

The Submarine Boys' Trial Trip eBook

The Submarine Boys' Trial Trip

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Page 1

A BIG CLOUD ON THE SUBMARINE HORIZON

"At what time did you say that the 'Pollard' was due to be back, Mr. Farnum?"

"At two o'clock," replied the owner of the boat-building yard at the little seaport town of Dunhaven.

"It's within five minutes of that hour, now."

"So it is," nodded the owner of the yard, after briefly consulting his watch.

For half an hour, or a little longer, a middle aged man, with the world of business and large affairs imprinted on him, had been walking to and fro along the shore end of the yard. In this walk he was accompanied by his son, a handsome, dark-eyed and dark-haired young fellow of nineteen. George Melville, the father, was attired very much as any prosperous, busy man might have been, with a touch of fastidiousness added, but the son, Don, was dressed and groomed to look just what he wanted to appear to be, the born young aristocrat.

"Punctuality is one of the cardinal virtues with me, you know," continued Mr. Melville, impatiently, as he again glanced at his watch. "I had hoped to be able to see your submarine boat, the 'Pollard,' this afternoon."

"And I certainly hope you will be able to," replied Jacob Farnum, cordially. This builder, a young man in his thirties, allowed a shade of uneasiness to flit across his face.

"However, when Don is in command of the boat," continued Mr. Melville, "things will doubtless be run on a better system. That is, if we should decide to invest the money and place Don on board as captain."

"Your son?" inquired Jacob Farnum, with a quick note of astonishment in his voice.

"Certainly," continued Mr. Melville, in the easy voice of one who is sure of his ground. "If my friends and myself decide to invest the required several hundred thousand dollars in your business, the first step of the reorganization on a broader basis will be the placing of my son in command of your boat."

"Hm!" murmured Jacob Farnum.

"Don is wholly fitted for learning the work that I have cut out for him," pursued Mr. Melville. "He has frequently taken command of my steam yacht, the 'Greyhound,' and my sailing master, Captain Carson, assures me that Don is not only a splendid sailor, but born to command. So, after a little time spent in mastering details, Don will make the ideal captain for the 'Pollard'."

"I have a very capable young man in charge now," said Mr. Farnum. "Captain Jack Benson has already done a few things with the boat that have astonished Naval officers."

"How old is this fellow Benson?" inquired Mr. Melville.

"Sixteen."

"Only sixteen?" queried Mr. Melville, in a voice of amazement. "Bah! He is entirely too young to be entrusted with the hopes of such a great boat-building company as I hope to help you organize. Don, too, is quite young, but he has a great deal of capacity and has had a valuable lot of experience. As to a boy of sixteen—however, your youth, Benson, may no doubt be retained aboard as a member of the crew, if Don likes him. And now, sir, it's two minutes of two."

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With another impatient frown Mr. Melville held his watch out before Mr. Farnum's eyes. That younger man hardly saw the dial. He was looking past, out beyond the mouth of the little cove or harbor. As he did so, Mr. Farnum beheld what, at first, looked like a big ripple spreading over the placid water. Then the top of a steel conning tower shot up into sight. It was followed by the emergence of the upper hull of a strange looking cigar-shaped craft.

"Two minutes before the hour, did you say?" asked Jacob Farnum, placidly. "Well, there's the 'Pollard,' just up from the depths, and gliding in to anchorage."

Don Melville had strolled away from the pair, but now, at a call from his father, he turned to watch the oncoming craft, which was none other than the new submarine torpedo boat, the "Pollard."

The elder Melville was judge enough of boats and of boat-handling to understand that the submarine was being brought into harbor in a very clever, seamanlike manner.

"She's still running under electric power, you know," explained Mr. Farnum. "The distance is so short that Captain Benson doesn't consider it worth while to start the gasoline engine."

Now, the boat came to a stop, with a slight reversing of her propellers. At this moment the manhole cover of the conning tower was raised. Out onto the platform deck surrounding the tower Captain Jack Benson nimbly stepped. As he took the wheel in the open, the craft glided on with hardly perceptible motion to a mooring buoy a few yards distant. Out hopped another boy, in dark blue naval uniform and visored cap. This youth, Eph Somers, ran nimbly forward over the hull. At just the right instant Eph bent over, securing the forward tackle to the buoy, then straightened up, saluting the young captain, as he called:

"Single tackle all fast, sir."

Now, a third boy, in uniform similar to those worn by the other two, sprang out through the manhole. Hal Hastings, who had remained behind to shut off the electric motor, waved his cap to Mr. Farnum.

"Well done, Captain Benson and crew!" shouted Jacob Farnum, heartily, across the water.

"It won't take you long to be able to beat that performance, I take it, Don," smiled the elder Melville at his Son. Don's upper lip curled just perceptibly. Jacob Farnum frowned slightly, as he turned his face away. It would not do to offend George Melville without cause, for that gentleman was considering the raising of six or seven hundred thousand dollars of additional working capital for the making of submarine boats.

"We're coming aboard, captain," added Mr. Farnum, shouting between his hands, across the water. "Everything ship-shape for inspection?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" Captain Jack responded.

"It was a shame, really, to ask that question," laughed Mr. Farnum, turning to his companions. "Benson was all but born aboard a boat, and he's a genuine old maid for having things aboard in apple-pie order. His two friends are just like him in that respect."

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Upon being signaled two workmen of the yard came hastily down to the water's edge. They seated themselves at the oars of a large yawl, while Mr. Farnum and his guests stepped into the boat.

"Give way, and lay us alongside of the 'Pollard,'" directed the boatbuilder.

Captain Jack, Hal Hastings and Eph Somers still remained standing at ease on the platform deck of the submarine craft. They were but a few weeks older than when they appeared before the readers of the first volume in this series, "*The Submarine Boys On Duty*." Readers of that volume are familiar with the story of how Jack Benson and Hal Hastings appeared in Dunhaven; how they made the acquaintance, first of David Pollard, the submarine's inventor, and then of Jacob Farnum, the boat's builder and financial backer. Readers of the first volume also remember how Eph Somers appeared unexpectedly on the scene, and just how he coolly put himself into the submarine picture, securing his place aboard that wonderful craft. Those who read the first volume are familiar with the way in which the boys met and vanquished the savage hostility of Josh Owen and Dan Jagers; they remember the desperate battle, in the ocean's depths, with the crazy boatswain's mate. They recall the dashing, laughable prank that Captain Jack played on one of the big battleships of the Naval maneuvers fleet, and remember the pretty romance, in which the submarine boys aided greatly, through which Mr. Farnum secured beautiful Grace Desmond as his bride. Our readers who have pored over the pages of the preceding volume, in fact, will recall all the many adventures through which Jack, Hal and Eph passed with daring and credit.

All the people in the world move forward—or backward—a bit every day. And so, while, our young friends were still aboard the "Pollard," and happy, affairs were shaping that might alter the whole current of their lives, their ambitions and their hopes. Convinced that he could, by the use of sufficient energy and capital, equip a larger yard and sell the United States Government a solid, efficient fleet of submarine torpedo boats that would constitute a fearful menace on the waves—or under them—to any foreign foe, Jacob Farnum had now begun to look about for the necessary capital with which to expand what he believed to be a highly promising business.

Thus it happened that the two Melvilles now came upon the scene. The elder possessed a good deal of spare money, and could influence several business friends into investing heavily. It was George Melville's habit to acquire control, gradually, of any business in which he invested heavily. He had wonderful skill in that line of conduct, and combined much tact with it. Mr. Melville, going into a new business, and contributing capital heavily, was accustomed to securing whole control of the business before his associates quite realized what was happening.

Now, as this capitalist climbed up the side and stood on the platform deck, looking about him, he began to picture himself as selling a fleet of such boats—all of them practically his—to the Government.

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"Not much of a place, this deck, to stand on and handle a vessel through rough weather?" he inquired, looking sharply at Mr. Farnum.

"No," admitted the builder, adding with a smile: "Of course, it takes the cream of our seafaring men to travel in such craft, anyway. Such men can stand discomfort and any amount of danger, at need. Ask Captain Benson."

Young Captain Jack smiled quietly. He and his two comrades guessed that George Melville was one of the capitalists whom Farnum was trying to interest in the business.

"Let us go below," suggested Mr. Melville. "Don, use your eyes to good advantage. You may have need of all you can learn about such boats."

Don Melville inclined his head, but said nothing. Farnum led them below. Captain Jack helped the builder in explaining the general working details of the boat. Hal and Eph answered such questions as were put to them by father or son.

"It's all very interesting," said Mr. Melville, slowly, at last. "Farnum, let us go up on deck a few minutes. Don, you might remain below. I have no doubt there is still much that you want to see."

So Don remained below. The boys of the submarine's crew, feeling that Mr. Farnum would want to be alone with his guest, also remained below.

"Do you—er—like this sort of thing, Benson?" asked Don Melville.

"The submarine boat work, you mean?" asked Captain Jack, brightly. "Why, it's my life—my very life!"

The glow that came to the cheeks of the young submarine captain bore out his words fully. Jack did love this fine craft. He gloried in having the command of her, though he never made the weight of his authority felt by his two comrades, who, indeed, virtually shared in the command. Captain Benson was especially proud and grateful at the confidence shown in himself and in his mates in being allowed full charge of the "Pollard." Love the life? It wouldn't be life, for him, without the "Pollard!"

Don began to ask some further questions about the boat. His tone was slightly supercilious. It was plain to be seen that he looked upon these daring, tried and proven youngsters as being decidedly his inferiors. Yet Jack fought against a growing feeling of irritation, giving good-humored and attentive answers.

Then Don went over to the little door of a compartment in the wall. Behind this door was some of the delicate mechanism—invention of David Pollard—by means of which the compressed air supply was better regulated than on any other type of submarine craft.

“Why, this place is locked,” observed Don.

“Yes,” nodded Captain Jack.

“You have the key?”

“I—I believe so.”

“Then be good enough to unlock this little door,” ordered Don Melville.

“I hope you’ll pardon me,” said Captain Jack, quickly, yet politely. “It wouldn’t be just the thing for me to do.”

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"Why not?" Don shot at him, coldly.

"Well—because I've no orders from Mr. Farnum to that effect. Because—well, behind that little door are a few mechanisms that amount to about the most important secret about the boat."

"Then you *refuse* to unlock that little door?" demanded Don, coldly, trying to disconcert the young captain by a steady, cold look into his eyes.

"Oh, no; I don't refuse," answered young Benson, in the same cool, pleasant tone. "But the order should come from Mr. Farnum. He's right overhead. You can call up to him. If he says so, then I'll unlock it with pleasure."

"Benson," retorted Don Melville, again trying to disconcert the young captain with a stare of cold insolence, "I guess you don't understand quite who I am."

"If I don't, I shall be glad to be enlightened," laughed Jack, softly. "Who are you?"

"I'm the son of the man who expects to put a big amount of capital into this enterprise. Farnum wants my father to do it."

"Then I hope your father does," nodded Jack Benson, with a look of polite interest.

"Of course, in that case," pursued Don, "the whole business will be reorganized."

"I should imagine so," nodded Jack.

"And, as a part of that reorganization, I'm to have command of the 'Pollard,' and of any other boats that may be built here!"

Captain Jack Benson's face blanched in an instant. He did not falter, but he felt, for the moment, as though he had been stabbed to the heart. Hal Hastings gave a little, barely perceptible gasp. Eph Somers, with a snort of wrath, turned and stepped through into the motor room.

"I'm to command this boat, and the others that may be built; that's one of my father's conditions in putting up the required capital," continued Don Melville. "Of course, I shall select my own helpers and crews. If you three are really competent, and show sufficient respect for authority over you, I may be able to provide some sort of places for you aboard this boat and the new one that's being built. Now, do you understand who I am?"

"I've heard all you said," replied Captain Jack, dully. He was so dazed, so tormented, that, for the moment, he did not dare trust himself to make more of a reply.

“Don!” called the elder Melville, briskly. “We’re going on shore now. You’d better leave your further studies aboard until to-morrow.”

“Good-bye, then, lads,” said Don Melville, laying a hand on the nickeled railing of the spiral stairway leading up through the conning tower. He spoke with a trace more of cordiality as he started up the steps: “When I come aboard next I trust there will be no misunderstanding of new facts.”

Jack Benson still stood by the little cabin table, resting one hand on it. His eyes were turned toward the floor, his chest heaving. The blow had struck him like a bolt from a clear, sunny sky!

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"That cold duffer coming aboard to boss us all around like cattle?" burst from Eph Somers, as he stamped out from the engine room.

"Confound it!" growled Hal Hastings, savagely. "I don't believe the yarn. Do you?"

"I'm half afraid," replied Captain Jack, raising his eyes, "that I do."

CHAPTER II

A SUBMARINE STUNT THAT DUMFIOUND THE BEHOLDERS

"It ain't true! Can't be! I won't believe it!" declared Eph, in a rage.

"We've had such a good time aboard, and have been so proud of what we've been able to do," added Hal, chokingly.

"Mr. Farnum won't put that snob in here!" asserted Eph. "Not in charge, anyway. Why, Mr. Farnum couldn't stand the fellow any more than we could."

"Fellows," rejoined Jack, looking at the hot faces of his mates, "we mustn't be too hasty, even in talking among ourselves."

"That fellow's a snob," asserted Eph. "I'll stand by that anywhere."

"I don't know that I'd say that," replied young Benson, who had recovered his calmness. "In the first place, Don Melville has evidently had a golden spoon in his mouth from the day of his birth. He's used to having things his own way. He may be all right at bottom."

"Then that's where I hope he goes," quivered Eph. "Straight to the bottom! Under a hundred fathoms of good salt water!"

"We may like him better when we know him," ventured Jack.

"I'm betting though," put in Hal, thoughtfully, "that we're much more likely to like him less."

"He's a duffer!" snorted Eph.

"We may have to change our minds about that," smiled Jack, dully.

"Ain't he a rich man's son?" demanded Eph, blazing.

"That doesn't make him out a fool or a dullard," retorted the young captain. "Rich men's sons aren't as often fools as they're suspected of being. Some of them are mighty

clever. The number of great American fortunes that are doubled, or trebled, in the second generation, show that."

"Then you're going to side with him?" sneered Eph.

"I don't know what I'm going to do, until the time comes," Captain Jack answered, quietly. "But I do know one thing I'm going to do, at any and all times—and so are you fellows. You couldn't help it, if you tried."

"What's that?" Hal wanted to know.

"We're going to be as square with Jacob Farnum as he has always been with us. That carries with it the idea of a big lot of loyalty."

"Right!" agreed Hal.

"Of course," nodded Eph, less angrily. "Just as long as Farnum runs the business. But, if other folks get in here and get the control—"

"Of course, we can drop out of this business at any time we want to, provided it wouldn't carry with it disloyalty to the employer who's been mighty good to us," supplied Jack Benson.

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"Mr. Farnum sent the boat out, to see if you young men want to go ashore," announced a voice from above.

Within two minutes the three submarine boys were making for the shore. After reporting at the office of the yard, and finding that Mr. Farnum would not want them again that afternoon, the young cronies sauntered off up into the village. At Jack's suggestion they talked no more about the Melvilles for the present. Yet each felt as though a lump of lead lay against his heart.

Though they tried to enjoy themselves in the village, there was too great a weight of dread upon them. It began to look as though all the pleasure of their recent life must fade. Though Don Melville, if he secured command of the "Pollard," might tolerate them aboard, all three knew that they would feel the burden of his cool contempt for them as inferiors. Listlessly, at last, the three submarine boys turned back toward the yard, went aboard, cooked a supper for which they had no appetite, and then waited for turning-in time.

In the next few days there were many signs that Melville intended to find and supply the desired capital for the promotion of the yard's business. Don and his father were much about the place, though they rarely came out to the "Pollard." Business friends of Mr. Melville's also appeared. Finally there came an important looking lawyer and an expert accountant.

"I reckon it's all settled except the signing of the papers," ventured Hal Hastings.

"The toe of the boot for ours, then, or as bad," murmured Eph Somers sardonically.

During these days David Pollard, the inventor who had made this splendid type of submarine boat possible, did not appear. For one thing, he was away in secret, pondering over the invention of further appliances to be tried out on the boat now building. More than that, David Pollard, shy and with no head for affairs, entrusted all new business arrangements to Jacob Farnum, who, he felt sure, could be trusted with a friend's interests.

"It's tough to be poor," grimaced Hal Hastings. "If I had the money, I'd put it into the business for the sake of keeping my berth aboard, and having things as pleasant as we've had 'em all along."

"So would I," grunted Eph. "But what's the use of talking, when this is all the capitalist that I am?"

He took out four paper dollars, passing them ruefully between his fingers.

"Why don't you say something, Jack?" demanded Hal. "Dry of words, for once?"

"I'm thinking," responded young Benson, absently.

"Well, it's a sure thing that thinking does less harm than talking," nodded Hal.

"But when a fellow's silent he can't spit out all that's boiling inside of him," snorted Eph Somers.

"I'm getting ready to talk presently," smiled Captain Jack.

"If it's anything strong, say it now," begged Eph.

The three boys were sitting about the cabin table. Eph sat with his elbows on the table, his chin in his hands, his eyes glaring defiantly at the wall opposite. Hal, rather listless, sat low in his chair, his feet well under the table, his hands thrust deep in his pockets. Jack sat leaning slightly forward, his left hand tapping lightly against the polished surface of the table.

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"Tell you what I'm going to do," suddenly exploded Eph. "I'm going to Jake Farnum and ask him, straight, whether that snob of a duffer is going to be put in here over us, with leave to kick us out when he chooses."

"Don't you do it," advised Hal, with a shake of his head.

"Why not?"

"Our employer is absorbed, and, troubled as much as he wants to be, now," rejoined Hastings. "When there's anything he wants us to know, and he can find time, he'll tell us."

"Huh!" half assented Eph.

"Don't be forward about it," continued Hal. "Just play the waiting game and rely upon Mr. Farnum being as fair and square as he has any chance to be."

"Hum" again nodded Eph. "Well, anyway, with farm labor at a premium, I'm not going to stay aboard to black the duffer's shoes."

"Fellows, listen!" commanded Jack Benson, suddenly looking up.

Then he told them both the thought and the scheme that had been in his mind all that day. While the young captain was talking his two mates were still—Hal, because it was his nature, and Eph Somers because he was actually staggered into silence.

"That's what I've been thinking of," Jack wound up.

"Don't you do it, old fellow—don't you dare!" ordered Hal, sitting up straighter and resting an appealing hand on his chum's shoulder.

"But think of the lives that have been lost on submarine boats during the last few years," pleaded Jack Benson, seriously.

"And you want to add your life to the others," retorted Hal, with mocking irony.

"I want to save, perhaps, hundreds of lives in the future," returned Jack, spiritedly.

"Then, at least, old chum," begged Hal, "tell your scheme to Mr. Farnum, and let him hire a trained diver to make the experiment."

"You think there's a lot of danger in it, do you?" queried Captain Jack, mildly.

"I certainly do," said Hastings, with emphasis.

"Then I'll do the trick myself," contended Jack. "I'm not going to think up a trick too dangerous for myself, and then hire another man to take all the risk for me."

Hal said no more. He knew the folly of trying to persuade his chum out of a decision like the present one.

"I don't believe Farnum will let you try it," hinted Eph. "It sounds too dangerous."

"Mr. Farnum won't know what it is until it's been done," responded young Captain Benson, with a light laugh, as he rose from the table. "Fellows, I'm going on shore for a little while. Look the electric motor over, and test the compressed air apparatus. We want to be sure that everything is working right."

"Let me go ashore with you," suggested Hal, also rising.

"Not this time," laughed Jack. "You might try to say something to Mr. Farnum to queer my plan. Stay here. You and Eph make mighty sure that everything is in running order."

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Going on deck, Captain Jack signaled for a shore boat, which was quickly alongside. Landing, the young captain walked slowly up to the yard office, thinking deeply all the time.

Just as the young submarine commander entered the outer office Jacob Farnum stepped out from his private, inner office. He was smoking a cigar, and looked as though he had come out to stretch his legs.

"Hullo, Jack," he greeted the young man, pleasantly. "Say, I hope you haven't come to talk business. Say something foolish, won't you, lad? I'm just in the mood for nonsense. All forenoon I've had my head crammed to bursting with figures and business, and now I'm in the mood for something reckless. You see, Melville is in a position to command a lot of capital, and we need it to expand this business. He's in there, now, with another capitalist, a lawyer and an accountant. But I had to break away. What do you know that's reckless?"

Jacob Farnum was not playing any part of treachery, or deception, in not telling his submarine boys about the proposed shifting of command to Don Melville's shoulders. The fact was that George Melville, after that first hint, had said nothing more about the subject, but was now craftily laying the wires for securing gradual control of the shipyard's enterprises.

"Why, I am glad to find you at leisure, and willing to be amused," smiled Captain Jack, quietly. "Will it be too much like business if I ask you down to the water to watch a little demonstration that we want to make with the 'Pollard'?"

"Is it something brand-new?" laughed Mr. Farnum, resting an arm on the young captain's shoulder.

"So far as I know, it's shingly new," laughed Jack Benson.

"What is it?"

"If you don't mind, Mr. Farnum, I'd rather show it to you first."

"How long will the demonstration take?"

"It ought not to require more than fifteen or twenty minutes, sir."

"I'll take you up, then," agreed Mr. Farnum, pleasantly.

Just at that moment the inner door opened. Mr. Melville came out, followed by his lawyer, Don bringing up the rear of the file.

"I guess you'd better come along with me, gentlemen," called Mr. Farnum. "Captain Benson has just invited me to witness something new in the submarine line."

"What is it?" questioned Mr. Melville.

"I don't know," admitted Jacob Farnum.

"What is it, boy?" demanded Mr. Melville, turning upon Jack. The very tone in which the word "boy" was uttered was meant to reduce the youthful captain to confusion, but it had the opposite effect. Though it brought a quick flush to Jack's cheeks, he answered, courteously:

"It is intended, principally, as a surprise to Mr. Farnum. If I were to tell, now, it would rob him of much of the pleasure of being astonished."

To this George Melville did not deign to reply, though he compressed his lips grimly enough. Don flashed a sneering look at Jack, then observed:

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"You're pretty independent for a boy."

"Let Captain Jack alone," drawled Farnum, expelling some cigar smoke between his lips. "He generally knows what he's doing."

Though there was nothing in the builder's tone at which offense could be taken, this reply quieted both Melvilles for the time being.

"Come on. We'll all go down to the shore and see what it is," added the yard's owner.

Captain Jack hurried ahead, entered the shore boat and was rowed out alongside the "Pollard."

"It's all right, fellows," he called, as soon as he boarded. "Everything ready?"

Receiving assurance that all was ready, Captain Jack turned to wave his hand to the little group watching from the shore. Two or three minutes later the "Pollard" slipped slowly away from her moorings, going out where the little harbor was deeper. Then, the manhole being closed, the submarine began to sink. Her conning tower was soon out of sight beneath the surface.

"There's about seventy feet of water, where the boat is going down," observed Farnum, to his guests.

"What's the aim of all this mysterious work?" demanded Mr. Melville, with some irritation.

"You know as much as I do," drawled Farnum, smilingly.

"It seems to me that you allow this young boat tender a good deal of latitude, and tolerate a good deal of mystery in him," cried the capitalist, impatiently.

"I have a good deal of confidence in my young *captain*," returned Farnum, good-humoredly, though with considerable emphasis on the title. "So far I have never had any need to regret giving Captain Benson rather a free hand."

"Yet you—"

Mr. Melville stopped right there, for Jacob Farnum, his eyes turned in a steady look out over the water, suddenly emitted an incredulous whoop. Then, without explanation, the boatbuilder broke into a dead run that carried him along the shore to the northern edge of the little harbor.

Nor was Mr. Farnum's astonishment to be wondered at, for he had just caught sight of Jack Benson's head, above the water at the point where the submarine had gone

down. And now, Captain Jack, after blowing out a mouthful of water, had started to swim ashore with long, easy strokes.

Not quite catching the great significance of it all, the Melvilles and the lawyer hurried after the builder.

Captain Jack Benson, clad only in a bathing suit, stepped out of the water and stood laughing before his employer.

“Jack, how on earth did you—” began Farnum, then stopped, overpowered by another wave of amazement.

