

Chapman Allen

Tom Fairfield at Sea: or, The Wreck of the Silver Star



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Chapman A.

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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	9
CHAPTER III	12
CHAPTER IV	15
CHAPTER V	18
CHAPTER VI	22
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	24

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CHAPTER I STARTLING NEWS

“Where to now, Jack?”

“Oh, I just thought I’d run into town and see what’s going on, Tom. Want to come along?”

“I’d like to – but this Latin – ”

“Oh, bother the Latin!” and Jack Fitch, the chum and roommate of Tom Fairfield, snatched the book from the scarcely resisting grasp of his friend. “Come along. You’re up well enough. Besides, we haven’t that old tyrant Skeel to deal with now in the classics.”

“That’s so. Guess I will go. Think it’ll be safe?”

“As safe as running the guard ever is, Tommy my boy,” and Jack assumed a wise air. “Probably there’ll be some of the proctor’s scouts out, but if we can’t fool ’em, after we’ve put in nearly a year at Elmwood Hall, I wouldn’t give much for our ability.”

“Right you are, Jack! Shall we tip off some of the others? Bert Wilson would like to come along, I know.”

“All right, I’ll give him the high sign. Shall we take the human question box?”

“Who, Georgie Abbot? Might as well. He isn’t as bad as he used to be, though he’s bad enough. Four will be just about right. Got anything special on, the reason you want to go to town?”

“No. But there’s a good musical comedy there, I hear.”

“How’s the weather? Is it raining yet?”

“Clear as a bell,” reported Jack, as he poked his head out of the window of their room. “Now I’ll take a look to see if the coast is clear, and get Bert and George while you put your collar on,” for Tom, to be at more ease while he was studying, had adopted a sort of negligee costume.

Gliding out into the hall, Jack knocked cautiously at the door of the adjoining room, giving a certain signal.

“Well?” whispered a voice at the keyhole.

“Come on into town, Bert,” whispered Jack in return, for caution was necessary, since it was past the hour for the Freshmen to go about as they pleased, to each other’s rooms, and long past the time when they might leave their dormitory without permission.

“What’s up?” asked Bert, as he opened his door a crack.

“Tom Fairfield and I are going to take in a show. I’ll get George, and we’ll have some fun. Cut down through the basement when you’re ready, and we’ll meet just outside the boiler room. Our studious janitor won’t give us away.”

“No, old Demy Miller will be so busy over his Latin or Greek, trying to be the king pin among studious janitors, that he won’t even see us. Go get ‘Why.’ I’ll be on hand in a minute.”

Jack glided to a room on the other side of his own and his chum’s, and repeated the tapping signal.

“Well?” queried George Abbot, otherwise ‘Why.’

“Come on to town?”

“What for? Who’s going? What are we going to do? Is it safe?”

“Say, if you fire any more questions at me,” whispered Jack hoarsely, “I know one lad who *won’t* be going, and that’s you, Why! Now hush up and come along. Tom, Bert and I are going to cut in.”

“All right, I’ll be with you directly.”

Jack glided back into his own apartment, and only just in time to escape the keen eyes of a patrolling monitor. But he did get inside safely, and breathlessly.

“What’s up?” asked Tom.

“Denton-is-out-there. But I-guess he won’t stay-long.”

Cautious observations through the keyhole proclaimed this for a fact a little later, and soon Tom and Jack were tiptoeing down to the basement. There they met George and Bert, and the four were soon on their way to town, cutting across the campus in such a direction as to conceal their movements.

It was rather a cool evening toward the close of March, and there had been a drizzling rain all day. Now it had cleared, coming off cold, and Jack, realizing this had felt a restlessness that could not be satisfied unless he was doing something – something forbidden, by all preference.

Tom, Jack, and a number of their intimate friends were approaching the close of their Freshman year at Elmwood Hall. They had gone through the sports of the fall – football and the like, the Christmas vacation had come and gone, and now the Easter holiday was approaching.

When that was over the spring term would open – the closing term at the school – and Tom would soon be in line as a Sophomore. But much was to happen before he could count himself a second-year student.

“Think anyone will catch us?” asked George Abbot, who never could seem to stop asking questions.

“What if they do, you old interrogation point?” inquired Tom.

“Nothing, only I don’t want to be expelled just when the Freshman year is so nearly over.”

“Don’t worry. Just trust to me,” spoke Jack. “I’m running this outfit, and we’re not going to be caught.”

“There’s someone now – just ahead of us!” suddenly exclaimed Bert, drawing back. The others instinctively paused.

“No danger!” called Tom, who was a little in advance of his chums. “It’s our friend Bennington.”

“Hello, Tom Fairfield!” greeted a voice out of the darkness. “Whither away?”

“Into town on a lark. Want to come along?”

“Thanks, no. Remember I’m a grave and reverend Senior, and not a giddy Freshman like yourself. I have a reputation to maintain, and I can’t afford to take any chances with my graduation in prospect. I’d like to though. I’ll see that you get in safely, however, in case there’s any danger.”

“Thanks,” called our hero, Tom, as he and his chums passed on, while Bruce Bennington, a Senior whom Tom had aided in a peculiar way during the former term, headed toward Elmwood Hall.

“He’s a great chap,” commented Bert.

“He sure is,” agreed Jack. “And he’s a heap sight different than he was before Tom found the forged note that Skeel held over him.”

“I’m glad I was able to help him,” said Tom. “Come on, now, fellows, sprint for it. I think I hear a car coming.”

They broke into a run, and a little later had boarded an electric vehicle that ran near the preparatory school, and into the town of Elmwood proper.

“Look who’s here,” spoke Jack to Tom in a low voice, as they took their seats, and he nodded toward the far corner of the car.

“Who?” asked Tom, and then he added: “Oh, Sam Heller.”

“And Nick Johnson is with him,” went on Jack.

“Well, I guess they won’t make any trouble for us,” said Tom, for the two lads had been, and still were, his enemies.

“Unless they squeal on us,” suggested Bert Wilson.

“They’re just as much in the fire as we are,” protested Jack.

“They may have gotten permission to go to town,” came from George Abbot.

