

The Submarine Boys for the Flag eBook

The Submarine Boys for the Flag

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

The Submarine Boys for the Flag eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	6
Page 1.....	7
Page 2.....	9
Page 3.....	11
Page 4.....	13
Page 5.....	15
Page 6.....	17
Page 7.....	19
Page 8.....	21
Page 9.....	23
Page 10.....	25
Page 11.....	27
Page 12.....	29
Page 13.....	31
Page 14.....	33
Page 15.....	35
Page 16.....	37
Page 17.....	39
Page 18.....	41
Page 19.....	43
Page 20.....	45
Page 21.....	47
Page 22.....	49

Page 23.....	51
Page 24.....	53
Page 25.....	55
Page 26.....	57
Page 27.....	59
Page 28.....	61
Page 29.....	63
Page 30.....	65
Page 31.....	67
Page 32.....	69
Page 33.....	71
Page 34.....	73
Page 35.....	75
Page 36.....	77
Page 37.....	79
Page 38.....	81
Page 39.....	83
Page 40.....	85
Page 41.....	87
Page 42.....	89
Page 43.....	91
Page 44.....	93
Page 45.....	95
Page 46.....	97
Page 47.....	99
Page 48.....	101

Page 49.....	103
Page 50.....	105
Page 51.....	107
Page 52.....	109
Page 53.....	111
Page 54.....	113
Page 55.....	115
Page 56.....	117
Page 57.....	119
Page 58.....	121
Page 59.....	123
Page 60.....	125
Page 61.....	127
Page 62.....	129
Page 63.....	131
Page 64.....	133
Page 65.....	135
Page 66.....	137
Page 67.....	139
Page 68.....	141
Page 69.....	143
Page 70.....	145
Page 71.....	147
Page 72.....	149
Page 73.....	151
Page 74.....	153

Page 75.....	155
Page 76.....	157
Page 77.....	159
Page 78.....	161
Page 79.....	163
Page 80.....	165
Page 81.....	167
Page 82.....	169
Page 83.....	171
Page 84.....	173
Page 85.....	175
Page 86.....	177
Page 87.....	179
Page 88.....	181
Page 89.....	183
Page 90.....	185
Page 91.....	187
Page 92.....	189
Page 93.....	191
Page 94.....	193

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
CHAPTER I		1
CHAPTER II		7
CHAPTER III		13
CHAPTER IV		19
CHAPTER V		23
CHAPTER VI		27
CHAPTER VII		30
CHAPTER VIII		33
CHAPTER IX		38
CHAPTER X		43
CHAPTER XI		46
CHAPTER XII		49
CHAPTER XIII		52
CHAPTER XIV		56
CHAPTER XV		61
CHAPTER XVI		64
CHAPTER XVII		67
CHAPTER XVIII		69
CHAPTER XIX		73
CHAPTER XX		77
CHAPTER XXI		80
CHAPTER XXII		84
CHAPTER XXIII		87
CHAPTER XXIV		92

Page 1

CHAPTER I

"Do you speak German?"

"Hey, there, Mister!" called out Jabez Holt, from one of the two office windows in the little hotel at Dunhaven.

As there was only one other man in the office, that other man guessed that he might be the one addressed.

With a slight German accent the stranger, who was well-dressed, and looked like a prosperous as well as an educated man, turned and demanded:

"You are calling me?"

"I reckon," nodded Jabez.

"Then my name is Herr Professor—"

"Hair professor?" repeated Jabez Holt, a bit of astonishment showing in his wrinkled old face. "Hair professor? Barber, eh? Why, I thought you was a traveler. But hurry up over here—do you hear me?"

"My good man," began the German, stiffly, drawing himself up to his full six-foot-one, "it is not often I am affronted by being addressed so—"

"There! He'll be outer sight in another minute, while you are arguin' about your dignity!" muttered Holt. "And that's the feller you said you wanted to see—Jack Benson."

"Benson?" cried the German, forgetting his outraged dignity and springing forward. "Benson?"

"That's him—almost up to the corner," nodded Landlord Jabez Holt.

"Run out and bring him back with you," directed Herr Professor Radberg. "Be quick!"

"Waal, I guess you're spryer'n I be," returned old Jabez, with a shrewd look at his guest. "Besides, it's you that wants the boy."

Running back and snatching up his hat, Professor Radberg made for the street without further argument.

Moving along hastily, the German soon came in sight of young Captain Jack Benson, of the Pollard Submarine Torpedo Boat Company.

“Ach, there! Herr Benson!” shouted the Professor.

Hearing the hail, Jack Benson turned, then halted.

“You are Herr Benson, are you not?” demanded Professor Radberg, as soon as he got close enough.

“Benson is my name,” nodded Jack, pleasantly.

“Then come back to the hotel with me.”

“You are a foreigner, aren’t you?” asked Jack, surveying the stranger coolly.

“I am German,” replied Radberg, in a tone of surprise.

“I thought so,” nodded the boy. “That is, I didn’t know from what country you came. But, in this country, when we ask a favor of a stranger, we usually say ‘please.’”

“I am Herr Professor—”

“Oh, barbers are just as polite as other folks,” Jack assured him, his laughing eyes resting on the somewhat bewildered-looking face of the German.

“Then please, Herr Benson, come back to the hotel with me.”

“Yes; if it’s really necessary. But why do you want to go to the hotel?”

“Because, Herr Benson, when we are there, I shall have much of importance to say to you.”

Page 2

"Important to me, or to you?" asked Jack, thoughtfully.

He had no intention of answering a much older man disrespectfully. But there was about Herr Radberg the air of a man who expects his greatness to be recognized at a glance, and who demands obedience from common people as a right. This sort of thing didn't fit well with the American boy.

"Oh, it is important to you, and very much so," urged the Professor, somewhat more anxiously. "Besides," added the German, with a now really engaging smile, "I have met your demand, Herr Benson, and have said 'please.'"

"Then I suppose I'll have to meet your demand," nodded Jack, good-humoredly. "Lead the way, sir."

"Ach! You may walk at my side," permitted the German.

It all seemed a bit strange, but Captain Jack Benson had been through more strange experiences than had most Americans of twice or thrice his age. Besides, as he walked beside Herr Professor Radberg Jack imagined that he had guessed at least an inkling of the other's business. The German had announced himself as a professor; probably, therefore, he was a scientist. Being a scientist, the Professor had very likely invented, or nearly invented something intended for use in connection with submarine torpedo boats, and wanted to interest the concern by which the young submarine skipper was employed. Though this guess was a reasonable one, it soon turned out to be the wrong one. The Professor's real reason for seeking this interview was one that was bound to take the submarine boy almost off his feet.

Readers of the preceding volumes in this series need no introduction to Captain Jack Benson, nor to his chums, Hal Hastings and Eph Somers. Such readers recall, as told in "*The Submarine Boys on Duty*," how Jack and Hal drifted into Dunhaven just at the right moment to fight for an opportunity to work themselves into the submarine boat building business. How the boys helped build the first of the now famous Pollard submarines, and afterwards learned how to man her, was all told, together with all their strange adventures in their new life.

In the "*The Submarine Boys' Trial Trip*" was related how Jack Benson solved the problem of leaving a submarine boat when it lay on the ocean's bottom, and also the trick of entering that submerged boat again, after diving from the surface of the water. The attempt of shrewd business men to secure control of the new submarine boat company was also described, together with the manner in which the submarine boys outwitted them. Through a successful trial trip, and Captain Jack's ingenious ways of arousing public interest, the government was forced to buy the "Pollard," as the first of the submarines was named.

In “*The Submarine Boys and the Middies*” was narrated how the submarine boys secured the prize detail of going to the Naval Academy at Annapolis as temporary instructors in submarine boating. Many startling adventures, and some humorous ones, were related in that volume.

Page 3

Then in "*The Submarine Boys and the Spies*" was shown how the young men successfully foiled the efforts of spies of foreign governments to learn the secrets of the Pollard craft.

In "The Submarine Boys' Lightning Cruise" the adventures of these clever, enterprising boys were carried further. In this book, was told how the boys were trained in the handling of the actual torpedo of, warfare. The Pollard boats, "Benson" and "Hastings" were entered in official government tests in which the submarine craft of several other makes competed. The desperate lengths to which the nearest rival of the Pollards went in order to win were told with startling accuracy. The result of all these tests was that the Pollard company received from the Navy Department an order for eighteen submarine torpedo boats, the "Benson" and the "Hastings" being accepted as the first two boats on that order.

By the time the present narrative opens it was near the first of May. Over at the shipyard, where facilities had been greatly increased, two of the submarines had lately been finished, and four more were under way in long construction sheds. Work on the government's order was being rushed as fast as could be done while keeping up the Pollard standards, of high-class work.

Of late Jack and his young friends, though their pay went on, had little work to do. Whenever a new boat was completed it was the task of the submarine boys to take her out to sea and put her through all manner of tests in order to determine her fitness. But there were days and days when the submarine boys had naught to do but enjoy themselves as their fancy dictated.

"Shall we sit down here?" asked Jack, as he and the tall German entered the hotel office.

Jabez Holt stood behind the desk, bent over the register, on which the Professor's name had been the only new one in a week. The old landlord pretended to be busy, but he was covertly watching and listening.

"Sit here?" repeated Professor Radberg. "Ach, no! Come along with me."

There was something rather disagreeably commanding in the German's invitation, but Jack merely smiled quietly as he followed in the stranger's wake. Up the stairs they went. The Professor unlocked a door, admitting himself and his guest to the outer of a suite of two rooms. Once they were inside Radberg locked the door behind them.

"Come to the other room, Herr Benson," directed the Professor. The door of this inner room the German also locked, remarking:

"Now, if the man, Holt, chooses to follow and listen, he can hear nothing."

“All this sounds mighty mysterious,” laughed Jack Benson, good-humoredly.

However, the submarine boy went and stood by a chair near the window and then waited until he saw that the stranger was about to seat himself.

“Now,” asked Jack, stretching his legs, “what’s the business about? I haven’t a whole lot of time to-day.”

Page 4

"Listen, and you shall hear, as soon as I am ready," came, stiffly, from the stranger.
"You are a boy, and I am Herr Professor—"

"Oh, you told me all about being a hair professor before," smiled Jack. "Now, see here. Whether you're really a barber, or whether you're just amusing yourself with me, we want to have one thing understood. I came here, sir, as a matter of courtesy to you, and you will have to treat me with just as much courtesy. Otherwise, I shall wish you good-morning."

This was said with a flash of the eye which warned Radberg that, in his rather overbearing way, he was going too far.

"Oh, my dear young friend," he replied, persuasively, "you don't understand. In Germany I am—well, perhaps what you would call a rather distinguished man. At least, my neighbors are good enough to say so. And, in Germany, when a herr professor talks, others listen respectfully."

"Just the same way with the hair professors in this country," chuckled Jack. "When an American barber gets wound up and started, all a fellow can do is to listen. It's no use trying to run away from a barber anywhere, I guess. He has you strapped down to the chair."

"Barber?" repeated Professor Radberg, in disgust. "I don't understand you."

"Oh, it isn't necessary," laughed Jack. "It's a sort of Yankee joke. And I beg your pardon, Professor, if I am wasting your time. Now, go ahead, please, and tell me why you invited me here."

There was something of salt water breeziness and crispness about Jack's speech that caused the German's brow to cloud for an instant. Then, after a visible effort to compose himself, Radberg leaned forward to ask:

"Do you speak German?"

"No, sir." Jack shook his head.

"Ach, that is too bad!" muttered the German, in a voice suggesting severe disapproval of one who hadn't mastered his own native tongue. "However, you will soon learn."

"Yes; if there's a big enough prize goes with it," agreed Jack.

"Prize?" repeated Professor Radberg. "You will say so!"

Then, leaning forward once more, and speaking in his most impressive voice, Herr Professor Radberg continued:

“Herr Benson, we are going to take you into the German Navy!”

The Professor now leaned back to watch the effect of his words.

“Are you going to do it when I’m awake?” asked Jack, curiously.

“Nein! I do not understand you.”

“Are you going to take me in by force, or wait until you catch me asleep?” questioned Captain Jack Benson.

“Ach! Do not be silly, boy!”

“I might say the same to you, Professor,” replied Jack Benson, composedly, “but we’ll let it pass. How are you going to get me into the German Navy, and what are you going to do with me after you get me there?”

“How?” cried Professor Radberg. “Why we are going to pay you a very handsome sum of money, and we are going to give you a most honorable position in our imperial service. And—”

Page 5

Here Professor Radberg leaned forward once more, lowering his voice considerably.

"There are three of you boys, all experts at the Pollard works. Well, we are going to take all three of you into the German navy, and we will do something very handsome for you all."

"The other fellows will be delighted when I tell 'em what's coming their way," smiled Captain Jack.

"Ach! So? Of course."

"Now, what do you propose to do with us in your navy?" Jack went on. "Are you going to make officers of us?"

"Officers?" repeated Herr Professor Radberg, slowly. "Well, no, Herr Benson. We could not exactly do that. Our officers are, as you will understand, very—what is your English word?—aristocratic. They could not be quite persuaded to take American commoners as their brother officers. That you would not expect, of course."

"Certainly not," young Benson agreed. If there was a slight tinge of sarcasm in his it was lost on the German, whose brow cleared as he went on, heavily:

"No, no, my young friend; not officers. But you shall all three have very honorable positions, and handsome sums of money to pay you for entering our service. We in Germany know the rank which you young men have won as submarine experts, and we shall not be niggardly, for we have determined to have you in our service."

