, only I realized what a splendid pair of young sailors were looking after – Why, there's Captain Halstead, drinking in enough flattery to turn his head," laughed the girl, catching sight of the young skipper.

"Is Mr. Tremaine rising?" inquired Mrs. Tremaine.

"No; sleeping like a log," replied Dixon.

"Then I'll go in and arouse him," declared Mrs. Tremaine. "I noticed from the stateroom port that we are running rather close to shore. We must be near the end of our present voyage."

Mrs. Tremaine disappeared into the starboard stateroom, but presently looked out again, bewilderment expressed on her face.

"I can't guess what's the matter with Henry," she confessed. "I've called to him, and shaken him, but he doesn't answer me. He's breathing so heavily that I – I'm alarmed."

By this time Captain Tom Halstead was presentable enough to join the others. After greeting the three, he followed Mrs. Tremaine and Dixon to the starboard stateroom.

Henry Tremaine surely was breathing heavily – almost with a rattle, in fact. But Tom, pressing past the others, succeeded in making the charter-man open his eyes.

"All right," he muttered, as though still in a daze. "I'll get up, right away."

"I'll stay and help you dress," proposed Tom, upon which the other two retreated.

"Gracious! How my head feels!" groaned Tremaine, as he got unsteadily onto his feet. Tom had to clutch at him and hold him.

"I feel as though I had been drugged," muttered Tremaine, slowly. "I – I can't half think, and my head aches, and is so dizzy –"

"You'll want to get in the air, then," proposed the young skipper, as Tremaine finished getting on the last of his clothes.

"Where – are we?"

"Why, since Mrs. Tremaine saw land from the port stateroom, I think we must at least be in the mouth of Oyster Bay, sir."

"Then, if we're going to land so soon," proposed Henry Tremaine, "I may as well get my money out. Halstead, be a good fellow. I feel so bad that I don't dare bend over. Here are my steamer trunk keys. Open the trunk and lift out the small iron box you'll find there. I have ten thousand dollars in bills there. I'll deposit the money on shore."

Halstead readily found the iron box, and placed it on the edge of the berth. Tremaine, still groaning about his head, fitted a key into the box, and raised the strong lid.

"What's this?" Tremaine almost yelled, as soon as he had the iron box opened.

Tom Halstead looked, then gasped.

"Why, there's not a dollar – not a sou – in this box!" roared Henry Tremaine. "Yesterday, there was ten thousand dollars in it!"

His excited exclamations brought the other passengers to the doorway.

"What's the matter, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Tremaine.

“Why,” exclaimed her husband, bewilderedly, “I appear to be out ten thousand dollars. The money was in this box yesterday afternoon.”

“Robbed?” gasped Mrs. Tremaine.

“So it would seem,” retorted her husband, dryly. “And – Jupiter! From the way my head feels, I’ve been drugged, too! Of course the thief had to drug me, in order to be sure that I wouldn’t wake up when he came in during the night.”

“Who has had access to this cabin while we slept?” demanded Oliver Dixon. “That negro – Ham?”

“No,” rejoined Tom Halstead, promptly. “Ham has been asleep in his berth. I locked the door into the cabin. I’m the only one who had access here.”

“Do you know anything about where the money went to, Halstead?” inquired Mr. Tremaine, looking up at him.

“I?” stammered the young sailing master of the “Restless.” “Certainly not, sir!”

“Then who does?” demanded Oliver Dixon, shooting a suspicious look at the young captain.

As Tom Halstead glanced swiftly from one face to another, something of the awful meaning of the situation flashed over him.

“See here,” he muttered, hoarsely, “I hope none of you think *I* could do anything like this! I? Rob my own passengers? Why, it would settle my fate as a yacht commander all in an instant! No, no! You surely must all see that I simply *couldn’t* have done a thing like this!”

## CHAPTER IV

### “BOAT-CALL FOR THE POLICE”

“WE’D certainly hate to believe anything of the sort,” said Oliver Dixon, slowly, in a half-purring tone, though reluctant suspicion sounded in his voice.