“What’s the meaning of all this?” demanded the elder Melville, pantingly, as he reached the scene.

“Mr. Melville, and gentlemen,” cried the boatbuilder, wheeling upon his guests, “do you even begin to grasp the importance of the marvel you have just witnessed? One of the great indictments found against the submarine torpedo boat is that, when one sinks and cannot be brought to the surface again, the crew must miserably perish. Very humane people shudder at the very idea of ordering men into a craft that may go to the bottom and become the hopeless grave of the crew. Yet the ‘Pollard’ lies at the bottom of this harbor, and Captain Benson has just come to the surface, laughing and uninjured.”

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"I suppose he opened the manhole cover, and rose to the surface," hazarded Mr. Melville.

"In that case, sir," smiled Captain Jack, "wouldn't you expect the 'Pollard' to be filled with water, and my companions drowned? Besides, sir, at a depth of seventy feet, the pressure of the water is such that it would be sheer impossibility to raise the manhole cover."

"Then how did you get here?" demanded the capitalist.

"Pardon me, sir," replied Jack, courteously, though firmly.

"Do you refuse to answer my question, boy?"

Again the irritating, half-contemptuous use of "boy" made Jack's cheeks flush, though he answered merely:

"I think, sir, Mr. Farnum has a right to the first information."

"Do you understand, boy, that I am about to take a large interest in this business?"

"I have heard so, sir. But I hope you won't mind my saying that this little surprise was thought out by my comrades and myself. It seems to me, therefore, that we have some rights in the disclosing of the secret."

"Humph!" broke in Don Melville. "It's all some deception—some cheap trick, anyway."

Captain Jack held up one hand to signal the shore boat, which, with two workmen in it, was hovering near. As the boat came in, the submarine boy announced:

"Now, I will show you the rest of the principle that my mates and I are demonstrating. Mr. Farnum, by the way, has just spoken of the humane side of this discovery, the making possible the rescue of a crew of a boat that can't be made to rise. Gentlemen, there's still another side to it. Under actual war conditions, with a submarine boat guarding a coast or harbor entrance, if the commander of the boat brought the conning tower above the surface, the presence of the boat would be detected on a clear day. But the head of a swimmer rising from the boat could not be observed at any very great distance. Yet the swimmer could make out the hull or masts of a hostile vessel some miles away. This new trick is likely to make submarine boats much more valuable to the countries owning them. Now, I want to try something else, and see whether I can do it."

The shore boat put in when called. In the bow was a hundred-pound anchor, with plenty of cable to pay out after it. Captain Jack entered the boat, looked over the anchor tackle, then returned to shore.

“Come to me where I stop,” he directed the men in the boat. With that, after getting his bearings fully, he swam out, counting his strokes as he went.

“It’s about here that I came up,” he called, pausing and treading water easily. “Bring the boat here.”

Clambering aboard, he directed the casting of the anchor overboard. Then, poising himself at the bow, he made a strong dive, vanishing under the water.

“What’s he going to do now?” asked Mr. Melville, curiously.

“I’d rather wait than guess,” smiled Mr. Farnum.

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For just an instant Don Melville looked, as he felt, green with envy.

Some moments passed. Then, not far from the spot where the “Pollard” had gone down, her conning tower appeared once more. That was followed by the emergence of the platform deck and upper hull above the water. In another moment the tower manhole was opened, and Jack Benson, with a wave of the hand, stepped out, his bathing suit changed for his uniform. He lifted his cap in a joyous salute to those on shore.

“By Jove, Jack, but you’re a wonder!” shouted Mr. Farnum across the water. “I’ll have Dave Pollard excited when I write him about this thing. But you have me guessing how the trick was done.”

Once more Benson signaled the small boat in close, after the anchor had been lifted. Now, the young submarine captain came in to shore.

“You come on board with me, Mr. Farnum?” invited Jack.

“Are you going to show him how you worked the trick?” demanded Mr. Melville, quickly.

“Yes, sir.”

“Then I believe we’ll all come on board.”

“I—I am sorry, sir.” Jack hesitated. “If anyone but Mr. Farnum comes aboard I shall show nothing. Later on, when Mr. Farnum and I have talked this matter over—”

“Are you going to stand for this boy’s nonsense, Farnum?” broke in the capitalist, angrily.

“I guess I shall have to,” responded the builder, with the pronounced drawl which, with him, was a sign that he was close to inward anger. “Mr. Melville, I must beg you to remember that the secret, whatever it is, belongs, so far, to Captain Benson. You may not approve, but I think he is wholly right in this instance.”

The capitalist bowed stiffly. He and his son remained on the shore as Farnum embarked with his young employe. They were soon on board the “Pollard,” which was not long in sinking. Then, after a few minutes, Jack’s head once more shot above the water. The shore boat was waiting, and again dropped the anchor close to where the boy had come up. Jack stood in the boat for a few minutes, taking in deep breaths and sunning his wet skin. Then, for the second time, he dived below the surface.

Five minutes afterward the “Pollard” was at the surface and moving back to her moorings. Mr. Farnum and Captain Jack returned to the shore. The boatbuilder’s face was glowing with delight.

“You saw our young captain come up while I was with the ‘Pollard’ down on the bottom, didn’t you?” inquired the yard’s owner.

“Yes,” admitted Mr. Melville, grudgingly, while Don half scowled, then turned his head away. “But how is the thing done?”

“That,” replied Jacob Farnum, courteously, “at the request of Captain John Benson, must remain a secret for the present.”

“Oh!” said the capitalist, but his tone was ominous.

CHAPTER III

MR. MELVILLE HURLS THE CRASH

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It was really a wonderful, even if a very simple, revolution in the handling of submarine boats that Jack Benson had thought out.

Up to that time many scores of lives had been lost, in different parts of the world, when the crews of submarine boats had found, for one reason or another, that they could not raise their craft from the bottom of the depths. Formerly, when crews found themselves placed in that predicament, death followed.

Jack's solution was wonderfully simple. In brief, when the "Pollard" lay on the bottom of the little harbor at Dunhaven, the young captain had crawled into the long tube through which torpedoes were to be discharged in war time.

One end of this torpedo tube projects slightly into the water, at the bow of the submarine boat. The other end of the tube is well inside the craft. Two doors, or "ports," as they are called, close the tube at the ends. Ordinarily the forward port is closed, to keep water from entering the boat. When a torpedo is placed in the tube for firing, the outer or forward port is opened automatically just at the instant of discharging the torpedo. Enough compressed air is turned into the tube to force the torpedo out, after which the torpedo goes on its deadly journey propelled by its own motor. The presence of the air thus turned into the tube at the instant of firing keeps out the water until the tube's forward port is once more closed. Then the rear port of the tube, inside the submarine boat, may be opened whenever it is desired.

Captain Jack Benson, when he reached bottom with the "Pollard," and had donned his bathing suit, crawled into the tube through the rear port. This port was then closed. Hal Hastings simultaneously opened the outer port and discharged compressed air into the tube. Thus Jack forced his way out into the water, and, with the aid of his natural buoyancy, made a quick swim for the surface.

In returning, he had dived down, close to the anchor cable. Nearer the bottom he seized the cable, thus hauling himself down to the outer port of the torpedo tube. He had quickly crawled into the tube, where the presence of air still kept the water out. As he knocked heavily at the rear port with both hands, Hal swiftly turned in a moderate discharge of compressed air, while Eph, controlling mechanism inside, swung the forward port shut. Then the rear port was swung back, Captain Jack crawling back into the forward compartment of the boat.

"The whole trick is rather easy," Jack informed Mr. Farnum, as they walked that night in the village and discussed the matter in undertones.

"But you were in not more than seventy feet of water there," suggested the builder. "You couldn't do it at much greater depth."

"At eighty feet of water I could do it," replied Benson, thoughtfully.

“But at a greater depth than eighty feet—?”

“Of course, the deeper one gets, the more tremendous the pressure of the water is,” answered the young captain. “At a depth of a hundred feet, say, the pressure of the water would be enough to crowd me back into the tube, crushing my body.”

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"And killing you," clicked Mr. Farnum.

"Undoubtedly. Yet seventy feet is as deep as one need go. Fifty feet is far enough below the surface, for that matter. And we have the splendid little 'Pollard' under such perfect control that we can drop to fifty feet below the surface, as shown by our submersion gauge, and keep just at that depth."

"It's all wonderful," cried the boatbuilder. "Jack, you are a genius at this work!"

"There are some rather big problems to be worked out, in connection with this new idea," hinted Benson.

"What are the problems?"

"Well, in observing a stretch of water, for the position or approach of a hostile battleship, it might be necessary for the swimmer to go up several times."

"Yes—?"

"That would call for a very considerable use of compressed air."

"Naturally."

"So, in the boat now building, Mr. Farnum, I think Mr. Pollard and yourself should provide for the carrying of greater quantities of compressed air. For, when a submarine is below, you must always have reserve tanks of compressed air to be used in bringing the boat to the surface. Of course, once on the surface, with the motor going, more compressed air can be quickly stored."

"You've been doing some busy thinking, Jack," spoke Mr. Farnum, approvingly.

"I haven't been doing it all, sir," was Benson's quick reply. "Hal and Eph have been talking it all over with me."

"The Melvilles are very anxious to find out how you performed the seemingly wonderful feat of leaving the submerged boat and then returning to it."

"Are you going to tell them, sir?"

"Not, at any rate, until I've taken more time to think about it. Yet, you understand, Jack, I can't be too offish with them. They are able to control the investment of a good deal of money, and that money I am afraid we are going to need if we are to go as steeply as we'd like into the building of submarines."

Jacob Farnum, it will be remembered, had married Grace Desmond, an heiress. Her affairs were not yet fully settled through the probate court, but she would presently be entitled to about a half million dollars in her own right. To many it would have seemed that, with a wife so rich, the inventor would not have to look far to find abundant capital. Jacob Farnum, however, knew the hazards that surround even the best conducted business concerns, and he had determined that not a penny of his young wife's fortune should be risked in his own ventures. In other words, it was a point of honor with him not to take the slightest risk of involving his wife's private fortune.

The following morning David Pollard was on hand, in response to a telegram from his friend. Things were now about in shape for final discussion between Melville, the builder and the inventor.

In the private inner office of the shipyard the group of those most interested gathered. Jacob Farnum seated himself beside his desk, Pollard taking a chair close by. Lawyer Demarest, with a pile of impressive looking documents before him, sat at a large flat-top desk. Melville, senior, and two business friends, sat a little apart, while Don Melville stood behind his father.

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"I will say, in beginning," commenced George Melville, in his smoothest, blandest tones, "that we have talked so far, you and I, Mr. Farnum, only in general terms. We will now come to the definite proposition under which my friends and myself are willing to contribute the share of new capital that you want in your business."

"That is what I most want, before we go any further," assented Mr. Farnum. "I will say, however, that I have in mind a proposition that I would like to submit, before we hear from your side."

"I am listening," nodded Mr. Melville, suavely.

"We have already decided," continued Mr. Farnum, "that my boat yard, with all its equipment, and including the ownership of the 'Pollard,' may be fairly rated at three hundred thousand dollars."

"That is quite true," nodded Mr. Melville. "That figure is in accordance with the estimates made by our expert accountant."

"In the boat itself," continued Jacob Farnum, "my friend Pollard has a stated amount of interest. To come quickly to the point, then, I propose that Pollard and myself, with the aid of a necessary third party—my superintendent, Partridge, for instance—form a stock company with a capital stock of three hundred thousand dollars. Then the six hundred and fifty thousand dollars that you and your associates are to advance, Mr. Melville, may be secured by an issue of bonds, which the company will secure authority to issue. These bonds will bear the unusually high interest of seven per cent., and this interest, of course, will have to be paid before any dividend can be declared on the capital stock of the company. That will retain the control of the company in my hands, and in Pollard's, and that is what we want."

"Yet do you expect that it will be easy to secure such an understanding with capital?" inquired Mr. Melville, easily. "The proposition amounts to this: That you put in the smaller amount of capital, and yet expect to reap the greater profits."

"By no means," replied Jacob Farnum, seriously. "We have demonstrated the value of our type of boat, and we have some valuable knowledge and ideas that cannot be appraised in dollars. So, though our amount of material capital is less than you and your associates would contribute, we feel that we are bringing to the enterprise the larger share."

"I see your point," nodded Mr. Melville, pleasantly. "Yet there is much to be discussed from *our* side."

So the contest was on—the quiet, polite battle that is as old as capital itself. The men who contribute the money expect the control of the business; the men who contribute the ideas and knowledge expect, capital to be satisfied with a good return on its money.

Both sides were silent for awhile. The lawyer, tapping a pencil against his lips, knew that George Melville did not intend to go into the enterprise on any arrangement that did not allow him to gain business control swiftly and surely.

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"We have much to discuss, along these lines," pursued Mr. Melville, in his smoothest tones and with his friendliest air. "But I have no doubt at all, Mr. Farnum, that we shall presently reach a basis that will be wholly agreeable to both sides."

Which, on the contrary, was what the capitalist knew to be impossible. Melville found himself wishing that something else would come into the conversation, in order to get the boatbuilder's mind briefly away from the main proposition.

Steps were heard, at this moment, in the outer office, and then the faces of Jack and Hal appeared close to the glass in the door. Eph was not far behind them.

"Oh, my crew," nodded Mr. Farnum, looking up. "You remember our experiment, the other day, of having a man leave the boat while under water? Some other problems have come up in that connection. So I sent word to the young men, asking them to step over to the office as soon as convenient. I guess they did not quite understand, and were busy at the time, so that they have come over a little too late. I will step to the door, and so inform them."

Here was the diversion for which Mr. Melville had just been wishing.

"Don't dismiss them, please," urged the capitalist. "On the contrary, will you be good enough to ask them to step in here? There is something that it might be as well to make clear before them."

Bowing slightly, as he rose, Jacob Farnum stepped to the door, opening it.

"Come right in, boys," he requested. "Mr. Melville wishes to say something before you."

Each of the three submarine boys felt a quick throb at the heart. All had a suspicion that a blow might be about to fall. So they stepped inside, halting not far from Mr. Farnum's desk, and turning to face the Melville group.

Mr. Melville cleared his throat before he began:

"In the reorganization of affairs here, my investing friends and myself will be obliged to expect that the command of the 'Pollard' submarine boat will pass to my son, who will actively represent our group. My son, Don, will have charge and knowledge of the boat, its successors, and of all new ideas tried aboard, and he will safeguard, so far as may be necessary our interests. It is possible, however, that he may find it advisable to employ some or all of the present crew. That will, of course, be for him to decide in the near future."



CHAPTER IV

A SQUALL IN AN OFFICE

Jack Benson paled, clenching his hands tightly. Hal Hastings raised his eyebrows slightly; he, too, changed color swiftly. Eph's face reddened; he had all he could do to keep from shouting outright.

Jacob Farnum flushed, half rose from his chair, then seated himself again and turned to look at the boys.

But George Melville appeared to have eyes, at that moment, for no one but young Captain John Benson.

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Don stood just beyond his father's chair, regarding the leader of the submarine boys with a supercilious stare.

There was such silence, for a few seconds, that the ticking of the big clock in the corner sounded almost like hammer-blows.

"You understand fully, do you not, Benson?" demanded George Melville, breaking the silence.

"I heard you, sir," Jack replied, not without an effort.

"And what have you to say, Captain Benson?" inquired Mr. Farnum, speaking with some effort.

Captain Jack turned around to face his employer; the other two submarine boys wheeled with him.

"Mr. Farnum, we have been in your employ, and we have always taken your orders. If you say we are to be dropped from the boat's crew, we bow to what we can't prevent."

"No one has spoken—definitely, that is—of dropping you boys from the 'Pollard's' crew," interposed Mr. Melville, slowly. "I have only announced that in the reorganization of this enterprise the group that I represent will require that my son, Don, be placed in command of the 'Pollard,' and of any other submarine boats that may be built. If you do not like to work aboard the submarines, very likely we can find work for you at something in this yard."

Jacob Farnum exchanged a few words in an undertone with David Pollard. Now, the boat builder faced about.

"Mr. Melville," he began, "Mr. Pollard and I feel under a debt of deep obligation to Captain Benson and his mates. Boys though they are, they have done much to make the 'Pollard' as famous as it already is. Between an intelligent employer and a capable, honest employe there can be no question about gratitude. I speak for both Mr. Pollard and myself, therefore, when I say that it is our feeling that Captain Benson and his mates must continue in their present positions."

The color came back to Jack's face. Joy beamed out in his eyes. Hal looked as though he had been given a new lease of life.

"Hooray!" roared Eph. He gave two vigorous jig steps, then stopped, abashed.

"Excuse me, Mr. Farnum," he begged, shamefacedly.

"I do not think you quite understand," went on Mr. Melville, regarding the boatbuilder coldly. "The placing of my son as I have indicated is an absolute condition on the part of our group."

"And I have declined it," returned Mr. Farnum rising, and standing easily.

"Then you do not want our capital, Mr. Farnum?" sternly demanded Mr. Melville.

"Not on your conditions, sir!" came, sharply, from the boatbuilder.

"Oh, you will come to your senses, soon," rejoined the capitalist, coolly. "You need a good deal of money for the extension of your business, and we stand ready to supply it. All that is needed is the conceding of certain conditions, and we are ready to pass our checks for all the money you need. My associates and myself ask for nothing that is unfair. Now, will you take our money into your business, or will you go on in the old, slow way?"

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David Pollard had risen, in some agitation, and had walked to the further end of the private office.

"Pardon me a moment," begged Farnum, then followed his friend. The two conversed in low tones.

"You may leave the room, boys," announced Mr. Melville, turning to eye Jack Benson.

Not one of the three stirred.

"Did you hear me?" insisted the capitalist, sharply.

"Yes, sir," answered Jack, quietly.

"Then why don't you go?"

"Mr. Farnum sent for us, and we are waiting to learn whether he is through with us for the present."

"You may take my word for it," snapped Mr. Melville. "Go!"

The submarine boys paid no heed to him.

"The impudent young beggars," sneered Don Melville. "Low-born, and no manners!"

Jack Benson turned, fixing his gaze upon Don's face Jack's look was full of contempt, though he spoke no word.

"Don't try any impudent airs on me," warned Don, flushing, then paling, as his fists doubled.

"Mr. Melville," broke in Jacob Farnum, returning, while David Pollard remained where he was, looking out of the window, "I think we can cut this scene very short. In the first place, in joining us, you demand that we treat with utter injustice bright young employees who have been extraordinarily faithful and devoted."

"You will soon come to see the need of that," replied the capitalist, with a light wave of his hand.

"We do not see it," replied Farnum. "Nor do we intend to. Further, we are disturbed by what you have made only too plain, that you intend to get complete control of this business, and make Pollard and myself merely subordinates in the affairs here."

“Not as bad as that,” protested the capitalist, with a smile. “Of course, in view of the very large amount of money we are offering, we must have some voice in the management of—”

“Not this business!” interjected the boatbuilder, with emphasis.

“But, man, you must have the money!”

“We’ll do without it, or get it somewhere else,” went on the boatbuilder, patiently. “We thank you, Mr. Melville, and those associated with you, but Mr. Pollard and I have decided to go no further in the present negotiations.”

“What’s that?” demanded George Melville, springing to his feet. “You don’t want our money?”

“We won’t take it—not at the price you set on it,” responded Farnum, bluntly.

For the first time the capitalist appeared decidedly uneasy.

“You don’t mean this, Farnum,” he answered. “You’re excited; perhaps alarmed over something that I have said, or which you thought I intimated.”

“I mean just what I have said, take my word for it, sir,” retorted the boatbuilder. “We do not intend to look to you for any money that we need. That is final, and, therefore, that is all.”

“All this change of front because of these wretched boys?” demanded George Melville, incredulously.

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"Partly on account of your attitude toward these boys," admitted Mr. Farnum, "and also because Pollard and I now realize that you had intended to wrest control of this business from us."

"You're losing your senses," Stormed the capitalist, angrily. "Unless you at once come to a realization of it, all we can do is to wish you good morning."

Mr. Farnum bowed, silently, then moved toward the office door, opening it.

"Come on, gentlemen," cried Melville, stiffly, turning toward his own friends.

In silence the members of that group started across the floor. Mr. Farnum, surveying them inscrutably, still held the door open.

"This is dramatic—and suicidal," said Mr. Melville, haughtily.

"You take it too seriously," replied the boatbuilder, with a slight smile. "It is only good morning."

"You're a fool, Farnum!" came the answer as Mr. Melville, in a rage, halted just inside the door. "And I warn you that, if we leave here, now, we shall not return, no matter how changed your attitude may become later. Have you any answer to that, sir?"

"Good morning," replied Jacob Farnum, with another courteous bow.

Stiffly, snorting but without words, George Melville walked out of the office, across the outer office, and out into the yard.

In the private office the three submarine boys stood as though riveted to the floor. They were astounded, and knew not what to say. They were overjoyed, but incapable of expressing any word of the gratitude that filled their young hearts.

David Pollard walked to a chair, dropping into it and studying the ceiling.

As for the boatbuilder, he stepped briskly across the room, pulling open the door of a cupboard. Taking out a broom, he began to sweep very carefully where the Melville group had sat or stood, and continued his sweeping across the threshold of the doorway. Then, returning, he tossed the broom into the cupboard. Stepping springily over, he dropped into his desk chair, letting out a hearty laugh.

"Well, that's over with, and a narrow escape," he announced.

"But you couldn't quite sweep all their dirt out after them," declared David Pollard, looking up with a smile.

“What do you think of that crowd, boys?” asked Jacob Farnum, cheerily.

“I’m not giving much thought to them, sir,” Jack replied, adding warmly: “But we fellows, Mr. Farnum, simply can’t think of words that will express how we appreciate the splendid way Mr. Pollard and yourself have stood up for us.”

Jacob Farnum eyed the boys quizzically, then turned to the young captain of the submarine to inquire:

“Wouldn’t you stand by me in anything? Wouldn’t you yell for this yard and its product with your last gasp? Answer me.”

“Why, of course we would,” Jack Benson admitted.

“Then I take just offense, if you expect me to be any less of a man than yourself,” declared Farnum, with a pretense of anger.

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"The same sentiment puts me on record," chuckled David Pollard:

"Then let us forget the low comedy, the melodrama, or whatever it was," proposed the boatbuilder. "Let us get down to the regular business of the day. We want more money here, if we can get it on a fair and square basis. If we can't, we'll do our best to go along as we've been going. And now, Jack, and the rest of you, Pollard and I have a few little things to whisper over."

CHAPTER V

DON MELVILLE TAKES A HAND

"Are we at liberty to go up into the village, sir?" asked Jack Benson, pausing at the door.

"Fun?" demanded the boatbuilder, regard them with a dry smile.

"Yes, sir," Jack nodded. "That is, the kind of fun we find in our work. We want to get some metal, a few tools and other things, to rig up something that we think may serve well aboard the 'Pollard.'"

"Run right along then," rejoined Mr. Farnum. "Get a bill for whatever you spend at the toolshop and turn the bill in as expense account."

"Thank you. Good morning, sir."

"Say, did you ever see that beat?" demanded Eph, all aglow with enthusiasm, as the boys stepped across the yard. "My, but didn't Mr. Farnum call the trick with those fellows?"

"We've been doing a heap of useless worrying over what Don Melville let drop the other day, haven't we?" asked Hal, quietly.

"Fellows," stated Captain Jack, earnestly, "as long as we work for this pair of men I'm never going to be uneasy again over anything but displeasing them. They're bricks! They can count on us, every time!"

Up the street, a little way past the gate of the boatyard, the Melville party had halted to light cigars.

"I'm afraid, Melville," said one of the capitalist's associates, "you didn't go at the matter with quite your usual tact. You showed your hand too soon. You came out a little too hard, just a little, too early in the proceedings."

“Pooh!” retorted the capitalist. “We’ll go to the hotel. Farnum will cool down soon enough, and realize what we represent to him. Inside of two hours he’ll have people out to find out whether we’ve left town. Gentlemen, I don’t know but it might be a good idea for us actually to leave Dunhaven.”

“An excellent idea,” replied Lawyer Demarest, dryly, “for we shall only waste our time by remaining here.”

“What do you mean?” questioned the capitalist, quickly.

“Farnum won’t send for us.”