"I hope you'll pardon me," proposed young Benson. "There is just one point that has been overlooked. You tell me that you are authorized to come to Dunhaven and kidnap my friends and myself. But, really, how do I know that you have such authority from your own side of the water?"

Radberg looked a bit puzzled, for a moment. Then, as he seemed to begin to comprehend, he replied, heavily:

"Herr Benson, I have already told you that I am Herr Professor—"

"Now, don't hang out the striped pole again, please," urged Jack, his face as sober as that of a judge. "Come right down to the points of the compass. How am I to know that you really do represent the German government?"

"Ach! I comprehend," nodded the German. "Of course you will understand that, on an errand of this kind, I do not travel with too many papers. But I shall take you and your two companions on to Washington to-morrow, I think—"

“To-morrow ought to do as well as any time,” replied Jack, ironically.

“Yes; I think it will be to-morrow,” continued the German. “I shall take you to our German Embassy, and one of our officials there will prove to you that I have been acting with authority.”

“That’ll be right fine of him,” agreed Jack, placidly.

“Ach! It is settled, then,” replied the German, all but dismissing the matter with a wave of his hand. “Yet you must bring your two comrades here. They must understand just what is wanted of them. And now, Herr Benson, do you wish to understand what is to be paid to you to transfer your services to our German flag?”

Page 6

"Why, yes; that will be mighty important—if we go under the German flag."

"If you go?" repeated the Professor. "Why, that is all settled!"

"Then I must have missed something, by not watching you closely enough," murmured Jack. "I shall have to sit up straighter and keep my eyes wider open. When was it all settled, sir?"

"Why, did you not tell me—"

"Haven't had a blessed chance to tell you anything," replied Jack, looking astonished. "You've been doing all the telling."

"But you'll go with me, of course, to Washington?" uttered Radberg, looking much taken aback.

"I doubt it," muttered young Benson, shaking his head. "In fact, sir, I may as well tell you that it's waste of our time to carry this line of talk any further."

"Ach! You are cunning," smiled Professor Radberg, no longer nonplussed. "That is as it should be, too, for you are a clever young man, Herr Benson."

"A thousand thanks," murmured Captain Jack.

"But, instead of talk," pursued the German, "you wish to see some money. Quite right! I should, were I in your place, Herr Benson. Well, then—ach! Look at this."

Thrusting a fat hand down deep in a trousers pocket, Herr Professor Radberg brought up into view a big roll of money. He held this up so that the submarine boy could feast his eyes on it. Jack looked, composedly.

"Did you ever see anything like this—you, who are such a young boy?" smiled the German, teasingly.

"I—I don't know, really," responded Jack, thoughtfully, thrusting a hand down into his own trousers pocket. Young Benson brought up into the light a very comfortable looking handful of banknotes, rolled and surrounded by a broad elastic band. "Let's measure the two, Professor, and see how they compare."

"Ach!" muttered the German, regarding Jack's money with some displeasure. "Where did you get all that?"

"Oh, now, Professor!" cried the young submarine captain, reproachfully. "I didn't ask you where you got yours!"

“Ach! This is all so much foolishness!” cried the German Professor, returning his money to his pocket.

“That’s what I think, too,” agreed Jack, following suit. “It’s what our English cousins call ‘bad form,’ to go to comparing piles of money.”

“Now, sit down, Herr Benson, and I will tell you what a very handsome sum of money, and what excellent wages, the German government will pay you to enter our imperial naval service.”

“How much money is there in Germany?” interrupted the submarine boy, thoughtfully.

“How much, in all Germany?” demanded the Professor. “Nein! How should I know?”

“You expect me, of course, to turn my back on this country for good, to tell you Germans whatever I may know about submarine secrets, to drill with your navy, and be prepared to fight in your navy if war comes?”

Page 7

"Ach, yes! of course," replied Radberg. "Now, we are beginning to understand one another."

"Professor," interrupted Captain Jack Benson, "we've had enough of joking."

"Joking? I assure you—"

"Professor," once more broke in the submarine boy, "*I wouldn't sell out my country's flag for all the money you ever saw!*"

For a few moments the Professor's face was a study in consternation. Then he broke forth, angrily:

"Ach! You are a fool!"

"I guess so," nodded Jack, without resentment. "That's just the kind of fools we Americans are generally."

Herr Radberg was a good enough reader of human faces to realize that, at all events, there was no use in continuing the conversation at present.

"Very good," he growled. "You can go. I shall see your friends, instead."

"When you get through with 'em you'll think they're idiots," grinned Captain Jack Benson.

Herr Radberg wasn't a fool. Neither was he a rascal, expert in offering bribes. Brought up within the wall's of a German university, he would have been willing to lay down his life instantly for the good of the Fatherland. Yet he couldn't understand that men of other nations could be just as devoted to their own countries. From Herr Professor Radberg's point of view Germany was the only country in the world that was fitted to inspire a real and deep sense of patriotism.

"No harm done, Professor," said Jack, moving toward the door, and turning the key to unlock it. "I'm sorry you had all the trouble and expense of coming to Dunhaven on a useless errand. Good-bye!"

"Ach! You may go, but you will come back," scowled the other. "If not, your comrades will, I hope, prove to be young men of better sense and judgment."

"Oh, they'll listen to you," smiled Jack. "Good-bye!"

"I shall have two of you, anyway," were Radberg's last words before the door of the outer room closed and Jack's footsteps sounded in the corridor.

CHAPTER II

"French spoken here"

"Well, what do you think of that?"

It was Eph Somers who put the question, and the time was some fifteen minutes later.

Captain Jack had met his two comrades up on the main street of the village. He had told them, with a good deal of amusement, of his late talk with the German.

Hal Hastings didn't say a word, but his eyes twinkled.

"I wouldn't have minded," laughed Jack, "but it was the Professor's cock-sureness that I was to be Germany's oyster."

"Is he an old man?" asked Hal.

"Not very," Jack answered. "Perhaps not old enough to know better. Anyway, if I were going to a foreign government, Germany would be about the last country. Germany is our rival in building a large navy. About every other month the experts in Germany sit down to figure whether they are anything ahead of us in the tonnage of warships, and, if so, whether there is any danger of our catching up with them. Now, unless the Germans have a notion that they may need, to fight us one of these days—"

Page 8

"Oh, I don't believe anything of that sort," broke in Hal, shaking his head. "I don't believe any country in the world is aching to pick a quarrel with us."

"Not while the United States pocket-book is such a fat one, and so well built for paying war expenses," grinned Eph. Then his look became more solemn, as he added:

"But we don't want ever to get into a naval condition where it will be easy for some other country to snatch that fat pocket-book out of our hands."

"Let's go along, fellows. Drowning and confusion to all possible foes afloat," proposed Hal, the one who could never see "war" on the horizon. "After a winter on hot sodas, it'll be a relief to know that the druggist put in icecream soda to-day."

So the three boys turned and made their way to the drugstore. While they were exploring with spoons the bottoms of their glasses, the street door opened. Herr Professor Radberg looked in, then came in, beaming condescendingly on the young men.

"Ach! You young men are just the ones I wish to see," he exclaimed, resting one hand on Eph's shoulder, the other on Hal's.

"Lots of folks will pay for that privilege," declared Eph, solemnly.

"Yes? Well, I will pay, too—you shall see. I shall look for you at the hotel, in just one hour. One hour—remember."

"Have you a telescope?" inquired Eph, calmly.

"A telescope. Eh?" inquired the German. "What for?"

"You might need it in looking for us," Eph replied.

"Then, in one hour, I shall see you—at the hotel!"

"You'll be lucky, if you do," grinned Eph.

"Eh? I do not know that I understand," responded Herr Professor Radberg, slowly.

"If you're figuring on seeing us," Eph went on, gravely, "I'm afraid you're in for bad news."

"Bad news? Ach! What do you mean, young man?"

"Just what I said," replied Eph.

Professor Radberg looked so puzzled that Hal Hastings broke in, quietly:

“Professor, unless I’m much in error, you want to see us about a proposition that we enter the German naval service.”

“Hush! Not so loud,” warned Radberg, looking suspiciously around.

“There’s nothing we have to keep quiet about,” Hal went on. “You have already spoken to our captain, Jack Benson, about this matter.”

“Ach! Yes.”

“And Jack has refused.”

“Your captain is a fool!” cried the German.

“Then we serve a fool, because he’s our captain,” retorted Hal, quietly, though there was a flash in his eyes.

“I shall look for you two at the hotel in one hour,” declared the German, impressively.

“My friend, Mr. Somers, has already told you that you’ll be using your eyesight to poor advantage, then,” Hal answered.

“What do you mean?”

“Why, I mean, Professor, that you can’t possibly persuade us to go to Germany and tell your people anything that we know about the Pollard submarine boats, or any other type.”

Page 9

"But you shall be well paid!"

"Professor, what would be your price for selling out your country to the United States?" asked Hal, gazing fixedly at the German.

"You insult me!" cried the German, his face growing red. "I am a patriot."

"Yet, you insult us by thinking that we would sell our country," went on Hal, coolly.

"Are you two going to be as big fools as your captain?" demanded Herr Professor Radberg, almost incredulously.

"Bigger!" promised Eph, with a grin.

"Ach! Well, we shall talk this all over when you come to the hotel in an hour," replied the German. He turned and left the store.

"Now, I don't doubt," mocked Hal, "he has gone away firm in the belief that we'll keep his appointment."

"He'll wake up after a while," laughed Eph Somers.

After indulging in a second ice cream soda the submarine boys started down the street toward the Farnum shipyard where the Pollard boats were built.

As they passed a street corner they heard a cautious:

"Hss—sst!"

"Now, who threw that our way?" demanded the irrepressible Eph, turning swiftly. Then he added, in a tone so low that only his comrades could hear:

"Say, fellows, I'll bet that cost something!"

"That" was, a rather undersized little man, of perhaps thirty. Dark of hair, and sparkling of eye, the stranger's rather pallid face was partly covered, in front, by a short goatee, of the French "imperial" sort, and a moustache whose points were waxed out in fierce military fashion.

It was the stranger's apparel that had attracted Eph's notice particularly. The stranger was arrayed almost exquisite fashion; his clothes were of finest texture and latest Parisian type. His little, pointed shoes were almost as dainty as a girl's. Though the day was warm the stranger was gloved, and handled a cane in the head of which a handsome amethyst shone.

"I wonder how that got through the custom house?" was Eph Somers's next undertoned question.

"Ah, good morning, gentlemen," greeted the stranger, coming toward them, all smiles and bows. "Av I have not med ze mistake, zen I am address ze torpedo boys."

"Right-o," drawled Eph. "Regular human torpedoes, as touchy as gun-cotton. Why, I am due to explode this moment!"

Though the stranger looked puzzled at first, his face rapidly broke into a cordial smile.

"Oh, ah! I understand. You mek what is call ze American joke, eh? You have little fun wiz me."

The Frenchman, for that he unmistakably was, laughed in the utmost good humor. The boys found themselves much inclined to like this stranger.

"Now, young gentlemen," continued the Frenchman, "I am ze Chevalier Gari d'Ouray."

"Glad to meet you, Chev," volunteered Eph, with suspicious amiability, holding out his hand, which the Frenchman took daintily. "I'm a 'shoveleer' myself, and this awkward, gawky looking boy with me is our engineer."

Page 10

Eph had a tight grip on the stranger's hand, by this time, and was surely making it interesting for the Frenchman. The Chevalier d'Ouray was doing his best to retain his politeness, but Somers's hearty grip hurt the foreigner's soft little hand.

"What can we do for you, Chev?" demanded Eph, holding to the Frenchman's hand so persistently that Hastings gave his friend a sharp nudge in the back.

"Let us go somewhere," urged the Frenchman. "Some place were we can sit down and have ze talk about important matters. I have ze message for you zat I cannot deliver upon ze street."

"Now, don't say, please," begged Eph, "that you have heard we are wanted in the French Navy."

The Chevalier d'Ouray looked intensely astonished.

"Parbleu! You are one marvel!" gasped the Frenchman. "You read my most secret thought. But yes! You have made ze one right guess. However, I cannot more say upon ze street. Let us go somewhere."

"All right," nodded Eph. "You go along, now, and we'll be along in an hour."

"Wiz pleasure," nodded the chevalier, eagerly. "But we're shall I go?"

"Anywhere you like," suggested Eph, cordially.

"But, zen, how will you know w'ere I am to be found?"

"Oh, we'll take a chance on that," proposed Eph, carelessly.

"But, unless I am able to say, now, w'ere I shall be—" the Frenchman started to argue.

"We'll guess the meeting place as well as we did your errand," proposed Eph.

"Ten thousan' thanks!" cried, the chevalier. "Yet, for fear we mek ze one mistek, suppose I say—"

Eph Somers had struck such a streak of "guying" nonsense that Jack Benson felt called upon to interpose, for he and Hal both liked the twinkling eyes and good-humored face of this dandified little Frenchman.

"Pardon me, sir," Jack accordingly broke in, "but, if we happened to guess your errand, it was because we have just gotten away from the agent of another government."

“How? Is zat posseeble?” cried the Chevalier d’Ouray, a disappointed look coming into his face.

“Yes; it’s true,” nodded Jack.

“But you did not come to any terms wiz him?”

“Oh, no!”

“Ah, zen, ze coast is steel clear,” cried the little Frenchman, delightedly. “So, as to w’ere we can meet and mek ze one talk—”

“We can get that all over with, right here,” Jack replied. “We can make you the same answer that we gave the other man. We are Americans, and would never think of serving any other flag, even in peace time. Chevalier, I can save your time by telling you that any arrangement to engage our services away from the United States would be utterly hopeless.”