“Not much!” asserted Tom. “They cut for it the same as we did, and they won’t say anything.”

Sam Heller and his crony glanced over at our friends, but said nothing, and the car continued on its way. Soon it was in town, and Tom and his chums hurried to a theatre that the school boys patronized. They were a little late to see the start of the performance, but they did not mind that.

“Say, this is great!” exclaimed Bert as one “turn” after another was gone through with behind the footlights.

“Here comes a sleight-of-hand performer,” remarked Jack. “I always like to see them, even though I know they fake every trick.”

“Say! did you see that!” exclaimed George, as the man apparently picked cards out of mere air. “How does he do it?”

“Foolish question number eight hundred and forty-seven!” exclaimed Tom in a whisper. “If you ask three more you’ve reached your limit, and out you go!”

George subsided, and with the others watched the play, which was a sort of musical comedy, with vaudeville interspersed. The performance was over all too soon, and the boys started back toward school, after a round of sodas in a drug store.

“Well, we’ll soon be going home for the Easter vacation, and then the baseball season will open, when we get back,” spoke Jack. “Say, Tom, are you going to keep your promise, and spend Easter week with me?”

“Well, I don’t know, Jack. You see dad and mother wrote to me to go down in the country, and visit an old aunt of mine whom I haven’t seen for ages. I don’t see how I can make it to go to your place, much as I’d like it.”

“Are your folks still in Australia?” asked Bert.

“No, they’ve left there,” explained Tom. “They went there to look up some property a relative left to my father. They’ve been gone a long while now – at least it seems so to me, though the time has passed quickly enough while I’ve been here at Elmwood Hall.

“But I got a letter the other day, from dad, saying that the property matter was all settled satisfactorily, and that they had started for home.”

“Are they coming by way of Europe, as they planned?” asked Jack. “Cracky! Wouldn’t I like to see Europe, though!”

“No, they’ve changed their ideas,” replied Tom. “Dad and mother both thought they’d like a long voyage, so they took a large sailing vessel in the Australian trade that is to land them at San Francisco. Maybe I’ll go meet them if I can arrange it.”

“Coming on a sailing vessel; eh?” remarked Bert. “There aren’t many deep sea sailing ships any more.”

“No, and that’s one reason why dad wrote that he was taking the trip this way. He always has been fond of sailing and he thought he might not get another chance. So he and mother are on board the *Kangaroo*, somewhere out on the vasty deep at this moment – and I wish I was with them!”

Tom’s voice was a trifle husky, for he was a bit homesick for his parents, in spite of the good times he had had at Elmwood Hall.

Jack Fitch was looking over an evening paper he had purchased from a newsboy on coming out of the theatre.

“Anything interesting?” asked Bert.

“Not much. I was just glancing at the sporting page. I guess we’ll – ”

Jack suddenly paused, and stared intently at a certain item on the printed sheet. Then he asked in a curious voice:

“What did you say was the name of the ship your people were sailing in, Tom?”

“The *Kangaroo*. Why?”

“Oh, er – nothing. I – say – New York is going to have a crackerjack baseball team this spring, if their manager gets all the players he’s after!” and Jack tried suddenly to change the subject.

Tom Fairfield reached over and took the paper from his chum’s hand. Jack tried to hold it back.

“Why did you ask that question – about the name of the ship my father and mother are in?” asked our hero, and there was a catch in his voice, and his face was white. “Why did you? You saw something! Show it to me!” he demanded.

“No, it – it wasn’t anything!” protested Jack. “Just a rumor. You shouldn’t bother about it. Those things are never true – at least it’s not confirmed – and – Oh I say Tom, it isn’t really anything!”

“Let me see it!” cried Tom hoarsely, amid a silence in the car as it sped along. “You’re trying to hold something back from me, Jack. Is the *Kangaroo* wrecked?”

“No, nothing like that!” he answered eagerly. “There, if you’ve got to see it!” and he pointed to a cable dispatch in the paper.

With staring eyes Tom read:

“Sydney, N. S. W., March 25. – The steamer *Bristol*, which reached this port to-day reports passing at sea, a week ago, in lat. S. 21:14:38, long. 179:47:16, wreckage from some large sailing vessel. Part of a lifeboat picked up bore the letters ‘ngaroo.’ It is surmised that it belonged to the large sailing ship *Kangaroo* which left this port for San Francisco last week with a mixed cargo, and several passengers. Captain Ward, of the *Bristol*, reports encountering heavy weather before sighting the wreckage. He cruised about in the vicinity for half a day, but saw no signs of life, and no trace of the vessel. The underwriters have posted the *Kangaroo*.”

Tom read this once, and then over again. Then he stared at the paper, his face white and his hands trembling.

“Maybe it isn’t true,” suggested Jack gently. “And, even if there was a wreck, maybe your folks were saved. Maybe they changed their minds at the last minute and didn’t sail. I wouldn’t worry if I were you.”

“I – I can’t help it,” whispered Tom. “Dad and mother are – missing! This is bad news – bad news!”

Jack put his arm around his chum.

CHAPTER II

TOM TO THE RESCUE

While the car is speeding back to Elmwood Hall, bearing Tom and his chums, and while our hero is endeavoring to bear up under the strain of the unexpected and bad news that came to him, I will take the opportunity to tell you something more about him and his friends.

As related in the first book of this series, entitled “Tom Fairfield’s Schooldays,” the reason why he went to Elmwood Hall was because his father and mother had to go to Sydney, Australia, to settle some business affairs about a valuable property inheritance. They did not want to take Tom with them, and so break up his schooling, so they picked out Elmwood Hall for him to attend.

The same day that Tom received the news about going to boarding school and heard that his parents were to start on a long trip, he met Bruce Bennington, who had motored out to where Tom lived, in Briartown. Bruce borrowed Tom’s boat for a row, and Tom was at once struck with the air of trouble that brooded over the student – for Bruce let it be known that he was a Senior at Elmwood Hall.

A little later, Tom started for the place of learning. Almost at the outset he made an enemy of Sam Heller and his crony Nick Johnson. But our hero also made friends, his chief one being Jack Fitch, with whom he roomed in Opus Manor, the dormitory of the Freshmen.