“He surely will, when he cools down.”

“I’m positive that he won’t,” asserted the lawyer. “If I know anything about men Farnum will get along without us from now on.”

“But he needs the money.”

“He can get it, Melville, I am inclined to think,” returned the man of the law.

“And we need the investment,” continued George Melville. “Why, with my influential connections at Washington, and some other connections that I have, I can see a return of millions on our investment.”

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"You will never make the investment, as long as Jacob Farnum has the deciding word," insisted Mr. Demarest.

"I'm sure of that, too," added Mr. Faulkner.

"And all on account of those rascally boys!" uttered Don Melville, in a tone of disgust. "Isn't it funny how some folks will cling to muckers? Why, anyone would think that the fellow Benson and his chums are so necessary that the business couldn't go on without them. They're the—"

"Hush!" murmured the lawyer. "Here come the boys."

Jack and his mates were at this moment coming out of the yard. They had turned on the sidewalk, and started along ere they caught sight of the group ahead.

"There's that infernal gang!" uttered Eph, wrathfully.

"Keep your eyes away from them, and don't say anything, then," whispered Jack. "Don't say or do anything that can possibly spoil the morning by putting us in the wrong."

But Don Melville, wrathful over the morning's happenings, and keenly disappointed over the knowledge that he could not hope to command the "Pollard," was not disposed to let the submarine boys go unchallenged.

On came Jack, Hal and Eph, walking abreast, yet ready to break and pass in silence.

"Dewey, Sampson & Schley!" jeered Don Melville, in a low tone, yet loud enough to be heard by Jack's party.

Yet the boys paid no heed, but would have passed in silence, had not Don added, insultingly:

"The three little muckers!"

That was too much for Eph. He couldn't help turning, the flush mounting to his cheeks, to retort:

"Speak for yourself!"

Don took a step forward. Eph, unable to ignore the implied challenge, wheeled about.

"Don't bother with the fellow, Eph," muttered Jack, gripping his bellicose chum by the arm.

“Fellow’?” cried Don, hotly. “Do you mean that for me?”

“Well,” demanded Jack, dryly, “you’re not a girl, are you?”

At that Don Melville lost his temper hopelessly. Burning at a white heat, he hissed:

“I’ll show you whether I am, or not, you cur!”

That word “cur” went far toward shattering Jack Benson’s good resolutions. Letting go of Eph’s arm he turned to glare at his tormentor.

“You need a lesson, mucker,” added Don, hotly.

“Don’t soil your hands on the fellow, Don,” cried his father, sharply.

“I must, sir, after he has insulted me,” cried Don, in a rage. “I must kick him, anyway.”

“Nonsense, Don! No brawling with people of this class,” commanded his father, sternly.

The elder Melville reached out to restrain his son, but that seemed only to render the young man more furious. He rushed at Jack, aiming a kick.

“Don’t you dare try that!” warned young Benson, his eyes flashing.

But Don, despite both warnings, did swing his foot. Jack dodged the impact, then darted in at the side, landing a blow on young Melville’s chest that sent him staggering back.

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"Strike *me*, will you?" flashed Don, throwing himself on guard.

George Melville, aghast at Jack's presumption in attacking his son, now stepped back, satisfied that Don must avenge the insult.

A dozen boys, talking over baseball nearly a block away, saw the start of this encounter.

"Fight! fight!" they yelled, gleefully, and raced down the street.

The cries readied the private office in the boatyard. Suspecting, partly, what might be up, Jacob Farnum snatched his hat, running out. David Pollard followed.

"You young puppy!" almost screamed. "I'll teach you a lesson that you need."

"I'm usually particular about where I get my training," retorted Jack Benson, insulted and stung past his power to endure.

Yet Captain Jack did not attempt to follow up that first blow. Throwing himself into the attitude of defense, he waited.

Don Melville did not keep him long waiting, but rushed at the shorter youth, intent on sending him to earth.

"Hit him like a gentleman, Don!" called his father.

Whatever way that might be, Don Melville struck out, his blood at the white heat of rage. With such force did he aim the blow that, when nimble Captain Jack failed to be in the way to stop it, Don pitched forward, falling to his knees.

"Hooray!" yelled some of the on looking boys, derisively.

Jack halted before his foe, smiling at him quietly.

"Know any more stunning tricks like that one?" Benson inquired.

"I'll show you!" panted Don, leaping up. As he did so, he caught sight of the smiling faces of Messrs. Farnum and Pollard, strolling up from the boatyard gateway.

As he faced the smiling submarine boy, young Melville was quick to realize that he must cool down if he did not want to become a laughing stock for the street crowd that was swiftly forming. Half a dozen workmen employed in the yard had climbed up onto the fence.

"Mind you," said Jack, coolly, "I don't want to hurt you. You started this, Melville."

The sheer coolness of this speech once more carried Don Melville out of the bounds of reason. On the “gym” floor Don had studied the art of boxing well, but he had not learned all he needed to know about coolness.

“You young hound!” he snapped.

“You said something like that before,” Jack laughed. “Is that all you can do? I feel as though I were wasting my time.”

“Do you?” mocked Don. “Take that, then!”

This time he leaped forward, feinting with his left hand. But Jack was not to be caught like that. Instead, he parried against the real blow delivered with Don’s right fist. The force of the parry threw Don to his left. Just at that instant Benson passed behind his opponent, landing a stinging blow on the other’s neck. Down flat to the ground went the Melville heir, hitting his nose roughly and starting the blood.

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"Hooray!" yelled a gleeful boy in the throng. "Say, ain't he fine at jiu-jitsu, though?"

A yell of great joy went up from some of the boys, who are always delighted at seeing the larger fellow thrashed, especially when he is the one who has started the trouble.

"Don't you think you'd better wait and cool down?" inquired Jack, dryly. "You're only making a show of yourself."

That taunt stung Don into rising and squaring off, while his father looked unutterably disgusted and angry over the ridiculous turn affairs had taken.

"Benson's advice is good—sound," approved Lawyer Demarest, stepping in. "Don, you're no match for your opponent, at least not in your present temper. Don't try to carry this any further."

"Do you think I'm going to let this young mucker make a fool of me?" demanded the Melville youth, huskily. "I've just got to settle with him."

"Yes, yes, Don; stop this. It's unseemly," insisted his father, red-faced through his humiliation. "Come on!"

Mr. Melville's other friends also interposed. Don, surrounded, yet not very anxious to carry the fight on any further, chafed hopelessly. Jack Benson, seeing the new turn of affairs, and realizing how ridiculous his foe must feel, turned to Hal to say:

"I guess we're not needed here any longer. Come on."

"As for you, Benson," choked the elder Melville, "we shall see what can be done about this. You ought to be arrested."

Jack's only answer was a tantalizing grin, after which he turned, his back, as he and his mates started off up the street, followed by a little cheer from some of the boys gathered there.

"What can the law do about this?" demanded the elder Melville of the lawyer, in a low tone.

"A warrant could be issued against your son for disturbing the peace," came the disgusted reply of Lawyer Demarest. "As for Benson, all he did was to protect himself when insulted and assaulted unjustly. It was a disgraceful affair, my dear sir. Now, let us get away from here before we're exposed to more ridicule."

Neither Mr. Farnum nor Mr. Pollard had said a word. Now, smiling quietly, they returned to the yard. The crowd broke up. The Melville party kept on to the hotel of Jabez Holt not far away.

CHAPTER VI

THE “POLLARD” HAS A RIVAL

Capital, backed by energy, can often accomplish wonders.

On the next day after the Melville squall in the boatyard office, Jacob Farnum, looking out of a window, and through the open gateway, saw three heavily-laden lumber trucks go by.

“That looks like a good deal for little Dunhaven,” he thought to himself. “I wonder what’s happening?”

His horse and buggy were in the yard. The young owner presently went out and got into his vehicle, driving slowly along the street to the northward.

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About a third of a mile from his yard Mr. Farnum came to the spot where the lumber was being unloaded. That was a hitherto vacant piece of land located at the edge of a small deepwater cove. Mr. Melville and Don were there, and also a gang of workmen. Carpenters were opening tool chests, as though preparing to go to work.

"Hm!" mused Jacob Farnum. Turning up a side street, he drove, by a roundabout way, back to his yard. Thereafter he took pains to keep himself informed of the Melville doings.

By night the foundations of a shipbuilder's shed had been laid by a large force of carpenters. Another gang of carpenters had gone to work building a fence as rapidly as laborers could set up the poles. By the night of the following day the fence was completed, and the shed, so far as outward appearances went, was completed.

And now, though George Melville and his son, preserved an air of great secrecy, the news leaked out that a new boatyard was added to the industries of Dunhaven, coupled with the further information that Mr. Melville was engaged in the manufacture of submarine torpedo boats.

Both Farnum and Pollard looked somewhat grave when this knowledge was first brought to them by Eph Somers, who had a great knack for picking up local news. However, the young builder was quick to cheer up.

"So we're to have a rival yard, and the 'Pollard' is to have a rival?" said Mr. Farnum. "Competition ought to stir us forward to the very best that is in us. Somers, ask Captain Benson and Hastings to come here. We'll talk this matter over."

Twenty minutes later the few devoted friends of the "Pollard" boat were gathered around Mr. Farnum's desk.

"Unless I'm in great error," said the young boatbuilder, "we're in for a lively rumpus, now. Melville is aroused over our refusal to let him in to this enterprise, and he's starting an opposition. He can command a great deal of money, and I understand that he has a good many influential friends in Washington. If he can carry on the most successful rivalry, he may do us a great deal of harm. For instance, if he can build so fine a boat that he can put ours in the shadow. In fact, while I don't mean to be a quitter or a skulker, I'll admit that Melville may possibly be able to dig a hole and drop us into it. If he produces a type of boat that goes far ahead of ours, then the Government is likely to buy his, overlook ours and leave me stranded financially. About all I'm worth is tied up in the present 'Pollard' and in the new torpedo submarine that I'm now building."

"He can't invent or build a finer submarine than the 'Pollard,'" declared Captain Jack, with conviction.

“Nor get as fine a crew to handle his craft,” added David Pollard.

“Don’t be too sure of that,” warned Jack, Soberly. “I think we fellows have done fairly well with your boat, up to date. But suppose Mr. Melville should be able to get a lot of experienced submarine men, and even, perhaps, an officer, from the United States Navy. We boys could hardly beat such a combination as that.”

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"I'm not so sure that you're right on this point, Jack," clicked Mr. Farnum. "I'll say this much: It would make me more uneasy to lose the services of you boys than it would to hear that Melville has a Navy crew for the boat he's building."

"Of course," went on Jack, thoughtfully, after a pause, "if you, Mr. Farnum, could interest all the capital you want, on your own fair conditions, you wouldn't have to be afraid of this man Melville."

"No," admitted the boatbuilder, making a wry face. "But getting all that capital together is the problem. You see, Jack, we know just how good a boat we have, but others don't."

"Others don't?" repeated Captain Benson. "That gives me an idea."

"Another trouble," pursued the builder, "is that this submarine business is just something of a speculation. Suppose investors come forward with a lot of ready money to put into this enterprise? Our boat is good, but how do the investors know that, within the next few months, some other inventor won't come forward with a new type of submarine boat that will leave ours hopelessly behind? Then the investors would stand to lose every dollar that they put in with us. That's the thought that makes investors shy."

"Yet Mr. Melville did not seem to be afraid of the chance of losing," remarked Jack Benson.

"He's a gambler all the way through, and he has some moneyed friends of his sort," replied Mr. Farnum. "But it's hard to find such investors."

"Now, for that idea I mentioned," proposed Captain Jack. "You can see what you think of it. Why not get people to talking about our boat? Why not make them talk about it as the most wonderful thing possible in a submarine boat? You know how I managed to leave the boat under water, and to return to it. The thing has never been done before. You know how simple the trick was, and that it was blundered upon by accident. But the people of the country at large don't know. Show the trick is done. When they hear about it, broadcast, won't they think that the 'Pollard' is the only real thing in submarines? Use the 'Pollard' type of boat, and no more men need be killed when a boat won't rise. That's the way the people will talk. So, Mr. Farnum, why not write to the editor of each of the biggest daily papers, inviting him to send a representative here on a near date, to see the thing done? Don't let the editors know just what feat is to be displayed. Simply let them know, in a mysterious, general way, that the thing we will demonstrate revolutionizes the whole art of submarine warfare—as it really does."

"That will make people talk, surely," acknowledged the young boatbuilder.

“And there’ll be pressure put upon Congress to buy your boat, and more like it,” urged Captain Jack. “All the newspaper talk will be free advertising, and I imagine that the kind of advertising that newspapers are forced to *give* is all the best paying.”

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"I haven't had much experience in that line, but I imagine it is the best kind," nodded Mr. Farnum.

All hands set to, to devise a list of newspapers to which invitations should be sent. The stenographer was soon intensely busy with this work.

Down at the new Melville yard affairs went on with a rush. Two tumble-down houses were rented in a little habited part of the town, and in these a gang of close-mouthed Italian laborers was quartered. Jabez Holt felt the new increase in prosperity, for Mr. Melville engaged his entire hotel. Before long there was a constant succession of arrivals at the hotel. Steel salesmen, motor drummers, salesmen in electrical supplies, and a whole host of miscellaneous representatives came to town, putting up at the hotel, where Mr. Melville had reserved a suite of rooms for temporary offices. The strangers in town spent money freely, and all the villagers enjoyed their presence.

In fact, so much business did these new happenings bring that Jacob Farnum speedily became sensible of the fact that the villagers looked upon the Melvilles with decided favor.

"The Melville crowd are at their new enterprise in real and bustling earnest," remarked Farnum, with an air of uneasiness, to his associate, the inventor.

"I imagine those people can control millions of dollars, if they need that much money," hazarded David Pollard.

"Undoubtedly," nodded the boatbuilder "And, though I am seeking for capital that will come in on terms fair to us, it's mighty uphill work."

This conversation was carried on in young Benson's hearing. Captain Jack turned to them with a laugh, to say: "Wait and see, though, if the exhibition before the newspaper correspondents won't take a lot of wind out of the Melville sails."

"It ought to," nodded the builder, "unless the Melvilles, or some of the experts they're dealing with, are shrewd enough to figure out how you left the boat and returned to it."

"Would you have figured that out, Mr. Farnum, if I hadn't told you?"

"Probably not, Jack. It's one of the things that are too simple to guess at easily."

Passers by the Melville yard were now able to hear the hammering of the riveters daily. It looked as though the new yard must be pushing a submarine boat to rapid completion.

“There hasn’t been a launching, anyway, so I don’t believe the Melville people will be able to do anything to beat our show to-morrow,” remarked Captain Jack, on the night before the day that had been set for the show before the newspaper men.

Early the next forenoon newspaper correspondents began to arrive in numbers from half a dozen large cities. As the hotel was monopolized, by the Melville crowd, Mr. Farnum had engaged other quarters at which to entertain the men of the press. Some of the newspapers sent women writers.

None of these visitors were taken direct to the yards. Mr. Farnum and Mr. Pollard took the journalistic visitors in charge and finally conveyed them in carriages to the boatyard, arriving at about a quarter before eleven.

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Here Jack, Hal and Eph, looking at their best in their natty uniforms, were on hand to be presented. Of course, the mere fact of a competent, well-trained boy crew was a novelty to the newspaper writers, who made much of the submarine boys and asked them many questions about their work.

"How soon are you going to take us out aboard the 'Pollard'?" inquired one of the women reporters.

"Just as soon as Captain Benson and his young men have had a chance to show you the remarkable feat that you have come here to see," promised Mr. Farnum.

"And what is that remarkable feat?" asked another journalist.

"The wonder of it will strike you all the more if we do not announce it in advance," rejoined David Pollard.

"Captain Benson, what have *you* to say about it?" pleaded one of the newspaper women. "Won't you give us at least a hint?"

"I'd like to, immensely," smiled Captain Jack, "but I've always had a great respect for Mr. Farnum's judgment."

"Good enough, captain," laughed the boat builder. "And now, signal for the boat that is to put you aboard."

As the boat was coming in Captain Jack turned to the newspaper writers to say:

"Ladies and gentlemen, the thing that is to be done to-day is something that has never been done on any other boat than the 'Pollard.' If it looks a bit dramatic, you will understand, of course, that that is a means toward making it all the more impressive."

"Oh, dear, but you *are* making me dreadfully inquisitive," complained one of the newspaper women, plaintively.

Embarking in the shore boat, the "Pollard's" crew were soon aboard the submarine. From the platform decks they waved their caps, then, one by one, disappeared through the tower, the manhole cover being pulled down after them.

"Are they going to take the boat out and submerge it?" asked one of the correspondents.

"Yes," nodded Mr. Farnum.

"And what else—please?" asked the particularly impatient newspaper woman.

Mr. Farnum smiled, then added:

“There they go, under electric power. Watch!”

By the time that the boat had gone a little more than a hundred feet one of the correspondents called out:

“They’re sinking!”

“All a part of the performance,” stated Mr. Pollard.

Before some of the visiting journalists could quite realize it, the tip of the conning tower had disappeared below the surface.

“That’s all very interesting to look at,” half shuddered one of the women. “But what if they couldn’t bring the boat up again?”

“The boat is built to go up or down, at need,” Mr. Farnum assured her. “Captain Benson has never had an accident yet.”

So the group of some thirty newspaper people watched intently, keeping their gaze on the place where they had seen the last ripples close in over the vanishing conning tower.

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The minutes passed by. The shore boat, with the hundred-pound anchor and cable in the bow, hovered just where Captain Jack had directed, but what could be going on in the submarine at the bottom of the little harbor?

“Mr. Farnum, don’t you sometimes get nervous over such things?” demanded one of the women.

“Never,” the boatbuilder assured her.

Yet it was not long before the yard’s owner pulled out his watch to look at the dial. Eleven minutes had passed since the disappearance of the submarine. The next time Farnum glanced at his watch the time had lengthened to fifteen minutes. Then the time dragged by to half an hour.

David Pollard was fighting hard to conceal the nervous dread that had seized him.

“Farnum,” he found chance to whisper, at last, “something tragic has happened to the boys, at last. What on earth can it be? Whatever it is, we’re utterly powerless to help them!”

CHAPTER VII

MISSING—A SUBMARINE AND CREW

Fifteen minutes more dragged by.

“Where’s your show, Mr. Farnum?”

“Something has gone wrong, eh?”

The correspondents were pressing about the worried builder and the uneasy inventor.

“There’s a tragedy going on over there, isn’t there?” demanded another journalist, pointing out across the water.

“I—I’m afraid there is a chance of it,” nodded Mr. Farnum, dejectedly, again looking at the watch in his hand. “It’s getting on toward an hour since the ‘Pollard’ went down.”

“What are you going to do about it?”

“Is there no way to rescue the crew?”

“Don’t let those boys die, without lifting a finger to save them.”

“Get busy, man—in heaven’s name, get busy!”

Such were the comments, questions and advice that poured in on the builder. David Pollard, his sensitive nature suffering extremely, shrank back out of the crowd.

“Gentlemen—and ladies, too—don’t you understand that nothing really can be done—at least not in a rush?” cried Jacob Farnum, the cold sweat standing out on his face.

“There isn’t a diver in or near Dunhaven, and that unfortunate boat is down in seventy feet of water. I’m going to rush a wire to the nearest place where I know a diver to be, but I—I am certain that it will be hours before we can hope to have one here. That is all—all that can possibly be done.”

“Oh, this is dreadful!” sobbed one of the women writers. “Those brave, splendid boys—such a fearful fate!”

“Must they be asphyxiated down there, below?” cried another woman.

“Don’t,” choked Jacob Farnum. “I must rush for the telegraph station and get off a message for a diver—also for a wrecking company to send tugs and floats here for raising the ‘Pollard.’ Yet it will take a wretchedly long time.”

“And the boys? Rescue will come too late to save them?” asked a newspaper man, with a decided choke in his voice.

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Jacob Farnum made a wild dash for his office, telephoning for a messenger boy. While waiting he wrote two telegrams in feverish haste.

Several of the newspaper people wrote hasty, excited dispatches to their papers for the evening editions. The messenger boy, when he arrived on a run, was all but loaded down with paper. Then the yard's owner and the newspaper folks dashed back to the shore.

Out on the harbor the water lay unruffled. There was not a sign of the suspected tragedy that lay beneath the waves.

"It's an hour and a half since the boat sank," called one of the correspondents.

"What were the boys supposed to do, anyway?" insisted another.

Jacob Farnum opened his mouth, as though to speak, then closed it again.

"Tell us," insisted one woman.

"Yes, tell us," insisted a man.

Just then, there came a shout over the waters. "Say, you lubbers, what did you move that boat for?"

There was an instant gasp from all who turned so swiftly to look out over the water.

Only Jack Benson's brown-haired head showed above the surface of the harbor, but his look was laughing, utterly care-free.

The boatmen who had allowed their craft to drift while waiting, now thrust out their oars, making quick time to where the submarine boy stood treading water.

In his sudden revulsion of feeling the inventor all but fainted. Jacob Farnum, his gnawing suspense over, felt as though his knees must give way under him. Then, by a mighty effort, just as the deafening cheering started, he led the race around the harbor.

"Here, you—Jack Benson!" gasped the yard's owner. "You come in here mighty quick! Give an account of yourself. What was wrong below?"

"Wrong?" hailed back Benson, standing in the bow of the shore boat as it made for shore.

"What were you doing down below, all this time?" demanded Mr. Farnum.

"Doing? Oh, Eph was taking a nap—"

“Taking a nap?”

“Hal was tinkering with the gasoline motor, and I was reading.”

“Reading?” fumed Mr. Farnum. “What were you trying to do? Torment the life out of us?”

“Were any of you folks worried?” asked Jack, smiling innocently at the excited crowd.

“Worried?” ejaculated the boatbuilder. “I’ve telegraphed for a diver and a wrecking company’s outfit.”

“Better countermand the order, air,” advised Jack, dryly.

“But what on earth caused all the delay? What did it mean?” persisted the boatbuilder. “Answer me, Benson.”

“Why,” laughed Jack, “when we started, I dropped a word or two about trying to make the exhibition dramatic, didn’t I?”

“If that’s what you tried to do, young man,” grunted one of the correspondents, “you’ve certainly succeeded. Why, in five or ten minutes more the evening papers in half a dozen cities will have extras out announcing that one more big submarine boat disaster has occurred!”

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"Did you really send that to your papers?" asked Jack Benson, some of his glee showing.

"Of course we did."

"And that reminds me," shouted another. "We've got to send the follow-up news, at once. I have, anyway."

That roused the newspaper people to a sense of what they were there for, though one man broke in:

"Just a second, folks! Let's find out what the show was intended for."

"Why, it's intended to show," replied Jack, "that a boat built and equipped like the 'Pollard' isn't a death-trap for the crew, if it should happen, through some accident, that the boat refuses to rise to the surface."

"That's the trick," confirmed Mr. Farnum. "But, Jack, why did you wait so long before coming up."

"So that you could all realize something of the anxiety of people over such accidents to submarines, and the great dread over the fate of the crew," laughed the boy. "I think our delay made you all realize something of that."

"You *have* something of the dramatic instinct, truly," murmured the newspaper woman who had sobbed. "You had us all scared nearly to the fainting point."

"Now," continued Captain Jack, "just to show you that the boat didn't get disabled in any way, I'm going down again and then come up with the boat."

"It won't take you as long as it did this last time, will it?" demanded one of the reporters.

"Wait right where you are," promised Jack Benson, "and you'll see me once more before you've really had time to realize it."

"No more dramatic business, eh, and needless tears on our part?" insisted another.

"This time," laughed Jack, "the dramatic will be confined to speed of operation."

He motioned to the men to row out. Jack calculated, finely, just where he had come up, and there the heavy anchor was dropped, the end of the cable being made fast in the boat.

Then overboard dived the submarine captain, going straight down. A tug at the line showed when he seized hold of it, down in the depths.

A little time passed, but now the newspaper folks, accustomed to all manner of sensations, were not apprehensive.

“Here she comes!” shouted David Pollard, gleefully.

More and more of the conning tower showed above the water, the platform deck and hull coming next into view. Then, as the manhole cover was raised, Eph Somers stepped into view at the steering wheel. The “Pollard” moved over to her moorings, and Hal came up to aid in making fast. Soon afterward, Jack Benson, in complete uniform, appeared on deck.