“I wouldn’t believe *that*— not if anyone swore himself as an eye-witness,” declared Ida Silsbee, promptly.

Skipper Tom thanked her with a swift, eloquent glance.

“It *would* seem absurd,” declared Mrs. Tremaine, though there was the briefest touch of hesitation in her tone.

“Confound my buzzing head! I don’t know what to say yet,” grumbled Henry Tremaine.

“I want this matter investigated to the very bottom,” protested Halstead, his voice shaking as no terror of the hurricane could have made it shake.

“Oh, well, the money must be somewhere on board, unless the one who took it threw it into the sea,” replied Henry Tremaine, pulling himself to his feet.

“And we won’t let anyone off this yacht, either, until the search has been made to the very end,” declared Tom Halstead. “Everybody and every nook and corner must stand search.”

“For that matter,” smiled Oliver Dixon, dully, “there must be countless little nooks and crannies on this boat where anyone knowing the craft could tuck away a small bundle of banknotes.”

“I’ll show every nook and cranny I know,” retorted Tom, turning almost fiercely on Dixon. “So will Joe Dawson. And, to prove our good faith, we’ll let the police authorities bring on board as many men as they like whose knowledge will fit them to search a craft like this.”

“Captain Halstead,” asked Ida Silsbee, stepping forward, speaking very softly, while her cheeks glowed, “will you take my hand?”

In sheer gratitude Captain Tom seized the dainty hand offered him, pressing it hard, while Oliver Dixon looked on, green-eyed with jealousy.

“Won’t you let me offer my hand, too, Captain Halstead?” asked Mrs. Tremaine.

Tom grasped hers, in turn.

“Oh, hang it all,” cried Henry Tremaine, “ten thousand dollars isn’t all the money in the world. It isn’t all the money in *my* little world, either. This will all come out all right. I want to be a decent fellow, and I would be, too, if this raging head of mine would only let me.”

“I’ll help you to a seat, dear, and bathe your head,” suggested Mrs. Tremaine, to which suggestion her husband assented.

“I must go on deck, now – simply *must*,” announced Halstead. “Yet I’d feel better about it if one of you could come up with me – just to see that I don’t dispose of the money, you know,” he added, with a wan attempt at a smile.

“I’m not needed here; I’ll go with you, Captain,” spoke up Ida Silsbee.

“No, no, no!” protested Dixon, almost hoarsely, as he pressed forward. “I will go.”

“By all means, Mr. Dixon, if you wish,” replied Ida Silsbee, flashing a curious look at him. “But I’m going with Captain Halstead, anyway, and I think you might better remain here, to be of possible service to Mrs. Tremaine.”

“But – but you’ll be in danger on deck,” objected Dixon.

“I doubt it,” retorted Ida Silsbee, with a toss of her head. “But even so, I shall be in the care of two whose bravery I have been made to respect.”

“As you will, then,” replied Dixon, in what he meant to be a coaxing voice. Yet his scowling look followed Tom Halstead.

“It was tremendously good of you –” murmured the young skipper, as the two walked through the passageway.

“What? To believe you honest?” inquired the girl. “I can’t believe that young men as cool and brave, and as unmindful of fatigue, as you two have been through the night can be anything but staunch and honest.”

“Thank you. Now, wait a moment, please, until I call out to Ham to pull his berth curtains before you pass through the motor room,” urged Halstead.

It took him a minute or so to rouse Ham Mockus and make that steward comprehend. Then the young skipper led the girl into the motor room.

“It’ll be pretty wet on deck, even yet,” hinted the lad, pausing in the motor room. “Here’s an oilskin coat. You had better slip it on.”

After helping her into the enveloping garment, Halstead assisted her to step onto the bridge deck.

“Better get a tight hold on the life-lines, Miss Silsbee,” he urged.

Joe Dawson, dog tired, was glad none the less, that his chum had been able to snatch some rest. Joe nodded brightly to both, then the sight of the young captain’s drawn face caught the young engineer’s attention.