Doctor Pliny Meredith was head master of Elmwood Hall, and among the teachers was Dr. Livingston Hammond, a stout, jolly gentleman, sometimes called the “Live Wire.” Doctor Meredith was known as “Merry,” because, as Jack Fitch said, “he was so solemn,” though not at all grim or forbidding.

There was also a certain Professor Burton Skeel, who was counted one of the most unpleasant of instructors. It was he who had made trouble for Bruce Bennington, in the matter of a forged promissory note, which threatened to ruin the career of the Senior.

But Tom was able to help Bruce in an unexpected way, and get possession of the note. The duplicity of Mr. Skeel was exposed, and he left Elmwood Hall. Not before, however, he had been the cause of considerable trouble.

His treatment of the students was so harsh that Tom proposed that they go on “strike” against him, and refuse to enter his class room. They did, Tom leading the revolt.

Our hero also led the escape from the school, when the whole Latin division of the Freshman class was made prisoners. The boys intended to desert to town, and stay there until Mr. Skeel was removed, but they lost their way in a storm, and had to come back.

Tom, however, had prepared an effigy of the unpopular instructor, and in the midst of a blinding snowstorm this effigy was burned on the flag pole, Mr. Skeel trying in vain to stop the student’s fun.

Thus the strike was broken, and Tom and his chums won, a new Latin instructor being engaged, and Doctor Meredith, though somewhat startled by the curious revolt in his school, managed to get material from it for a paper which he read before a very learned society.

But it was not all unpleasantness and strikes during Tom’s time at the school. He had spreads, he took part in a big football game, and made a sensational run, and he was champion of his class in the annual skating race, though Sam Heller tried to trip him.

Mr. and Mrs. Brokaw Fairfield, Tom’s parents, had remained in Australia ever since September, when they went there, to settle up the matter of the property that had been left to them. Tom had spent the between-term vacations with Jack Fitch, but the Easter one, his parents wrote him, they wished him to spend with an aged aunt.

“And – and, maybe that’s the last letter I’ll ever get from them,” thought our hero gloomily.

He was, as I have said, on his way back to the Hall from the theatrical performance, when Jack Fitch had unexpectedly come upon the item of bad news.

“Say, maybe this is nothing but a newspaper yarn,” suggested Bert Wilson, for want of something better to say, after a period of tense silence.

“I wish I could think so,” answered Tom gloomily. “But this paper is a reliable one, and that cablegram came by the Associated Press. That organization doesn’t send out false news very often.”

“But this may be just one of those occasions,” put in George. He was not asking questions now. He, as well as the others, wanted to do all they could for Tom, who was a general favorite in school.

“Well, of course, I’m going to hope so,” said our hero. “But that isn’t going to stop me from doing things.”

“What is your plan?” asked Jack.

“I don’t just know. I want to find out about the truth of this dispatch, if I can. I’m going to telegraph, or cablegraph – or – or, do something.”

“If we can do anything to help you, let us know,” suggested Bert.

“That’s right,” added George.

“My father has a lot to do with telegraph and cable companies,” said Jack. “He has a brokerage office in New York. Maybe he could get some information for you, by wire.”

“Perhaps he can,” agreed Tom. “I’ll ask him in the morning. Oh, I wish it was morning now!”

It was rather a dejected group of students who quietly made their way back into Elmwood Hall that night. Tom’s grief was like a pall over all of them, and they would not have greatly minded if they had been caught out after hours by some prowling monitor, or a late-staying professor.

But it was all too easy. They managed to get into the basement unobserved, and Demy, the friendly and studious janitor, let the boys into their corridor, whence they made their way to their rooms.

“By Jove, Tom, I wish I hadn’t bought that paper,” spoke Jack, as the two chums were getting ready for bed.

“Nonsense! It wasn’t your fault, Jack; I’d have known it sooner or later, and I’m glad to have it sooner. I can get busy quicker.”

“But even if the wreckage was found,” went on Tom’s chum, “that doesn’t say that the *Kangaroo* is lost. She may have been in a bad storm, and some of her lifeboats may have been carried away. Why even if badly damaged she could manage to keep afloat for a long time. A wooden ship isn’t like a steel one, you know.”

“I suppose not. I’ll hope for the best.”

“And I’ll wire to dad for you the first thing in the morning,” promised Jack.

Tom did not pass a very good night, sleeping only a little, and that restlessly, and he was up early. So was Jack, and at the suggestion of the latter they both obtained permission to go into town, and to absent themselves from lectures that day.

“Of course, my dear lads, of course!” exclaimed Doctor Meredith genially, when the case had been explained to him. “Do whatever you think necessary. And I will help you all I can. I sincerely trust that you will find the report unfounded, or, at least, that it is not as bad as it seems.”

“Say, he’s all right, if he is a head master; isn’t he?” asked Jack, as he and his chum were on their way to town, after an early breakfast ahead of their class.

“He sure is. Skeel was the only thorn here, and he’s gone; thank goodness!”

“I wonder where?”

“I don’t know. I heard he’d gone out west somewhere, changed his name, and was trying to get a berth in a new school.”

The two lads made their way to a telegraph office, and, explaining matters to the agent, he kindly offered to rush the messages for them. Jack sent one to his father, requesting an answer as soon as possible.

“Now we’ll have to wait a bit,” suggested Jack. “Come on for a walk around town.”

They were back at the office in a comparatively short time, however, and waited there while the instruments nervously clicked off their messages of cheer or sadness.

“Here comes one for you,” the operator suddenly said, and Tom stared at the affairs of brass and rubber, vainly wishing that he could understand the Morse code. Finally the agent handed over a moist slip.

“Sorry I have no good news for your chum,” Mr. Fitch wired his son. “Have communicated with Sydney agency and they confirm report. *Kangaroo* may not be lost, but she is missing. Can I do anything else?”

For a moment there was silence between Jack and Tom, and then the former said:

“Well, it isn’t as bad as it might be. Only missing. She may be afloat, and may limp into port. It will be hard waiting, though, for you, Tom.”