“But ze money—” began the Frenchman, protestingly.

“There isn’t money enough across the Atlantic to hire us,” Jack answered, bluntly.

“And ze honneur—”

Page 11

“Honor? What would that word afterwards mean to Americans, Chevalier, after they had left their own country to serve another?”

The Chevalier d’Ouray began to look as though he realized he had a harder task before him than he had expected.

“So you see, sir,” Jack went on, “it will not be in the least worth your while to try to tempt us. Come what will or may, we are under the American flag for life. You yourself, Chevalier, wouldn’t leave the French flag to serve this country, Great Britain or Germany.”

“No; but zat is deeferent, for I, monsieur, am French.”

“And we are American,” Jack responded.

“I will leave you, now, zen, gentlemen,” replied the Frenchman, in a tone of disappointment. “But I shall not go away before to-morrow. If you change ze mind—or weesh to hear w’at I have to mek ze offer—”

“Thank you,” nodded Jack. “But don’t waste any more time on us, Chevalier. And now—good-bye!”

The Chevalier d’Ouray shook hands with them all most gallantly. Eph felt somewhat ashamed of his late nonsense, and, to prove it, hit the Chevalier d’Ouray a friendly slap on one shoulder that set the Frenchman to coughing.

“Say,” muttered Jack, as the three now hurried along the street, “I begin to wish I had a good umbrella.”

“Humph! You’d look great with one,” retorted Hal. “You, who have stood on the platform deck of a submarine for hours, steering unconcernedly, when the skies were trying to drown you.”

“But I feel,” remonstrated Jack, “that it’s soon going to rain foreign agents. I’d like to get in out of the international wet.”

“Oh, we won’t see any more of these fellows,” smiled Hal.

“Now, there’s just where I believe you’re wrong, messmate,” Jack contended. “These foreign governments hire detectives to watch each other. When we hear from one, we’re likely to hear from the whole lot at once. Look around you, Eph. Do you see a Jap anywhere?”

“Not a solitary jiu-jitsu fiend,” responded Eph, after halting and staring both ways in turn along the street.

“Well, Japan is about due,” laughed Benson. “And now, let’s get in through the gate of the shipyard. If any more of these foreign agents show up—well, there are two boats in the harbor that are in commission. We’ll find an excuse to put to sea in one of them.”

“Just the youngsters I was going out to try to find,” hailed Grant Andrews, foreman of the submarine construction work, as he hurried across the yard. “Mr. Farnum told me to get out and find you. He’d have sent some one else, but I guess the business is rather on the quiet.”

“Is he in his office?” queried Jack.

“Yes.”

“Thank you; we’ll go right in, then.”

“Now I wonder what country it is whose agent has gotten hold of Mr. Farnum?” asked Eph, plaintively.

“Nonsense!” mocked Jack.

Page 12

"That's what we try to tell 'em all," mocked Eph. "But the Germans are the hardest."

All three of the submarine boys were laughing so heartily, as they entered the shipbuilder's private office that Jacob Farnum, a youngish looking man to be at the head of so large a manufacturing plant, glanced up quickly.

"What's the joke, boys?" he asked. "I haven't had a laugh since I pounded my thumbnail with a sledge-hammer."

Captain Jack Benson quickly detailed the meetings with Radberg and d'Ouray.

"The Frenchman didn't look a bit like a 'shovelee' either," muttered Eph. "If anything, that looked more in the German's line."

"Well, you'll have a chance to get rid of nonsense, now, for a while," went on Mr. Farnum, after having enjoyed a few laughs with the boys. "I've some serious business in hand for you, and the time has come."

That was like the shipbuilder. Whatever he was planning, at any time, he kept strictly to himself until the time came to put the plan into operation.

"There's quite an important little job for you up at Craven's Bay," continued Mr. Farnum. "You know, there are important fortifications there, because the Navy people expect, in wartime, to use Craven's Bay as a possibly important naval station and shelter for vessels that have to put in. Now, for some time the Army engineer officers have been perfecting a system of submarine mines for the bay. The engineers have a problem on hand as to whether an enemy's submarine boats could sneak into the bay and blow up the submarine mines before the Army woke up to the danger."

"There's a chance that *that* could be done," nodded Jack, musingly.

"Jest so," nodded Mr. Farnum. "So I want you to go up in one of the boats. To-morrow the engineer officers at that station will test it out with you whether a submarine can destroy the mines, or the mines could be made to destroy the submarine boats."

"Then the Army engineer officers will use dummy submarine mines, I hope," broke in Eph.

"Oh, of course," nodded Mr. Farnum. "Now, the trip to Craven's Bay is only an eight-hour sail at a good gait, so you won't really need to start until after dark to-night."

"I believe I'd rather start now, though, and go at less speed," suggested Jack, thoughtfully.

"That's just as you please, of course," nodded the shipbuilder.

“It will take us out on the water, for one thing,” Captain Jack continued, “and we’ve been growing stale on shore, of late.” Then he added, whimsically: “Besides, if the agents of any more foreign governments show up, they won’t find us here.”

“And there’s a Jap just about due now,” grimaced Eph.

“Take Williamson with you, for use in the engine room,” advised Mr. Farnum. “That will allow you to take the boat through with two watches above and below. Which boat will you take?”

Page 13

"The 'Spitfire,' unless you'd rather have us take the other one," young Benson replied.

"Take the 'Spitfire,' by all means," nodded the owner.

Twenty minutes later, Williamson having been found, the crew was all ready for the start for Craven's Bay.

Eph and Williamson cast off from moorings while Hal Hastings, down below at the gasoline motors, started the twin propellers as soon as Jack Benson, at the deck wheel, signaled for speed ahead.

Right after the start, Williamson, a grown man and machinist, dropped below. Eph Somers stood beside the young submarine captain.

For some minutes both boys gazed out over the waters. Then Eph remarked:

"Well, we got away without being overhauled by a Jap or a Russian, didn't we?"

"I don't know," smiled Jack, unsuspectingly. "See that launch over to port? Hanged if she doesn't seem to be putting toward us."

"She does," admitted Eph, solemnly. "Oh, well, with a few more turns of the screw we can easily get away from that launch."

For some moments Captain Jack paid no especial heed to the launch bearing down upon them on the port side. He noted only, at the distance, that the launch contained two men. Presently, however, as the launch came nearer, Captain Benson made a discovery.

"Eph," he gasped, "look over there! Are my eyes going back on me, or is that a Japanese in the bow of the launch?"

"Japanese?" gasped Eph Somers, in turn. "Nothing but!"

Eph made a swift dive for the box that contained the signal flags used in the international marine signaling code. Moving swiftly, young Somers selected the two flags representing "N" and "D." These he strung to the halliard of the short signal mast forward. Nor was he ahead of time, for by this time the launch had described part of a circle, and was coming up alongside.

In the bow of the launch stood the Japanese, smiling, and holding a megaphone in his hand.

"Submarine, a-ho-o-o-oy!" came the hail. "Will you slow down? I have something to say to you."



Up flew the signal flags, fluttering in the breeze. Then Eph snatched up a megaphone, holding the smaller end to his mouth.

“Launch ahoy!” he shouted back. “Just tell your folks that you saw our signal!”

The Japanese read the fluttering flags, then called back:

“N.D.? What does that mean?”

Hoarsely Eph Somers bellowed back:

“Nothing doing!”

CHAPTER III

THE MAN WHO MARKED CHARTS

It was a little before midnight when the “Spitfire” came to anchor in Craven’s Bay, after having been piloted to anchorage by a quartermaster’s tug that put off from Fort Craven on signal.

“Fine place, if your searchlight is keen enough,” yawned Eph, gazing off into the darkness.

Page 14

Eph and Williamson had slept through the evening, after supper, and were now to take the night watch tricks, the machinist's deck watch beginning at once and lasting until four in the morning.

About an hour after daylight, Eph Somers deserted the deck, except for occasional intervals. After a while the odor of coffee and steak was in the air. Then, snatching up a bugle, Somers sounded the reveille tumultuously through the small cabin of the submarine torpedo boat.

Not long did the other members of the crew take to turn out and dress. They came out into the cabin to find Eph trotting between table and galley, putting things on the table.

"This seems like old times," chuckled Williamson, as he seated himself with the boys.

"Yes; because you don't have to cook," grimaced Eph. "Wait until after breakfast, when you have to clear away and wash dishes!"

"Even so, I have the best of it," laughed the machinist, good-humoredly. "I have something in my stomach to work on."

"I always do get the tough end of any job, don't I?" grumbled Eph, resignedly, then buried his troubles under a plateful of steak and fried potatoes.

"You hoisted the signal, 'N.D.', yesterday afternoon," laughed Captain Jack, laying down his coffee cup. "If you don't watch out, Eph, I'll hoist the 'N.G.' flag over this table."

"Breakfast no good?" demanded Eph, looking much offended.

"No; 'N.G.' will stand for 'no grouch.'"

Somers joined heartily in the laugh that followed.

Just as they were finishing a really good meal, for which every breakfaster had a royal, salt-water appetite, a steamer's whistle was heard, not far off to port.

"I'll bet that's the Army tug!" muttered Captain Jack, rising hastily from the table. "Tell you what, fellows, we've got to begin to have something like Navy discipline aboard this craft. In that case, we'd have had breakfast over an hour ago."

Jack was off up the steps as though pursued. Eph went after him as soon as that youth with the sun-kissed hair had time to pull on his visored cap and button his blouse. No matter what the need of haste, Somers never appeared on deck looking less natty than a veteran naval officer.

Forward, on the tug, stood a major of engineers, a young lieutenant beside him.

“Good morning, Mr. Benson,” hailed Major Woodruff. “We’re going to try to come in close enough to put a gang-plank over. Can you take a bow line from us?”

“Yes, sir,” Captain Jack saluted the Army officer, and Eph hurried to receive the line.

In less than two minutes Major Woodruff and Lieutenant Kline were on the platform deck of the “Spitfire.”

“This is the first one of your craft we’ve seen,” declared the major, as Eph cast off the bow line, and the tug backed water. “Will you show us over?”

This the submarine boys gladly did, as the Army shares with the Navy in the defense of the country.

Page 15

"You see what you have to do, Kline," said Major Woodruff, presently. Then the older officer turned to Jack to say:

"Mr. Benson, since Mr. Farnum has been kind enough to place you and the boat at our orders, Kline is going to remain on board, today, during the tests. He will give Mr. Somers whatever orders are necessary in order to make the tests most successful."

"Why not give the orders to me, sir?" Jack asked.

"Why, you see, Mr. Benson," replied the major, "I plan for you to be on shore, out on the neck, to make certain observations regarding the work of your craft. Those observations you will turn in to me."

"Very good, sir. The neck, I take it, is the narrow strip of land that separates this part of the bay from the ocean?"

"Quite right, Mr. Benson."

It was to be observed that the major, like naval officers, addressed Jack by the title of "mister," not "captain." This was because, in the military service, Army and Navy titles are not recognized unless conferred by government appointment or commission. Hence, though young Benson was "captain" to his crew and to civilians, officers of the United Service could address, him only as "mister."

"The neck, Mr. Benson," continued Major Woodruff, "is the land best suited for watching our work from to-day. And now, I will state what the object of to-day's tests is. This morning our tug will be engaged in planting certain submarine mines. Mr. Somers will watch our work of planting. Of course the mines will contain no explosives. You young men have, I understand, solved the problem of leaving a submarine boat while it lies on the bottom? You are also able to enter the submarine again from the surface?"

"Quite right, Major," Jack nodded.

"Then, if Mr. Somers watches the planting of the dummy mines, he will have the same advantage as would the commander of an enemy's submarine in knowing where our mines are planted. We shall plant four of them, this morning, and Mr. Somers, after seeing each mine planted, will mark down its position on a chart of the bay. He will then take the boat outside, enter under water, and, without touching any of our mines, while handling the boat, will see if he can stop close by and cut the connecting wires."

"If your mines contain no explosive, Major," Eph inquired, "how are you going to be able to tell whether I collide gently with one of your submarine mines?"

“We shall know at once,” smiled Major Woodruff. “If you should collide with one, you will cause, a bell to be rung in the camera obscura room over at the fort. The bell that rings will show us which one of the mines you touched against.”

Page 16

The “camera obscura,” as used at a modern fort, is in itself a most interesting contrivance. While no elaborate description of it can be attempted here, it will be enough to explain to the reader that, in the camera room, which is darkened, is a large white table covered with white oil-cloth, or other white substance. On this white surface is drawn a plan of the harbor to be defended. The position of each mine sunk under the water’s surface is indicated on this map against the white background. Each mine is numbered. Overhead is a revolving shutter, somewhat on the plan of a camera’s lens shutter. This shutter, which turns a reflecting lens on the harbor, can be turned in any direction. Any vessel in the harbor can thus be “caught,” and its reflection, in miniature, thrown upon the white map surface.

Suppose an enemy’s battleship to be entering the harbor. The camera obscura shutter, in being turned about, suddenly throws upon the white screen-map the miniature picture of the hostile battleship. Henceforth the officer in command sees to it that the shutter is so operated as to keep the image of the battleship always upon the white screen map. Thus the course of the battleship is followed—absolutely. At any second the exact position of that battleship in the harbor is known.

Let us suppose that the officer in command at the white, map-covered table finds that the battleship is gradually approaching the position indicated in the harbor as mine number nineteen; as the officer watches the moving image of the battleship, he sees it going closer and closer to the exact spot numbered nineteen on the white map.

