

Chapter 14

NIAGARA

The hours passed, and the situation did not change. The steersman returned on deck, and the captain, descending, watched the movement of the engines. Even when our speed increased, these engines continued working without noise, and with remarkable smoothness. There was never one of those inevitable breaks, with which in most motors the pistons sometimes miss a stroke. I concluded that the "Terror," in each of its transformations must be worked by rotary engines. But I could not assure myself of this.

For the rest, our direction did not change. Always we headed toward the northeast end of the lake, and hence toward Buffalo.

Why, I wondered, did the captain persist in following this route? He could not intend to stop at Buffalo, in the midst of a crowd of boats and shipping of every kind. If he meant to leave the lake by water, there was only the Niagara River to follow; and its Falls would be impassable, even to such a machine as this. The only escape was by the Detroit River, and the "Terror" was constantly leaving that farther behind.

Then another idea occurred to me. Perhaps the captain was only

waiting for night to return to the shore of the lake. There, the boat, changed to an automobile, would quickly cross the neighboring States. If I did not succeed in making my escape, during this passage across the land, all hope of regaining my liberty would be gone.

True, I might learn where this Master of the World hid himself. I might learn what no one had yet been able to discover, assuming always that he did not dispose of me at one time or another--and what I expected his "disposal" would be, is easily comprehended.

I knew the northeast end of Lake Erie well, having often visited that section of New York State which extends westward from Albany to Buffalo. Three years before, a police mission had led me to explore carefully the shores of the Niagara River, both above and below the cataract and its Suspension Bridge. I had visited the two principal islands between Buffalo and the little city of Niagara Falls, I had explored Navy Island and also Goat Island, which separates the American falls from those of the Canadian side.

Thus if an opportunity for flight presented itself, I should not find myself in an unknown district. But would this chance offer? And at heart, did I desire it, or would I seize upon it? What secrets still remained in this affair in which good fortune or was it evil fortune--had so closely entangled me!

On the other hand, I saw no real reason to suppose that there was any

chance of my reaching the shores of the Niagara River. The "Terror" would surely not venture into this trap which had no exit. Probably she would not even go to the extremity of the lake.

Such were the thoughts that spun through my excited brain, while my eyes remained fixed upon the empty horizon.

And always one persistent question remained insolvable. Why had the captain written to me personally that threatening letter? Why had he spied upon me in Washington? What bond attached him to the Great Eyrie? There might indeed be subterranean canals which gave him passage to Lake Kirdall, but could he pierce the impenetrable fortress of the Eyrie? No! That was beyond him!

Toward four o'clock in the afternoon, reckoning by the speed of the "Terror" and her direction, I knew we must be approaching Buffalo; and indeed, its outlines began to show some fifteen miles ahead. During our passage, a few boats had been seen, but we had passed them at a long distance, a distance which our captain could easily keep as great as he pleased. Moreover, the "Terror" lay so low upon the water, that at even a mile away it would have been difficult to discover her.

Now, however, the hills encircling the end of Lake Erie, came within vision, beyond Buffalo, forming the sort of funnel by which Lake Erie pours its waters into the channel of the Niagara river. Some dunes

rose on the right, groups of trees stood out here and there. In the distance, several freight steamers and fishing smacks appeared. The sky became spotted with trails of smoke, which were swept along by a light eastern breeze.

What was our captain thinking of in still heading toward the port of Buffalo! Did not prudence forbid him to venture further? At each moment, I expected that he would give a sweep of the helm and turn away toward the western shore of the lake. Or else, I thought, he would prepare to plunge beneath the surface. But this persistence in holding our bow toward Buffalo was impossible to understand!

At length the helmsman, whose eyes were watching the northeastern shore, made a sign to his companion. The latter, leaving the bow, went to the central hatchway, and descended into the engine room. Almost immediately the captain came on deck, and joining the helmsman, spoke with him in a low voice.

The latter, extending his hand toward Buffalo, pointed out two black spots, which showed five or six miles distant on the starboard side. The captain studied them attentively. Then shrugging his shoulders, he seated himself at the stern without altering the course of the "Terror."