“But I’m not going to wait!” cried our hero.

“What?” asked Jack in surprise.

“I say I’m not going to wait for news. That’s the worst thing in the world – waiting.”

“But what are you going to do?”

“I’m going to the rescue!” exclaimed Tom. “I’m going to quit school, go to San Francisco, catch the first steamer I can for Australia, and hunt up dad and my mother.”

“Great!” cried Jack. “By Jove, I wish I could go with you! When are you going to start?”

“To-day, if I can get packed up. I’m off for Australia!”

CHAPTER III

A MYSTERIOUS PASSENGER

Tom's sudden resolve came rather as a shock to his chum, Jack, and the latter, after his first expression of approval, began to wonder if the plan would prove practical.

"But how are you going to do it, Tom?" he asked. "Have you money enough to charter a steamer?"

"No, not exactly, though I guess I could raise it if I had to, for, since he got this Australian property, dad will have quite a fortune. But that won't be necessary."

"How else are you going to rescue them?"

"Well, I don't exactly know," admitted Tom frankly. "I just can't wait quietly around here, doing nothing. I'm going to start for Australia, anyhow, and maybe some plan will come to me on the way."

"But it seems to me," insisted Jack, practically, "that you ought to have some definite plan."

"Well, I have, part of one," went on Tom. "I'm going to Sydney, unless I find them drifting around before I get there. I'll pick out some steamer that will go as near as possible to the latitude and longitude mentioned in the dispatch, as being where the wreckage was picked up. Maybe I can induce the captain to cruise around there for a while, even if I have to pay for lost time."

"Anyhow, if I don't locate them before, I'll go on to Sydney, and there I'll hire some sort of a vessel, and set out in search of my folks."

"That sounds reasonable," admitted Jack. "I only wish I could go with you. But I'm afraid my folks wouldn't let me."

"I wish you could go, too," spoke Tom. "But I guess it's out of the question. Besides, you've got your school career to think of. Leaving now, just before the spring term, might put you back, and you'd be a Freshman for two years."

"I shouldn't mind that. Still, I won't think of going. But if I can do anything for you, don't hesitate to let me know."

"I won't," promised Tom, and then, when a telegram had been sent to Mr. Fitch, telling him of Tom's resolution, the two boys returned to school. But it was not to resume study, for there was much to be done.

Tom at once told his plans to Doctor Meredith, and the head master agreed that Tom could scarcely do otherwise than go. He made arrangements to excuse him from his classes, and Jack began to help his chum to pack.

Word soon got around the Hall of Tom's trouble and the fact that he was to leave at once was talked of on all sides. His room became a Mecca for fond friends, from every class in Elmwood Hall.

"By Jove, Tommy!" exclaimed Reddy Burke, one of the best athletes in the school. "It's a crying shame to have you leave now, and the baseball season soon to start."

"Well, I've just got to go," insisted our hero.

"Oh, sure. Well, we'll have a little celebration in your honor before you leave. Sure any lad that could get up a strike against Mr. Skeel deserves to have a gold medal. And I say, Tommy," went on Reddy, "bring me back a pet snake, or a rabbit or something from Australia; will you?"

"I'll try," promised Tom, and he laughed a little – the first time since he had received the bad news, for Reddy was a jolly soul.

Tom found it impossible to leave that day, and that night, in spite of rules and regulations to the contrary, there was a spread in the room of Tom and Jack, and in the apartment of Bert Wilson, a communicating door being opened for the occasion.

Though the sadness of Tom's leaving was felt there could not be all gloom and sadness where so many congenial spirits were gathered together. Tom was toasted again and again, and the best of wishes were expressed in his behalf. He made a brief address, and said he hoped he'd meet them all again soon.

"For He's a Jolly Good Fellow!" some one started, and it was loudly sung. And the odd part of it was that no one came to break up the little gathering.

True a monitor did hear the unusual and forbidden noise in the rooms, but, being both wise and sympathetic, he said nothing, and no report reached the proctor. Demosthenes Miller, the studious janitor, was a guest at the farewell supper, and made a speech in what he said was Latin, but – well, he is such a good chap, and was such a friend to the students, that I'm not going to say anything unpleasant about him.

And so, after all, in spite of Tom's sad heart, he could not help feeling a little better as he was a witness to the love of his classmates.

"Well, it's good-bye, old man!" exclaimed Jack a bit solemnly the next morning, as the time for parting came. Several others, deeming their farewell of the night before not enough, also came in to shake hands.

"I'll see you again – some time," faltered Tom.

He went to bid good-bye to Doctor Meredith, and his own particular professors, and then hurried on to the station, with Jack Fitch as his only companion.

They parted with a handshake, and with moist eyes, and lumps in their throats.

"Good – good luck!" stammered Jack.

"Thanks," murmured Tom, and then his train pulled out, and Tom had started on his long journey.

A week later found him in San Francisco, the trip across the continent having been without special incident. He had stopped in New York, to see Jack's father, and Mr. Fitch had given him some good advice, and letters to his agent in Sydney.

"And now to hunt for a ship that will take me where I want to go," mused Tom, as he left his baggage at a hotel and started for the waterfront.

Tom was well supplied with money, and had drafts and letters of credit for a larger amount. His father had left funds in his name in their local bank on leaving for Australia, and also instructions with his business partner to supply Tom with as much cash as was necessary in case of emergency.

The news of the possible loss of the *Kangaroo* was held by Mr. Fairfield's partner to be an emergency, and Tom had drawn on the reserve account.

Following the advice of Mr. Fitch, Tom sought out a certain San Francisco steamship agency and told of his needs.

"Hum," mused the manager when Tom had given the longitude and latitude where the wreckage had been sighted. "That's in the vicinity of the Eastern Group of the Friendly Islands, as near as I can make out," and he consulted a chart. "We don't have many vessels hitting just at that particular spot in the ocean. Still – hum – let me see."

He looked over a sailing list, made some notes, looked again at the chart and announced:

"Well, I guess the *Silver Star* would about hit what you want. She's not a very large steamer, but she's comparatively new, and a good safe boat. Captain's nice man, too. She doesn't carry many passengers, but her berths are not all filled, and I guess they can make room for you. If you want to stand the expense I can arrange to have the captain cruise about in the vicinity of those islands for a day or so."