“Now, give us just an idea of how the thing is done, Mr. Farnum,” begged one of the correspondents, turning to the boatbuilder.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” replied the yard’s owner, gravely, though he was tempted to laugh over the mystery he was making, “I am certain that you all want to know.”

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"We do," came the chorused answer.

"But if I were to tell you," responded Farnum, speaking as gravely as ever, "it would be to reveal to the whole world one of the strongest points in our plan of submarine operation. You will understand that, of course, and will realize that we do not care to explain anything so valuable, when that idea is not yet patented."

"I suppose you're right about that," admitted one of the journalists, thoughtfully. "We'd like awfully to know just how the feat is accomplished, and you have equally good reasons for not telling us."

"Have you much genius for machinery?" whispered one of the women writers to a man beside her. "For, you know, we've been promised a chance to visit the boat. If you keep your eyes open, very likely you can detect how it is possible to leave the 'Pollard' when she's on the bottom—a performance that isn't possible with any other type of submarine torpedo boat."

Jacob Farnum now slipped away to countermand his orders for a diver and wrecking apparatus, the newspaper people also seizing the chance to send another wire to their home newspapers.

After that Captain Jack received one-third of the party aboard the "Pollard." He gave them a short trip on the surface. Then, pressed to do so, he submerged the boat for two minutes. After that the rest of the correspondents were taken out and below the water. Most people are not particularly eager, at first, for a trip under the water in submarine boats, but with the newspaper fraternity it is different. They are always on the lookout for any new experience, no matter how dangerous it may seem to be. It is a part of their calling.

Yet not one in all this party of thirty trained, keen-minded people managed to penetrate the secret of how Captain Jack had been able to leave and return to the "Pollard" while that craft lay on the bottom of the harbor.

When all had visited the boat, and had sunk with her, Jacob Farnum took the party in carriages to his home, where luncheon was served. The boatbuilder, by the use of all his tact, kept the party together until it was time, to drive them to the railway station and see them aboard the train.

In this way, he prevented any of his visitors from falling into the hands of the Melville people. Consequently, when the next day's papers appeared there was much in them about the wonderful work done by Captain Jack Benson in a "Pollard" submarine, but there was not even as much as a mention of the fact that any rival submarine boatyard existed in Dunhaven.

“That is one long march stolen on the Melville foes,” laughed Jacob Farnum to Benson. “It has been a splendid bit of business, Jack, and you boys have helped it all through in great fashion. To-day, we have the satisfaction of knowing that people all through the country are talking about the ‘Pollard.’”

“That fellow Benson is being a lot talked about to-day,” declared Mr. Melville, after scanning two or three of the morning papers.

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"Humph! Let him be talked about," returned Don, with a lowering scowl. "I suppose he's pretty conceited to-day, but it won't be long before I'll have it fixed so that his pride shall go down lower than ever the 'Pollard' could sink."

"Will you use our submarine boat to do it?" inquired the elder Melville, with a meaning smile.

CHAPTER VIII

FARNUM STOCK GOES UP

"Got time to look at something, Mr. Pollard?" asked Captain Jack, two days later.

The captain and crew of the submarine had entered the outer office. In his hands Jack carried a small wooden box. Hal and Eph looked delightfully mysterious.

"Time to look at something?" repeated the inventor, with a laugh. "I seem to have plenty of time for almost anything these days."

There being none of the office employees about at the moment, Benson led the way to one of the desks, opened the box and took out a complicated-looking little model.

"You know, Mr. Pollard," murmured Jack, while the other two boys drew close, "although we have hit upon the way for some of a submarine's crew to escape when the boat is at the bottom, or in deep water, it always needs at least one of the crew to remain behind to close the rear port of the torpedo tube and to operate the compressed air a little. So, valuable though our trick may be, it really means that, in case of serious accident, one member of the crew would have to remain behind in order to help the next to last to get away. So, in case of accident, there would always be one member of the crew who would have to be left behind to die. That's the thing we fellows have been working on, and here's the result. At least, it's the best we can do with it."

"What's the idea?" inquired the inventor, examining the small model curiously.

"Why," laughed Jack Benson, good-humoredly, "it's an automatic device, set to a time principle, for closing the after port of the torpedo tube and letting off some compressed air. By means of this automatic device the last fellow could let himself out safely. That's the theory, you see; but we're new inventors, and so there's some flaw in the device. It will take a skilled mind like yours to see where the fault lies."

Jack explained volubly, while David Pollard looked over the model that the trio of young geniuses had put together. Then Benson drew from an inner pocket, and spread out, some carefully made mechanical drawings that made his idea plainer. Jack was not a trained draughtsman, but he had a great natural talent in that direction.

“Why, you have a splendid idea here,” cried the inventor, presently.

“It doesn’t quite work, though,” said Hal, ruefully.

“Lot’s of inventions don’t, unfortunately,” winced David Pollard. “I know something about that, for a big percentage of my inventions have turned out to have more flaws than good points. But this is really ingenious, boys. Who has had the big share in this get-up?”

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"The other fellows," replied the young captain.

"Jack's idea, mostly," broke in Eph, "although Hal Hastings and I have been allowed to butt in some."

"It's splendidly done, as far as you've gone," glowed the inventor, full of unselfish admiration. "And you've made it plain just how you expect to attach this device and make it work automatically. What are you going to do with it, now?"

"We thought, perhaps, Mr. Pollard," explained Captain Jack, "that you might think it worth while to take the device up at this point, and work over it until you find out where the hitch is in the idea. If you succeed, it will make the 'Pollard' absolutely perfect in her class."

"But it would seem mean of me to take your idea, so nearly finished, and go ahead with it," protested the inventor.

"Well, you see, sir," Jack replied, earnestly, "we don't care who brings the idea through provided it makes the 'Pollard' a world-beater. Do you care to take this in hand, Mr. Pollard, and try to perfect it? For we'll admit we're stuck fast and can't get any further with it."

"Do I care to?" repeated the inventor. "Why, boys, I'll be delighted to work over it. It'll be better than sleep to me for many a night to come. But I hate to take it out of your hands, since you originated it."

"Take it and welcome," begged Hal Hastings. "The only thing we want is to see it work."

"And the sooner the better," grunted Eph Somers.

"Then thank you, I will," cried the inventor, earnestly. "But you boys, if the device can be made to work, shall have your full share of the credit."

"Hullo, boys," greeted Jacob Farnum, coming out from the inner office, a letter in his hands. "By the way, here's something that may interest you. I've a letter from a man who writes about the new trick of leaving a submerged boat. He refers to you boys as our young experts."

"He doesn't know, does he," chuckled Jack, "that we're only three apprentices, and rather raw, at that?"

"No, you're not," retorted Mr. Farnum. "My correspondent is pretty near right in referring to you as young experts."

“If we’re going to get that reputation,” muttered Benson, more than half seriously, “we’ll have a heap to do in ‘making good.’”

“Just look here, Farnum, at what these boys have been at work on,” begged the inventor, calling attention to the partly-finished model.

In an instant the boatbuilder became absorbed in the idea as shown by model and drawings.

“Can this be made perfect, Dave?” he asked, eagerly, turning to the inventor.

“I think it can,” answered Mr. Pollard. “The boys have been good enough to ask me to try.”

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"Then I hope you'll start, this minute," exclaimed the yard's owner. "It means more to us, Dave—more to us, boys—than any of you suppose at this moment! Let me tell you something. This letter holds the key to the secret. Trying to interest people in our work, I've been writing right and left trying to raise more capital on terms that would be fair to us. Now, here's a letter from Broughton Emerson, a man worth millions. He admits that my letter has interested him. He'll come here, soon, and he states that, if we can show him a good enough chance to make money he will put in the needed capital, taking satisfactory security, and yet leave the business under its present control. In other words, he's likely to do just what we wanted George Melville to do. Isn't that good enough news for one morning?"

"Yes, provided we can make as good a showing as he expects," replied the inventor, cautiously.

"Oh, if we could only get a chance to make a trial trip for a United States Naval board!" sighed Jack Benson, wistfully. "The Navy Department has money now at its disposal for the purchase of submarines. If we could get the Government to buy the 'Pollard,' that would show investors what's what in money-making." Benson's face was all aglow with mingled enthusiasm and wistfulness. He, and his mates, took as keen an interest in the future of the "Pollard" as though they themselves owned that doughty little craft.

"A trial trip for the Navy Department?" smiled Mr. Farnum, gravely. "Well, I don't mind telling you that we may have that, too, before long."

"Is any date set?" breathed Captain Jack, quickly.

"Not yet, nor is the matter even fully decided. But the newspapers have produced a big effect on the Navy Department. The makers of other types of submarine boats are green with jealousy of us, just now. Your escaping trick, Jack, has made so much public clamor that Farnum stock is going up all over the country. We'll have some big chances, mighty soon, I'm thinking. If we get the chances, I'm certain enough that you boys will help push us on to victory!"

Happy dreams were these that builder, inventor and crew dreamed! The fever of conquest was in their veins.

Shutting himself up in a room at Farnum's home, depriving himself of much of his needed sleep, often refusing food, David Pollard attacked the problem of perfecting the device that Captain Jack and his mates had originally planned.

Two days later Broughton Emerson arrived. He was a pleasant, portly man of more than fifty years. His manners were quiet and easy. He was affable with everyone, but he had a keen way of looking into things. No one could guess quite what he thought of the chances of success in the enterprise of building submarine boats. Before the day

was over George Melville, who was slightly acquainted with Mr. Emerson, learned that he was in town. That evening Mr. Melville succeeded in meeting Mr. Emerson and getting him over to his hotel.

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"If you want to save a lot of money, Mr. Emerson," hinted George Melville, "you want to be very careful to keep it out of the Farnum investment."

"What's wrong with the Farnum business?" questioned the other capitalist.

"About everything, I believe," replied Mr. Melville. "And, even if the 'Pollard' were a capable a boat as its backers claim, it would still be beaten by the type of boat that I am now working on."

"Are you looking for capital for your submarine business?" asked Broughton Emerson, a shrewd little twinkle in his eyes.

"No; I have all we want. Not a dollar is needed, but I don't like the idea of your losing a lot of money with that other crowd. They haven't any real show to do anything with their boat."

"They are a great lot of enthusiasts over at the Farnum yard," said Mr. Emerson, musingly. "I like people as enthusiastic as they are. Why, just think of those boys; what a bright lot they are!"

"Humph! In the end Farnum will wish he never seen those boys," sneered Mr. Melville.

"Why?"

"Well, the boys are wholly ready to sell out all they know about the Farnum boat."

"Are you sure of that, Melville?" demanded Mr. Emerson, opening his eyes more widely.

"Wholly positive. Benson has already offered to sell us all he knows about the 'Pollard.' He'll steal plans, shift to our employ, or serve us in any way that he can by betraying his present employers."

"You astound me," cried the other capitalist. "And you are really quite sure of this?"

"As sure as I can be made by Benson's own offer."

In declaring this George Melville believed he was telling the truth. His son, Don, hoping to work out a scheme whereby Jack could be hopelessly disgraced, had gone as far as to tell his father that Jack was willing to overlook the past fight, and to "sell out" all he knew about the design and inner workings of the "Pollard."

"The Farnum business looks very inviting, despite what Melville says against it," thought Broughton Emerson, later that night. "Yet, if I put any money into the venture, on any terms, I must insist on the one condition that the boys be banished from Farnum's employ."

Of this far-reaching mischief, following Don's deliberate lie to his father, Captain Jack Benson and his mates had not even a suspicion.

Two days later the three submarine boys were delighted at knowing that Broughton Emerson, despite the advice he had received from Mr. Melville, was thinking most seriously of advancing a few hundred thousand dollars to help boom the "Pollard" type of submarine boat.

"That will put a crimp in the Melvilles, when they hear, won't it?" laughed Jack, in talking it over with Hal Hastings and Eph Somers.

Not one of the boys would have slept that night, had they known of the plans forming to disgrace Jack Benson even in the eyes of Messrs. Farnum and Pollard.

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CHAPTER IX

A RASCALLY PIECE OF WORK

"Now, we shall soon know!" cried David Pollard, hoarsely.

He was trembling with the fever of the intense inventor.

Out in the little harbor the "Pollard" lay on the bottom. In the cabin, besides the three submarine boys, were only Jacob Farnum and David Pollard.

The eyes of all five were fixed on a small but ingenious bit of mechanism that had been carefully adjusted near the rear port of the boat's torpedo tube. This was the automatic device, first planned by Jack Benson, with the aid of his mates, and carried forward to working order by Mr. Pollard. By the aid of this automatic mechanism it was believed that the last man aboard a torpedo boat could let himself into the tube, relying upon the automatic device first to close the rear port, then opening the forward port and at the same time letting just the right amount of compressed air into the tube. By this means the last man aboard a submarine below the surface could provide for his own escape, without the aid of a comrade.

Eph Somers had been chosen to make the effort. He now stood, in his bathing suit, awaiting the word.

"Go ahead, Eph," ordered Mr. Farnum. "Be very careful to set the device just right. Not one of us is going to touch it."

Eph carefully set the time hand on the dial, next crawled into the torpedo tube, the rear port of which stood open. Sixty seconds later the automatic device closed the rear port with a sharp click.

David Pollard counted up to fifteen.

"He must have had time to get clear of the boat," quivered the inventor. "Now, captain, take us to the surface."

In a twinkling, almost, the "Pollard" was riding the waves.

"There's Eph, dancing up and down on the beach," reported Captain Jack, from the conning tower.

"It worked like a charm," chuckled Eph Somers, gleefully, as soon as the others had joined him on shore. "That little charge of compressed air shot me out of the tube, and up I bounded to the surface, like a piece of cork."

“Now, we really lead the whole world in submarine boating,” cried Mr. Farnum, hoarsely. “I don’t care what any other inventor may have discovered, I’m satisfied that no one else can a boat as safe for the crew as the good little old ‘Pollard’ is!”

So happy did all of the five feel, in fact, that they shook hands gleefully, all around. Then, while Eph rowed out to the craft to dry himself and get into uniform, Jacob Farnum ran to the machine shops, there sounding several sharp, triumphant blasts on the steam whistle.

The whole affair—Eph’s escape to the surface, the joy of the submarine, party and the blowing of the whistle, were all noted by a spy whom Don Melville had set to the task of watching the Farnum crowd.

Don was equally well aware that David Pollard had been working day and night in his room at Mr. Farnum’s house.

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"They've discovered something that pleases them mightily," thought Don, sick with rage. "What can it be? I'm going to know, if money has still any power to buy other men's services."

"Jack Benson may be very happy now," muttered Don, vindictively, "but his joy shall soon be turned to ashes—or worse."

Nor was Don Melville speaking by mere guesswork. His ignoble nature had evolved the whole plan by which Jack was to be ruined. Don even stooped to use his father as an innocent tool in a series of rascally deceptions.

"I got word that you wanted to see me at once," said Broughton Emerson, dropping in upon Mr. Melville that afternoon at the hotel.

"I certainly do," returned Mr. Melville, leading the way to an inner room. "Emerson, you remember my telling you that Farnum's crew are wholly willing to sell out their people if the price is big enough?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Would you like to see that proved?"

"By all means, if it can be," replied Mr. Emerson, a look of keen anxiety in his eyes, for he had finally determined to use his own judgment and invest heavily in the Farnum submarine enterprise.

"Will you consent to doing a little watching with me?" asked Mr. Melville.

"What's in the wind?"

"To-night, at eleven o'clock, on a lonely bit of road well out of town," replied George Melville, "young Captain John Benson has agreed to meet my son, Don."

"For what purpose?"

"Pollard has recently perfected a submarine boat device of the greatest practical value. Young Benson has promised Don to steal the drawings and descriptions pertaining to that device, and to turn them over to Don, for a price, of course!"

"It's horrible—unspeakable!" gasped Mr. Emerson, indignantly.

"Of course. But I want you to understand the kind of crowd that surrounds Farnum. It will be a guide to you in investing with those people. If you go with me, to the appointed place, ahead of time, and we hide close enough to witness the whole transaction, then you'll believe all that I've been telling you, won't you?"

"Of course," nodded Mr. Emerson, speaking thickly. His whole soul revolted at the treachery of such a transaction, which made him add:

"But won't you and your son, Melville, be in as bad a light through profiting by such infernal treachery?"

"We would, if we *did* profit," replied George Melville, flushing. "However, as soon as Don has dismissed the young blackguard, Benson, my son will touch a lighted match to the papers and burn them all, with yourself looking on. What do you say, Emerson?"

"It's a mean kind of business to take any part in," protested Broughton Emerson, hoarsely. "But—yes, I'll go, for if such things can be done it is my duty to myself to know."

Plans were thereupon made for the meeting in the evening. Broughton Emerson, honorable and broad-minded went away from that meeting heavy of heart. He hated the whole business, and yet he admitted to himself that he must know the truth ere he invested a fortune in other folks' business game. Yet, weighed down by the sickening feeling that, at best, he was about to play the spy, Mr. Emerson presently called up Jacob Farnum on the telephone.

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"Farnum," he said, "I understand that something is to happen, to-night, that you and I ought to know."

"What is it?" asked the boatbuilder, alive with curiosity.

"I'll give you a chance to find out, to-night, but you must pledge me your word that you won't breathe a word of this, until afterwards, to anyone, not even to Pollard. Just come along and learn what you learn, then act as you please. Will you agree to that?"

"Yes," promised Mr. Farnum.

"Good enough. Then be at—" Broughton Emerson followed with directions for late the coming evening. He did not explain who was to be spied upon, or anything of the nature of the business, though he did add:

"Don't be surprised, Farnum, no matter whom you see me with. It's all a part of the night's walk. Just follow us both, without letting your presence be known at any stage. I know this all sounds mysterious, but believe me, it's going to be vastly worth your while."

The remainder of the afternoon the boatbuilder's heart was, somehow, heavy with undefined dread as to what he was to learn that night.

In the middle of the afternoon, Don Melville, with the aid of one of his father's Italian workmen, laid the last stone in the edifice of trickery that he was building for the crushing of Jack Benson.

"Jack was coming down the street from the village, when his steps were arrested by the sound of a sharp:

"Hist!"

Turning, he saw an Italian workman, beckoning mysteriously. Jack went curiously up to him.

"I have message for you—you alone," whispered the Italian, speaking fairly good English. "You are in danger of great meanness. One of your enemies plots it."

"You're one of the Melville workmen, aren't you?" asked Captain Jack, looking curiously at the fellow.

"Yes, and you have bad, wicked enemies over at our place."

"I guess that may be true enough," smiled Jack, grimly.

“Some of us are bad over there, and some honest,” went on the Italian. “Some of us hate much to see dirty work done, and I have friend who works also for Melville. My friend knows all about what Don would do against you. It is wicked—very. Meet my friend, to-night, at nine o’clock, and he will tell you all—everything. I cannot tell you now. But you will meet my friend?”

“Yes, I guess I will,” nodded Jack Benson.

“But you must go alone; not tell your odder friends. Until you have seen my friend you must keep all this gr-reat secret.”

After some further talk Jack Benson agreed to all this. The Italian seemed wholly honest and earnest. Moreover, he appeared as though greatly troubled and anxious to save the submarine boy from some unusually mean trick.

So Jack Benson walked on, thinking deeply and wondering much. He had no suspicion of any trap against him in the person of this seemingly very honest Italian, and so Don Melville had succeeded in laying the last wire of his despicable plan.

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At half-past eight that fateful night Captain Jack found a pretext for leaving his companions. Swinging out onto the road, and down past the new Melville yard, he went on briskly to the point, well out of town, that had been named for the meeting.

"I wonder if I'm foolish?" he thought, suddenly. "Is there any trick in all this? But, pshaw! The Melvilles surely aren't that kind of people, and no one else has anything against me. It's all likely enough that Don is putting up some mean game against me down at the yard, or that he's saying something mighty mean against me. Whatever it is, these Italians are honest enough to feel disgusted, and they want to warn me. Yet they don't want to have any Melville eavesdropper seeing them with me. That's all natural enough, for these Italians have their jobs to look out for, even if they *do* hate the rascals who pay 'em wages."

So Captain Jack kept on his way, feeling that any suspicions of the Italians were unfounded and therefore unnecessary.

David Pollard, after wandering through the grounds around the Farnum home, that evening, and missing his friend, the owner, at last decided to go to his own room and read.

Always soft-footed, Mr. Pollard made no noise until he turned the knob of the door to his room. There was a sudden, scurrying sound inside. Though he was a man of very nervous temperament the inventor was no coward. He darted in, in time to see a figure making through the dark for an open window.

"Who's there Here! Stop!" thundered the inventor, rushing forward.

But the intruder did not obey.

Hidden behind a book in a bookcase was the inventor's revolver. Mr. Pollard hauled the book out, dropping it, and, in a trice, had the weapon in his hand, racing again toward the window.

The intruder had gained the ground by the time that Mr. Pollard reached the window.

"Stop, you thief! Hold up, or I'll shoot!" warned the inventor.

However, the skulker took to his heels. Pollard fired once, the flame spitting from the muzzle of his revolver. But the figure still continued in flight, and the inventor realized that there was no further use in firing.

"That was odd," thought Pollard. "The fellow had on a uniform just such as our boys wear. If it weren't so absurd, I might be tempted to believe, despite the darkness, that it was Jack Benson. But *he* would have no need to break in here."

Then Mrs. Farnum appeared, with the servants, for the shot had alarmed the household.

“Have you found that anything is missing from here?” inquired Mrs. Farnum, while Mr. pollard searched and explained at the same time.

The inventor now halted before his desk, rummaging.

“Yes,” he answered, dryly, though with a slight quaver in his voice. “The thief found and departed with the drawings of a most important new device, originated by Benson and his friends and finished by myself. I’d rather lose a large sum of money than those drawings.”

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At about this time Jacob Farnum was prowling carefully about the spot that Mr. Emerson had named. He waited there, in hiding, for a long time, ere Messrs. Melville and Emerson came along. He let them pass, then followed slyly, in accordance with Broughton Emerson's directions of that afternoon.

"Now, what on earth does this all mean?" wondered Jacob Farnum, unable, despite his curiosity, to regard this expedition without a feeling of considerable disgust with himself. "Confound it, it's unmanly, this spying on someone else! It makes me feel like a rubber-soled detective, a thug or a labor picket trying to 'warn' a workman with a lead-stuffed club! Yet Emerson is a gentleman, or I've been fooled. It must be all right, I suppose."

The night was dark, and the moon not yet quite due to rise. When it did come up above the horizon it was certain to be more or less obscured by the clouds hanging there.

While Messrs. Melville and Emerson stepped off along the road, Jacob Farnum was forced to keep behind bushes and other natural objects of cover, which increased the boatbuilder's uneasy feeling that he was, doing something well nigh dishonorable.

At last, however, the two capitalists stepped off the road, concealing themselves in a clump of bushes as though by previous understanding.

"It looks like a prearranged meeting of some sort," reflected the boatbuilder, after having crept close enough to be able to see and to overhear.

Five minutes went by. Then Don Melville, narrowly escaping running into Mr. Farnum, appeared suddenly before his father and Mr. Emerson.

"It's almost the time, now," laughed Don, speaking in a low voice, as he held his watch close to his eyes. "I'll slip right down into the road, in plain sight, where you can see what happens."

Back of all the rest, in the bushes, Jacob Farnum muttered, disgustedly, to himself:

"I like it little enough to find George Melville this. I like it still less, now that I find Don having a finger in the pie of mystery."

Smoke wafted back from a cigarette that Don was smoking. A few minutes thus passed, when there came the sound of a low whistle. Tossing away the stub of his cigarette, Don answered with another whistle.

Broughton Emerson straightened up instantly, being well enough hidden for that, and so did Jacob Farnum, whose presence, of course, was unsuspected by either of the Melvilles.

Then out from the cover of the woods stepped a boy of sixteen, in a uniform like that worn by the submarine boys.

“Have you got the plans?” asked Don, in a low voice that was yet distinct to all the listeners.

“Yes,” came in a hoarse whisper, from the one in uniform.

“Pass them over, then,” commanded Don. “That’s right. Here’s your money, in this envelope.”

Just then ray from the rising moon struggled through the filter of clouds, the light touching lightly upon the uniformed one.