“What on earth is the matter, Tom?” he demanded.

“During the night ten thousand dollars belonging to Mr. Tremaine has disappeared.”

“No!” exploded Joe, incredulously.

“It seems to be a fact, though,” Tom nodded, dully. “Let me have the wheel. Then stand by and I’ll tell you about it.”

The “Restless” was, as Halstead had supposed, now running in at the mouth of Oyster Bay. Though the water was rough, here at the mouth, it was noticeably smoother than it had been out on the Gulf. A good deal of spray dashed over the bow and rail from starboard. It was broad daylight, though a gray, drizzly morning. The low, sandy coast, with scant forestry, looked uninviting enough in the dull light.

As for Skipper Tom, he took only a long enough look at his surroundings to make out where he was. Then he plunged into his story, while Miss Silsbee walked down by the cabin deck-house.

“Naturally, perhaps,” Tom finished, “there’s almost a suspicion that I got the money.”

“You?” gasped Joe, thunderstruck. All his belief in his comrade was expressed in the explosive, unbelieving way that he uttered that single syllable, “you.”

“Of course I haven’t touched the money,” Tom pursued, dully, as he threw the wheel over to avoid the worst force of an onrolling big wave. “But yet you can’t blame Mr. Tremaine, if he wonders, can you?”

“I blame him for poor judgment of human nature, anyway!” vented Joe Dawson, hotly.

“Bravo, Mr. Dawson!” applauded Ida Silsbee, and Joe turned to acknowledge this championship with a graceful bow.

“When we reach anchor, presently,” Tom went on, doggedly, “I’m going to sound the whistle for the police, and I mean to have every man on board searched from top to toe. That failing, we’ll search every corner of the boat itself.”

“Oh, you and I can stand a search, all right,” declared Joe, cheerily, only to add, glumly:

“But to think that such a thing as that could happen aboard the ‘Restless’! I tell you, I –”

He had been about to declare his suspicion of Oliver Dixon, whom he had disliked almost from the first, when Joe suddenly recollected Miss Silsbee’s presence. Dixon was paying court to this girl, and Dawson wanted to play fairly.

Through Halstead’s mind, however, the same suspicion of the young man was running. For now the young skipper remembered the vial in which he had seen Dixon dissolving something.

Captain Halstead also remembered having, through the peep-hole, seen Dixon pour some of the contents of the vial into the water bottle on the sideboard.

“And Mr. Tremaine is the only one of the passengers who takes a glass of water the last thing before turning in,” flashed through the youthful skipper’s mind.

The hatchway opened to admit another arrival on deck. This time it was Dixon, who had only awaited his opportunity to gain the deck before Ida Silsbee could prevent.

“You came on deck, anyway,” was the girl’s rather chilly greeting. Joe having fallen back from the wheel, Miss Silsbee stepped up beside the youthfull skipper, as though determined to give Dixon no chance for her society. Joe Dawson was quick to follow this up by saying:

“Mr. Dixon, if you’ve the time to spare, I’d like to have you walk aft with me. I’ve one or two things I’m burning to ask.”

“Well?” demanded the young man, as they reached the after deck.

“How did Captain Halstead happen to get locked in with the air compartment last night?”

“How do I know?” muttered the young man, paling slightly.

“Don’t you?”

“Of course not.”

“Do *you* suspect any of our crew of taking Mr. Tremaine’s money?” persisted Joe.

“Why, that would be a fearful thing to say.”

“Don’t you care to answer me?”

“I don’t care to discuss the matter at all.”

“Very good, sir,” returned Dawson, curtly. “That is all.”

Turning on his heel, he left Dixon, the latter feeling queerly uncomfortable, for, all the time they were talking together, Joe had kept his own eyes turned keenly on Dixon’s.

Miss Silsbee kept so close to Tom that Dixon, when he finally came forward once more, soon made an excuse to go below.

“Have you ever seen the town of Tres Arbores?” queried Halstead, something like three-quarters of an hour later.