"I'll stand the expense!" cried Tom eagerly. "We may sight something!"

"All right. Then I'll draw up the papers. The *Silver Star* sails in six days from now."

Those six days Tom spent in San Francisco, seeing the sights of the place, and fretting and worrying that time did not pass faster.

Tom made the acquaintance of Captain Amos Steerit, the master of the *Silver Star*, and at once took a liking to him. Our hero went on board several times, when the steamer was loading at her wharf, and made friends with some of the crew.

At last sailing day came, and the bustle and confusion that had been going on for some time seemed redoubled. But there was a certain order about the proceedings, and at last everything had been done.

“I wonder if that fellow is ever coming?” murmured the captain, as he stood on the bridge, waiting to give the word to cast off.

“Who?” asked Tom, as he stood beside the skipper, for being a sort of privileged character, our hero was allowed certain liberties.

“Oh, a passenger who is going to Honolulu, and who engaged a berth by wire. He said he couldn’t come on board until the last minute, but it’s past that now. Ah, maybe this is he coming now.”

Down the wharf came a rather stout man, followed by a stevedore carrying a steamer trunk. There was a certain familiar air about the approaching figure, and Tom found himself wondering where he had seen the man before. The glimpse of the face he had, however, was not enlightening, and our hero soon turned his attention elsewhere, for the getting of the ship under way was somewhat of a novelty to him.

“Well, you finally got here, I see,” half growled the captain from the bridge, as the belated passenger came on board.

“Yes, I – that is I – well, I came as soon as I could,” said the man, pantingly.

Tom wheeled at the sound of the voice, but he had no chance for a close inspection of the man’s face. For, no sooner had our hero shown his curiosity, than the passenger turned, and fairly ran toward the berth deck, at the same time calling:

“See you later, captain! I have forgotten something.”

“Well, it’s too late now, if it’s got anything to do with going ashore!” cried the commander. “Haul in that gang plank there!” and he swung the engine room telegraph lever over to half speed ahead. The *Silver Star* began slowly to leave her dock, while Tom found himself wondering who the mysterious passenger could be.

“But it doesn’t concern me,” he mused. “I’ve got enough other troubles.”

If Tom had only known, though, the belated passenger did concern him, and vitally, too.

CHAPTER IV

A PUZZLED CAPTAIN

Amid a confusing sound of tooting whistles, the clanging of bells, hoarse commands shouted back and forth, the *Silver Star* made her way through the shipping of the harbor, and pointed her nose toward the mysterious Pacific – the ocean that held so many strange lands and islands, – the ocean on whose broad bosom perhaps, Tom's father and mother were drifting helplessly about, in a wreck. Or mayhap they lay beneath the waves.

But Tom did not dare dwell on that terrible possibility and, for the time being, he resolutely put all thoughts of never seeing his parents again, out of his mind.

"I'm just going to find them!" he cried bravely, though he knew he had a hard task ahead of him.

But just now the busy scenes that were taking place, as the steamer started off on her voyage, held his attention, and for a moment he even forgot the mysterious passenger who had gone to his cabin in such a hurry.

"Well, Tom, my boy!" exclaimed Captain Steerit, as he looked at our hero, "we've got good clean weather to start off with, and, if I'm any judge, it will hold for some time."

"It isn't so rough on the Pacific as it is on the Atlantic; is it?" asked Tom. "At least I've read so, and the name –"

"Don't get that idea into your head," laughed the commander. "The Pacific is peaceful in name only. Of course I don't mean to say that it isn't calm a good bit of the time, at certain seasons of the year, just as the Atlantic is. But when it wants to kick up a fuss it can make a bigger one than that ocean you've got back east there."

"Yes, when we get a storm out here, we certainly get a bad one. But I'm not looking for trouble. We're going to point our nose into the nicest part of the ocean, to my thinking. You'll enjoy it, even if you have a hard trick at the wheel ahead of you. There'll be lots to see, especially if you go all the way to Australia with me."

"Well, I expect to go there," answered Tom, "for I haven't much hope of sighting anything near the place where the wreckage was seen."

"Nor I, either," spoke the captain, "though I didn't want to discourage you. The drift of the current, and the wind, wouldn't let anything stay in one place long."

"Then I'll just have to go on to Sydney and start my search from there," ventured our hero earnestly.

"Well, yes, I suppose so, though of course there's a bare possibility that we may sight something on our way out."

"What do you mean?" asked Tom quickly, a new hope springing up in his heart.

"I mean that the *Kangaroo*, from all accounts, was coming over about the same path in the ocean as we'll take going out. She was to stop at Honolulu I see by the papers, just as we are. Of course she was wrecked – or at least we'll suppose so – before she got there. And if we sail over the same course we may sight her – or what's left of her."

"Mind though!" the captain went on quickly, as he saw the look of despair on Tom's face, "I'm not admitting that she was wrecked. Just as you have told me, I believe that she may have been disabled in a storm, and part of her gear, her masts and her lifeboats, may have been swept overboard. That has often happened. In fact it's happened to me when I had charge of a big sailing ship."

"But it's possible to rig up a jury mast, make some sort of sail, and stagger on, when by all accounts one ought to be at the bottom of the sea. So you see it doesn't do to give up hope."

“And I’ll not!” cried Tom. “Oh, I do hope we can pick up the *Kangaroo*. I’m going to keep a lookout every day.”

“Yes, you can do that,” agreed the captain. “I’ll let you take a good glass, and I’ll also instruct the lookout to keep his eyes peeled day and night. But it’s too soon to begin yet, so you might as well take it as easy as you can. Say, did you notice the passenger who came aboard in such a hurry?”

“Yes,” answered Tom, for the ship was now well on her way and there was less of interest to hold our hero’s attention.

“Did you think he acted in any way funny?”

“Well, yes, I did,” admitted Tom. “He didn’t seem to know exactly what to do.”