“Be ready, Sergeant,” calls the officer, warningly, to a non-commissioned officer who stands before a board on the wall on which are several electric push-buttons, each numbered.

“Yes, sir,” replies the sergeant.

At this moment the officer sees the image of the battleship passing fairly over the dot on the white map that is numbered nineteen.

“Fire nineteen, Sergeant,” calls the Army officer in charge.

The non-commissioned officer quickly presses electric button numbered nineteen. As he does so the electric current is sent flashing, perhaps along four or five miles of insulated wire on the bottom of the harbor. At the other end of that wire is submarine mine number nineteen. In a breathless instant the current traverses the whole length of the wire. The spark has reached the gun-cotton! There is a dull, booming sound; a great column of water shoots up from the surface. In the midst of the commotion the enemy’s battleship is rent, and all on board, perhaps killed. The cool, dry-eyed Army officer bending over the white screen-map sees all this scene of horror depicted under the white surface beneath his eyes. He knows that submarine mine number nineteen,

planted out there in the harbor, has done its duty in protecting this portion of the coast of the United States.

Page 17

Here, at Fort Craven, it was desired to find whether an enemy's submarine boat could creep in, below the surface, find the mine, whose location was already known through spies, and effectively cut the firing wire. If this could be done, then, in war-time, it might be that the sergeant at the wall-board would press the button in vain. No explosion would follow. With the current thus cut off, the officer bending over the white screen would not see the miniature reproduction of the destruction of the enemy's battleship.

A submarine torpedo boat, coming into a harbor underneath the surface, is not pictured on the white table under the camera obscura. So it was desired to see whether Eph could come in, knowing the exact locations of each of the four dummy mines, and quickly cut the firing electric wires. If this could be done, the Army would have to revise its method of firing such submarine mines by means of the camera obscura detection.

As Eph listened to the explanation his mind began to revolve plans rapidly whereby he hoped to succeed in cutting the mine wires.

"You will keep sufficiently below the surface, too, Mr. Somers," continued Major Woodruff. "We do not want you so close to the surface of the water that a ripple would show on the camera obscura table. You cannot, of course, rise and use your periscope to see where you are. Even the periscope would betray you."

The "periscope" is a device also of the nature of a camera obscura. In the case of the periscope a narrow metallic tube is thrust above the water and the shutter turned about, reflecting all the scene about on a white-covered table in the boat's cabin.

"I think I can beat you, Major," smiled Eph.

"I certainly hope you can," replied Major Woodruff. "That is what we want to see today. We shall watch closely, too, and see whether any plan can be devised for beating a submarine torpedo boat at its own game."

Lieutenant Kline was to remain on board the "Spitfire," both in order to watch the work and to give Eph any instructions that might be necessary in order to make the tests more conclusive.

"If you will come along with me, then, Mr. Benson," suggested Major Woodruff, "I will put you ashore on the neck. On the way over I will give you your instructions."

As the tug came alongside again Jack followed the major over the gang plank to the deck of the other craft.

"Good-bye, Captain Somers," called Jack, laughingly. "Give a fine account of yourself as an enemy of the United States!"

"Oh, you—" began Eph, flaring red, but wisely cutting his speech short.

On the way over to the strip of land known as the “neck” Major Woodruff managed to make his instructions wholly clear to young Benson.

“Now, you know what to watch for, and what observations, to report to me,” finished the major of engineers, as the tug came to a stop. A small boat was lowered, and, in this, Captain Jack Benson was put on the desolate shore.

Page 18

Then the tug went back over by the fort. Jack grew tired of waiting, for it was some two hours ere the tug finally left the ordinance wharf at Fort Craven.

It was warm out there, on the low, sandy cliffs, provided one got into a position sheltered from the ocean winds. So Jack, in the weariness of his waiting, threw himself down in a sheltered hollow.

Finding that the sun shone disagreeably in his eyes, the submarine boy pulled his cap forward over his face.

Then, in the course of a very few minutes, the inevitable happened. Jack Benson drifted off into sleep.

He awoke with a fearful start, for he had no idea how long he had slept. Yanking out his watch and noting the time, the submarine boy concluded that he had not been asleep more than twenty or thirty minutes.

"But I might just as easily have slept for hours," Benson reproached himself. "Then what a hero I'd have felt. Asleep on post!"

At that moment Jack Benson heard a faraway whistle, across the bay. Showing just the top of his head above a ridge of sand, Captain Jack saw the Army tug just pulling out from the dock across the bay.

But Jack saw something else, too, in that brief instant.

A slim, soldierly-looking man of perhaps thirty, tall and of naturally good carriage, was skulking along in front of the submarine boy, yet hidden from the bay by a sand ridge.

Under one arm the stranger carried a draughtsman's board and a book. A strap over one shoulder held a field-glass case.

"Where in blazes have I seen that chap before?" wondered Captain Jack Benson, staring hard. "For I have seen him—somewhere. I'd declare that under oath."

Figure, carnage and face all strangely haunted the submarine boy, who crouched lower, watching.

"By the great turret gun! He's skulking for a reason!" muttered Benson. "Is he spying on the mine-planting? I wonder? Yes! That must be his work! Long-legs, I'll keep my eyes on you!"

The stranger hastened along for perhaps a quarter of a mile further. Then he threw himself down on the sand, choosing a position in which he could lie flat, his head fairly well hidden behind a low ridge of sand.

Unslinging the field-glass, the stranger brought it to his eyes, closely watching the progress of the tug.

“Ha-ha!” muttered watchful Jack, who had followed, keeping behind another sand ridge. “So, sir!”

The minutes passed, though Jack Benson was so absorbed in watching this long stranger that the boy had but the vaguest notions of the flight of time.

The tug had halted, now. A great crane at the bow swung around, and a submarine mine hung poised in the air. Then, with a rattle of chains not audible at the distance, the mine was slowly lowered until it touched on bottom.

While this was going on, the long-legged stranger, wholly absorbed in his own work, made some observations and some hurried calculations. Then he pulled the drawing-board toward him, jotting down a point.

Page 19

Jack Benson, standing stealthily, got a good look, for the first time, at the top of that drawing board.

"A chart of the bay, of course," muttered Benson, savagely, between his teeth. "The fellow is marking down the exact position of that mine!"

Still, the submarine boy did nothing to betray his own presence. He watched and wondered. The thought struck him that this long-legged one might be an officer of the Army, on observation duty like the submarine boy himself.

"But that isn't right; I'm sure it isn't," decided young Benson, quickly. "If they fellow were here on honest business, he wouldn't have sneaked out here to get in position. Besides, I have a vague remembrance of this fellow, and I don't connect him with anything honest!"

The Army tug, out on the bay, was now engaged in planting a second mine. Again the slim stranger was all attention. When the crane began to lower the mine, a second mark was made on the chart on the drawing board.

Now, once more, the fellow lay at full length, watching intently off over the bay. At his right hand lay drawing-board, the book and the field-glasses.

"I'll give him a little excitement!" grimaced Jack Benson, stealing softly forward.

Suddenly the boy swooped down upon drawing board, book and glasses, then, with a panting whoop, wheeled and started off on a dead run.

"Here you—stop!" yelled the slim one, hoarse with sudden anger.

Like a flash the stranger was up and in pursuit. As he quickened in the chase this stranger drew a revolver that glinted in the sun.

CHAPTER IV

JACK'S QUEER LOT OF LOOT

"Stop, thief!"

Jack Benson only sped onward the faster.

"Halt, you young rascal!" roared the long-legged one, in pursuit.

"The fellow who can call names like that, under the circumstances, has no sense of humor!" chuckled the submarine boy, inwardly.



"Drop that chart and book!" panted the one in chase. "You're stealing government property!"

"Yes, but which government?" Jack shot back at his pursuer.

"Are you going to stop?"

Jack's answer was to increase his burst of speed slightly.

"Then I'm going to fire!" came the warning. Glancing over his shoulder the submarine boy saw the long-legged one still running after him. At the same time the pursuer was raising his revolver, sighting.

Jack felt a little shiver. He had never been suspected of being a coward, yet he was willing to admit that he didn't want to feel a chunk of lead plowing its way through him.

"Last word to halt!" yelled the pursuer, in an ugly tone.

"Fire, then!" dared Jack Benson.

Crack! Whizz-zz! Chug! The weapon was discharged promptly. Jack, still in flight, heard the bullet whistle by him. Then it struck the sand, fifty feet ahead, throwing up a spurt of the fine particles.

Page 20

"That was for a caution. The next shot will be to hit!" panted the pursuer.

"I wonder if you can do it?" Jack taunted backward over his shoulder.

There was method in the submarine boy's tactics. He hoped, by making the stranger angry, to spoil his aim.

Crack! The bullet sped by, fanning the fugitive's face. The close aim, however, had the reverse of the effect expected by the marksman. It roused all the submarine boy's anger. He might be hit, but he would stop, now, only if a bullet laid him low.

Two more shots sped after the fugitive. Their aim was too close for comfort, though not true enough to score a hit. Each of the shots sounded a bit further back, too.

"He's getting winded," gritted the running submarine boy. "With his long legs that chap ought to get over ground faster than I. The difference is that that fellow is out of condition, and my hard work keeps me about up to the mark of condition all the time. He—"

Crack! Jack happened to turn, just as the fellow fired, and the boy was able to see that the bullet struck the ground behind him.

"Out of range!" clicked Benson. "What's the good of carrying a pocket revolver for service work? Now, if he had a dozen shots more left he would be wasting his cartridges to fire at me."

In fact, it was plain enough that the pursuer had given up the chase for the time being. Not only was he out of range of his quarry, but the long-legged one lacked the wind to keep on on foot.

"Say, what a fool I'd have been, to give up this plunder!" cried Jack, mockingly. "That chap couldn't catch me; he couldn't hit me. So I've gotten away with the stuff he was so anxious to have—and which the Army, I'll bet, would a thousand times rather he didn't have!"

"Now, how am I going to get back to the Army people?" wondered young Benson, slowing down to a walk, though keeping a vigilant lookout to the rear. "I don't want to walk something like a million miles to find a place from which I can get across the bay."

It was desolate country, over here. Jack and the long-legged one, well to his rear, now, might be the only human beings within some miles. The outlook was not an encouraging one.

"Say! Wow! Whoop! Blazes!" uttered Captain Jack, suddenly. "Now, I remember Long-legs! Millard was the name he gave when he came to us, at Dunhaven, last Fall.

He was the chap who wanted to work on the submarine construction. Said he'd do any kind of work, but Grant Andrews put him in a separate shed, sorting and counting steel rivets, and never let him get near a submarine boat. That's the same fellow—Millard. Or, at least, that was the name he gave them. But, when Millard found he wasn't going to do anything but take care of rivets, he threw up the job four days after. He had pretended to be mighty hard up, too, and wanted work at any sort of wages."

Page 21

Jack's face began to glow as he remembered more and more of the brief career of Millard at Dunhaven.

"And Dave Pollard, when he was over in Washington later, said he ran across Millard living at the swell Arlington Hotel! Millard had a different name in Washington, and refused to recognize Mr. Pollard—said there was some mistake. By hookey! There isn't any mistake. Millard was trying to steal submarine secrets at Dunhaven, and now he's trying to map out harbor defenses in Craven Bay!"

Again Captain Jack glanced backward over his shoulder, but Millard was no longer in sight.

"He knew me, probably, in a flash," muttered the submarine boy. "I'm sorry I didn't recognize him sooner."

Having gotten his wind back, Jack broke into a run again. Just because Millard had dropped out of sight was no reason for taking chances of a sudden swoop from the stranger.

For some five minutes Jack Benson jogged along. Then he came in sight of a little semicove. Here lay a small motor launch, whose skipper, somewhat of the fisherman type, was busily engaged with the engine.

"Say," hailed young Benson, running down to the water's edge, "can you start your engine at once?"

"I reckon," nodded the fisherman, looking up.

"Run your bow in, so I can get aboard, then," directed Captain Jack, briskly. "I want to get over to where the Army tug is at work. Do you know where that is—over to the southeast ward?"

"Yep," nodded the fisherman.

"I'll give you three dollars to take me over there in a hustle," proposed Jack.

"You're easy enough," grinned the man in the boat, starting the engine, then lightly driving the bow of the boat upon the sand. "But you'll pay me in advance."

"Certainly," nodded the submarine boy, taking out the money, as he stepped into the boat, and handing it over.

"Now, pick up that boathook, and shove off, and we'll start," added the master of the little launch.

As Jack snatched up the boathook he caught, sight of Millard, three hundred yards away, just coming in sight on a run.

“You’d better get your engine going fast,” warned Jack, “or that fellow headed this way will make trouble for us both. He’s carrying a gun.”

The skipper took just one look at Millard, who was racing along, pistol in hand, and was prepared to believe his present passenger. That little launch stole out of the cover under its reverse gear until the master of the craft thought himself far enough from shore for him to be out of range of Millard’s weapon.

“Who is that feller?” asked the fisherman, when satisfied that he was at a safe distance and increasing it every instant.

“From the way he’s dancing up and down, it looks as if he were crazy,” laughed Jack, coolly.

“What’s his particular specialty in craziness?” asked the master of the launch, looking shrewdly at the submarine boy.

Page 22

"Now, see here," protested Benson, good humoredly, "as I understand it, you're paid to take me over to the Army tug—not to ask questions. Am I right?"

"You're right," nodded the fisherman, then surveyed the boy's uniform curiously.

"Your uniform looks like you was in the Navy?" suggested the man at the stern of the boat.