A quarter of an hour later, I could see plainly that there were two smoke clouds at the point they had studied so carefully. Little by

little the black spots beneath these became more defined. They were two long, low steamers, which, coming from the port of Buffalo, were approaching rapidly.

Suddenly it struck me that these were the two torpedo destroyers of which Mr. Ward had spoken, and which I had been told to summon in case of need.

These destroyers were of the newest type, the swiftest boats yet constructed in the country. Driven by powerful engines of the latest make, they had covered almost thirty miles an hour. It is true, the "Terror" commanded an even greater speed, and always, if she were surrounded so that flight was impossible, she could submerge herself out of reach of all pursuit. In truth, the destroyers would have had to be submarines to attack the "Terror" with any chance of success. And I know not, if even in that case, the contest would have been equal.

Meanwhile, it seemed to me evident that the commanders of the two ships had been warned, perhaps by Mr. Wells who, returning swiftly to Toledo, might have telegraphed to them the news of our defeat. It appeared, moreover, that they had seen the "Terror," for they were headed at full speed toward her. Yet our captain, seemingly giving them no thought whatever, continued his course toward the Niagara River.

What would the torpedo destroyers do? Presumably, they would maneuver so as to seek to shut the "Terror" within the narrowing end of the lake where the Niagara offered her no passage.

Our captain now took the helm. One of the men was at the bow, the other in the engine room. Would the order be given for me to go down into the cabin?

It was not, to my extreme satisfaction. To speak frankly, no one paid any attention to me. It was as if I had not been on board. I watched, therefore, not without mixed emotions, the approach of the destroyers. Less than two miles distant now they separated in such a way as to hold the "Terror" between their fires.

As to the Master of the World, his manner indicated only the most profound disdain. He seemed sure that these destroyers were powerless against him. With a touch to his machinery he could distance them, no matter what their speed! With a few turns of her engine, the "Terror" would dart beyond their cannon shots! Or, in the depths of the lake, what projectiles could find the submarine?

Five minutes later, scarcely a mile separated us from the two powerful fighters which pursued us. Our captain permitted them to approach still closer. Then he pressed upon a handle. The "Terror," doubling the action of her propellers, leaped across the surface of the lake. She played with the destroyers! Instead of turning in

flight, she continued her forward course. Who knew if she would not even have the audacity to pass between her two enemies, to coax them after her, until the hour when, as night closed in, they would be forced to abandon the useless pursuit!

The city of Buffalo was now in plain view on the border of the lake. I saw its huge buildings, its church towers, its grain elevators. Only four or five miles ahead, Niagara river opened to the northward.

Under these new conditions which way should I turn? When we passed in front of the destroyers, or perhaps between them, should I not throw myself into the waters I was a good swimmer, and such a chance might never occur again. The captain could not stop to recapture me. By diving could I not easily escape, even from a bullet? I should surely be seen by one or other of the pursuers. Perhaps, even, their commanders had been warned of my presence on board the "Terror." Would not a boat be sent to rescue me?

Evidently my chance of success would be even greater, if the "Terror" entered the narrow waters of Niagara River. At Navy Island I would be able to set foot on territory that I knew well. But to suppose that our captain would rush into this river where he might be swept over the great cataract! That seemed impossible! I resolved to await the destroyers' closest approach and at the last moment I would decide.

Yet my resolution to escape was but half-hearted. I could not resign

myself thus to lose all chance of following up this mystery. My instincts as a police official revolted. I had but to reach out my hand in order to seize this man who had been outlawed! Should I let him escape me! No! I would not save myself! Yet, on the other hand, what fate awaited me, and where would I be carried by the "Terror," if I remained on board?

It was a quarter past six. The destroyers, quivering and trembling under the strain of their speed, gained on us perceptibly. They were now directly astern, leaving between them a distance of twelve or fifteen cable lengths. The "Terror," without increasing her speed, saw one of them approach on the port side, the other to starboard.

I did not leave my place. The man at the bow was close by me. Immovable at the helm, his eyes burning beneath his contracted brows, the captain waited. He meant, perhaps, to finish the chase by one last maneuver.