“And another thing,” went on the captain. “It seemed to me that the sight of you scared him.”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed Tom, though he was aware that the captain was eyeing him sharply. “Why should he be disturbed on account of me?”

“I can’t say, I’m sure. Did you ever see him before?”

“Not that I know of,” replied Tom. “Though when I heard his voice it sounded like some one I’d heard before, though I couldn’t be quite sure, and just now I couldn’t even place the voice.”

“Well, perhaps I’m mistaken,” admitted the captain. “No matter. Have you got your stateroom in shape?”

“Yes, but I guess I can put a few finishing touches on it. I’ve been so interested in watching our start that I haven’t been below much.”

“Well, I’m going down to get something to eat,” went on the commander with a smile, “and if you’d like to come along I can offer you a meal,” for he had arranged that Tom should sit at his table.

“I will!” exclaimed the lad. “This sea air makes me hungry.”

“I thought it would,” responded the commander, with a laugh. “Keep her on this course, Mr. Merton,” he said to the first mate, who had come up on the bridge, at a signal, to take charge of the wheel.

“I wonder if I ought to knock on his door and ask him if he’s hungry?” spoke the captain, half aloud, as he and Tom went below.

“Who?” inquired our hero, though the question was not exactly addressed to him.

“That passenger I was speaking of – Mr. Pierson Trendell his name is – the one who came on board late. He was recommended to my care by a friend of one of the owners of this steamer, though I don’t know him personally. He’s going to Honolulu for his health I understand. Guess I’ll have to be decent to him, though I didn’t take much of a notion to him, and I don’t like anyone who can’t arrive on time.

“But I’ll take a chance, and ask him to come with us and have a little lunch. As you say, this sea air does give one an appetite.”

They were on the berth deck now – the deck where Tom’s stateroom, an outside one, was located. The captain turned into a passageway, and paused before the door of a room not far from our hero’s.

“This is his berth,” he remarked as he rapped on the panel.

“Who’s there?” came a quick demand.

“Captain Steerit,” was the reply. “Would you like to come to lunch with me, Mr. Trendell?”

“In a private room?” was the query.

“No, but at my private table.”

“Any one else?”

“Humph! You’re mighty particular,” murmured the commander. “Why, yes,” he made answer in a louder tone. “My friend, Tom Fairfield, is coming with us. Shall I have a place laid for you?”

“No, thank you – er – that is, I’m not feeling very well. The motion of the boat, you know – in fact I haven’t quite got my sea legs on. Some other time, Captain.”

“Oh, very well, just as you like,” and with rather a frown of annoyance the captain passed on.

“Very strange,” he murmured, half to himself, but loud enough for Tom to hear. “They said he was an experienced sailor, and had been in all sorts of rough blows. And yet he’s seasick when the water is as calm as a millpond. I can’t understand it,” and the puzzled captain shook his head.

“Can a person get seasick more than once?” asked our hero, rather anxious on his own account.

“Oh, yes, there are lots of such cases. And again there are some who never suffer from it. It’s all a matter of nerves, I think. It never bothers me, and yet I had a first mate once, who was always very sick the first two days out, and then he’d be as steady on his legs as a sea lawyer. But every new voyage it would be the same way. But come in to lunch now,” and he led the way to a private table, where Tom was soon putting away a substantial meal that was more like dinner than luncheon.

There was only a slight motion to the *Silver Star* now, hardly any more than to Tom’s motorboat when he had been out in a blow, and he was beginning to feel that he would not suffer from seasickness.

Captain Steerit left him to his own devices after the meal, for the commander had many things to look after. Tom went to his own stateroom, which he put in shipshape. Then he went on deck again.

The Golden Gate was fading from sight now, and the routine of a vessel out at sea was well under way. Tom saw several passengers, but the man he had begun to classify as the “mysterious one,” did not appear.

“If he’s going to be seasick now’s his chance,” mused Tom, for there was now quite a decided roll to the ship.

But it did not bother our hero, who was feeling in excellent health. Of course he could not help worrying about his father and mother, but he looked on the brightest side, and made up his mind that if there was any possibility of rescuing them he would do so.

It was coming on toward evening, and Tom was wondering how he would sleep on his first night at sea. As he passed near the bridge, on the upper deck, he saw Captain Steerit and the first mate in conversation.

“I can’t understand it,” the commander was saying. “He comes on board as a man who is traveling for his health, and who wants to get all the sea air he can. Yet when I give him an outside stateroom, near young Fairfield’s, he goes and changes it before I know it. He won’t come out to lunch, and now you tell me he asks to have all his meals served in his cabin.”

“That’s it,” said the mate. “He sent the steward to ask me, and I thought it best to speak to you.”

“Quite right. Well, I suppose we’ll have to let him have his way, but I can’t understand it. He wants fresh air, but he won’t come out and get it,” and the captain filled his lungs with the salty, ocean breeze. “Very puzzling! Very puzzling!”

CHAPTER V

THE WATERSPOUT

“That mysterious man – they’re speaking of him,” said Tom softly, as he turned away. “I’m glad, after all, that he did not keep the stateroom near mine. There may be no harm in him, and he may be all right, but he certainly acts queer, and I don’t want to have anything to do with him.”

Tom retired that night, rocked by the gentle motion of the ship. He knew, now, that he was not going to be seasick in ordinary weather, though he realized that he still had to undergo the test of a storm.

“I wonder what it’s like?” he mused. “There very likely will be big waves and a powerful wind. But I hope we don’t have one. I want to make a quick voyage, and a storm would delay us.”

Then he thought of the storm that had wrecked the *Kangaroo* and this brought the possible fate of his father and mother to his mind. He took out, and read over again, for perhaps the fiftieth time, the clipping from the newspaper that had given him his first hint of the bad news. There were one or two other clippings from other papers, telling the same story, and a later one, confirming the first dispatch.

“Poor dad and mother!” sighed our hero. “I’m coming to you as fast as I can. Oh! if only there was some way of reaching you by wireless! But, even if the wireless was on their vessel at first,” he mused, “it wouldn’t work after the wreck. I’ll just have to wait.”

He stretched out, but it was some time before he got to sleep, and his thoughts were rather sad as they dwelt on the possible fate of his parents.