"Does it?" queried Jack.

"Are you in the Navy?" persisted the boat man.

"Just now, I'm serving with the Army," Captain Jack replied, evasively.

"Are you—" started in the human interrogation point, anew.

"See here," broke in the submarine boy, "I thought we agreed you had just one job to do for me, and that questions formed no part of it."

"That's right," agreed the fisherman. "But say, there's just one question I wish you'd answer me. Are you—"

"No!" interrupted Benson, decisively. "I am not. I never was."

"You didn't let me finish," complained the man.

"Wait until I'm out of the boat," proposed the submarine boy. "Then ask all the questions you like. Maybe you're paid to ask questions, but I'm paid to hold my mouth shut."

It went a good deal against the submarine boy's grain to be so brusque with an inquisitive stranger, but there seemed to be no other defense.

"Oh, well, if you're ashamed of your business—" retorted the fisherman, falling into a sullen silence.

This turn of affairs just suited Benson. He compressed his lips and sat back, looking out across the bay at the tug, which was at work some three miles away.

"Can you put on a little more speed?" inquired Jack.

"No," answered the fisherman, sulkily. "Doin' all the gait she'll kick now."

So Jack possessed his soul in patience until the wheezy little launch had covered the whole distance.

While still some two hundred yards off Jack caught sight of Major Woodruff coming out of the after cabin of the tug.

"Ahoy, Major!" yelled the submarine boy, holding his hands to his lips. "Perhaps you'd better stop work until I've reported."

Then the launch ran in alongside, and Jack stepped up to the deck of the tug, holding tightly to the loot he had taken from Millard.

The master of the launch manifested a disposition to hang about in the near vicinity, until curtly ordered away by Major Woodruff.

"I suppose you thought, Major, that I took a good deal upon myself in advising you to suspend work," Jack hinted. "Yet I've something to show you, and much to tell you. And I'm wagering an anchor to a fish-hook that you'll be glad you stationed me over on that neck of sand."

Major Woodruff led the way back into the cabin. There he examined the chart, with a start of astonishment.

"The fellow was marking down all our mine positions," came savagely from between the Army officer's teeth.

Page 23

Then he picked up the book.

"A nice little assortment of notes on matters of military interest along this coast," muttered the soldier. "Your long-legged fellow has been busy at other points than Craven's Bay."

Then, closing the book with a snap, Major Woodruff looked keenly at the submarine boy as he remarked:

"Mr. Benson, I think our present submarine tests can be well suspended. We have a much more important task ahead of us—to catch this impudent thief of military secrets! And, in this undertaking, Benson, you can be of the greatest sort of help!"

CHAPTER V

SIGHTING THE ENEMY

"You can count on me, sir," declared Captain Jack Benson, eagerly.

"I can count on every one of you submarine boys, can't I?" asked Major Woodruff, thoughtfully.

"You can count on us," declared Benson, earnestly, "as though every one of us were sworn into the service and had a record of being tried and tested!"

In an instant after speaking the submarine boy realized that this must have had a boastful sound. So he added, quickly:

"Please don't suspect me, Major, of being a braggart. But Hal, Eph and I have always taken our work with seriousness. We have always acted just as though the Flag depended upon us for its protection. We have the desire, every minute of our lives, to be great Americans—that is, great in our devotion to the Flag, even if we cannot be great in deeds."

"By Jove, I believe you!" cried Major Woodruff, reaching forward and clasping Jack's hand tightly in his own.

The major went on heartily:

"No, no, Benson, I don't consider you boastful. You're talking the way I heard some youngsters talk when I was a boy. It's refreshing and encouraging to hear you talk that way. Do you know, boy, when we older fellows sometimes get to thinking of the country's past glories, we wonder whether the boys of to-day are going to make such men as have carried the United States of America forward in the past? The thought

makes us solemn and anxious. I suppose every man who is grown and on toward middle life has always, in every generation, wondered whether boys were as serious and dependable, as staunch and loyal as the boys of the day before yesterday. Look here, lad!"

Major Woodruff rose, stepping to the door aft and throwing it open. The stern of the tug was visible. From the pole that slanted out over the stern, hung the Stars and Stripes.

"You don't need to glance at that fine old bit of bunting more than a second, lad," continued the major, "before you feel all that it can ever make you feel. In your case, I believe the sight of the Flag is always an inspiration to you. I pray it is so with every boy who grows up in this country. But is it?"

Standing there before the Flag, Jack quietly doffed his cap.

Page 24

"Thank you, Benson," acknowledged the major, also doffing his own cap. Then, closing the door, Major Woodruff stepped back to the table on which lay chart and book.

"This chart, Benson, shows what the rascal Millard, has been doing out on the neck. This book proves that he has been at work at some other points. The book doesn't tell much of the story, though. Of that I am certain. Millard, if he has been at work long, has compiled other notes in other written volumes. If so, then he has also made other charts of our coast defenses. For what other government has he thus marked a series of charts with our secrets? And has Millard succeeded in getting other charts, and other books of notes, off to the foreign government he is serving—or has he them hidden somewhere in this country, awaiting his chance to take the results of his spying out of the United States?"

"I wish I knew!" muttered Jack.

"I'm coming to the point," continued Major Woodruff, briskly. "Now, of course, when we discover evidence that spies of other governments are at work along our lines of national defenses, the first thing we try to do is to catch these foreign agents and all the material they have succeeded in getting together."

Major Woodruff, who was becoming considerably excited, paused to light a cigar, ere he continued, more slowly:

"Now, you and your two friends, Benson, know this fellow Millard. You will spot him instantly, wherever you go. I shall communicate with Washington, at once, by means of a telegram in cipher. The War Department will order me to use all speed in catching Millard, and in finding out where he keeps his other stolen records. Men and money will be used in running down this fellow. Yet you and your two chums should be in the front ranks of pursuit, for you will know him the instant you lay eyes on him."

"You want me to take my friends ashore, then, Major, and lay the 'Spitfire' up?"

"By no means," answered Major Woodruff, decisively. "In reality operations will be suspended at this point until we have run Millard down. Yet we must have the appearance of being as busy as ever. The submarine will hover about, and this tug will be busy, apparently, in laying the bay with mines. You have a fourth man on your boat?"

"Yes, sir; Williamson, the machinist."

"Can he run the engines all right?"

"As well as any of us, Major."

"Then I will put aboard a man who can steer. Thus the 'Spitfire' will be seen moving about the bay, and apparently at work. I'll also put aboard a guard of a sergeant and

three or four soldiers of the engineer corps, and they'll guard that boat from harm with their lives. That will leave all three of you young officers of the 'Spitfire' free for shore duty."

"It will, Major. And now, sir, what is that shore duty to be?"

"Simply to locate Millard. He may be at one of the hotels in Radford."

Page 25

Radford was the busy, important little port four miles farther up the bay.

"He's likely to be somewhere in Radford, anyway," nodded young Benson.

"Wherever the fellow is found, he must be seized at once," continued Major Woodruff, warmly. "Any policeman will seize him on your request. I will give each of you three a written statement that you have been asked to locate Millard and have him arrested. If you run across Millard anywhere, turn him over to a policeman, then show my written authorization. On that the police authorities will hold the scoundrel and notify the military authorities. Then, once we have Millard out at Fort Craven, securely under lock and key, by authority from Washington, we will make every effort under the sun to locate his charts and notebooks."

"Why, the work you want us to do is going to be easy enough," murmured Captain Jack.

"It is going to be easy, if you succeed in finding the fellow, and in turning him over to a policeman," replied Major Woodruff. "And, by the way, I have just remembered that Lieutenant Ridder, of the engineer corps, reported last night from a former station in the West. No one around here will know him. Good enough! I'll have Ridder get into citizen's clothes and go about with you three. He can give you instructions on any point about which you're in doubt."

"We ought to run that rascal down, sir," answered Jack Benson, rising. "Unless—"

"Unless what, Benson?"

"Why, sir, unless he's more clever than a rascal usually succeeds in being. I haven't lived so very long, Major Woodruff, but, from what little I've seen of the world, it has struck me that the cleverest scoundrels are always just a little less smart, in the end, than the average of honest men."

"I hope you'll prove it, in this case," replied the major. "And now, to signal your boat. We'll run both craft in at the ordnance dock at Fort Craven."

A couple of miles away Eph Somers was slowly running the submarine back and forth over the water in seeming aimlessness. In response to sharp blasts from the whistle of the Army tug, the "Spitfire" was seen to turn and head for the tug.

"Mr. Somers, you will follow in our wake," shouted Major Woodruff, when the two craft were within hailing distance of each other. "We will show you where to make fast at the ordnance dock."

"Very good, sir," Eph responded, with a salute.

A little later in the forenoon both boats docked at the water front of Fort Craven.

“You’ll come up to my quarters, now, and meet Lieutenant Ridder,” announced the Major, when he had gathered the submarine boys together, and when Jack had given necessary explanations to Williamson.

“You may not see us again, for a few days,” Jack informed the machinist, in winding up.

“That won’t surprise me so very much, either,” laughed the machinist. “Things are always happening, where you are, and mysteries have ceased to puzzle me.”

Page 26

"Have you young men ever been on a military post before?" inquired Major Woodruff, as he led them up from the dock.

"Never sir," replied Jack. "We have seen considerable of Navy life, but this is the first time we've ever been at a fort."

"You don't see much about this place, do you," laughed the engineer officer, "that makes you think of a fort?"

"Not much," Benson admitted.

"Yet we have a fighting plant here that could prevent a big fleet, indeed, from getting far up the bay at the important cities beyond. That is," Woodruff continued, thoughtfully, in a low voice, "if the enemy, in advance of his coming here, doesn't know all about our defenses through the work of spies."

Just at the point near the dock, Fort Craven looked not unlike the yard of a big factory plant. Wagons going and coming constantly heightened this effect. Beyond, past the plain, on one side, Major Woodruff pointed out the barracks of the Coast Artillery, of the Engineers soldiers, and of the Infantry. There were also laborers' quarters, several office buildings, a hospital, a chapel, and two streets of cottages that served as quarters for the officers stationed at Fort Craven.

It was into one of these officers' streets that Major Woodruff soon led his three young companions. Admitting the boys to his home, the major took them to the library on the ground floor.

"Now, I'll telephone for Lieutenant Ridder to come over in citizen's dress," announced the major. "At the same time, I must advise Colonel Totten, who is commander of the post. He may come over here, or he may order us all over to headquarters."

Colonel Totten elected to come over to the major's quarters. He arrived just after Lieutenant Ridder, who proved to be a rather boyish looking young man, not long out of West Point.

The plans were quickly laid by which Lieutenant Ridder was to take an automobile up to Radford, going to one of the hotels and registering.

Jack and his two chums were to make the journey in another auto. They would go to still other hotels, perhaps to three different ones. At any moment when instructions were needed, any one of the three could call up Lieutenant Ridder on the telephone.

In addition, Major Woodruff gave each of the three submarine boys a written and signed authorization for them to call upon the police to seize Millard, if found, and hold the fellow for the United States military authorities.

“Now, you young men may start for Radford,” continued the major. “Colonel Totten and I will busy ourselves with the despatches that must be sent to Washington about this affair. But I trust, lads, you will not fail to realize the importance of prompt success.”

“It’s a special duty to the Flag, sir,” Captain Jack answered, simply.

The automobiles were waiting outside. Lieutenant Ridder was given a three minutes’ start. Then the submarine boys followed after, in a second car.

Page 27

As Radford was but four miles distant from the post the trip was not to be a long one.

"This is the sort of job that has me by the ears," glowed Eph Somers, enthusiastically. "I won't be selfish enough to say I hope to be the fellow to catch Millard. But, if he does stray my way, I hope I won't be idiot enough to let him slip through my fingers."

"I don't care if Lieutenant Ridder is the one who nabs him," remarked Hal, coolly. "All that I'm particular about is to see this foreign agent nabbed before he succeeds in getting any information out of the country."

The car that bore the boys was soon driving through the streets of Radford. Jack held in his hand a list of the better grade and middle-class hotels that Colonel Totten had given him.

"Which hotel are we going to first?" asked Hal.

"I don't know," uttered Jack, suddenly, sharply. "I know what I'm going to do, however."

Leaning slightly forward the young submarine captain prodded the chauffeur lightly, twice, in the back—a signal that had been agreed upon at need.

In response, the chauffeur ran the car slowly in at the curb.

Captain Jack, opening the tonneau door, was quickly out on the sidewalk, without any need having risen for wholly stopping the car, which then shot forward again.

"Now, what on earth was that for?" demanded Eph Somers, as the car sped on.

"Don't look back," replied Hal.

"Why not?"

"Well, a certain party would see you looking at him."

"Who?"

"Why, Jack had the good luck to see Millard going along on the sidewalk. We've just passed the fellow!"

"Are we going to nab him?" demanded Somers, breathlessly.

"You'll have to leave that decision to good old Jack," chuckled Hal Hastings. "He's out there, dogging Millard from the rear. It's Jack Benson's affair just at this moment."

It was mighty hard for Eph to refrain from looking back. But he restrained his curiosity.

CHAPTER VI

FLANK MOVEMENT AND REAR ATTACK

When Jack Benson first touched the sidewalk, and the automobile glided on, leaving him in the wake of Millard, it was the young submarine captain's intention to follow his instructions to the letter.

Millard, having no especial reason of his own for feeling in danger, was walking along at a moderate gait, occasionally glancing into shop windows or gazing at the people whom he passed.