Suddenly, a puff of smoke rose from the destroyer on our left. A projectile, brushing the surface of the water, passed in front of the "Terror," and sped beyond the destroyer on our right.

I glanced around anxiously. Standing by my side, the lookout seemed to await a sign from the captain. As for him, he did not even turn his head; and I shall never forget the expression of disdain imprinted on his visage.

At this moment, I was pushed suddenly toward the hatchway of my cabin, which was fastened above me. At the same instant the other hatchways were closed; the deck became watertight. I heard a single throb of the machinery, and the plunge was made, the submarine disappeared beneath the waters of the lake.

Cannon shot still boomed above us. Their heavy echo reached my ear; then everything was peace. Only a faint light penetrated through the porthole into my cabin. The submarine, without the least rolling or pitching, sped silently through the deeps.

I had seen with what rapidity, and also with what ease the transformation of the "Terror" had been made. No less easy and rapid, perhaps, would be her change to an automobile.

And now what would this Master of the World do? Presumably he would change his course, unless, indeed, he preferred to speed to land, and there continue his route along the roads. It still seemed more probable, however, that he would turn back toward the west, and after distancing the destroyers, regain the Detroit River. Our submersion would probably only last long enough to escape out of cannon range, or until night forbade pursuit.

Fate, however, had decreed a different ending to this exciting chase. Scarce ten minutes had passed when there seemed some confusion on

board. I heard rapid words exchanged in the engine room. The steadily moving machinery became noisy and irregular. At once I suspected that some accident compelled the submarine to reascend.

I was not mistaken. In a moment, the semi-obscurity of my cabin was pierced by sunshine. The "Terror" had risen above water. I heard steps on the deck, and the hatchways were re-opened, including mine. I sprang up the ladder.

The captain had resumed his place at the helm, while the two men were busy below. I looked to see if the destroyers were still in view.

Yes! Only a quarter of a mile away! The "Terror" had already been seen, and the powerful vessels which enforced the mandates of our government were swinging into position to give chase. Once more the "Terror" sped in the direction of Niagara River.

I must confess, I could make nothing of this maneuver. Plunging into a cul-de-sac, no longer able to seek the depths because of the accident, the "Terror" might, indeed, temporarily distance her pursuers; but she must find her path barred by them when she attempted to return. Did she intend to land, and if so, could she hope to outrun the telegrams which would warn every police agency of her approach?

We were now not half a mile ahead. The destroyers pursued us at top speed, though being now directly behind, they were in poor position

for using their guns. Our captain seemed content to keep this distance; though it would have been easy for him to increase it, and then at nightfall, to dodge back behind the enemy.

Already Buffalo had disappeared on our right, and a little after seven o'clock the opening of the Niagara River appeared ahead. If he entered there, knowing that he could not return, our captain must have lost his mind! And in truth was he not insane, this man who proclaimed himself, who believed himself, Master of the World?

I watched him there, calm, impassive not even turning his head to note the progress of the destroyers and I wondered at him.

This end of the lake was absolutely deserted. Freight steamers bound for the towns on the banks of the upper Niagara are not numerous, as its navigation is dangerous. Not one was in sight. Not even a fishing-boat crossed the path of the "Terror." Even the two destroyers would soon be obliged to pause in their pursuit, if we continued our mad rush through these dangerous waters.

I have said that the Niagara River flows between New York and Canada. Its width, of about three quarters of a mile, narrows as it approaches the falls. Its length, from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario, is about fifteen leagues. It flows in a northerly direction, until it empties the waters of Lake Superior, Michigan, Huron, and Erie into Ontario, the last lake of this mighty chain. The celebrated falls,

which occur in the midst of this great river have a height of over a hundred and fifty feet. They are called sometimes the Horse-shoe Falls, because they curve inward like the iron shoe. The Indians have given them the name of "Thunder of Waters," and in truth a mighty thunder roars from them without cessation, and with a tumult which is heard for several miles away.