“Never,” replied Ida Silsbee.

“Unless my chart lies, that’s Tres Arbores off the starboard bow,” Halstead continued.

“Is that where Mr. Tremaine wants you to dock?”

“It’s the present end of the voyage. We can’t dock, though, as there is no dock there. We’ll have to anchor and row ashore to the little landing stage.”

Joe, five minutes later, routed Ham up from below. That young colored man came up rubbing his eyes, but he looked mightily pleased when he caught sight of the nearby shore.

“Ah reckon ole Satan didn’ ride dat gale all de way,” he grinned. “We’s done reach poht all right.”

Joe, with the sounding lead, kept track of the depths here. Tom ran the “Restless” in to within a quarter of a mile of the landing stage, then shut off speed, drifting under decreasing headway for some distance ere he gave the word for Joe and Ham to heave the anchor.

Then, all at once, the whistle shrilled out, in a succession of long blasts.

“What’s that for?” asked Miss Silsbee, curiously, when the din had stopped.

“Boat-call for the police,” replied Tom Halstead, reddening not a little.

## CHAPTER V

### TOM HAS SOME OF HIS OWN WAY

“OH, what a pity!” cried the girl, in a voice of genuine distress. “I’m almost certain Mr. Tremaine won’t like that.”

“It is a matter with which Mr. Tremaine has very little to do,” replied the youthful skipper of the “Restless.” “A robbery has been committed on the boat I command, and it’s my duty, as well as my own desire, to have the police come aboard.”

On shore, in the sleepy-looking little town, nearly a dozen people of varying ages were visible from the boat. All of these had turned waterward when the whistle sounded so long and shrilly.

“Likely as not the police force has taken a small boy with him and gone fishing somewhere,” observed Halstead, dryly, as he reached once more to sound the whistle.

The Tremaines and Dixon had come up on deck through the after cabin hatch, and now stood looking curiously ashore.

As the second series of long whistles woke the echoes of this little Florida town, a negro was seen to amble down to the shore, step into a boat and push off. He rowed until within hailing distance, when he called:

“W’ut you-uns gwinter want – provisions or gas-oil?”

“We’ve been sounding the police call,” Tom shouted back. “Send a policeman on board.”

“Good Lawd!” ejaculated the black man at the oars. But he put about, beached his boat and vanished up the street. Presently he came back, followed by a drowsy-looking white man, not in uniform. After he had gotten his passenger aboard, the negro rowed more lustily than he had previously done, and soon ranged up alongside the “Restless.”

“Ladies and gentlemen,” sang out the white man, “this amiable black Ananias tells me you want a police officer.”

“I do,” replied Halstead. “I am captain of this yacht – ”

“You?” returned the Tres Arbores officer, staring hard.

“I am captain of this yacht,” Tom nodded, “and there has been a disappearance of money on board. I shall be much obliged, as will most of the others, if you’ll come on board and search all the men. Afterwards, if necessary, the boat.”

“I reckon, I’ll have to understand this,” responded the lone policeman, as the negro in the small boat held out an oar which Ham seized, then drew the rowboat in close. As the officer stepped up onto the deck of the “Restless,” he threw back his coat, displaying a police star beneath.

“I am the one who lost the money,” explained Henry Tremaine, stepping forward and introducing himself. “I don’t want to subject anyone, especially this young captain and engineer, to any search. I’d sooner lose the money than bring upon any innocent person such a humiliation.”

“It won’t be any humiliation to me to be searched, when I know I didn’t take the money,” rejoined Tom Halstead, hotly. “Officer, I want the search made, and I’ll submit to it first.”

“But I object,” broke in Mr. Tremaine. “I don’t want anybody searched.”

“I reckon p’raps you-all had better explain this to me,” requested the policeman, who gave his name as Randolph.

Henry Tremaine told the story quickly.

“Why, sir,” replied Officer Randolph, “if you, Mr. Tremaine, refuse to make any complaint, I don’t see that I can do a thing.”



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