He did not look behind, so it was easy for Jack, less than half a block to the rear, and keeping close to the buildings, to follow without being detected.

"Hullo," muttered the submarine boy. "There's a policeman on the crossing at the next corner. In another moment our long-legged one will be safely in custody."

Feeling in his inner coat pocket for the written authorization, Benson's fingers touched the envelope.

Page 28

"He's easily caught," murmured the boy.

There is sometimes a big slip between a wish and its fulfillment. Just as Captain Jack was on the point of darting out into the street to hail the policeman a street car whizzed by. With a flying leap the policeman landed on the front platform and was whirled along the thoroughfare.

"Lesson number one about being too sure," grumbled disappointed young Benson. "However, we'll soon come upon another policeman."

Two blocks more were covered, however, without sighting a bluecoat. Jack even began to wonder how it would do to leap upon Millard, calling upon passing citizens to aid him until a policeman arrived.

"But that would be a two-edged sword, that might cut too keenly on the wrong side," reflected the submarine boy. "Millard would be sure to claim that I was assaulting him. It would look like that, too, and I'd probably get a thumping from the crowd, while Millard slipped away. Then he would be warned that he was wanted, and he'd make himself mighty scarce after that."

Still no policeman came into sight.

"Gracious!" muttered Jack Benson, suddenly. He had just glanced into a store's show window, where a mirror was set at an angle. The submarine boy, looking into that mirror, became aware that he could see people at a considerable distance behind him down the street.

"I wonder if Millard has been taking sights, too, and has had a peep at me, that way?" muttered the boy.

At the next corner the long-legged one, after a brief look down the side street, turned into it.

"Now, that we're getting away from the main street there'll be far less chance of finding a police officer," sighed Jack, at last wholly discontented with luck.

Millard led without, apparently, ever thinking to glance back. He turned a second corner, into another small street, and kept on.

"This is getting more exciting," muttered the young trailer. "Yet all signs point to the fact that I've got to make the grab all by myself. I wonder if I can down that chap and get the upper hand of him? I don't mind a thumping, but I'd be sadly ashamed of myself to let the fellow get away from me."

Millard was walking briskly, now. Next, he turned sharply to the left.

“Ah!” Then Jack Benson shot swiftly forward on tip-toe, trying to make no noise as he ran.

For the long-legged one had, to all seeming, at the distance, wheeled and gone through the wall of a brick building.

Just an instant later, however, this impossible feat was explained. The submarine boy found himself at the street-end of a narrow alley between two brick buildings.

“He has gone into the rear house, at the end of the alleyway,” decided Benson, peering down this narrow thoroughfare. “He has left the door partly open, too. I’ll have to have a look-in.”

Page 29

As he stole down the alley-way Jack Benson was too sensible, and by this time, too much experienced in the ways of a rougher world, not to suspect that there might be some trap in that door partly open. "He may have seen me, and may have left that door open on purpose," Benson reflected. "He may be lying in wait for me, inside. Or else he may have left that door open, just to make me suspect a trap and keep out. In the meantime, he may be slipping through a door on the other side of the house, and sneaking away from me."

For a few seconds Jack Benson paused thoughtfully on the step just outside the door that was partly ajar.

"I may walk into a trap, by going inside, or I may be letting that wretch walk out of one by staying out here," wavered Benson, torn between two impulses.

Then, just as suddenly, this thought flashed through his mind:

"What you're doing is for the Flag! Never mind what happens to you, Jack Benson. Just rash in and say '*here goes*'!"

There was not another second's hesitation. Jack Benson softly pushed the door far enough open to admit him. At the back of the hallway he saw stairs leading below.

"Basement stairs, with a rear basement door letting out on another alleyway!" suspected the submarine boy.

Though he had determined to be as reckless as seemed necessary in order to get quickly on the trail of the vanished one, Jack moved on tip-toe. He had all but reached the head of the stairs when a ground-floor door behind him opened noiselessly. The long-legged one, who had an equally good reach of arm, thrust out a noose that fell over the boy's head.

"Ug-g-g-gh!" rattled in Jack Benson's throat, as Millard, in grim silence, jerked the rope noose tight about the boy's neck. A sharp pull, a twist, and Millard had the boy face down in that hallway, and was kneeling on the victim's back.

"You ought to have known enough to keep away from me," growled the wretch, as he tightened on the noose.

That was about the last that the young submarine captain heard or knew, just then, for things were rapidly growing black before his eyes. Jack tried to fight, but the choking was too severe. He couldn't get even a breath of air into his lungs to give him fighting strength.

Finding that the boy's struggles had ceased, the long-legged one eased off on the noose. He bent Jack's arms behind him so that the wrists crossed. Then, pulling

another cord from one of his pockets, the wretch tied the youngster's hands with a few deft movements. Oh, but this rascal was an expert artist with ropes and cords.

Jack felt himself being prodded just over the pit of the stomach, and his senses slowly wandered back to him under the disturbing handling. He was lying on his back, when his eyes opened once more. His throat felt sore, but he could breathe again.

Then the submarine boy discovered that his hands and feet were securely lashed. Beyond that, he discovered Millard squatting on the floor, close by, in Japanese fashion, for the foreign agent was sitting back on his own crossed heels.

Page 30

“Feel wholly comfortable?” mockingly inquired the foreign agent, when he saw the boy’s eyes open.

“Not especially, thank you,” mumbled the boy, dryly.

Jack had discovered, by this time, that he was lying on a wooden floor, very likely in the basement of the house. The room contained no furniture, beyond an old table. Daylight was excluded by wooden shutters fastened into place over the windows. On the table a single candle burned in a candlestick.

“Why didn’t you bring along with you, Benson,” sneered the long fellow, “the property of mine that you stole from me?”

It was plain, then, that the foreign agent remembered the submarine boy well.

“Why are you playing this fool trick on me?” counter-questioned Captain Jack. “You knew I didn’t have the—the things with me. You could see that.”

“I put you to this inconvenience,” replied the foreign agent, “because I wanted to know a few things. In the first place, why are you bothering with me, or with my plans?”

Jack remained silent.

“Won’t talk, eh? Oh, well, then, perhaps we can find out a few things without any very especial help from you.”

Millard bent over, thrusting his hand into one after another of young Benson’s pockets. In so doing he brought to light the envelope in the lad’s inner coat pocket. Just an instant later, the wretch snatched the folded sheet from the envelope, spread the paper open and held it up to the light.

“Ho-ho!” sneered the rascal, “an order authorizing you to cause my arrest? This disposes of your case, then, young Mr. Benson!”

CHAPTER VII

A LESSON IN SECURITY AND INFORMATION

Despite the savageness of his utterance Millard continued to gaze thoughtfully, for a few moments, at the submarine boy’s face.

As the rascal gazed, however, a grayness came into his cheeks that, somehow, smote Captain Jack with secret terror.

"I—I don't see how it can be helped," gasped Millard, at last, in an altered tone that came as another dash of ice water over the submarine boy. "Benson, I hate to do it. I'd hate to use a dog in such a way, but—but there's no help for it!"

A long-drawn-out sigh, a still queerer look in his face, then the scoundrel broke forth again:

"It's your own fault, after all, boy, and there's no help for it."

"By and by I suppose you'll enlighten me as to what 'it' means?" hinted Jack, trying hard to bolster up a courage that, none the less, would ooze and drop.

Millard's only answer was to bend over the boy and roll him somewhat in examining the prisoner's bonds. It was through this that Jack discovered what he had not known before—namely, that his wrists, besides being bound behind his back, were also lashed fast to something in the flooring.

There was a queer little choke in Millard's breathing as he went out of the room and returned with a bushel basket of shavings. These he dumped on the floor, close to a wall. Then, again, he went out. When he returned he was carrying a can of coal-oil. The contents he poured over the shavings, then against the wall. Next, over the shavings, he heaped three or four newspapers.

Page 31

Jack Benson didn't ask questions. Millard went at it all in such a business-like way that the submarine boy felt the words sticking in his throat; they couldn't be uttered.

Finally, when all else was ready, Millard took the lighted candle out of the candlestick.

"This candle will burn for thirty minutes yet," guessed the wretch, noting its unburned length with the air of an expert "That will be time enough. Poor lad!"

He set the lighted candle down on top of the papers, over the pile of oil-soaked shavings. It fitted nicely into a place that the wretch had made ready for it. Then, without a word, the long-legged one tip-toed softly over and bent beside the submarine boy.

"Open your mouth," he ordered.

Of course Captain Jack didn't propose to do anything of the sort. With one hand, however, Millard gripped the boy's nostrils, pressing tightly. Just a little later Jack had to open his mouth for air.

"Thank you," mocked the other, and neatly shoved a handkerchief between the boy's jaws. This he tied in place, and rising, looked down upon a gagged foe. Then, with a last look over at the candle, the long-legged one darted from the room.

Left alone, Jack Benson watched that candle on top of the prepared heap. His eyes gleamed with the fascination of terror. When that candle burned down to the right point it would set fire to the paper, and then—!

Try as he would to bolster his grit, Captain Jack Benson found himself in a fearful plight. At first, he could only stare, with terror-dilated eyes, at that candle—ever burning just a slight fraction shorter!

While the horror-laden moments were dragging by Jack heard a step on the stairs behind his head. Then he realized that some one was looking into the room. Then a voice spoke. It was Millard's, though scarcely recognizable on account of its huskiness.

"It's a fearful thing to do, Benson, but—but I can't help it! If you only knew what it means to me to win!"

Then followed a moment of utter silence. Jack could hear his own heart beating, as he fancied he could hear that of his persecutor. Then there was another sound, as though some light-weight metallic object had fallen to the floor.

"Good-bye, old chap! I—I respect you for your calm grit—that's all I can say."

There was the sound of a quick turn, then soft footsteps. Jack knew that Millard had fled.

“He respects me for my ‘calm grit!’” laughed Jack, grimly—almost hysterically. “Doesn’t the scoundrel know that I’m all but frozen into the torpor of dread?”

Then, just as suddenly, an anguished “oh!” broke from the boy’s lips, to be followed, instantly, by a tremor of hope.

For, except at the time when interrupted by Millard’s return, the young submarine captain had been fighting savagely at the bonds behind his back. Now, he fancied, he heard or felt a single strand giving way.

Page 32

"I've got to get out of this quickly, if at all!" quavered the boy, staring with wavering eyes at the ever-shortening candle-bit. "There won't be anything left to do—except bear it—if I'm ten minutes longer at this all but hopeless task."

After a few frenzied moments of struggle there was another "r-r-rip" behind him—close to his wrists.

Now, young Benson fought with rage and frenzied strength. His gaze was ever toward the candle, burning lower. It seemed as if it must communicate its flame to the paper at any instant.

There came another ripping sound. Captain Jack Benson, though he could not see, felt something giving around his wrists. Frantically he squirmed and twisted with his hands. Then, suddenly, his wrists fell apart—free!

With an exulting throb of gratitude for this well-nigh unexpected boon, Benson forced himself up into a sitting posture. He was shaking, now, from sheer nervousness.

Swiftly, tremulously, he felt in his pockets.

"My long-legged friend never thought to take my knife—probably because he hadn't the slightest idea I'd be able to use it," thrilled the submarine boy, as he forced a blade open.

It didn't seem to take an instant, now, to cut the cords and set his feet free. Jack staggered to his feet. The lighted candle had burned down, now, even more perilously close to the paper—but what did the submarine boy care now? At the worst, he could easily run from this house which, he felt certain, was untenanted save for himself.

As soon as he could steady himself well enough, Benson bent and snatched up the burning candle from the tinder-like bed on which it stood propped.

"Instead of destroying me," he chuckled, "this candle will now light me on my way out."

At the doorway at the end of the room Jack Benson, by some strange chance, happened to remember that slight metallic sound of something falling to the floor while Millard was speaking. Now, Jack bent over, holding the candle to aid him in his hunt. Ah! There it was! Yet how utterly insignificant—nothing but a hairpin!

"Trifles often lead to something big, though," muttered the submarine boy, dropping the hairpin into his pocket. "I've been too much around machinery to despise small things."

Candle in hand, Jack quickly ascended through the rest of the house, after finding, in the lower hallway, a stout stick that he picked up. With this club he felt he had a weapon to be depended upon at need.

But there was nothing in the rest of the little three-story house to throw any light upon the habits of Millard, or the place for which that worthy had departed.

In one upper room Benson found a small mirror hung from a nail in the wall. In this same room was a small trunk, lid up and empty.

Back to the basement Jack returned. At the rear he found a small yard. Beyond that a fence, with a gate in it. The gate was unlocked. On a nail at the edge of the gateway Jack found a fluttering fragment of gray veiling.

Page 33

"A woman has left here," thought Jack, holding the fragment of veiling in his hand. "Or else Millard got away disguised as a woman. That trunk may have held woman's apparel for the very purposes of such an escape."

This rear gateway opened upon a long, narrow alley that led to a street beyond.

Having satisfied himself on this point, Benson stepped back into the yard.

"Hold on! Here's something that will help," muttered the boy, staring down curiously at the ground.

It was the imprint of a foot in a wet spot on the ground. As Jack bent over it he saw the marks of diagonal criss-crossing such as is found in the soles of rubbers.

"The print is a fresh one. Either Millard wore rubbers away, or some woman has been here who wore them," Jack concluded.

Dropping his cudgel, since he would have no use for it, Benson made his way down the alley to the street beyond. At the corner stood a small grocery store, whose proprietor was in the doorway.

"I wonder," began Jack, "whether you saw a woman came down out of this alley-way lately? A tall woman?"