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Jacob Farnum started as though he had been shot. There was a great bound at his heart.

“Jack Benson!” he throbbed. “By the Great Shark, are my eyes playing me a hideous prank?”

CHAPTER X

A RACE FOR MIXED PRIZES

As the moon’s ray vanished behind a cloud Jacob Farnum was breathing hard.

Nor was it any wonder that the boatbuilder felt staggered with astonishment. He had grown to trust Captain Jack Benson to the utmost. Now, to find him faithless came like a heavy blow on the head.

To this man’s ears came Don’s low but clear cut tones:

“You’ll keep your eyes open, won’t you, Benson, and bring us all the points you can? Anything that you think will be useful to us?”

The boy in uniform nodded. Though the boatbuilder could not see the uniformed one’s face very well, he observed that nod, as did also Messrs. Emerson and Melville.

“You don’t want to have anyone see us here together, then,” went on Don. “So scoot! You know how to communicate with me when you want to. That’s all.”

Don waved his hand as a sign of dismissal.

The other boy, with a nod, turned to make his way off. “No, by the Great Porpoise, that isn’t all!”

The words, shouted, with a tremendous energy behind them, caused some other hearts to bound.

Jacob Farnum, his blood now boiling, found himself unable to contain himself any longer.

As he shouted out, he burst through the bushes, making a bee-line for the departing boy in uniform.

Don Melville gasped, in sheer dismay, yet he had the presence of mind to yell:

“Scoot, Benson! Travel as fast as ever you can!”

Then Don ran a few steps in the opposite direction. Young Melville was a very fair sprinter, but he wanted to have a bit of a start in case of need.

“Melville, you young scoundrel, I’ll settle with you later!” roared Jacob Farnum, keeping on down the road.

Straight in the middle of the road the fugitive was now dashing along, until Don yelled after him:

“Take to the woods, Benson! You can lose him there!”

“I’ll get him, anywhere on earth!” shouted Jacob Farnum, full of purpose and vim.

The boatbuilder was long-legged and slim. He had been a runner at college, and now his old knack was coming back to him.

Undoubtedly the most humiliated man present was George Melville. Though that capitalist had not been averse to stooping to the purchase of secrets from another man’s trusted employe, he felt badly indeed to have Farnum detect his son.

So George Melville now came out quickly from cover.

“Don,” he demanded, “how could Farnum ever have gotten wind of this?”

“Talk it over with Mr. Emerson,” panted Don Melville. “I’m off after Benson and Farnum.”

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With that Don put his own sprinting abilities to the test, dashing into the woods at the point where he had seen the others vanish.

Though it flashed through George Melville's head that Broughton Emerson must have given information to the rival boatbuilder, the elder Melville did not now stop to question Mr. Emerson.

Instead, the father, who was rather heavy, started off puffily in the wake of his son.

"This looks like ticklish business," George Melville told himself, "and Don, though usually self-contained, is hot enough of temper, at a time like this, to make matters pretty bad for all concerned."

Wanting to see the matter through Broughton Emerson kept a little to the rear of the other capitalist. It was a curious Indian file that stretched out through the woods with the uniformed boy in the lead.

"You may as well stop!" yelled Jacob Farnum, after the fugitive. "I'm going to catch you, anyway!"

It looked that way, indeed. Dark as it was, with the moon behind a cloud, the running boy, looking back over his shoulder, could see the enraged boatbuilder coming after him at great strides.

Mr. Farnum was soon so close upon the heels of his quarry that he could all but reach out his hand and grasp the boy's collar. But just then the boy went down to earth, instantly rolling himself as nearly into a ball as he could.

Jacob Farnum, unable to stop in time, tripped and fell over the fugitive, plunging, head-first, into a clump of bushes and scratching himself.

With a jubilant laugh the boy in uniform was up again, and off. He got a good start, but the boatbuilder, after listening a few seconds, and getting the sounds of flight, bounded off, once more, in the right direction.

Don had halted precipitately, when he saw the tumble, but now he too darted forward once more.

"If Farnum can catch him," shivered Do; "I've got to be at hand to help out in a lightning rescue."

Mr. Farnum did some tall running before he again came in sight of the runner ahead.

Yet the pursuit had not reached its finish. The fugitive suddenly dived through a fringe of bushes, going out of sight.

Mr. Farnum reached the spot, then halted, looking undecided, almost bewildered.

There was now no sound to guide the pursuer.

“Confound him, if he has gotten away,” muttered the boatbuilder, impatiently, to himself. Yet he did not dare risk running forward in any direction, for fear of getting further from his quarry.

Don Melville halted, too, chuckling softly to himself.

“Oh, you!” snorted Farnum, glancing backward over his shoulder in high disgust.

Don chuckled again.

Just then the sound of stealthily moving feet came to the boatbuilder’s ears. Don, in his glee, had lost the chance to make so much noise with his own feet that the other boy could steal softly away undetected.

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Without a word, now, the boatbuilder sprang forward. As he advanced, he heard the running of the uniformed boy plainly enough, and, a moment later, came in sight.

Now, Jacob Farnum, though not much given to making empty threats, decided to try the effect of a ruse.

"You! You ahead!" he shouted. "Stop, or I'll send some lead after you. Do you want me to fire?"

Swift as thought Don Melville, again in pursuit at the rear, yelled:

"Don't mind him, Benson! Scoot! He hasn't any gun."

"If some fairy only would take care of that snake-in-the-grass behind me!" quivered Mr. Farnum, silently.

Having the uniformed boy plainly in sight, though some hundred or more feet ahead, Farnum by no means felt like giving up the race. All the same, the boatbuilder, long out of practice in athletics, was beginning to feel severely the effects of this chase over rough ground and through bushes.

"I've got to die or get him!" muttered Farnum, doggedly, between his teeth. "Oh, for a little light on this cloudy night! If I could be sure the fellow is, or isn't, Benson, I might be more willing to drop this pace!"

Putting on a better spurt, as a last, desperate resort, Farnum did all in his power to overtake the uniformed boy.

He seemed likely enough to do it—would have done it, no doubt, but for a new trick on the part of the enemy.

Don Melville, seeing how matters were going, and being in much better training, increased his own burst of speed, running as softly as possible.

Then, with an exultant cry, Don leaped upon the back of Jacob Farnum, catching him around the neck and bearing him to the ground.

"Run, Benson!" cheered young Melville, "He'll never catch you now!"

CHAPTER XI

WHAT BEFELL THE REAL BENSON

Whistling softly, the real Jack Benson went along cheerily to the appointed place.

Being wholly courageous, there was no thought of dread in his mind over any possible treachery.

As he came in sight of the two trees, between which he had been asked to meet the Italian, he made out a man waiting there.

“Good evening,” came the low, soft hail.

Then the speaker stepped forward, proving to be the same who had accosted the young submarine captain in the afternoon.

“Good evening,” was Jack’s pleasant reply. “You’re on time, I see.”

“Oh, sure!” laughed the Italian. “I been here twenty minute, already.”

“Where’s your friend?”

“Up in the woods. We take this path here, and we find him.”

The Italian took Jack Benson lightly by one arm, piloting the boy until he had turned him into the path. Then the foreigner stepped in advance, saying:

“We reach my friend, in minute.”

Thus they proceeded for perhaps five hundred feet into the woods. Presently a small light, looking as though it might be the glowing end of a cigar, appeared ahead.

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"Ah, here is my friend," announced the guide. "Giacomo, here is the young captain."

"Hush! Not too loud," came the soft warning from the man behind the cigar.

As Benson came up this second man held out a hand, which the submarine boy unsuspiciously took, at the same time looking over this second man. He appeared, like the first, to be a laborer at the Melville yard.

"I hear you have some interesting word for me," began Benson. "I—oh, great Scott! How dare you?"

For, dropping his cigar from between his teeth, this second Italian, while still holding the boy's hand, gave his wrist a wrenching twist that forced Captain Jack over to the ground.

In a twinkling the guide fell upon him, too.

"What on earth does this mean!" demand Benson, freeing his right hand and doing all in his power to fight.

The spot was fearfully lonely. Captain Jack remembered, in a jiffy, all the gruesome tales he had heard about the dread doings of the Black Hand. Brave though he was, the young submarine expert felt suddenly cold and creepy, though he did not once think of giving up the fight.

"Now, be still you!" ordered the late guide, plaintively. "We not want to hurt you. But, if you make us—"

"Be still, behave, and you be all right," promised the other Italian, in a gruff appeal for reasonableness.

Though he tried to fight like a savage, Jack Benson soon found himself being yanked to his feet, while a stalwart laborer held him by either arm.

"You see, you can do nothing," advised the Italian who had thrown the boy. "You not want to get hurt? We no want hurt you, but if you be one big fool, then—!"

"What's the meaning of this rough game?" Jack demanded, hoarsely.

"You be verra good, no make noise, come with us and wait little while, then you go loose bimeby. Make fight, and well—then we no can help!"

That statement, coupled with the sinister, menacing tone, was sufficiently clear. It didn't take the submarine boy more than a few seconds to realize that he was helpless, and

that the most sensible thing to do would be to go along, provided no worse violence than had already been used were attempted.

“Where do you want me to go?” he asked.

“Oh, we show you,” replied the late guide, in a tone half implying that he stood ready to do his young captive a great favor.

There appeared to be no help for it. Grim faced, and with teeth tightly clenched, Captain Jack allowed himself to be led on through the woods, both his arms being still tightly held by his conductors. Had they intended any more dastardly violence, he reasoned, they could easily have carried out their purpose without having hauled him to his feet.

No more was said as the three tramped through the woods. Though the Italians did not by any means relax their hold, they used no more force than seemed necessary for their purpose. Indeed, they acted with that smooth consideration typical of the Latin races, even in bad moments.

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A tramp of a quarter of a mile brought them to a little clearing in the woods. In the middle of the open space stood a building. As he got closer young Benson saw that it was a dilapidated-looking structure that for many years, probably, had not been a home.

The front door stood open, however, and to this the captors marched their victim.

"Look out you do not trip over broken sill," admonished the late guide, politely. Then, as all three moved into the dark interior:

"You be good, and lay down on floor for minute. That's all."

Jack felt his feet kicked out from under him. Down he went, one of the Italians sitting firmly on him. The other went across the room, fumbled, and presently lighted a lantern in an open cupboard.

"Now, you come along, no fuss and no hurt," advised the late guide, as they raised the boy. They conducted him through into a rear room, where one of the pair raised a trap-door in the floor.

"Now, this is easy," smiled one of the pair, pointing to the darkness under the open trap.

"We have take ladder away, but you can drop. Not far."

Then, seeing a look of alarm flit across the boy's face, the fellow laughed, adding:

"No hurt. All right. See?"

He dropped a stone through the trapway. It fell on ground underneath, nor did the distance down appear to be more than a few feet.

"Cellar, that's all," grinned the Italian, reassuringly. "Now, drop, and we not hurt you. No danger. In two, three, four hour we put down ladder and let you up. Keep you here little while; that's all."

Of course Jack Benson could have tried to put up a fight, but he knew he would easily be beaten. Besides, these men, smiling and polite as they now appeared, might have tempers bad enough to lead them to resort to Italian steel, if they had to do it. Therefore Jack nodded, then knelt at the trapway, and next, with an inward prayer, let himself drop down into the darkness. He landed on damp, soft earth.

"Good boy!" called one of the Italians, the lantern lighting his smiling face as it appeared framed by the trapway for an instant. "Not so very long to wait. Let you out so you go home, bimeby."

Then the trapdoor was gently put tack in place, after which Jack heard the click of a padlock above to secure the barrier in place.

Young Benson got upon his feet, stretched to make sure he was unhurt, then broke forth, under his breath:

“Of all the prize fools in the world, commend me to Jack Benson! Here, at the request of a perfect stranger, I’ve taken a long walk this night, just in order to place myself wholly in the hands of men who, however mild they may be in their piracy, certainly wish me no good. Oh, you, Jack! Oh, you blooming, prize idiot!”

Then he smiled grimly, wondering. From what had happened so far he felt inclined to believe the smiling rascals above. Had they intended worse violence, they had had abundant opportunity to show it.

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"Of course, they're probably stretching a point when they say I'm to be here only three or four hours," reflected the boy. "Yet, now I'm here, I imagine I'll have to remain here until they're pleased to let me out. But—will I, though?"

Overhead, at that moment, sounded the tinkle of a mandolin. It came, apparently, from the room nearer the front door. The two foreigners began to hum softly to the accompaniment of their instrument.

"May-be it was a lucky thing it never occurred to the pair to search me," murmured the submarine boy. "Probably they wouldn't have left this box of matches in my possession."

Lighting one of the matches, Jack began to explore. The cellar was much like any other, and wholly empty. On each side was a little, low window, probably not large enough for the submarine boy to crawl through. Even at that the openings had been bricked up and looked as though they would resist a long assault.

At the rear of the cellar were steps, leading up to a stout-looking bulkhead. It was padlocked, on the under side, with stout hasp and staples.

"Nothing doing here, either," muttered Jack. "Yet—hold on—blazes!"

Almost feverishly he felt in an inner pocket. It was there—a case containing seven or eight small, fine saws and other tools often employed by machinists in constructing small devices or models. He had been using some of the instruments on the boat that afternoon.

"Wow!" sputtered the submarine boy, joyously. "And again—some more wow!"

Lighting another match, carefully selecting his saw, and then lighting still another match, he took a look at the padlock, trying to find some portion of the ring where the metal was more slender. The saw was intended for use on metals. After he had made a sufficient notch in the ring, young Benson was able to work, much of the time, in darkness.

"Blessings on that mandolin," chuckled this industrious young human beaver. "If it wasn't for their jolly old twang-twang those Italians might hear my fairy buzz-saw at work."

Yet, though he progressed, what a fearful length of time this task appeared to take!

"And, if it turns out that there's another padlock in place on the outside, this will be just another case of love's labor lose," sighed the boy.

Occasionally, when the mandolin sounds ceased for a few moments, Benson rested, too. It would never do to take the risk of having his slight noise overheard.

At last! The saw went through the ring, proclaiming the task all but finished. First, with trembling fingers, the submarine boy replaced the saw in its case. Then, with another tough little tool, he started patiently to bend the severed ends of the ring metal sufficiently far apart. In this he succeeded finally.

Removing the padlock, he let the hasp fall away from the staple. On the floor above the mandolin was twanging merrily, the voices of the Italians rising somewhat in their song.

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With his pulses throbbing, Jack Benson essayed to raise the bulkhead. Glory! It rose! A moment later Captain Jack Benson was out in the open, under the cloudy skies.

No time did he lose there, however. Stealing softly for the woods, he sped on into them. Nor did he cease his hurried gait until he had covered at least a quarter of a mile.

"Not much risk of their finding me, now, even if they're wise at last," reflected the submarine boy, slowing down to an easier walk.

In all, Captain Jack must have gone nearly three-quarters of a mile from the scene of his late confinement when something occurred that made him fairly jump.

Ahead there came the sound of rapid steps. Then the sounds of a slight scuffle, followed by Don Melville's undoubted tones, shouting:

"Run, Benson! He'll never catch you now!"

"How on earth does Don Melville know I'm here?" quivered Jack, stopping short.

CHAPTER XII

THE CAPITALIST DOESN'T LIKE THE SITUATION

Someone was dashing through the woods straight at Jack Benson.

Almost immediately there came the yell, in baffled rage:

"Confound you, Don Melville! I'll settle with you for this!"

"That's Mr. Farnum's voice!" throbbed the real Jack, all agog with wonder.

Immediately there dashed between the trees a panting boy in a uniform identically like Benson's.

"That you, Hal?" shouted the real Jack.

"Yes," came a hoarse answer.

"What's wrong?"

"Run to Farnum—quick!"

"You're a liar, whoever you are!" retorted Jack, putting himself in motion after the fugitive. "You're not Hal Hastings—nor yet Eph Somers!"

The race was a spirited one. The fugitive ran splendidly, gamely, but Jack Benson's wind had had a long rest, and now he was in the pink of condition for sprinting.

So, ere three hundred feet had been covered, the young submarine boy made a flying leap that carried him onto the shoulders of the fugitive down went both to earth.

"Now, hold quiet, will you, or shall I have to pummel your face out of any human likeness?" demanded Jack.

"Oh, Jack! Jack Benson! That you?" shouted the wondering voice of Jacob Farnum.

"Yes, and I've got some fellow who's masquerading in *our* uniform!" yelled Captain Jack.

Jacob Farnum had succeeded in hurling Don Melville away from him, and now the all but exhausted boatbuilder came through the forest with lumbering steps.

All of a sudden the downed fugitive began to fight, and Jack was forced to be strenuous.

"Here, let me take him. I'll quiet him," promised Jacob Farnum, grimly. That gentleman was in a state of mental maze over the sight of what at first appeared to be two Jack Bensons fighting each other; Yet the incident gave him evidence that there was something unusual in this night's appearances. Without any difficulty, now, he separated the real from the false Jack, and promptly laid hands on the latter.

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Don Melville's face was now a sickly white, but he felt that he had to act on the instant.

"Here, let that fellow go," he ordered, darting up, his eyes blazing.

"Get back there! Stand away! Hands off!" roared the submarine boy, facing young Melville and sending him back by a blow in the chest.

"Let that fellow go!" insisted Don, angrily. "If you try to hold him, I won't be responsible for what I do!"

"I can tell you what you'll do, if you try to mix in at all where Mr. Farnum is busy," retorted Jack, facing his foe with a savage grin.

Nevertheless, Don, espying a stick of wood lying on the ground, snatched it up, then tried to dart around Captain Jack in order to get at Mr. Farnum, who was having a rather one-sided struggle with the recent fugitive.

But Jack stopped Don—stopped him all of a sudden, by rushing at him and forcing him back up against a tree trunk. Whack! thump! It was no time for delicacy. Young Benson struck Don two hard blows in the face, next wrenching the stick away from him.

"The ground's good enough for you—full length!" snapped Jack; wrathfully. Leaping at the Melville heir once more, he bore that angered youth to the ground. Had not Don been winded by so much running he would not have been so easy to handle.

"Now, you stay there," commanded Jack, testily. "I believe you know a good deal about things that have happened to me to-night, and we've got to get it all straightened out."

"I've got this one, Jack," called Mr. Farnum, gleefully.

The arrival of the real Jack Benson on the scene, in contrast with the sham one, had opened the boatbuilder's eyes. He could not fathom, yet, what it all meant, but he was certain that his hitherto trusted young captain would be able to explain it all satisfactorily.

The young stranger in blue now lay on his back, while Jacob Farnum sat astride of him. The boatbuilder felt carefully over the outside of the clothing of his captive, until his hands encountered the feel of paper.

"I guess this is what I'm looking for," muttered the "Pollard's" builder, thrusting his hand into a pocket and pulling out an envelope. "This looks like the envelope Don Melville handed you, back there up the road. Let us see how much you got for your rascality to-night."

Striking a match, Mr. Farnum drew some banknotes from the envelope, counting them.

“Twenty dollars, for all that dirty work,” sneered the boatbuilder. “Young man, you sell yourself too cheaply. It ought to be worth more than twenty dollars, just to have to be found with the Melvilles.”

Hearing that, Don gnashed his teeth. Like many another rascal, Don wanted people to think well of him.

“Jack,” called out the boatbuilder, “see if young Melville has a long, white envelope anywhere about him. In the inside coat pocket, if I remember rightly.”

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"Don't you dare!" challenged young Melville. But Jack glanced down at him with contempt, retorting:

"I follow only Mr. Farnum's orders. People who follow your orders take too big a risk of having to go to jail."

In Don's inner coat pocket rested a long, white envelope. Jack fished it out with a cry of triumph.

"Got it, Jack?" hailed the boatbuilder.

"Yes, sir."

"Then hold on to that envelope until we have a good chance to look it over. It's supposed to contain plans, or some sort of information, that you were supposed to be selling the Melvilles to-night."

"What?" gasped Captain Jack.

"Oh, there's a lot to the affair, and some of it needs unraveling, but we'll get to the bottom of it yet."

"I should say we'd have to!"

"This young hoodlum that I'm holding down is dressed in a uniform just like yours."

"I noticed that, sir."

"He's your figure, and complexion, and doesn't look a whole lot unlike you, Jack. I was fooled to-night, from the distance, when he impersonated you. But, now I have a closer look, this young fellow looks more like a thug, and he's slightly cross-eyed, too."

"I hear voices, so they must be over this way," sounded the tones of Broughton Emerson, between the trees. Then he and George Melville came upon the scene.

The elder Melville stared incredulously, with a startled gasp, when he got close enough to make out what had happened.

"Benson," blurted the capitalist, "how dare you? This is an outrage, you young puppy! Don, get up out of that undignified position. Get up this instant!"

"He will," said Jack, dryly, "as soon as he can get away. At present he's held down by force of circumstances."

"Get off my son, you impudent young upstart!" insisted George Melville, aghast at the ignoring of his first order. "Don, get up this instant."

"Mr. Farnum gives all the orders here, so far as I'm concerned, Mr. Melville," announced the submarine boy.

"Oh, let him up," said Farnum, dryly. "We know just where to find Don Melville any time that we need him."

Jack got up willingly enough, then. But Don, as soon as he had recovered some of his crumpled dignity, held out one hand imperiously.

"Give me that envelope you just took from my pocket," he commanded.

"Oh, will I?" rejoined Benson. "Ask Mr. Farnum for it."

"Hold onto that envelope, Jack," commanded the boatbuilder.

Jack Benson thrust it into his inner coat pocket, next firmly buttoning the front of his coat. Don made a move forward, as though to prevent, but drew back sullenly when he caught the flash of the submarine captain's steady eyes.

"Did young Benson take anything from your pockets?" demanded George Melville, stiffly.

"Yes, that envelope that he has just buttoned up in his own coat," said Don, sulkily.

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"Return that to my son, at once," insisted the capitalist.

Jack, this time, did not even honor the command so far as to admit having heard it.

Broughton Emerson, deeply puzzled, had left group to go over to Mr. Farnum and the strange boy in blue.

"Jack!" called the boatbuilder, and Benson ran to him.

"Do you think you can fasten onto this youth, and prevent his getting away from us?" asked Jacob Farnum.

"I'm rather sure of it," nodded Benson.

"Then keep your eye on the fellow, Jack. He's got to go to jail. He's been engaged in some conspiracy against us, and I'm going to fathom it all, and have the fellow sent up for years and years at hard labor."

The fellow whom Jack was now holding heard this with a start and a shiver.

"You hear that, Don Melville?" he gasped. "Remember, you promised to see me through safely, if any trouble happened. You've got to keep your word."

"Hold your tongue if you think I'm going to do anything for you," growled Don.

"If you don't stand by me," threatened the prisoner, "I'll make things warm for you—and you know I can do it!"

Don paled, visibly, under that threat.

"Ho, ho!" laughed Jacob Farnum. "When thieves fall out—"

"Mr. Farnum, sir," thundered the elder Melville, stalking over to where the boatbuilder stood, "do you realize you're talking about my son?"

"Well, why not?" asked Mr. Farnum, coolly. "It's becoming pretty evident that he isn't a bit too good to be talked about."

"What does all this hubbub and outrage mean, anyway?" cried George Melville.

"It looks to me," rejoined Farnum, coolly, "as though your son would have the extensive task of informing us."

"Come on, father; let's be getting away from these people," proposed Don. "But what are you going to do with that young man?"

“In the name of the Commonwealth,” replied the boatbuilder, “I’ve placed this young man under arrest, and I’m going to deliver him up to the authorities. He has been engaged in a conspiracy, and must suffer for his full share in the affair. If he confesses, and implicates others, they’ll have to stand the consequences.”

Again Don lost color, though now he was careful not to betray himself any further. But he hesitated, afraid to go away, lest Jack’s prisoner be led into betraying him.

“Start your young man towards the road, Jack,” directed Mr. Farnum, who now had the envelopes taken from Don and the stranger.

Jack started, holding to the arm of his late impersonator.

“Mr. Farnum, may I have a word with you?” asked George Melville, as the others walked along.

“Mr. Emerson,” urged the boatbuilder, “will you walk on the other side of Captain Benson’s prisoner? I want to make sure that no attempt at rescue is made.”