“Oh, pshaw!” he finally exclaimed, half aloud. “This won’t do! I’ve got to be more cheerful.” Then he changed his current of thought to the good times he had had at Elmwood Hall, and soon he felt himself dozing off, as he recalled the merry midnight suppers he and his chums had partaken of.

“And when this trip is over I’m going back there, and have some more good times,” he whispered.

Tom went up on the bridge after breakfast, to find Captain Steerit looking critically at the barometer.

“Anything wrong?” asked our hero.

“No, not yet. And yet it has fallen a little. I don’t just like it, but otherwise the weather is good. I don’t see any signs of a storm, so I guess I won’t worry. How did you sleep?”

“Pretty good.”

“Do you mind the motion much?”

“Hardly any.”

“That’s good. I guess we’ll make a sailor of you, after a while. Be around at noon, when we take the observation, and I’ll show you how it’s done.”

“I will,” promised Tom, and then he went around the ship, speaking to some of the sailors and officers whom he knew. He also made the acquaintance of several of the passengers. There was one gentleman, a Mr. Case, who, with his little son, aged about seven years, was making the trip to Australia, where he had a business, near Melbourne. He had come to New York with his wife to settle up some affairs, and the child’s mother had died there.

“And now I’m going back,” the father confided to Tom. “I am going to try and forget my sorrow – forget it in hard work.”

Tom felt a deep sympathy for him, and for the child, and the latter lost no time in making friends with our hero. They had many a romp on deck, and Tom made up a number of games and amusements for the lad.

The promise of uncertain weather given by the barometer was not kept, and the ship slipped along through the water in a succession of calm, sunny days. Tom had almost forgotten about the strange man now.

Mr. Trendell was not seen on deck, keeping carefully to his stateroom, and Tom heard that he was suffering much from seasickness. He felt sorry for the man, as only a person can who does not suffer from the qualms of the boat's motion.

"Jackie was ill on our trip over," said Mr. Case, the father of Tom's little playmate, "but I'm glad to see that he's well going back. I guess it's the attention you give him that takes his mind off it. But don't let him be a bother to you."

"Oh, I like him!" exclaimed Tom, who was fond of children. "He's a good sailor; eh, Jackie?"

"Sure," answered the little chap. "Come on, now, let's play ring-toss some more," and Tom complied.

The passengers, of whom there were only about a dozen, had soon made friends with each other – that is all but the "mysterious one," as Tom still thought of him, – and they all did what they could to make the time pass pleasantly.

Tom's sad quest became known to all and he received much sympathy, while Mr. Case told stories of shipwrecks in which persons, believed for a long time to be lost, had finally been found. This comforted our hero very much.

"How anyone can remain below on such a night as this I can't see!" once exclaimed a Mrs. Pendleton, who was taking the trip with her daughter. "Such a lovely moon, and such a calm sea! And yet, I understand, Mr. Fairfield," she said to Tom, "that there is a gentleman on board who hasn't yet been out of his stateroom – who takes all his meals there."

"Yes," replied Tom. Nearly all the passengers were out on deck that evening, enjoying the calm, peaceful night, and looking at the phosphorescent sea, silvered by the moon. "I don't know why he stays below unless it is that he is very ill."

"Perhaps no one has invited him out," suggested Mrs. Pendleton, who was quite impulsive. "Let's go, you and I, Mr. Fairfield."

"Oh, no, mamma!" exclaimed her daughter. "Perhaps he has good reasons for being quiet. It is none of our affair."

"But we ought to make it our affair to see that he enjoys the best part of the trip," insisted her mother. "I'm going to get him out."

"No, you must not!" her daughter insisted. "Oh, mamma, you do the strangest things!" and she laughed. "I have to be watching her all the while," she added with a laugh, to the others. "She has no regard for conventionality."

"There's no sense in it," insisted the elder lady. "But I'll not go if you don't want me to. There, a big fish just jumped up!" she exclaimed, as there came a splash in the water.

They all crowded to the rail to look, Jackie Case, who had not yet gone to bed, being the most eager.

"Where's the big fish?" he cried. There was quite a swell on, and the boat rolled from side to side at times with a dangerous pitch, but not annoying to those used to it. It was just on one of the occasions when the ship slid along, tilting her rail, with the passengers up against it toward the waves, that little Jackie tried to climb up to the highest point of vantage.

"I don't see the fish!" he cried, and he leaned over still farther. In another instant he had overbalanced, and, with a cry of terror, he had slipped across the rail.

"There he goes!" cried Mrs. Pendleton. "Jackie has fallen!"

His father came rushing up with a cry of anguish. But Tom had been near enough to make a grab for the little chap, and he hung fast. Now a voice rang out:

"Man overboard!"

"Man overboard!" repeated the lookout. "Lower the boat!"

There was a clanging of bells in the engine room, as the propeller was reversed.

“Hold tight, Jackie!” cried Tom, as he tried to get the little fellow back over the rail. “I’ll help you. Hold tight!”

But the little boy was too frightened to aid himself and he let go. But now our hero had a better hold and he clung on desperately, until others came to his assistance, and then both were helped to a place of safety. Tom had gotten pretty wet, but this he did not mind.

“Oh, Jackie! Jackie, my boy!” cried Mr. Case, hugging the little form to him, and then, still clasping his son, the man held out his hand to Tom.

“I – I can’t thank you now,” he said brokenly, “but I may be able to – sometime.”

The accident broke up the pleasant little party on deck, and Tom hurried below to change to dry garments. As he passed the stateroom of the mysterious man our hero saw that one of the stewards was speaking through the partly-opened door to Mr. Trendell.

“It’s all over now,” the steward was saying. “A little boy almost fell overboard, and Tom Fairfield went after him.”

“Was either recovered? Was Tom Fairfield drowned?” asked the voice of the man in the stateroom.

“No, sir. They were both saved. Thank you!” This last obviously in response to a tip handed out. The door was closed and Tom passed on.

“Queer,” he mused, as he reached his stateroom, “very queer that he should want to know if I was drowned.”