"About twenty minutes ago I saw a tall woman, in a gray dress and wearing a gray veil," replied the storekeeper.

"Was she carrying anything?"

"Some sort of a grip—a suit case, I guess."

"Did you ever see the woman before?" persisted Jack.

The storekeeper shook his head.

"Which way did the woman go?"

"I don't remember, particularly, but I think down that way," replied the grocer, pointing.

Jack hurried along. It was a quiet part of the town. None of the people to whom he spoke within the next three or four minutes remembered having seen the tall, veiled woman in gray, though some "thought" they "might have."

"I reckon," wisely decided Captain Jack Benson, "that I know just about enough to take my information to Lieutenant Ridder."

CHAPTER VIII

EPH FEELS LIKE THIRTY TACKS

As agreed, the young West Pointer was in a room at the Grindley House. As this room was equipped with a telephone, the young Army man was in touch both with Fort Craven and with the submarine boys, should the latter find anything to report over the talking wire.

Here in the room Captain Jack found Ridder, for the boy had felt it best to go direct to the hotel.

"Surely, you haven't found out anything as quickly as this?" asked the young lieutenant of engineers, looking up in surprise.

"I've learned a few things," replied Jack, quietly.

"Sit down, and let us hear what you've learned."

Jack dropped to the chair, but Lieutenant Ridder, when he heard the news, was so excited that no chair could hold him.

"Jove! and just our luck!" gasped the Army officer. "No policeman in sight! Now, if you three boys had kept together—"

Page 34

"But, you see, when I dropped from the automobile, I wasn't sure it was Millard. I had had only a glance, and his face was away from me."

"If you see that wretch again, jump on him wherever he is."

"I could have done it, this last time," Benson nodded. "Yet I had an idea that, if I followed him, he might lead me to the place where he kept his maps and his other stolen information. And he did, I guess," added Jack, with a somewhat disappointed smile.

"Wait a moment. I'll try to get Major Woodruff over the wire," muttered Lieutenant Ridder. "He may have some orders for us."

Major Woodruff was at his home. He heard the message and sent his orders crisply.

"The major thinks we had better keep this matter from the police, yet, and do our best to find Millard, either in his own garments, or behind that gray dress and veil," announced the Army lieutenant.

"Then I wish we had the other boys here," muttered Jack, wistfully.

At that moment the 'phone bell rang. It was Hal, reporting, and inquiring whether any word had come from his chum.

"Mr. Benson is here, and I think you'll do well to get here as quickly as you can," replied Ridder.

"Is there any word—" began Hal Hastings.

Ting-ling-ling! The 'phone bell rang, cutting off Hal. The latter had received his orders, and his next concern was to obey them. That was lesson number one in brisk Army discipline.

Hal was on hand in five minutes. While Jack was recounting to him the adventure with Millard, Eph Somers came in. He stood in the background, listening, his jaw gradually dropping until his mouth was wide open.

"You heard how Benson ran into the fellow?" asked Lieutenant Ridder, turning to Somers.

"Yes," muttered Eph, disgustedly, "and I guess I have been enjoying the fool's part of the adventure!"

"How so?" demanded the Army officer quickly.



"I met that same woman, I'll bet a cookie," growled Eph, "and—and—I—"

"Well, sir?" demanded Lieutenant Ridder, briskly.

"I carried that bag for *her*—carried it nearly two blocks!"

"What's that?" cried Jack Benson, leaping up. "How—"

"No; I don't believe, on second thought, that I'm the prize fool."

"Come, come," directed Lieutenant Ridder. "Talk up quickly, young man."

"If you want to hear what I have to say," retorted Eph, with a slight flash of his eyes, "you'll have to wait until I get around to it."

It was serving direct notice on Ridder that Army briskness wouldn't do in Eph's case.

"Well, what have you to tell?" demanded the young lieutenant, impatiently.

"I was on my way back here," Eph continued. "Guess, maybe, I was eight blocks or so away from here. I had been to the hotels that I agreed to visit, and—"

"Why did you go to the hotel, anyway, after you knew Benson had sighted Millard?" broke in the Army officer.

Page 35

"Because it wasn't a sure thing that Jack had seen Millard. He thought so, and so did we. But, after we left him, the auto ran along slowly, and we heard no row behind, so we guessed that maybe Jack had been wrong in his guess. At least, Hal and I figured it out that way. So I went to the hotels on my list, just the same, and I guess you did, didn't you, Hal?"

"Yes," nodded Hastings.

"This isn't bringing us, very fast, to your latest adventure," complained young Ridder.

"It's your fault, then," continued Eph, placidly. "You asked a question, and I answered it."

"Well, what about meeting the woman in a gray dress and veil?"

"I met her," retorted Eph.

"Could you see through the veil?"

"No."

"Then how do you know it was Millard?"

"I don't know," Eph rejoined. "But there are mighty few women as tall as Millard. Besides, this one had rather a long foot, and wore rubbers. I noticed that. Huh! This makes me feel like thirty tacks!"

"How did you meet her—or him?" asked Ridder.

"I was crossing a street, maybe eight blocks from here," Eph replied, "and I saw that tall woman, in gray, slip on the crossing. There was a street car coming, and she gave a little yell. I got to 'her' just in time to pull 'her' out of the way of the trolley and to set 'her' on 'her' feet again. Then I picked up 'her' dress suit case. It struck me that the one I supposed to be a woman was on the point of speaking to me when he—she—seemed to see my uniform and then get a look at my face. Then the party, whether it was he or she, made signs to show that he, or she, was deaf and dumb. The suit case was heavy, so I offered to tote it along, as I was headed the same way. I thought it was the least I could do for a woman who had just had a great shock. If that was Millard—and I'd bet a torpedo boat it was—how he must have chuckled over the idea of having one of the submarine boys carry his bag for him."

"How far did you go with this 'lady'?" asked the Lieutenant Ridder, with a faint touch of sarcasm.

"Two blocks," replied Eph.



“And you left her—”

“At a cheap hotel where I can find her again. And I guess it’s up to us to start right away.”

“Yes,” nodded Jack. “And we can’t start too soon.”

It may have occurred to Lieutenant Ridder that he wasn’t exactly being consulted. However, he saw that these submarine boys were used to acting swiftly, and he began to believe that they would work better if left to their own devices. So he merely nodded, adding:

“I’ll wait here. I’ll hope to have a report before long.”

Eph led his two comrades back unerringly to the cheap hotel. They went straight to the hotel desk, Jack asking, bluntly, whether any very tall woman, in gray, and carrying a dress suit case, had registered there.

Page 36

"No," replied the clerk, very positively.

Then they interviewed the porter. He remembered the "woman" having stepped inside the hotel. She readjusted her veil in the lobby near the doorway.

"Then she went outside, spoke to a driver, got into his cab, and went away," continued the porter.

"She spoke to the driver, did she?" Eph asked.

"Of course, sir," retorted the porter. "You didn't think she made signs, did you?"

From their talk the submarine boys were satisfied that it was the same "woman" whom Eph had so gallantly assisted. They were equally sure that this veiled "woman" in gray was none other than Millard.

"Do you remember which driver it was whose cab she engaged?" Jack asked, turning to hand the porter a dollar.

"Jack Medway's cab, sir," was the quick answer. "And here it comes, now."

The submarine boys hurried out, transferring their attention to Medway.

"I'm just back from taking the lady," replied the driver, after Jack Benson had slipped him, also, a dollar bill. "But say—was it a lady, or a joke?"

"Why?" queried Jack Benson.

"Well," replied the driver, "the voice was pitched high, but there was something peculiar about it. I wondered, at the time, if it was a man rigged and toggled out like a woman."

"Where did she tell you to take her," Jack Benson wanted to know.

"To Furnam Square!"

"Did you take her to any address there?"

"No; just to the square. Then I waited to fill my pipe, and I saw the woman, if woman it was, walk across the square and get into another cab."

"If you haven't anything else to do," hinted Jack, "suppose you take us to Furnam Square now."

Within a very few minutes the three friends were gazing out of a cab window upon the square. It looked like a very quiet residence section.

"There was another cab here, you say, that took your last 'fare' from this square?" asked Jack.

"Yes; there is a fellow who has a regular stand here. It's his cab," replied Medway.

"Let us know, then, when that particular driver gets back here," begged Jack. "We'll sit here in your rig and wait."

Medway grinned. Waiting, as well as driving, meant money for him.

Fully an hour and a half dragged by. Jack was beginning to wonder if it would not be better to give up this present clue to the chase, when Medway, leaning down from his box, called quietly.

"That's the other fellow and his rig, coming back into the square now."

"As soon as he stops," directed Benson, "drive us over alongside. Don't say anything to him. Let me do the talking."

In a moment more Jack was out on the sidewalk, talking earnestly with the driver just returned.

"You've had a long trip of it," guessed Jack, noting the warm condition of the horses.

Page 37

"You bet," nodded the other driver.

"Just got back from taking the tall woman in gray somewhere."

"Yep. But do you call it 'somewhere'? I'd call it most anywhere."

"How far was it?" asked Jack.

"What do you want to know for?" demanded the Jehu, looking with sudden sharpness at his questioner.

"Because we'd like to go to the same place that you took the woman," returned Benson, promptly.

"Huh! I took her for three dollars. I wouldn't go over that trip again for less'n five."

"We'll pay the five, and be glad to," proposed Jack Benson, displaying some money.

"More than that, if you play right fair with us, we'll put another five on top of the first, just as a little present to your horses."

"You'd better use the young gentlemen right, Jim," advised Medway. "They're good fellows, and they pay well."

"Why do you want to go where I took that last party?" questioned Jim, with a shrewd look.

"One of the things that the second five-dollar note pays you for is asking no questions," retorted Jack. "Do you want to take up our offer?"

"Yes; if you'll give me fifteen minutes to rest and water the horses," agreed Jim.

"That'll be all right," nodded Jack. "And now, Medway, have we paid you enough?"

"Plenty," cheerfully responded the first driver, taking the hint and leaving.

"Where did you take that woman?" questioned Jack, while the new driver got out a bucket for watering his horses.

"Away down by the sea-coast. Know where the Cobtown fishing shanties are?"

"No."

"Well, Cobtown is made up of three or four little villages of rickety old houses. Some are occupied by fishermen, and some ain't. There's three or four coves down that way fishing craft anchor in. It's a lonely, wild bit of country, and some rough characters 'mong them fishermen."

“Did you take your fare to any particular house or shanty down at Cobtown?”

“Nope; she got out on the road, in sight o’ Cobtown, an’ walked along, toting her old grip.”

“What kind of a ‘grip’ was it?”

“An old brownish suit case.”

“That’s the one,” nodded Eph.

As the driver busied himself over his team, the submarine boys drew aside to talk over their new information.

“I reckon we’re going to be too late,” grumbled Captain Jack.

“What makes you think so?” Hal inquired.

“Fishing villages, smacks and fishermen,” answered Jack, gloomily. “Fishermen are a daring, reckless lot of fellows. They’d take a craft anywhere, in any kind of weather, for money enough. Fellows, I’m afraid Millard has hired a smack and started up or down the coast.”

“Then we’ve got a craft that can chase any smack on the Atlantic coast,” declared. Eph, stoutly.

“Of course; if we knew which craft to overhaul, and had the authority to do it.”

Page 38

"Authority? Then what's the matter with the people at the Fort?" demanded Eph.

"Their authority runs only on the land. Besides, by the time we got through the red tape, and got started, any smart smack, in a good wind, would be forty miles the other side of the horizon."

"Are you going to take this long drive, then?" asked Hal Hastings, rather dubiously.

"Yes," declared Jack Benson, promptly. "Hal, old fellow, any trail is best where it's freshest."

"I reckon you can git in, now, gents, if ye want," called the driver.

Seated in the cab the submarine boys set out to meet whatever might be before them in Cobtown. Had they possessed the gift of prophecy—

However, none of us possess that!

CHAPTER IX

JACK PLAYS WITH A VOLCANO

After something more than an hour's drive the Jehu pulled his horses up, got down from the box and opened one of the doors.

"Here you are, young gents. This is the spot where I put the last fare down. An' now you know as much about her whereabouts as I do."

The district into which the submarine boys had come was well outside of the city, and in a different direction from Craven's Bay and the Fort.

It was bleak and wild here. Even the shanties of the three little villages, with their fish-sheds, their racks with nets spread, the rickety wharves—all looked dismal. It seemed as though here must be one of the spots where only a scanty living is earned and only by the hardest kind of work.

"Well, we're much obliged to you, driver, and here's the money promised to you."

"Obliged to you, gents. Will you want to be going back with me?"

"No," Captain Jack answered. "I reckon we're going to be moored here for a while."

"Now, whereaway? What's the course?" demanded Eph Somers.

Benson glanced at his watch, then up at the sun.

"It'll be dark in about an hour and half," he muttered. "Why not wait until dark? We can't have been seen from any of the villages yet. Looking out over the water you don't see a craft of any sort headed away from here. From this point, looking down, we can see if any of the boats in port get ready to put out. So Millard, if he hasn't already escaped, can't get away by sea without our knowing it. If he tries to get away by land, we're right where we can see him coming."

"Then you think we'd better wait here, keeping out of sight, until dark?" asked Hal.

"Most decidedly. Don't you?"

"Yes," nodded Hal.

"But it'll be a mighty tedious wait," growled Eph, the impatient one.

"Well, youngster, we're not here to consult our own comfort," retorted Captain Jack. "There's something higher to consult—the best interests of our country."

"Oh, if you put it that way!" grumbled Eph, much mollified.