Broughton Emerson readily nodded his agreement, and stepped up ahead. As for Don, he fell in behind this group, while Messrs. Melville and Farnum walked still more to the rear.

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"Now, what does this whole affair mean?" demanded George Melville.

"As far as I understand it," answered Jack's employer, stiffly, "it looks as though your son and yourself had framed up a scene, to be witnessed in poor light, at night, in which my young captain would appear to be hound enough to sell out Pollard's business secrets, and mine."

"I can assure you," said the capitalist, coldly, "that I had nothing to do with any deception."

"Then your son, without your knowledge, fixed up to-night's affair."

"You seem bound to fasten something upon my son."

"Well, Mr. Melville, can't you yourself understand that everything appears to point to Don as the prime mover in all this business?"

"I do not agree with you, sir."

"Well, perhaps that's hardly to be expected," laughed Jacob Farnum. "However, since the real Jack Benson wasn't in that little picture so neatly framed for inspection, let us get up closer to him, and ask him to tell us just what did happen."

So Jack, as the party turned into the road, related the story of the trap that had been sprung on him, and how he had escaped from it.

At the conclusion of the narrative, Mr. Farnum turned around to say to Don:

"Young man, if you have engineered the whole of to-night's plan, I must compliment you on your originality and ingenuity. Nothing but accident prevented you from having a complete triumph."

"Be careful, sir, what you say about my son!" warned George Melville, pompous in his anger.

"As it disturbs you," smiled Farnum, "I won't say any more about it. The whole business will keep."

The elder Melville, however, pulled Mr. Farnum by the arm until he had him well to the rear of the others.

"Now, Farnum," murmured the capitalist, in a conciliatory voice, "I am ready to admit that it begins to look a bit as though my son may possibly have been a bit reckless. I shall want the truth of it all proved. But, if I am satisfied that Don has been wholly in the

wrong in anything that he has done, believe me, I shall be most ready to make the matter right with you.”

“Right with me?” repeated the boatbuilder, in amazement “What do you mean by that?”

“Why, I mean, of course, that, if I am convinced that Don has been headstrong and over-zealous—”

“Mr. Melville, listen to me, and understand me fully. It looks as though to-night’s business had been engineered on purpose to dissuade Mr. Emerson from investing money in my enterprises. If that is true, it is a matter of conspiracy, and I cannot hold out any hope to you that I shall allow anyone to escape just punishment.”

“Do you threaten my son?” demanded the elder Melville, a menacing frown clouding his face.

“Of course not unless he can be shown to be undoubtedly guilty. For your sake and his I hope that won’t be the case. And now, sir, good night.”

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They were nearing the streets of the village, and, Soon after the two Melvilles fell behind, Mr. Farnum found a constable who took the stranger in the blue uniform in charge.

Mr. Emerson excused himself, going to his own stopping place, but Mr. Farnum and Jack continued with the officer until they had seen the young stranger locked up.

Then Mr. Farnum hurriedly telephoned to the house of a lawyer, rousing that gentleman, and sending him to the lock-up to interview the prisoner. Jacob Farnum had already returned to the young stranger the twenty dollars found in the envelope in his pocket. The boatbuilder had also handed to Don Melville the envelope taken from him, after having ascertained that it contained only blank paper.

As Mr. Farnum and Captain Jack again turned into the street they encountered David Pollard, rushing along and looking much excited.

"Oh, here you are," burst from the inventor. "I've been looking for you everywhere, since you were not at home. Two things of the utmost importance have happened."

"Some other things, also, of which I do not believe you yet know," smiled the boatbuilder. "But let's have your news, first, Dave."

"A thief, dressed in a uniform very much like Jack's, and of the same size and similar build to our captain, broke into my room and stole the drawings for the automatic closer for the torpedo tube," hastened on the inventor, almost breathlessly. "I fired a shot at him, from my window, but he escaped."

"We know the fellow, I guess," nodded Jacob Farnum, "and we know he disposed of some blank paper to-night. But I did not know your drawings had been stolen."

"Say," broke in Jack Benson, thoughtfully, "do you remember the two holes in the right side of the fellow's coat?"

"Yes, I do," rejoined the boatbuilder.

"Probably he's the same fellow. A bullet, passing through his coat, might have made those two holes without touching his body."

"Jove!" muttered Farnum. "Yes; that's so. I believe your guess is wholly right, Jack."

"Tell me about that," begged Mr. Pollard.

"One thing at a time, please," urged the boatbuilder. "Now, if that young rascal had the drawings, did he turn them over to Don Melville before the arranged meeting that I saw? For our prisoner had no such papers aboard him when I searched him."

“That will have to be solved,” muttered Jack, seriously. “We can’t afford to have those secret drawings in the possession of the rival submarine boat builders.”

“But what about your other news, Dave?” interposed Mr. Farnum.

“This telegram!” burst, eagerly, from the inventor, producing a yellow envelope. “It was addressed to you, but in your absence I opened it.”

While Jack struck a match, the boatbuilder read with feverish interest showing in his eyes.

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"Oh, but this is great news!" he gasped. "We've finally got the Navy Department awake. This dispatch inquires how soon we can be ready to run the 'Pollard' through an exhaustive trial trip with a board of Naval officers aboard. Do you grasp it, Jack? If the trial succeeds we'll sell our first boat to the Government and be on the high road to success and fortune! Oh, this is the grandest news! It overshadows everything else!"

It truly did.

CHAPTER XIII

ON TRAIL AS YOUNG EXPERTS

Very early the next morning Jacob Farnum sent the following telegram to the Navy Department at Washington:

"Send board of officers as soon as you desire. Everything in readiness. Advise me promptly, and how many will be in party."

Then, knowing that he could not expect to hear from the national capital for at least several hours, and feeling that he simply must have something absorbing on his hands, the boatbuilder turned his attention to following up the business of the night before.

He soon learned, through means of his own, that Don Melville had engaged a driver and had left Dunhaven during the night.

"Pooh!" snapped the boatbuilder. "If we want that young man, detectives will find him sooner or later. Or else, he'll be compelled to hide at the ends of the earth, so that he'll give us no further trouble."

The young stranger at the lock-up steadfastly refused to admit that he was David Pollard's burglar of the night before. Naturally, therefore, he failed to disclose what had become of the envelope of drawings stolen from the inventor's room.

Yet the lawyer engaged by Mr. Farnum had strong hopes that, eventually, the prisoner would be forced to reveal all that he knew. Another attorney, engaged, presumably, by Mr. Melville, had also seen the prisoner, and probably had succeeded in making the young man feel that he would be well paid for silence.

During the forenoon the prisoner's case was called in the local justice's court, but Farnum's lawyer had no difficulty in having the hearing postponed. The prisoner gave the name of James Potter, which undoubtedly was fictitious. No bail was offered for "Potter." If Mr. Melville felt inclined to do that, he undoubtedly dreaded that such an act would be construed as a tacit admission of Don's connection with the strange business.

Captain Jack was sent, with an officer, to see whether he could identify the two Italians who had trapped him the night before. Though all the workmen of the yard were rounded up, Jack could not find his recent assailants among them.

“And now,” cried Mr. Farnum, when Captain Jack returned to the Farnum yard, “you will have to get busy with any preparation on board the boat that has to be made.”

“No preparation is necessary,” replied Benson, “except to remove the automatic closer from the after port of the torpedo tube, so the Navy men won’t see it. That can be done in ten minutes or less. The ‘Pollard’ is all ready for inspection or any kind of tests, sir.”

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So Jack spent his time at leisure aboard the submarine. Eph and Hal listened enviously to the recital of his night's adventure.

"And all that time," grumbled Hal, "I was taking an extra nap in the starboard stateroom."

"And I was reading a great story about the boy scouts of the War of 1812," sighed Eph, regretfully. "Doing that when something real was happening within a long stone's throw of here. Oh, Jack, Jack! Why didn't you tip us off?"

"If I had only suspected that something was up, I would have done it," Jack replied. "I tell you, fellows, there was a time, when those Italians were marching me through the woods, that a little company of my own sort would have been mighty pleasant. I couldn't be very sure, at one time last night, of whether you'd ever see me again. But I had the conviction that, if I tried to put up a useless fight against those two powerful fellows, there'd be sure to be a new captain aboard the 'Pollard.'"

It was well along in the evening when Mr. Farnum received a telegram from Washington, informing him that a board of three Naval officers, provided with proper credentials, would arrive in Dunhaven on the next morning but one.

The boatbuilder came promptly on board the submarine with the news, adding, earnestly:

"Don't you boys leave this boat unguarded for an instant until after the trial trip is over. Mr. Melville will very likely hear about this and I'm not sure he'd hesitate to disable our boat if he could. At the rate at which work is going on at his yard his boat may be finished before our second submarine is ready for demonstration. It would be greatly to his interest to have a boat to show the Government first, especially if he now has the plans of our automatic closing device."

It turned out that the suspicion of Mr. Melville receiving the news of the coming trial trip was wholly correct. The next morning that capitalist called at Jacob Farnum's office.

"Farnum," he announced, "I've decided that, in order to heal all breaches, and also to make what is very likely to be a good investment for myself, I'll be ready to put in all the money desired with you, and on what I think will be your own terms."

"Of course I feel greatly obliged to you," rejoined the boatbuilder, with evident sarcasm. "But to put money into this enterprise, Mr. Melville, would be to encourage, needlessly, competition with your own submarine building."

"Oh, we can merge the two yards, Mr. Farnum," responded the capitalist, with a wave of his hand.

“Some little time ago, Mr. Melville, I would have been very greatly pleased with your offer. Now, Mr. Emerson stands ready with hundreds of thousands of dollars. He knows that a trial trip is being arranged for the Government, and he stands ready to act by the result. If we can sell our first boat to the Government he stands ready to turn over all the money we can possibly use.”

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"But what if the Government doesn't buy?"

"Then there would be no sense in using more capital for the present."

"The Government may be fairly well satisfied, and yet there may be a hitch about buying one of your boats. What, then?"

"We shall have to wait and see," replied Mr. Farnum.

"But my offer, Mr. Farnum, if not accepted to-day, will not be repeated," warned the capitalist.

"Your offer, Mr. Melville, would not, under any circumstances, be considered, or even tolerated," rejoined the boatbuilder, coolly.

George Melville leaped to his feet, his face flushing.

"Do you mean that?" he demanded, glaring at the man opposite him.

"I never meant anything more in all my life," smiled the boatbuilder. "Mr. Melville, I thank you for suggesting that you are ready to advance money, but I assure you, on my word, that I shall never have any business dealings with any members of your family."

"Man, you are talking like an idiot! Throwing away chances like a fool!" stormed Mr. Melville, his look becoming blacker every instant.

"And I appreciate the fact that you are much too wise a man to talk with a fool," laughed the boatbuilder, walking over and throwing the office door open. "Good morning! This will be my busy week."

"You'll want me when, it's too late," cried the angry capitalist, striding through the doorway. "You will live to see the day, very soon—"

What that day was Mr. Farnum didn't learn, for he closed the door on his departing caller, going, laughing, back to his desk, where he picked up a cigar and lighted it.

"How poison runs through the blood of some families," mused the boatbuilder, blowing out several rings of smoke.

On the morning appointed the three Naval officers arrived at Dunhaven. Their appearance did not excite much interest among the natives, for all three were in ordinary civilian dress.

Commander Ennerling came as president of the board; the other two members were Lieutenant Commander Briscoe and Lieutenant McCrea, the latter serving as recorder of the board.

"I've had the pleasure of meeting you before, haven't I, Lieutenant?" murmured Mr. Farnum, in an aside.

"Yes, and the commander of your boat is the same who played that wonderfully funny trick by leaving the submarine's card painted on the side hull of the battleship 'Luzon' during the hours when I was watch officer," replied the Naval officer, in an equally low tone. "But please don't refer to it before my comrades, They've stopped hazing me about it, and have almost forgotten the incident."

As Lieutenant McCrea spoke his face was very red. He had been tormented much by his brother officers over the laughable prank that Captain Jack had played upon him, as related in the first volume in this series.

Mr. Farnum took the Naval board first of all to his house, where the inventor was presented to them. Then, after an early lunch, the party went out to board the "Pollard."

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Captain Jack Benson and his crew of two were on the platform deck to receive the visitors from Washington. As Jack's hand met Lieutenant McCrea's the submarine boy said only:

"I am very glad to see you again, sir. I hope we shall have something worth showing to you."

"Get away from moorings, Captain Benson," directed Mr. Farnum. "Then, when we get out on the broad ocean, we'll be ready for any tests that these gentlemen want."

Within a very few minutes more the "Pollard" was a mile off shore, heading almost due east and traveling at nearly her full speed.

"We'll see how fast you can log the knots off for an hour," proposed Commander Ennerling, picking up a satchel that he had brought with him. With McCrea's help he adjusted a patent log that he had brought along with him, casting the line over the rail into the water.

"Now, let me know how soon you are ready to have the record of your speed begin," he suggested.

"Take the log from this minute," requested Captain Jack, for, as soon as he saw the Naval officers adjusting the log, he had quietly passed word by Eph to Hal Hastings, who was in the engine room, to crowd on every revolution of the twin shafts that the gasoline motor would stand.

For an hour there was nothing to do but to steer straight ahead. Part of the time some of the officers spent below smoking, though always at least one of them remained on deck, to make sure that the log record was not tampered with.

At exactly the end of the hour the indicator of the log was read off.

"Twenty-one and four tenths knots!" cried commander Ennerling, with an expression of amazement. "Whew! I knew we were traveling fast, but I didn't imagine we were doing quite as well as this."

"You're satisfied with your test, aren't you?" inquired Mr. Farnum.

"Yes, for the log was carefully standardized for us before we came."

Hal Hastings was called on deck to be complimented for this performance.

"The motor can be improved so as to beat that speed," declared Hal, flushed and happy, for he had nursed that motor along during the hour!

“As it stands, the twenty-one-spot-four record beats anything of the kind with any other submarine boat in the United States, doesn’t it?” inquired David Pollard.

“I—I—it may do. It’s a very excellent record for speed, anyway; very remarkable,” admitted the president of the board, cautiously.

“Now, gentlemen, what test will you have next?” asked Mr. Farnum.

“Suppose,” replied Commander Ennerling, after glancing at his associates, “that you submerge the boat, on even keel, and let us see how many feet under water you dare to go with this craft?”

“It shall be done,” nodded Mr. Farnum. Accordingly the ventilators were shipped, all hands went below, and the conning tower manhole was closed. Everything was in readiness for the drop below the surface. The gasoline engine was shut off, the electric motor being started. At Captain Jack’s order Eph stepped up to take the conning tower wheel, while the young commander stood by the diving controls.

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"Even keel, if you please," again requested Commander Ennerling.

Jack began to flood, slowly, the water tanks, the "Pollard" sinking gradually. With the young captain at one side of the gauge, Messrs. Farnum and Pollard took their posts at the other side, to watch the readings.

"How many feet down do you want to go?" asked young Benson, coolly.

"How far down do you dare to take the boat?" asked Mr. Farnum, almost hesitatingly.

"As far as you dare to let me," replied Jack, with spirit. "Watch the gauge, and tell me when to stop."

"Jove, but you have a cool nerve, lad, if you back that up," laughed lieutenant McCrea.

"Perhaps our young skipper is relying upon the caution of his employer," suggested Commander Ennerling, smiling.

It is always a question of great importance just how far below the surface a submarine torpedo boat may go with safety. The greater the depth the more enormous the pressure of the water. At sufficient depth the water pressure is terrific enough to crush in the hull of the stoutest submarine. At even less depth the pressure may easily start the plates so that the inrush of water will destroy all on board.

Yet Jack Benson's proposition was to send the "Pollard" further and further below the surface, until owner or inventor should order him to stop.

All three of the Navy officers shot a look of admiration at the doughty young skipper. Then, almost immediately, their faces resumed their usual expressions. To the Navy officers this experience carried with it no dread. The "Pollard" might prove, under severe test, wholly unfit to stand the pressure below surface. Their death might be but a minute or two away, but with these Naval officers it was all in the line of duty.

It was not, with the members of the board, so much a matter of actual grit as of constant association with all forms of danger.

"We're going pretty low," muttered Mr. Farnum to himself, as he read the gauge.

"Can we stand much more depth?" wondered David Pollard, inwardly uneasy, though outwardly calm. A moment later he told himself:

"Jack Benson has never been as low as this before!"

"It won't take much more of this to make further trial trips of no interest to us," almost shivered Jacob Farnum.

Yet Jack, true to his word, allowed the “Pollard” to sink lower and lower. He was waiting for the word—or the bottom!

CHAPTER XIV

FOOLING THE NAVY, BUT ONLY ONCE

Commander Ennerling bent forward to read the submergence gauge.

“Jove, but you’ve really your nerve with you, Captain Benson,” he declared, simply.

“Confidence in the boat, sir,” Jack answered coolly.

Up in the conning tower, where he could observe the duplicate gauge, Eph Somers, though not easily frightened, was beginning to feel more than curious.

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"If we go much deeper, I'll sure let out a yell," Eph gritted, between his teeth.

At last Jack's voice broke in, coolly:

"You see, gentlemen, the gauge now gives a constant reading. We can't go any lower, for the water tanks are as full as they'll hold, and there's still the buoyancy caused by all the air the interior of the boat. So we're as far below the surface as we can go."

"Bully for you, Benson!" cried Lieutenant McCrea, slapping the young skipper on the back. "You understand what you're doing, and no one could do it with more coolness. You must have been born aboard a submarine."

"He never saw a craft of this kind, until a few weeks ago," retorted Jacob Farnum admiringly.

Taking out a notebook and pencil, Commander Ennerling recorded the reading of the submergence gauge, which showed how many feet the craft was below the surface of the water.

"Of course," hinted Mr. Farnum, smilingly, "don't know the gauge to be correct."

"We've the means with us of testing and standardizing the gauge in the harbor," replied the president of the board.

"If we ever see the harbor again," muttered Eph Somers, overhead in the conning tower.

"How does this compare with the depths touched by submarine boats now owned by the Navy?" asked David Pollard, a bit feverishly. He was not afraid of their present rather dangerous position, but was frightfully nervous over the thought of any good showing this craft born in his brain might fail to make. "This is thirty feet lower than any submarine record I've ever heard of."

"I—perhaps it would be wiser for me not to say," replied Commander Ennerling. "It may be as well for me to wait and compare this record with those on file at the Navy Department."

"Have you had all you want of this, gentlemen?" inquired the boatbuilder. "Shall we show you anything else?"

"Yes; you might give us a run at full speed under water, at the lowest depth that you deem it wise to try to run the craft," answered the president of the board.

"Very good," nodded the builder. Hal took this as the signal to leap back into the motor room.

"How far below the surface would *you* dare run the 'Pollard,' Captain Benson?" inquired Commander Ennerling.

"At the greatest depth we can go, the present depth," quietly answered Jack, without bravado.

The president of the board glanced at the builder of the submarine.

"Does that appeal to you, Mr. Farnum?"

"I'll let Captain Benson have his own way, unless the members of the board have other instructions," replied Jacob Farnum, promptly.

"Well, Captain Benson, if you deem it wise to work your propellers at their best at the present level, go ahead and try it," laughed the president of the board.

"Half speed ahead, Hal," called the young submarine captain. "Full speed as soon as you get well started. Eph, swing around and go due west."

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"Aye, aye, sir," came the response, from both members of the crew.

Erelong the splendid little craft was making the best speed of which she was capable. That there was a big chance of risk in it all knew. If the hull of the boat was not of the most perfect construction there would presently come an ear-splitting report through the bursting in of steel plates on account of the tremendous pressure of the water all around the boat. That would be followed by the inrush of the ocean and prompt destruction.

There was another danger, not so great. Wrecks of ships often sink below the surface, there to drift tediously about as long as the timbers hold together. If the "Pollard," traveling under present conditions, should collide with such a hull, there would be no future for anyone aboard.

Yet, though all three of the submarine boys fully comprehended the chances that now confronted them, all three did their work without faltering.

In fact, none of the eight human beings aboard during this extremely hazardous undertaking betrayed any cowardice, nor even alarm.

Lieutenant McCrea watched the gauge, the other two officers going forward to make record of the number of revolutions per moment at which the electric motor could drive the propeller shafts.

After ten minutes the president of the board approached Mr. Farnum to say:

"We are satisfied with this part of the work. Let us return to the surface for a welcome look at the sky."

"Will you hold your watches, gentlemen," inquired Captain Jack, "in order to see how much time passes before we are running on the surface?"

One of the members of the board, watch in hand, climbed up the staircase to stand beside Eph in the conning tower.

"Awash, sir," Eph soon called down.

The time was noted.

"Now, show us anything that you wish," suggested Commander Ennerling.

Captain Jack looked significantly at Messrs. Pollard and Farnum. Both nodded.

"Then, sir," rejoined Captain Benson, "if don't mind, we'll run back to Dunhaven, and show you a specialty of ours in the harbor at Dunhaven."

“Very good,” agreed the president of the board.

Not until they were in sight of the little harbor was the manhole opened. Now, some of the party stepped out onto the platform deck and remained there a few minutes.

“I’ll have to ask you to come inside, now, gentlemen,” requested Jack Benson, courteously, after making an unobserved signal to someone on shore. “We’re going down to the bottom of the harbor.”

As soon as the “Pollard” had sunk, and rested on bottom, Jacob Farnum invited the members of the board into one of the staterooms aft.

“For just a few minutes, gentlemen,” he explained, “we want to keep you from seeing something.”

As soon as the visitors were out of the way, Captain Jack sprang forward to the torpedo tube. Hal Hastings, stripping off his outer clothing, stood forth in his bathing suit.

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"Into the tube with you, now," whispered Jack. "Crawl well forward—right up to the forward end of the tube—so. Get hold of the crossbar of the cap. Hold on hard. Now, when we close the rear port, and open the forward cap, with a little rush of compressed air, the cap will open forward and up, dragging you out into the water. Now, then, got a good hold?"

"A grip like death itself," laughed Hal.

"Be ready, then."

Captain Jack closed the rear port of the tube, and turned on some compressed air, which also drove the forward port open and up. A moment later the submarine boy tapped at the door of the state-room.

"Has anything happened?" smiled Mr. Farnum.

"Hal Hastings is missing, sir," reported Jack.

"Missing?" demanded the boatbuilder, leading his guests out into the cabin.

Young Benson pointed to the pile of clothing, just as Hal had left it on the floor.

"Get to the surface," commanded Mr. Farnum. "We shall have to look into this."

Soon the conning tower of the "Pollard" reappeared above the waves.

"Hal is safe, gentlemen," reported Captain Benson, from the tower.

An instant later he opened the manhole of the tower, allowing all hands to step out on deck.

Grinning delightedly, Hal stood in the bow of the small shore boat.

"How did he get there, from a submarine on the bottom?" asked Commander Ennerling, in astonishment.

"That is one of the secret features of this boat," laughed Mr. Farnum. "Now, gentlemen, if you will kindly come below again, we're going to sink."

Hardly had the submarine touched bottom before Mr. Farnum again conducted his guests back to the state-room. When Captain Jack summoned them forth, they returned to find Hal Hastings, laughing in a way that showed his white teeth, standing there in his dripping garments.

"From what you have seen, gentlemen," said the builder, seriously, "I am sure you will understand that we have mastered a new feature, of great value in submarine boating." The three Navy officers struggled to conceal their wonder.

"Make for the surface, Captain Benson," directed the owner.

When the passengers aboard the submarine stood once more on the platform deck, the yard's owner signaled for the shore boat to lay alongside. Into this small boat he took his guests. The boat was rowed away two or three lengths, immediately after which the "Pollard" again sank.

Two or three minutes passed. Then Captain Jack's head shot above the surface. He made for the boat, hanging onto the gunwale.

"It would be bad judgment to call you young fellows mermaids," said Commander Ennerling, dryly, "but you are surely *merboys*."

A moment later Hal Hastings's head came above the surface.

"Mr. Pollard and young Somers could as easily leave the boat and join us," explained Mr. Farnum. "However, if the last man aboard leaves the boat then there is no way provided for a return to the 'Pollard,' and we would be placed at great expense in raising her. I think we have, however, shown you enough to make you believe that we have mastered some new wrinkles in submarine work."