Neither our hero nor little Jackie was any the worse off the next morning for the accident. Tom’s heroism was the talk of the ship.

“I think the big fish, whatever it was, that caused all the trouble, must have brought the change of weather,” said Mrs. Pendleton to Tom that afternoon. “It isn’t as nice as it was.”

“Oh, we can’t always have good weather,” spoke Tom. The day was one of lowering clouds, and as our hero, a little later, went up to the pilot house, he saw Captain Steerit again studying the barometer.

“Anything wrong?” inquired Tom.

“She’s falling again,” was the answer. “I don’t like it. I think we’re in for a storm.”

The wind began to rise about an hour after that, and the clouds appeared lower than ever, some of them seeming fairly to touch the distant waves. The rigging hummed and twanged like the strings of a harp. Sailors were hurrying about, making everything snug below and aloft.

“Ha! What’s that?” suddenly asked the captain, as the lookout in the bows cried out a warning. The man repeated what he had said, but Tom could not catch it.

“Look, look, Tom my lad, if you want to see a strange sight!” said the commander, taking hold of Tom’s arm, and directing his gaze off to the left. “Did you ever see the like before?”

Our hero looked and saw, rising from the ocean, a dark mass of water, twisted into the shape of a funnel, with the upper end whipping about and twisting like a snake. At the same moment, from a black and threatening cloud above, a similar funnel-shaped mass seemed to drop, only the point of it was toward the point in the cone of water.

Suddenly the two met, forming a black pillar, and there was a loud roaring sound.

“What is it?” cried Tom, but, even as he asked he knew what the captain would say.

“Waterspout! A waterspout, and a big one, too!”

The attention of everyone on board had been called to the strange and threatening phenomenon by this time, and they all watched it anxiously.

“A waterspout,” murmured Tom. “I’ve often heard about them, but I never saw one before. What will it do?”

“Break when the whirlwind that caused it dies out,” was the answer, “but – ” The captain suddenly ceased speaking. Then he cried:

“It’s headed right this way! The waterspout is coming toward us!”

CHAPTER VI

SEEN IN THE GLASS

Instantly there was a commotion all through the *Silver Star*. The captain's alarming words had frightened the sailors as well as the passengers. As for Tom, he stood in fascinated wonder on the bridge, watching the approaching waterspout.

And that it was approaching, and rapidly too, could not be doubted. It was sweeping onward with a whirling motion, straight for the ship, and there was a low, moaning and humming sound to the wind that had created it, which did not add to the pleasure of the spectacle.

"Is there any danger?" asked Tom.

"There is if it hits us," was the captain's grim answer. "But I'm not going to let that happen, if I can help it. I'll go ahead full speed and try to get out of the way. It's only in a sailing ship, where it's hard to change the course against a perverse wind, that there is really any great danger, though I have heard of steamers being hit."

"Oh, Captain Steerit!" cried a woman passenger from the deck below. "Will we be wrecked?"

"Not if I can help it," was his answer. "There is comparatively no danger. I'll pass the spout to one side."

"Then I'm going to try for a picture!" exclaimed Tom. "Will it last long enough for me to get my camera?" he asked, pausing on his way down.

"It will if you hurry," answered the commander. "And I may be able to give you a chance to get a rare view."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I'm going to try to break that spout with a cannon shot. I've read of such things being done, but I never tried it. I've got a gun on board, for saluting some of the owners at the islands where I trade, and I'll have my gunner try a shot at it."

"Great!" cried Tom. "If I can get a view of the spout, as the cannon ball hits it, that will be a rare one."

He hurried below for his camera, while the captain gave his order about the cannon, and the crew ran the gun out on the bow.

When Tom came up from his stateroom he saw that the spout was much nearer. But the course of the *Silver Star* had been so changed that she was in comparatively no danger of being struck, unless the waterspout suddenly shifted.

"All ready now with that gun!" cried the captain.

"All ready! Aye, aye, sir!" came the answer.

Tom was taking several views of the waterspout as it was whirling along, and some of the other passengers, grown bolder as they saw that there was no danger, were doing the same.

"Ready to snap her, Tom?" asked the commander.

"Yes, sir," answered our hero.

"Then here she goes! Fire!"

There was a puff of white smoke, a dull flame, and a report that seemed to jar the whole ship. Tom had a glimpse of something black bounding over the waves. It was the round shot from the old-fashioned cannon, and had no great speed, as cannon balls go.

"Get ready, Tom!" called the captain.

Tom focused his camera on the whirling waterspout, and waited the right moment to push the shutter lever.

It came.

Surely aimed had been the cannon, for the ball cut right through the center of the twin-joined funnel-shaped masses of water. The one that had risen from the sea slumped down into the waves again, carrying with it the mass of water that had been drawn from the heavily charged cloud, and Tom got a wonderful picture of the destruction of the spout.

“There, I guess that won’t trouble us any more, even if it had been headed directly for us!” called the captain, while he signalled for full speed ahead, since he had slowed down the vessel to enable Tom to take the snapshot.

“It was great!” exclaimed our hero, as he went up on the bridge to thank his friend the commander. “Do waterspouts do much damage?”

“They do when they’re big enough, and when they hit a small vessel. Even a big steamer might suffer from having thousands of tons of water dropped on her decks at once. I don’t want to encounter a waterspout. They are quite rare I believe. At least I’ve seen very few, and the farther off they are the better I like ’em. Did you get a good picture?”

“I hope so. But I can’t develop it here.”

“Oh, yes you can. I used to be quite an amateur photographer myself, and I had a dark room fitted up on board. I guess there are all the chemicals and other things you need, including the ruby light. Go ahead and develop your film, and see what sort of a view you have.”

“That’s great!” exclaimed Tom. “If they’re any good I’ll make some for you.”

“All right. I’ll be glad to have ’em.”

Tom went below, noting as he did so that the sea was still foaming and agitated where the waterspout had subsided into the waves. The passengers were crowded about the gun that had been fired, congratulating the gunner, and talking about the waterspout and its sudden destruction.

To get to the dark room, fitted up in a small stateroom, Tom had to go past the room of the “mysterious” passenger.

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