Between Lake Erie, and the little city of Niagara Falls, two islands divide the current of the river, Navy Island, a league above the cataract, and Goat Island, which separates the American and the Canadian Falls. Indeed, on the lower point of this latter isle stood once that "Terrapin Tower" so daringly built in the midst of the plunging waters on the very edge of the abyss. It has been destroyed; for the constant wearing away of the stone beneath the cataract makes the ledge move with the ages slowly up the river, and the tower has been drawn into the gulf.

The town of Fort Erie stands on the Canadian shore at the entrance of the river. Two other towns are set along the banks above the falls, Schlosser on the right bank, and Chippewa on the left, located on either side of Navy Island. It is at this point that the current, bound within a narrower channel, begins to move at tremendous speed, to become two miles further on, the celebrated cataract.

The "Terror" had already passed Fort Erie. The sun in the west touched the edge of the Canadian horizon, and the moon, faintly seen,

rose above the mists of the south. Darkness would not envelop us for another hour.

The destroyers, with huge clouds of smoke streaming from their funnels, followed us a mile behind. They sped between banks green with shade trees and dotted with cottages which lay among lovely gardens.

Obviously the "Terror" could no longer turn back. The destroyers shut her in completely. It is true their commanders did not know, as I did, that an accident to her machinery had forced her to the surface, and that it was impossible for her to escape them by another plunge. Nevertheless, they continued to follow, and would assuredly maintain their pursuit to the very last.

I marveled at the intrepidity of their chase through these dangerous waters. I marveled still more at the conduct of our captain. Within a half hour now, his course would be barred by the cataract. No matter how perfect his machine, it could not escape the power of the great falls. If the current once mastered our engines, we should inevitably disappear in the gulf nearly two hundred feet deep which the waters have dug at the base of the falls! Perhaps, however, our captain had still power to turn to one of the shores and flee by the automobile routes.

In the midst of this excitement, what action should I take

personally? Should I attempt to gain the shores of Navy Island, if we indeed advanced that far? If I did not seize this chance, never after what I had learned of his secrets, never would the Master of the World restore me to liberty.

I suspected, however, that my flight was no longer possible. If I was not confined within my cabin, I no longer remained unwatched. While the captain retained his place at the helm, his assistant by my side never removed his eyes from me. At the first movement, I should be seized and locked within my room. For the present, my fate was evidently bound up with that of the "Terror."

The distance which separated us from the two destroyers was now growing rapidly less. Soon they were but a few cable-lengths away. Could the motor of the "Terror," since the accident, no longer hold its speeds? Yet the captain showed not the least anxiety, and made no effort to reach land!

We could hear the hissing of the steam which escaped from the valves of the destroyers, to mingle with the streamers of black smoke. But we heard, even more plainly, the roar of the cataract, now less than three miles away.

The "Terror" took the left branch of the river in passing Navy Island. At this point, she was within easy reach of the shore, yet she shot ahead. Five minutes later, we could see the first trees of

Goat Island. The current became more and more irresistible. If the "Terror" did not stop, the destroyers could not much longer follow her. If it pleased our accursed captain to plunge us into the vortex of the falls, surely they did not mean to follow into the abyss!

Indeed, at this moment they signaled each other, and stopped the pursuit. They were scarce more than six hundred feet from the cataract. Then their thunders burst on the air and several cannon shot swept over the "Terror" without hitting its low-lying deck.

The sun had set, and through the twilight the moon's rays shone upon us from the south. The speed of our craft, doubled by the speed of the current, was prodigious! In another moment, we should plunge into that black hollow which forms the very center of the Canadian Falls.

With an eye of horror, I saw the shores of Goat Island flashed by, then came the Isles of the Three Sisters, drowned in the spray from the abyss.

I sprang up; I started to throw myself into the water, in the desperate hope of gaining this last refuge. One of the men seized me from behind.

Suddenly a sharp noise was heard from the mechanism which throbbed within our craft. The long gangways folded back on the sides of the machine, spread out like wings, and at the moment when the "Terror"

reached the very edge of the falls, she arose into space, escaping from the thundering cataract in the center of a lunar rainbow.