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"You have shown us more than we can quite digest," admitted Lieutenant Commander Briscoe. "But how is this all done?"

"That," responded Mr. Farnum, gravely, "the Government will know when the boat is purchased for the American Navy."

The anchor being again lowered, both Jack and Hal dived below. In five minutes the "Pollard" was on the surface. Mr. Farnum asked:

"Have we shown you enough at one time?"

"Yes," admitted the officers. "This evening, after dark, we may ask you to take us out and show us your boat's diving powers."

"Jack, my boy," whispered Jacob Farnum, when the young captain joined the party on shore, "your trick of leaving and returning to the boat when it lies on the bottom has gotten our friends of the Navy into a state of hard guessing. Do you think we'd better show them some more of it at another time?"

"If you want my opinion, sir, I think we'd better not. We've puzzled them this time, but if we keep on doing the trick for them, I'm afraid they'll soon guess how it's done. I don't believe, sir, you can fool the American Navy more than once."

CHAPTER XV

SERVING IN THE CAUSE OF PEACE, NOT WAR

"It seems almost a shame to have to go below," sighed Lieutenant McCrea.

It was evening, the time about nine o'clock. For nearly an hour the "Pollard" had been running out to sea at something below her full speed. She was now something like a dozen miles off the coast.

Commander Ennerling had just decided that it would be a good time to test the diving capabilities of the submarine.

Ventilators were shipped, and all other preparations had been made for going below the surface.

Eph was left in the conning tower, Lieutenant McCrea with him.

"How far do you want the dive to be made, sir?" asked Jack Benson.

"A depth of forty feet ought to serve the purpose," stated the president of the board.

“Then, sir, we will make a sloping dive to that depth, then complete the curve until we strike the surface again,” proposed the submarine boy. “How will that suit you, sir?”

“Excellently,” agreed the Navy commander.

“Do you want to take the record with your stop watch?”

“Yes?”

“All ready, sir.”

As Captain Jack gave the word he threw open the forward water tanks, so that water rushed in, tilting the bow of the craft downward. The “Pollard” moved on a decided slant until Captain Jack read the depth of forty feet on the gauge. Then, with a barely perceptible rest. On an even keel, the young submarine expert threw compressed air into the forward tanks, expelling the water, at the same time admitting water to the tanks aft.

Gracefully, and with, the precision of a trained living being, the submarine craft curved upward until Lieutenant McCrea shouted down:

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"We're awash, sir"

Benson drove the water from the tanks aft, and the boat rode the waves.

"Now, let us see you run a little lower than awash, with just enough of the conning tower in the air for the helmsman to see where he is steering," proposed the president of the board.

Jack went above to relieve Eph at the wheel, while Commander Ennerling stationed himself beside the boy.

"You may use your searchlight, of course," proposed the commander, "and proceed just as though you were trying to pick up a battleship of the enemy without much exposing yourself."

As the broad, bright beam of the searchlight shone out over the waters ahead, Captain Benson called down for the best speed.

Commander Ennerling watched the boat's performance, and the work of the young captain for some minutes before he said:

"Benson, I'll admit that the more I see of this craft the more anxious I am to see her under our Navy flag."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, sir," cried Jack, his face glowing.

"Yet I'm a bit puzzled, after all."

"How so, sir?"

"Why, the more I think about it, the more I wonder just how much of my delight and interest are due to the boat itself, and how much to the splendidly expert way in which you young men handle her."

"You call us experts, sir?"

"Don't you believe, yourselves, that you are?"

"We hope that some day we shall be," was Jack's slow response.

"Benson," went on the Navy officer, earnestly, "if you're not now experts, you never will be."

"Does that mean, sir, that we shall never know much more about such craft than we do now?"



“By no means. You’ll know more every year that you stick to the work. What I intended to convey is that you three are the best experts in this line I have ever seen, considering, of course, the amount of time you have already given to this work. Give you three lads time enough, and the United States appears destined to possess the three greatest submarine experts in the world.”

“That’s great praise, sir,” said Jack, quietly, his cheeks tingling.

“I mean all I’ve said,” rejoined Commander Ennerling, gravely.

They had run some miles by this time. Captain Jack, reaching up to swing the searchlight about over the course ahead, suddenly uttered:

“Look over there, sir—two points off starboard. What do you make out?”

Commander Ennerling instantly became absorbed as he caught sight of a steam yacht something more than a mile away.

“Going under full power, but shooting rockets,” added Jack. “They’ve just sent up two from aft.”

“Distress sign, without a doubt,” mused the Naval officer. “Wonder what it means?”

Jack had reached for a pair of night glasses, which he now handed Commander Ennerling.

Already the “Pollard” had swung to a bow-on course and was making straight for the steam yacht.

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"Mutiny, by Jove!" murmured the Naval officer. He did not speak excitedly, but with a certain grim dryness. "Catch up with them as soon as you can, Captain Benson."

"There they go, heading away from us," muttered Captain Jack.

"From her present performance she doesn't look to be over a fourteen-knot boat," declared Ennerling. "You won't be long in running alongside."

"What do you make out, sir?"

"A white-haired old man, in a yachting suit, and another man in white duck. They are aft, and both appear to be holding pistols. There are two women, one middle-aged, I should say, and the other barely more than a girl. Excellent glasses, these, Benson."

"Can you make out any mutineers?"

"There are some men, pressing back astern, yet seemingly not wholly liking to risk revolver fire," went on Commander Ennerling. "I don't believe I can make out all the mutineers, from this point of view."

"What shall we do, sir, when we get alongside?"

"Quell the mutiny," retorted Commander Ennerling, with emphasis. "It's the one choice a Naval officer has in a case of this sort. Briscoe! McCrea!"

The two junior officers came hastily up the spiral stairway. Commander Ennerling told them as rapidly as he could what had happened.

"There's something wholly wrong on that yacht," he wound up, "and we've got to get alongside and look into it."

"Want to get out on the platform deck?" inquired Captain Jack.

"Yes, by all means."

More of the water was expelled from the tanks until the platform deck was two feet above the surface. Then the manhole was opened, and an interested crowd hurried out on deck. Only Eph remained below, he, to his disgust, being sent to the motor.

Jack Benson now stood at the deck wheel, while the others gathered at the rail to watch the progress of the pursuit.

Even as they looked, the older man aft on the yacht fired his revolver twice, aiming forward. The flashes could be distinctly made out, though the reports of the weapon were borne away by the breeze.

“Have either of you gentlemen a revolver?” demanded Commander Ennerling of his subordinate officers.

Neither of them had. Nor had any of the submarine’s own people.

“Hm!” muttered the commander, grimacing. “This is a fine Naval outfit to lay alongside of a craft that has a mutiny aboard!”

“Do you want to hail, or try to board the yacht?” inquired Jacob Farnum.

“I think we’d better run alongside and hail that crowd,” answered Commander Ennerling. “Yet, if it comes to it, we’ll have board!”

Three shots flashed out, amidships, on the yacht, showing that the fire was directed towards the stern. Two shots from the two men aft replied. No one appeared to have been hit.

“We’ll have to fight if we’re to be of any use,” muttered Ennerling. “With our fists, too, confound the luck!”

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They were now rapidly overhauling the yacht. It was with throbbing pulses that Captain Jack Benson steered the "Pollard" up alongside.

CHAPTER XVI

FIGHTING A MUTINY WITH THREATS

Hal Hastings came springing out of the conning tower with a megaphone.

Jack, with a final swing of the wheel, brought the "Pollard" in on a course parallel with the steam yacht, and not more than two hundred feet away from the other vessel's port rail.

At the same moment Benson rang the signal bell for reduced speed, so that the sterns of the two craft were kept almost on a line with each other.

"Ahoy, yacht!" bellowed the commander, through the megaphone. "Any trouble aboard?"

"Mutiny!" hoarsely shouted the white-haired man, turning his head only enough to send the word.

"It looks like it," agreed Commander Ennerling. "We are United States Naval officers, aboard a torpedo boat. The mutiny must stop. Shut off your speed, and send a boat over here. My order is addressed to the mutinous crew."

Two of the mutineers were hiding behind a mast, three more behind the forward end of the after deck house. Just how many more there were, could not be clearly made out by those on board the "Pollard," for some had undoubtedly crouched below the deck bulwarks.

But one man among the mutineers possessed the rough courage to advance to the rail, shouting in a husky voice:

"You go on your way, and mind your own business, Mr. Navy!"

"Stop that mutiny and submit to your officers," insisted Commander Ennerling, sternly. "Do you want us to come aboard and wipe you out to the last man?"

"You can't board us, from a craft of that kind," jeered the fellow at the yacht's rail.

"You'll find we can, if we have to."

"Come along, then!"

“Do you realize, my man, that we are United States Naval officers?”

“Not when I can’t see your uniform,” laughed the mutineer, roughly.

“I’m not going to argue with you any more. I’ve given you my orders. Do you intend to submit, or will you fight?”

“We’ll fight!” roared the mutineer. A hoarse cheer went up from his comrades.

“They don’t estimate our fighting power very highly,” muttered Ennerling, in a low tone. “If they knew the whole truth they’d be still less afraid of us.”

From the mutineer at the rail came another hoarse hail:

“Shove off and get away, or we’ll rush the crowd aft and wind up the women! You start a fight if you think you can. If you know you can’t, then get away. We’re not afraid until we’re killed.”

Now, eight mutineers, in all, lined across the deck, each man showing a revolver.

“Humph! We’ve got to fight—and can’t!” muttered Commander Ennerling, in great disgust.

“We can save those women,” muttered Jack Benson, “if they’ve the nerve to help themselves be saved.”

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"How?"

"Hal Hastings and I can swim over, and can hold the women up if they have the nerve to leap overboard."

"Those brutes might fire on you, and the women, but it's worth trying," decided the Naval officer, instantly. "Over with you, then!"

Captain Jack waited only long enough to shed coat and cap, then sprang to the rail. Hal was with him, instantly.

"Sir," bellowed Commander Ennerling, "Have your women folks jump overboard. We'll pick them up in the water. Be quick about it!"

There were a few hurried words in the little group of four aft on the steam yacht. Then, with the "Pollard" running in closer, so that a bare fifty feet separated the two craft—Mr. Farnum at the submarine's wheel—Jack Benson plunged overboard, followed by Hal. The girl aboard the yacht leaped at once, the older woman following quickly.

"Get us, too, if you can," shouted the white haired man at the yacht's stern. "We can swim a little."

Both craft were still going ahead at about fourteen knots, but, as the two men jumped Lieutenant Commander Briscoe and Lieutenant McCrea plunged overboard to get them.

Now Jacob Farnum rang for the reversing of the engine, and the submarine, first pausing, began to glide backward, then stopped altogether.

From the steam yacht went up another hoarse cheer, the mutineers dancing like demons, discharging their revolvers into the air. All this while the yacht steamed steadily away from the scene.

The girl was sinking for the second time as Jack Benson, with a forward swoop, shot one arm under her.

"You won't go down now," he called, cheerily. "Keep cool and just do what I ask you."

The older woman, buoyed up by a greater spread of skirts, had not sunk below the surface at all by the time that Hal Hastings reached her.

"All just as it ought to be," hailed Hal, blithely. "Don't be at all afraid, madam. Porpoise is my middle name, and you can't sink while I have you."

The work of the two Naval officers who had plunged overboard was easier. Both of the men who had leaped from the yacht's stern rail were able to swim. Briscoe and McCrea merely reached them and swam alongside.

David Pollard had ropes over the side of the submarine in a jiffy. It was easy work for seafaring men to climb these ropes over the sloping, easy side. It was scarcely more difficult to get the women up in safety.

"Let the ladies go below to the port stateroom," called Mr. Farnum. "They can disrobe, rub down and get in between blankets in the berths. Their men folks can take care of 'em."

"I'm the steward, sir, of the 'Selma,' the yacht that's ahead," explained the man in white duck. "I'll help them below at once, sir."

"We can have hot coffee in seven minutes," Mr. Farnum continued. "Captain Benson, if you'll take the wheel again, I'll go below and get to work in the galley."

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The white-haired man, in the meantime, was hurriedly making himself known to Commander Ennerling as Egbert Lawton, owner of the "*Selna*," a hundred-and-forty-foot schooner rigged steam yacht. The ladies were his wife and his sixteen-year-old daughter, Miss Ethel Johnson was the steward's name.

"Get after the yacht again, Captain Benson," requested Commander Ennerling. "We have the owner and the ladies safe, but we've got to take that crew to land as mutineers."

"They'll fight to the last shot," declared Mr. Lawton, shaking his head.

"Did you and your steward bring your revolvers with you?" asked Ennerling.

"No; we tossed them into the sea as we dived," laughed Mr. Lawton. "Bringing weapons to a Naval craft is like carrying coals to Newcastle."

"Unfortunately," rejoined the commander, plaintively, "this isn't yet a Naval vessel, and the most dangerous weapon aboard is the breadknife in the galley. But how did the mutiny start, Mr. Lawton? And how did you come to have such a rascally crew aboard?"

"Two or three bad men got into the crew, started fights, and some of the old crew quit. Then these bad men passed the word to other tough characters to apply to my captain. In a short time the crew was all of one piece of cloth, including the fellows in the engine room."

"How many mutineers are there aboard?"

"Thirteen, in all. Even the cook joined them."

"But your officers?"

"Captain Peters and Mate Sidney. It was the mate's watch when the trouble started. You see, as most of my cruises have been short, I carried but one mate. So, on a long run, the captain had to stand watch in turn. Captain Peters was below. Mate Sidney went forward, to the forecabin, for something. He must have been felled and ironed. One of the crew roused the captain, saying the mate needed him forward. Then Captain Peters went forward, was seized and ironed. Then, howling like fiends, in order to frighten us the more, the mutineers rushed aft."

"Yet you stood them off?"

"Yes; Steward Johnson and I both happened to be on deck, and were both armed. The rascals didn't want any of their side killed, so they tried to parley when they saw our weapons."

“What started the mutiny?”

“Mrs Lawton usually carries her jewels, when on board. They are worth two hundred thousand dollars—a rich prize to desperate thieves.”

“What folly to tempt men so on the broad ocean!” muttered Commander Ennerling, under his breath.

“The jewels were kept in a safe in the cabin,” continued Mr. Lawton.

“And there are the scoundrels just smashing in the cabin door,” broke in Jack Benson.

“There they go, piling below.”

“They’re welcome,” jeered Egbert Lawton. “As it happened, my wife had some sort of presentiment, and the jewels are in two canvas pouches securely fastened under her clothing. She leaped overboard with them.”

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As the “Pollard” now ran much closer, those aboard the submarine could hear the yells of rage that came from the yacht’s cabin.

“The safe was unlocked, and the rascals have found out how badly they’ve been sold,” laughed Mr. Lawton. “But why are you going so close to the yacht? In their rage, they’ll fight like fiends, and you are unarmed.”

“We shall see what we shall see,” dryly commented the commander, murmuring a few words in Hal Hastings’s ear.

Hal promptly dropped down below.

“Selma ahoy!” hailed Ennerling, when the submarine was once more up with the yacht.

“Get quiet and go to sleep!” shouted back the leader of the mutineers, derisively.

“Under the law you mutineers are pirates,” shouted back the commander, firmly. “If you don’t surrender we shall be compelled to sink you.”

“Sheer off and forget it!” jeered the mutineer.

“Look here, my man,” bellowed Commander Ennerling, “we’ll have no further nonsense from you. Surrender, without further parley, or you’ll find our nose pointing at your side hull—and then there’ll be some fireworks. You can’t be insolent with the United States Navy.”

Then, leaning over the manhole, Commander Ennerling shouted down:

“Watch below!”

“Aye, aye, sir!” rose Hal’s voice, clear and strong.

“Pass the word to load the torpedo tube.”

“Aye, aye, sir!”

Next, hailing the “Selma,” Ennerling called:

“Last hail before trouble! Do you surrender?”

“No, you sea-lawyer!”

Just a word to Jack from the Naval officer, and the “Pollard” shot ahead of the other craft, then came up and around, going after the yacht on the quarter, nose on.

“I hope this line of business works,” remarked Ennerling, with a dry smile.

“Toot! toot! too-oo-oot!” sounded the yacht’s steam whistle, shrilly.

At the same time her engines reversed. Another of the mutineers rushed to the rail, waving a white towel.

“In heaven’s name, don’t do it!” he bellowed, hoarsely.

“You surrender, then?” demanded Ennerling, stiffly, though his heart must have bounded with joy. “Wise men! We’re not going to put a prize crew aboard. You’ll have to take the yacht in. Head about for the coast, taking the course as we signal it. Don’t try any tricks, or any slowing down of speed. The least sign of treachery, and we’ll sink you without further warning—”

“—if we can do such a trick with compressed air alone,” added Commander Ennerling in a tone heard only by those near him on the platform deck. “Captain Benson, what is the nearest place on this coast with a police force capable of taking charge of such a crowd.”

“Clyde City is about a thirty-two mile run from here, sir,” Jack answered. “There’s a harbor police boat there.”

“Then make for Clyde City, please. I’ll attend to signaling the yacht.”

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As the two vessels proceeded on their way the ladies below were made as comfortable as possible. Mr. Lawton and his steward were provided with dry clothing, and coffee was served. It was an hour before either Jack or Hal found time to change their clothing in the motor room.

CHAPTER XVII

JACK PERPETRATES A PRACTICAL SEA JOKE

"Searchlight ahead, sir."

Captain Jack made the report to Commander Ennerling.

It was in the small hours of the morning, and the submarine, having taken its prize in to Clyde City's harbor, was now on its way up the coast to tie up for the night at Dunhaven.

They were running about six miles off the coast. As the president of the Naval board had a great desire to test the craft running all but submerged, only the upper portion of the conning tower was above the water.

At Clyde City the "Selma" had been put in charge of the squad of the harbor police boat, and the yacht's captain and mate, neither of them badly injured, had been freed.

Dry clothing had been secured for the ladies, and they were taken ashore. Eghert Lawton was profuse in his expressions of gratitude, and declared that he hoped to meet all hands of the submarine party again at an early date indeed. Our friends learned, later, that the mutineers had been sent to prison.

Now only her regular party was aboard the "Pollard." For half an hour the little vessel had been running along, nearly submerged, and with the searchlight not showing.

At Jack's report Commander Ennerling looked up from the compass he had been studying by the shaded light that showed at only that point in the tower.

"She's coming head-on toward us," said Ennerling. "Benson, Navy men are handling that searchlight."

"You think so, sir?"

"No; I know it," was the dry rejoinder. "There's a way, in the Navy, of swinging a searchlight; a way that no merchantman or yachtsman has ever yet caught."

As yet the vessel behind the searchlight was not visible. Indeed, if she were painted the dark gray color of the Navy craft, it would be some time yet before her hull could show plainly at night.

Commander Ennerling used his glasses for some moments.

“Shall I answer with our searchlight, sir?” inquired the submarine boy.

“No, no, thank you. I’m more interested in seeing how close we can get to that vessel, since she belongs to the Navy, before she succeeds in picking us up with her light. It’s of great practical value to know just how close we can get to that other vessel, undiscovered, in the night time.”

“How close would you like to get to her?” inquired young Benson, a smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

“Humph! I’d like to tie up to the other craft,” muttered the Naval officer.

“Well,” propounded Jack, “what’s to prevent us from doing it?”

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"Several things. The watch that's kept aboard a Naval vessel under way, for one thing."

"I'll try the trick, sir, if you'll stand for it."

Ennerling turned to stare at the boy in amazement.

"Benson, you've done several clever things, but now you're talking nonsense."

"I don't say I can do the thing," rejoined Jack, "but would you like to see me try?"

"Yes, if you take no risk of ramming the war ship, or doing any other damage."

Captain Jack instantly shut off the speed, reversing, next allowing the "Pollard" to stop and drift as she lay.

"What's that for?" asked Commander Ennerling.

"I'm going to try," replied Jack, with a laugh. "Oh, Hal!"

Hastings came at once up aloft with them. His mouth opened in a broad grin as he listened to his chum's rapid sentences.

"And now ask Eph to come up here," finished Jack.

As Somers reached his young chief Benson demanded:

"Eph, see that light? Commander Ennerling is sure it belongs to a Naval vessel. We're going to try to tie up to her while she's going at cruising speed."

"Say, that's like you!" burst from Eph Somers, an admiring grin showing in his face.

"Eph, have you sufficient nerve to get into your bathing suit like lightning, and go overboard with a lantern and a rocket or two, with only a state-room door to float on?"

"Of course," nodded Eph. "The sea's not rough, and a state-room door is big enough to ride on. But you're not going to leave me marooned, are you?"

"Not likely," laughed Jack. "You're right in the path of the approaching vessel, Eph, and they'll see your rockets and lantern. They'll pick you up."

Eph's face went suddenly solemn.

"Say," he muttered, "I'll have a real interesting time trying to make some sort of an explanation, won't I? What shall I tell them if they do pick me up?"

"Tell 'em anything you like, except that the 'Pollard' is trying to tie up," responded Jack.

“That all?” demanded Eph, with a grin. “If it is, I’m off to get into my traveling clothes.”

“Hurry,” nodded Jack. “Send Hal up to the wheel, while I explain the whole thing to Mr. Farnum. But, commander, what if that shouldn’t be a Navy vessel?”

“It is,” responded Ennerling, with emphasis. “It’s the gunboat ‘Massapeqna.’ She’s in these waters just now. You’ll find I’m right.”

Jacob Farnum began to laugh heartily when he caught the whole of Captain Jack Benson’s new idea of a sea joke.

Eph was quickly in his bathing suit. He and Jack unhinged a stateroom door, carrying it up through the conning tower. Hal, in the meantime, under orders, had attended to bringing the “Pollard’s” platform deck briefly above water.

The movements of the searchlight ahead convinced the submarine boat’s observers that the gunboat’s watch officer had not yet detected the presence of so small and unlighted an object as the “Pollard,” miles away.

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As the door was floated on the water alongside, Eph stepped out onto it, squatting. He had with him a lantern, three rockets and a box of wind matches.

"Don't forget I'm here, if I'm overlooked by the other people," called Eph, with a wave of his hand, as he floated slowly astern.

"And don't let 'em know where you came from, or what's up," called back Jack Benson.

"Say, do you think I'm as foolish as I look?" blurted Eph, half-indignantly. Those were the last words exchanged, for the "Pollard," now moving slowly forward, had left its detached door astern.

With only a couple of feet of the conning tower above surface, the "Pollard" began to make good submerged time forward. Presently the little craft dropped below the water altogether. Ten minutes later the tower flashed above the water for just a moment.

The Naval commander quickly brought the night glass into play.

"That's the '*Massapequa*,'" he declared, laying down the glass.

"There, they've picked us up," cried Jack, as the light passed over the top of the conning tower.

"They won't be sure after just that brief flash at us," rejoined Ennerling. "Drop out of sight."

Jack let the "Pollard" drop at a semi-dive. Just as they had barely gone under there was a steadier flash of light on the water in front of them. Jack chuckled.

"Quick work," nodded Ennerling, approvingly. "The lookout on the gunboat thought they saw something here on the water, and swung the ray back to find out what it was. Now, they've doubtless concluded that they were fooled by a shadow."

"The next time we come up we'll have passed the '*Massapequa*' and be astern of her," predicted Jack.

"Good enough, if you can calculate correctly the distance. The gunboat, of course, has no searchlight aft."

For some minutes the "Pollard" ran under water.

"I'm sure we're a little astern, now," said Captain Jack. "I'll take a lift up into the atmosphere."

With that the “Pollard,” which had been running not more than five feet below the surface of the water, rose gently.

“Jove!” murmured Commander Ennerling.

“Did you work by calculation, Benson, or guesswork?”

“I calculated the distance as nearly as I could,” replied Jack Benson quietly.

“Then you’re a marvel, lad,” cried Commander Ennerling, admiringly.

It was little wonder that the Naval officer was astounded. For the “Pollard” had emerged barely a hundred feet to the starboard of the gunboat’s line of course, and barely two hundred feet astern.

“The rest is going to be easy,” laughed Captain Jack, confidently. “The trick is as good as played on the ‘*Massapequa*.’”

He gave the wheel a hard turn to bring the nose of the submarine about.

“There’s your gleeful friend, Eph Somers,” announced Commander Ennerling, pointing ahead as the “Pollard” came about.

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A bare eighth of a mile away, directly in the track of the gunboat, sat Eph on his door. Those in the tower could not quite make him out in the night, but they could see the circles described by the lighted lantern that Eph was swinging.

CHAPTER XVIII

EPH ENJOYS BEING RESCUED

In going that last eighth of a mile the gunboat's speed was gradually slowed.

It was a pretty piece of ship-handling. The "*Massapequa*" lost headway gradually a hundred feet from where Eph sat solemnly blinking back at the sailors' faces along the forward starboard rail.

An officer's uniform showed at the edge of the bridge, as he called:

"Ahoy, there!"

"Ahoy, yourself," answered Eph. "And another one for courtesy."

"Don't get funny, boy!" admonished the officer on the bridge. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," Somers replied. "But; say! Can you spare a cushion."

"How did you come to be there, boy?"

"Floated," admitted Eph, truthfully.

"How did you ever get six miles off the coast on that float you're on?"

"Can't remember," replied Eph, dubiously.

"How long have you been out here on the water?"

"Ever since February, 1976," Eph Somers asserted, solemnly.

"Crazy!" muttered the officer to himself. "We'll have to get him aboard and turn him over to the officers at the next port. I'll try him on one more question."

Raising his voice, he called:

"What's your business? Do you follow the sea?"

"Say, you haven't caught me leading it anywhere, have you?" inquired Eph, wonderingly.

"If we throw you a rope, will you try to catch it?"

"Yep, or a beefsteak, either," Somers declared, promptly.

"Send the boy a rope," directed the officer on the bridge. "Be careful not to sweep him off the float. The lad doesn't seem over-bright."

Though this remark was not intended for his ears, Eph caught it nevertheless.

"Not bright, am I?" muttered Eph, to himself. "Gracious, what a lot of company I have in the world, then!"

Through the air the rope, deftly thrown, came swirling. Eph caught his end of the line in a manner to make the officer say to himself:

"That boy has followed the sea. He knows as much about life on salt water as I do."

Very deliberately Eph bent over, fastening his end of the line around the knob on the stateroom door.

"Haul in, my hearties," he hailed.

Eph stood up, balancing himself nicely while the sailors hauled the slack until the door lay bumping against the side hull of the gunboat.

"Look out," sang out Eph. "Little Willie, the Boy Dewey, is coming on board."

With that he began to climb the rope, hand over hand, until he reached the rail and clambered over, standing dripping on the deck.

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"Say," remarked a petty officer, "you left the line fast to that raft."

"Certainly," nodded Eph, with cool assurance. "That's so you can haul the door on board, too. Mother'd make a fuss if I got home without the door to her ice chest."

"Shall we haul the door aboard, sir?" called the petty officer to the bridge.

"Yes," nodded the young officer up there.

So that came aboard, too, almost in a jiffy.

Eph, with a very wide grin on his face, stood regarding the sailors who had curiously gathered around him.

"Where are you from?" asked one of the seamen.

"Just in from the salt water," Eph assured him.

"Let the boy alone, men," warned the officer on the bridge. "I'll have the guard take care of him for the night. In the morning I'll report the case to the captain. But bring the boy up here for a moment."

Two sailors thereupon escorted Eph to the bridge. The officer in charge looked him over curiously.

"Now, young man," began the young officer, "have you anything to tell me about yourself?"

"Yes," volunteered Eph.

"Go ahead."

"I'm wet."

"Boy, you're in the wrong place to try to get funny," came the stern rebuke. "I guess I know what you need."

Just at that instant the sounds of a decided though indistinct commotion came from aft.

"Then shake," begged Eph, offering his hand. "I know, too, what you need."

"What is it that you think I need?" demanded the officer, suspiciously, eyeing the boy closely.

"You need to get wise," declared Somers, promptly. Then, noting that the sounds from aft had caught the officer's quick ear, the submarine boy added, with another grin:

“By the time you’ve found out the meaning of the rumpus aft you’ll know a lot more.”

Over in one corner of the bridge a cadet midshipman had stood silent during this talk. Turning to him, the watch officer said hurriedly:

“I leave you in charge here. Look after this boy.”

Then the watch officer ran quickly down from the bridge, making his way aft.

No wonder there was excitement on the after part of the gunboat.

Captain Jack Benson, after heading the “Pollard” about, had run as close as he, or rather, Hal, dared. Hastings was at the wheel, much of the upper hull of the boat being now out of water. Jack was forward, on the upper hull, with a line, one end of which was made fast to the platform deck. At the other end of the line was an iron bolt for weight.

Close in under the stern of the gunboat, slightly to starboard, stole the “Pollard.” Jack, balancing himself, made a cast of the line. The iron bolt shot up, past the stern flagstaff, then down into the water astern again.

With the gunboat lying to, the submarine could move only with the barest headway. The instant he saw that the line had passed around the base of the flagstaff, watchful Hal Hastings set the reverse deck control in order to keep from bumping the “*Massapequa*.” Next, the submarine stole quietly over towards port, Jack, with a boathook, gathering in the line that he had thrown around the flagstaff. This end he made fast in a trice.

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"The marine guard, if there is one, didn't see the line flying," whispered Jack, gliding back over the "Pollard's" hull to the platform deck. "I don't think I'll be caught now until I'm on that other boat's deck."

"Good work! Fine!" whispered Commander Ennerling, his eyes gleaming with satisfaction. "Here's the note."

Captain Jack slipped the folded paper in his pocket, then hastened back to the line. Hal ran the submarine far enough back to leave the double line all but taut. Seizing the rope with both hands, Jack made his way swiftly up to the gunboat's stern rail.

In another twinkling he was over. It was not until his feet touched the deck that the slight noise caught the marine sentry's ear, causing him to wheel about.

"Halt!" hailed the marine, throwing his gun to port. "What are you doing there?"

"I've a message for your commanding officer," Jack answered, halting with a click of his heels as he brought them together.

"Where did you come from?" demanded the marine, wonderingly.

"Are you the commanding officer?" questioned Jack. "If not, take me to him."

"Corporal of the guard!" bawled the marine.

Almost in a jiffy the corporal was there.

"Corporal," said Jack, crisply, "I've a message, in writing, and an official message, too, for your commanding officer."

"I'll take it to him, then," said the corporal. "Or shall I conduct you to his quarters?"

"You may take it to him," agreed Jack, holding out the folded paper.

"Sentry, keep your eyes on this stranger," ordered the corporal of the marine guard, as he received the paper.

A moment or two later, the commanding officer of the "Massapequa" was reading this brief but astounding communication:

Commanding Officer, U.S.S. "Massapequa": You are towing the submarine torpedo boat "Pollard" astern. Technically and theoretically, haven't you lost your ship? (signed) Ennerling, Commander, U.S.N.

With an explosive remark the gunboat's commander snatched up his cap, darting aft. The corporal, whose curiosity was aroused, judged that he was expected to follow, and did so.

"What's this nonsense about towing a submarine torpedo boat?" demanded the gunboat's commander, reaching deck aft.

"Wh-what, sir!" stammered the marine sentry, presenting arms.

"Where did this boy come from?" demanded the Naval officer.

"I—I don't—" began the sentry, but his superior, leaving him, rushed to the flagstaff.

"Sentry, what were you doing? What was everyone else doing?" cried the gunboat's commander. "Did you think it a part of our cruise to serve as mooring for stray torpedo boats? You—come here, you blockhead!"

The corporal got there ahead of the private, looking down in utter bewilderment at the sight of the "Pollard" riding the waves so saucily just astern of the gunboat's hull.

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"Did you come aboard from the submarine?" questioned the gunboat's commander, wheeling upon Jack Benson.

"Yes, sir."

"Ahoy, '*Massapequa*,'" floated up in Ennerling's tones. "Is that you, Braylesford?"

"Aye, Ennerling, and a shabby old trick you've played on us!"

Commander Ennerling's hearty laughter came up from below.

"Captain John Benson, the young man who came over your stern rail, is the genius who planned the joke," called up Ennerling.

"But with your approval, eh?"

"Of course, Braylesford."

"Then, Ennerling, I'm sorry I can't have the pleasure of putting you in irons," nodded Lieutenant Commander Braylesford, dryly.

"Let down a rope ladder, and I'll come aboard for a moment, Braylesford."

The watch lieutenant, who had hurried aft at this juncture, stood waiting respectfully for a word with his superior.

"What have you to report, Lieutenant?" demanded Braylesford.

"We stopped, sir, to rescue a boy afloat on a door. He's in bathing suit, and gives none but the most idiotic replies to my questions."

"He must be part of this outfit," retorted the lieutenant commander, pointing below at the submarine, at which the watch lieutenant was now staring with wide-open eyes.

"Yes; that's Eph Somers, one of our crew," smiled Captain Jack. "He was turned loose on the door to take up your attention, while we did the tie-behind trick."

A rope ladder having been lowered, Commander Ennerling, by nimble use of the tow-line, had succeeded in reaching it, and he now came over the rail, chuckling.

"It's on the '*Massapequa*,' I admit," grinned Braylesford.

"On me, I'm afraid," pronounced the watch lieutenant, with a half-groan.

"Don't feel badly about it, gentlemen," laughed Commander Ennerling. "Jack Benson is the same lad who stole up under the battleship '*Luzon*,' and painted the name, 'Pollard,'

in sixfoot letters on the hull of the battleship as a reminder of his call. The lad is a sea-joker of the first order.”

“He ought to be in the Navy,” retorted Braylesford, then turned, with a smile, to offer his hand to the submarine boy.

“Oh, he will be, surely enough, if war-times ever come upon us again,” replied the commander.

Word was now sent to conduct Eph aft.

“Get aboard your own craft and dress; then come on board and join us in the ward-room,” invited Braylesford.

“I’m afraid the lad can’t,” said Commander Ennerling. “He and one other, Hastings, are the only members of the crew that will be left on the submarine if you keep Benson here to talk with him.”

Within two minutes the two craft were on their way south. The members of the Naval board, Messrs. Farnum and Pollard and Captain Jack were entertained in the ward-room of the gun-boat, while Hal and Eph ran the submarine along some two hundred yards to the westward. It was a jolly time, indeed, in the “*Massapequa’s*” ward-room, for Naval officers are keen to enjoy a good joke, and Jack’s exploit was voted a prime one.

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At the end of an hour, however, the “Pollard” was signaled to lie to, the gunboat doing the same. It was time to break up the ward-room party. The visitors went down the side gangway to a small boat, and were transferred to the submarine.

“The Navy has something to talk about, now, wherever officers meet for dinner, or social talk in the ward-room,” declared Commander Ennerling. “At the same time, Benson, your ingenuity and skill have shown us how easy it is for such a boat as this to destroy any warship afloat. And now, for Dunhaven and a long sleep—if we don’t run into further big adventures on this eventful night.”

CHAPTER XIX

JACK STUMBLES UPON A BIG SURPRISE

“Busy, Farnum?”

“At this moment, not especially.”

“I’m glad of that.”

George Melville’s attire was particularly fashionable this morning, three days after the first trial trip run, when he dropped in at the boatbuilder’s office, finding the latter there alone.

Mr. Melville’s eyes were twinkling, his face beaming. He had the whole appearance of a man who is satisfied with himself and anxious to please others.

“I’ve come to hold out the olive branch, Farnum, if anything of the sort is needed,” continued the capitalist.

“It isn’t. Nothing is needed here but a good decision from the United States Government,” replied Jacob Farnum, briefly.

“Ahem! Now, see here, Farnum, of course I understand that you had abundant reasons for feeling offended the other day. But this state of affairs ought not to last between us. You have a splendid type of boat, but you need more money in order to push your yard properly. You need a lot more of building plant here.”

“Yes,” assented Mr. Farnum.

“Now, on the terms that I was inclined to refuse before, I am ready to supply a sum even greater than was at first spoken of,” and the man beamed on Mr. Farnum.

“I no longer care to talk business with you, Mr. Melville.”

“Why not?”

“We need not go into that. I bid you good day, Mr. Melville.”

“You don’t seem to know what you’re doing, Farnum. I control millions. I also have some influence—in Washington,” and the man strode from the room, leaving Jacob Farnum a bit shaken but not repenting his decision not to deal with George Melville.

“One other road is open to Melville if he but knows it,” thought the boatbuilder. “One hundred and ten thousand dollars’ worth of bills for materials are now a few days overdue. My creditors have faith in me, but Melville, with his money, could buy up these bills by offering a bonus and could then press me for immediate payment. If only Washington did not move, so slowly!” and the man groaned.

That same evening about ten o’clock the submarine boys were on their way from the village to the “Pollard” when they heard the fire alarm. They were in front of the volunteer fire house, and were at once pressed into service to take the place of some of the young firemen who were not at hand.

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“Look!” shouted Eph Somers. “The fire is in the Melville boatyard!”

The volunteer firemen beat down the big gate of the yard with lusty blows and rolled the hand engine inside and, coupling the hose, threw a stream of water on a fiercely burning shed. Jack Benson, relieved of his task of pulling the engine, went toward the big shed where the submarine was under construction—at least, there was no other place on the premises that such work could be carried on.

Just as Jack reached the big shed some firemen battered down the door in order to turn a stream of water on the fire there. The flames lighted up the place with an intensive light, leaving no corner unilluminated. Jack, on the *qui vive* with interest and curiosity, looked within.

“Empty, oh-ho! What do you know about that!”

Hal Hastings came up just then and Jack said:

“See that, Hal? The Melvilles have been putting up a show of building a submarine to beat ours. This fire betrays the fact that no boat is being built here. Nothing here but iron plates and the hammers with which the workmen have been beating every day!”

“Of all idiotic things!” exclaimed Hal.

The three submarine boys came upon Mr. Farnum standing in the watching crowd and gleefully told him of the empty shed.

“That might have helped a week ago,” said the boatbuilder. “I fear we’re beyond help now, boys.” He had already told them in confidence of the financier’s threat.

Just then Melville came along. Mr. Farnum and the boys would have ignored him, but he stepped up to the group and snapped:

“You’re a fine bunch! Some of my workmen tell me that you young rascals were sneaking about my yards and set fire to the sheds.”

“That will do, Mr. Melville. We’ll listen to no such talk,” and before the boys could speak or Melville reply Mr. Farnum pushed the boys before him out of the crowd.

“All those fellows heard him say that, and some of them will believe it!” cried Hal.

“That’s bluff on his part, and silly bluff, at that,” said Jack. “These firemen can say where we were when the alarm came in.”

“But not where we were when the fire started,” grumbled Eph.

“The fire’s practically out; we’d all better go home now,” said Mr. Farnum.

CHAPTER XX

CONCLUSION

The next afternoon Commander Ennerling of the United States Navy reported to Messrs. Farnum and Pollard that the naval board had witnessed the tests of the submarine and were ready to report to the authorities. They did not conceal the fact that the boat had made a favorable impression, then they continued:

“You have a crew of experts, though they are very young. John Benson especially is a genius.”

“We are well aware of that, gentlemen,” replied Mr. Farnum beamingly.

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Soon after the naval men had taken their train for Washington, David Pollard came into Mr. Farnum's office, carrying a valise and a brief case and announced that he was going away for a time where he could not be reached to rest and study and think.

It was the third day after this that Jack, wishing to see Mr. Farnum in regard to some supplies for the "Pollard," went to his office.

"He's not been here since three o'clock yesterday," said his stenographer.

"Out of town?" asked Jack.

"I wish I knew."

Jack called up Mr. Farnum's house and got his wife on the telephone. To his question she replied:

"I got a note last night not to worry if he was late getting home. But he has not come in yet," and her voice had a catch in it.

Jack and his chums were greatly worried. Had Melville played some trick on the boatbuilder?

"I'm going ashore," said Eph the next morning, as soon as he had eaten his breakfast in the submarine cabin.

"For anything especial?" asked Jack.

"First, I want to know if anything's yet known of Mr. Farnum. Then, you know that Don Melville's in town. Why? His father's left and all the pounding workmen at his fake yard are gone, too. Something needs explaining."

"He's trying to find out whom he can bribe into saying we set fire to the yard," said Hal bitterly.

"Oh, on second thought Melville would conclude that would be too risky to do," observed Jack.

"Maybe—maybe not. I'm going over to look about and listen."

In less than an hour Eph Somers, agog with excitement, was back on the "Pollard."

"Say, fellows, that Potter fellow that got into Mr. Pollard's room and stole the papers broke jail last night. Now we know what Don Melville was here for! He had a hand in that!"

So far, the young fellow had refused to talk.

“Bribed by the Melvilles,” Hal had declared. “But they’ll find that expensive, for he’ll continue to bleed them, now he knows how.”

Jack, who usually reserved judgment until he knew some facts on which to build, was inclined this time to agree with Eph, and Hal was certain that Somers was right.

“It would be to their advantage to have Potter disappear before they begin their dirty work against Mr. Farnum,” Hal insisted.

“I telephoned to Mrs. Farnum and she reports ‘nothing new,’” continued Eph. “It’s queer.”

Just then the boys heard a hail and saw David Pollard, bag and brief case in hand, on the shore signaling to them.

“Where’s Farnum?” he asked as soon as he was on the submarine.

“We’d, any of us, give six months’ salary to know that, Mr. Pollard,” said Jack, and went on to tell what had been taking place.

“That spells ruin for us,” groaned the inventor, who knew how things stood financially.

“Do you think, Mr. Pollard, that we’d better suggest to Mrs. Farnum to put a detective on her husband’s trail?” asked Eph.

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"That trail would probably lead straight through the Melvilles," said Hal bitterly.

"No, don't do that—yet," replied Pollard.

"Mr. Farnum may be away on legitimate business," added Jack slowly.

Hal and Jack rowed Mr. Pollard ashore. After bidding the inventor good-bye, the two youths decided to go to the shipyard. As they were about to enter the office they were accosted by a man who was coming out. He asked them if they were in Mr. Farnum's employ.

"Yes, sir," Jack answered.

"Can you tell me where he is? The office force could give me no information."

"Mr. Farnum is away at present," said Jack.

"I know that! Where is he?"

"Why should I tell a stranger about my employer's business?" asked Jack sharply.

"Here's my card." The man was a Mr. Stevenson, the head of a firm of ship's steel jobbers. "Here's a bill for twenty-five thousand dollars, and Farnum seems to have disappeared. I can sell this at face value, but I don't want to."

"Give Mr. Farnum a chance, Mr. Stevenson," pleaded Jack. "We can guess who is willing to buy that bill from you—for a bonus. The man will be as eager to buy next week as this."

The man looked shrewdly into the eyes of the two boys for a moment, then, with a shrug of his shoulders, turned away, saying:

"I guess this can wait awhile."

The boys, after a brief call in the office, went on to town. Mr. Melville was fond of horses, and still drove a handsome pair.

"There comes Don Melville in his father's carriage. I don't wonder they hang on to it. Those horses are beauties," remarked Hal.

The carriage stopped and Don jumped out.

"Say, you muckers, things are happening and you won't be needed now on the 'Pollard.'"

"Really?" drawled Jack indifferently.

Hal could not summon indifference, or the appearance of it. He said contemptuously:

“Having helped a deserving young man to escape from jail, you’ll probably put him on the ‘Pollard.’”

Don flushed angrily and turned to the coachman, a brutal looking fellow.

“Johnson, chastise the young puppy!”

Johnson jumped down and raised his whip.

“Give it to them both!” yelled Don.

Just then Grant Andrews, the foreman in the submarine shed, having come up in time to hear and see what was taking place, sprang between the boys and the coachman. He crashed his fist into the man’s face, and thus disposed of him, then grabbed the whip and brought it down on Don Melville’s shoulders.

“Oh, you’ll pay for this!” yelled Don.

“Then I may as well get the most out of it,” retorted Andrews, and again brought down the whip, this time coiling it around Don’s legs.

Don, seeing a grinning crowd about them and stinging with physical pain and humiliation, turned and sprang into the carriage. Johnson was already there, and they hurried away.

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"Grant Andrews! Who would have thought it of you!" exclaimed Hal.

"Sorry I did it, boys?" and the flush on Andrews' face subsided and a grin came to his lips. He was usually an easy-going man, but when aroused he could act.

"We-ll, no," admitted Jack, while Hal laughed. "But come on; let's get out of this crowd."

It was several days after this affair that Mr. Pollard, who was on the submarine, got a message from Mr. Partridge, the superintendent of the yard. The message read:

"Mr. Partridge begs Mr Pollard to come to the office at once."

"I'll go, Jack. But I'm weary and may need support. Come with me, will you?"

On entering the outer office the two found the bookkeeper and the stenographer.

"Mr. Partridge is in the inner office with two men, Mr. Pollard," said the stenographer. "If you need me, I shall be right here."

Mr. Partridge was sitting at Mr. Farnum's unopened desk when the man and the boy entered. Mr. Melville and a man Jack soon learned was a lawyer were sitting facing him. Mr. Partridge rose and gave his chair to Mr. Pollard.

"Mr. Melville insisted on seeing me, Mr. Pollard, and I thought best to send for you," said the superintendent.

Without greeting the financier snapped out:

"Where is Farnum, Pollard?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"I have a claim against him on an overdue bill."

"I didn't know that Mr. Farnum had any dealings with you," was the quiet reply.

"I bought this bill of Riley and Grannan for electrical supplies only recently. It is for a trifle over ten thousand dollars."

"Surely you believe Mr. Farnum is good for that amount?" queried the inventor softly.

"I'm sorry to say that I do not."

"Then why on earth did you buy the bill?"

The capitalist flushed, but said frankly:

“I expect before the day is over to be the owner of other claims against this business.”

“In order to wreck us and take the business?”

“Wreck you? Yes. That is good business. But, Mr. Pollard, we will make it well worth your while to stay with the new owners.” He was well aware that the inventor might be on the verge of new inventions that would outdate the “Pollard,” and he wanted to keep anything new for himself.

“Nothing would induce me to stay on if Mr. Farnum were forced out, Mr. Melville.”

“What’s that? Forced out?”

The voice came from the doorway, the door having been noiselessly opened, and Jacob Farnum stood at the entrance.

Melville and the lawyer turned in their seats and the others sprang to their feet.

“Oh, it’s you, is it, Melville? What can I do for you?” asked the boatbuilder.

“You can settle for this claim, Farnum,” and the capitalist held out the paper.

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"Very well. I will write you a check at once. The banks are closed for the day now, but I will deposit the money the first thing in the morning. Until I do that, I have not enough in bank to cover this," and he looked at the paper. "By the way," and he turned to his employees and to the inventor, ignoring the two outsiders, "the Navy Department has accepted the 'Pollard.' I've sold her for one hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars. Have you any more assigned claims against me, Mr. Melville?" he drawled, again facing the capitalist.

"No," snapped the man. He had paid a thousand dollar bonus to get the one he had; and was feeling sick over the outcome.

Just then the door opened and the stenographer showed Broughton Emerson into the room.

"I see you answered my telegram in person, Mr. Emerson," said Farnum, rising from the chair he had taken and shaking hands.

"Yes, I came in person, and quite prepared to furnish the capital you need after the preliminaries are arranged."

George Melville rose and after a brief nod of farewell made for the door, followed by his lawyer. Jack opened the door quietly, then shut it just as softly.

Broughton Emerson invested heavily in Mr. Farnum's yard and the business was incorporated, Mr. Farnum and Mr. Pollard retaining control. The owners praised highly the three boys for the way they had handled the "Pollard" on its trial trip, saying that this was a factor in the Navy's acceptance of the submarine. They also gave the three boys one thousand dollars each and ten shares apiece in the new corporation.

George Melville had spent more than thirty thousand dollars in trying to get hold of Mr. Farnum's business. This, of course, was a total loss. Soon after this, in trying to get control of a railroad by his underhand methods, he lost all of his fortune and had to accept a small clerkship in order to make a living. Don, at the same time, became steward on the yacht of one of his father's old-time acquaintances.

Jacob Farnum had been in Washington, a fact his wife had known after the first day of his absence. He had been secretive about the matter, as he wished if possible to keep George Melville in ignorance of his whereabouts until his business was settled.

Not even with the transfer of the "Pollard" to the Government did the life of the submarine boys aboard their pet boat cease. Some further adventures of these boys are told of in a volume entitled: "*The Submarine Boys and the Middies; or, The Prize Detail at Annapolis.*"