Page 39

The submarine boys had stepped into a little hollow, just off the road, and barely below a rise in the ground. There were trees and bushes about to aid them in concealing themselves. If they saw anyone coming their way they could easily find better hiding.

No one came, however. Dark found the boys desperately hungry.

"Of course we didn't think to bring anything to eat," uttered Eph, disgustedly. "What are we going to do about it?"

"We've got to each of us take a village, presently, enter it and search," replied Captain Jack. "With only one of us to each village, it will be tough luck if each one can't find some one who has enough food to sell a little of it."

"How soon are we going to start?" asked Eph, hopefully.

"Well, supper time will be the best time to go through the villages," decided the young submarine skipper "If Millard has taken refuge with anyone who lives in one of these villages, he'll be more likely to show himself at supper time than at any other."

"It won't take long to look into each of the houses," muttered Hal. "There aren't many in any one of the villages."

"If we don't espy our man at table," Captain Jack went on, "we'll have to try other means of finding him out. You two will know what to do when you're on the ground. If Millard is anywhere in the village that you go to look through, don't fail to find him—that's all."

Jack chose, for himself, the northernmost village. Hal took the next one, and Eph the southernmost.

"Now, remember, fellows," breathed Benson, sharply, as they parted, "the one great thing is not to fail!"

The night was dark and the sky overcast as the submarine boys parted to go their several ways.

"I think I can understand how Eph feels about his stomach," grimaced Jack, as he strode along. "I don't believe I'd balk, just now, at the plainest food ever cooked. Why, I haven't eaten since this morning!"

The evening being rather warm, most of the houses, as Jack neared the village, proved to have open windows. Lights shone, and the fishermen and their families could be seen at table.

No one appeared in the street, at first. Jack strolled down the principal street, looking into each house without much difficulty. Yet the one face that he sought was not visible.

Down at the further end of the street Benson came upon a tumble-down-looking grocery store.

"What kind of sandwiches can you put me up?" queried the submarine boy, casually.

"Stranger, eh?" asked the man behind the counter, staring curiously.

"Yes; haven't you had any other strangers here lately?"

"Not as I knows on," replied the man, a shaggy, unkempt-looking fellow of forty.

"None here to-day, eh?" asked Jack, taking out a half-dollar and toying with it on the counter.

"Don't remember anybody very special," replied the storekeeper.

Page 40

"You haven't answered me about the kinds of sandwiches you can put up," Jack reminded him.

"Not very fancy in that line, young feller. Cheese, or sardines; that's all."

"Give me three of each, then," begged Jack. He seized the first sandwich that was prepared and began to eat it.

"Hungry, eh!" asked the storekeeper.

"Yes," Jack admitted; "for want of anything better to do."

"Foller the sea, don't ye?"

"Depends," muttered Jack, his mouth half full of sandwich. "When I'm going before a brisk fair wind, sometimes the sea follows me."

"Spose so," grinned the storekeeper, passing over the second sandwich. After that, the fellow got in slightly ahead of the submarine boy's appetite, though Benson finished the whole meal in a few minutes.

"Now, if you've got a bottle of soda water, to wash that all down with," hinted Benson. It was forthcoming, also a smoky-looking glass.

"So you haven't had any strangers here lately," hinted Captain Jack.

"Nope."

"Any craft been fitting out to sail to-night or first thing in the morning?"

"Nope."

"Gracious, but this is a dead place," laughed Jack. "Must be a lot of shacks for rent around here?"

"There was one place," stated the storekeeper, "but a dude feller hired it last week. Said some sort o' fishing club'd be down this way to fish, once in a while. That kinder minds me," went on the storekeeper. "I guess maybe some o' that crowd are down, 'cause I saw a light up there at the house, jest come dark."

"If there's a fishing club down here, that ought to make business good for you," suggested Captain Jack.

"Dunno. They can start tradin' as soon as they like. I'm ready."

"Which house has the fishing club hired?" was Jack's next question.

"Why, I guess you can make it out from the door," replied the storekeeper, coming out from behind the counter and going to the front of his establishment. "There, if yer eyes are good, you can jest make out a building over there on the point. See it? Well, there's a little boat wharf in front that ye can't see until you get closer."

Jack had found out just what he wanted to know. He had the very information for which he had been fishing, nor did he believe the storekeeper suspected him of undue curiosity.

"Well, I've got to be moving along, now I'm fed," announced young Benson. "The yacht I belong to is some distance from here. Good night!"

Nor did Captain Jack linger in the village. Had anyone stood still in that street and stared after Benson, he would have seen the boy vanish in the darkness.

Captain Jack, however, had not disappeared from the scene. He was merely shifting to the part of it that interested him most. Cautiously he stole out along the further side of a ridge of land, toward the rickety old house on the point.

Page 41

"Not a sign of a light, now," breathed the submarine boy. "If Millard was really there, I hope he hasn't had time to get away for good."

All was silent and dark about the old house, as Captain Jack stole closer. At nearer range he made the circuit of the house, only to find every window shuttered, and the place as dismal as the grave.

"I'm afraid the game has escaped," muttered Benson, with a sinking feeling at his heart. "Yet he didn't escape, by sea or land, while we were watching outside the village. And it was just at dark that the storekeeper saw a light here. I wonder if it would be easy to—"

Right there Jack Benson's train of thought broke off. From the opposite side of the house came a sound exactly like that of the opening and closing of a door.

"Can that be our man coming out?" wondered Skipper Jack.

He started cautiously around the house, but soon drew back around the corner of the building. Dropping to the ground, and lying flat, the submarine boy allowed only the top of his head to show as he peeped.

Glory! Jack knew, well enough, that tall figure striding off into the gloom. It was Millard, and under his left arm the fellow carried a large package that might be a bulky portfolio well wrapped.

"He has his drawings—his maps of American fortifications and fortified harbors—the very stuff that we want to get!" throbbed the boy. "And now—we're going to get them!"

Keeping Millard's receding figure zealously in sight, Jack, crouching low, started after the long-legged one as soon as the distance between seemed sufficient to keep Millard from guessing at pursuit.

"Oh, how I wish Hal and Eph were here!" muttered Captain Jack, in keen disappointment.

"I need help on this!"

Within two minutes Millard had struck into a well-beaten path that led northward over succeeding ridges of laud. In a way, it was easier following here, for there were occasional trees and clumps of bushes behind which the young shadow could drop at need.

Two minutes in this path, and Jack Benson's heart gave another quick leap. Some one else was coming stealthily behind him. Jack dodged around a clump of bushes and waited.

“Hal!” breathed Jack, almost wild with joy, as the two chums clasped hands fervently for one brief instant. Then:

“See here, Hal, I’ve got to dart forward again, or Millard will be out of sight. But I’ll tell you what—while I trail Millard, you concern yourself only with following me.”

“Good enough,” whispered Hastings, nodding. “Now, you start again!”

For just an instant Millard had disappeared. However, by moving forward quickly, Benson was soon able to make out the quarry through the darkness.

For some five minutes more the chase continued. Then, his long body rather sharply defined against the sky, Millard began the ascent of a low hill that ended in a cliff overlooking the broad ocean.

Page 42

As Millard's course forward could end only in the sea, Jack now crouched low, stealing along a parallel course behind a low ridge of rock.

Then Millard suddenly stepped into a clump of tall bushes. Though his game was now out of sight, Jack did not lose his nerve, for he could hear the fellow.

Spink! spank! clank! The noise came from a shovel, vigorously used.

"Not a hard one to guess," throbbed Captain Jack Benson, exultantly. "He has brought his maps and his stolen records with him, and is burying them in this lonely spot until some other time when he'll feel safe about coming back for them. Talk about luck! Why, Hal and I can pounce on this fellow, when he comes out over yonder, and, after we get him, we can next dig up whatever it is that this foreign agent thinks is worth burying!"

Then, with a shade of curiosity, Benson added to himself:

"I don't know, yet, how it happened that Hal was on my trail. There wasn't time for him to tell me."

Clank! clank! But after a while the noise of the shovel ceased for a while. Captain Jack craned his neck eagerly, trying to pierce the darkness of the night. He could make out nothing, though he heard some one still moving inside the clump of bushes.

Then again the noise of the shovel on the dirt was heard.

"He's filling in, now, beyond a doubt," thought Captain Jack. "He is burying—what? The maps and records? Hiding them here that he may dig them up at some later date?"

Benson chuckled noiselessly.

"If that's Millard's game I reckon some one else will do some digging over yonder before he pays this place a second visit!"

Ah, the noise had stopped, at last. Now, Millard came out of the thicket.

"He hasn't that bundle he brought up here!" throbbed Jack Benson. "And he isn't bringing a shovel out, either, so it must be hidden right handy. Great!"

Mr. Millard could depart, now, if he wanted. Jack trusted to his chum, prowling somewhere about, to have the good judgment to follow the long-legged fellow away. As for Benson, he didn't mean to do another thing until he had found the shovel, and had determined just what had been so carefully buried on this dark night!

So Jack watched, rather indifferently, as Millard slunk off into the darkness. After three minutes or so had passed, Jack rose and ran straight for the thicket.

There it was—new ground, that had just been turned over with a shovel. There was no mound, but the fresh earth showed just where to dig.

“Oh, this is as easy as making change for a blind man!” chuckled the young submarine skipper, rubbing his hands ecstatically.

What about the shovel? Jack turned to feel around in the darkness. Really, Millard couldn't be such a very clever fellow! Jack had no difficulty in finding the shovel. Its handle was sticking out from under a mass of dead brush.

Page 43

Jack Benson drew out the implement, brandishing it.

“Hal had the good sense to shadow that chap away,” decided the young skipper. “Otherwise, he’d have been here by this time. Good haul—rascal and records in the same night. For, if Hal goes on Millard’s trail, then Millard is pretty sure to be a prisoner before the night is over. Oh, I wish Eph would turn up.”

Then Jack took a good grip on the shovel. Clank! spink! spink!

Having been so recently moved, this dirt was easy to dig.

Yet, suddenly, there came a new note on the night air.

“Jack, O Jack!” sounded in Hal’s frantic tones. “Quick!”

“Eh?” called Captain Benson. “What’s the row? Come here and see what I can show you!”

“No! You come here—quick!”

“That’s queer,” pondered Jack Benson, leaning on his shovel, trying to understand what it could all mean.

Then he heard, even at the distance, the sound of Hal Hastings panting, as though engaged in hard physical effort.

Again rose Hastings’s frantic voice, though somewhat muffled in its sound.

“If you don’t hustle, it will be too late!”

Jack dropped the shovel on the ground, wheeled, and ran down the slope to where Hal’s voice sounded.

“I’m coming, old fellow!” quivered the submarine skipper, starting to run.

Boom! A terrific explosion shook the ground. The air seemed full of flying fragments of rock.

CHAPTER X

“Mr. Gray” Makes new trouble

Had Jack Benson started down the slope two or three seconds later he must have been killed.

As it was, the fearful force of concussion sent him sprawling headlong on the ground.

A shower of small fragments of rock and of loose dirt fell about him.

Yet Jack was up again, like a flash, never stopping to inquire whether he had been hurt.

“O-oh!” came the groan, from Hal Hastings.

“There, in a second!” panted Captain Jack, beginning to run again.

A blow sounded, then a fall.

Captain Jack raced into a little, bush-lined hollow, just in time to see Millard leap up and take to his heels.

Hal Hastings lay on the ground, as though badly hurt.

“Oh, you would, would you?” raged Captain Jack Benson, making a swift spurt after Millard.

He caught the long-legged one, too, by the back of the fellow's coat collar.

Yank! Millard was pulled over backward. Down he went, Benson piling a-top of him.

“Down!” cried Skipper Jack, exultantly. He found, however, that Millard possessed strength enough to put up a stiff fight.

“Come on, Hal—if you can!” called Jack Benson, sharply.

“Can't—just yet,” came, in muffled tones, from the usually prompt Hal Hastings.

Page 44

"Let go, you young hound!" ordered Millard, striking out savagely.

Jack hung desperately. Yet the trouble was that the young submarine skipper had tackled a man who was at least fifty per cent. stronger and fully as agile.

While Hal still hung back, Millard gave a heave, then rolled himself over on top of Jack Benson.

"I'll give you just a short lesson!" snarled the long-legged one.

He raised a fist, intent on bringing it down like a sledge-hammer across Benson's face.

That blow, however, wasn't the one that landed. Biff! whack! Two sturdy, hard fists registered on Millard's head from behind. Then a boy shot himself forward, battering-ram fashion, hurling Millard over to the ground. The boy went with the fellow, landing on top of him.

And that boy was Eph Somers!

"Come on, Jack, if you want some of this!" offered Eph, generously.

Truth to tell, there was need of both the submarine boys, for Millard now fought more fiendishly than before.

Millard was a powerful fellow, when aroused, but he had pitted against him two of the doughtiest, gamest boys to be found along the Atlantic coast. He was pretty well beaten up, in fact, by the time that Hal came limply upon the scene.

"Want any help?" demanded Hal, in a still somewhat breathless voice.

"Nope!" answered Eph, sturdily. "Not unless you want exercise."

As Somers spoke he landed another blow, this against the "wind" at Millard's belt-line. In the same instant Jack Benson managed to knot his hands in the fellow's coat lapels, and to press the backs of his hands against the wretch's throat.

"I sur—ug-g-gh!—er—render," gurgled the long-legged one, weakly.

"You'd better, unless you want to discover that we haven't yet started in with rough handling," retorted Eph valiantly.

Young Benson eased his hold on Millard's wind-pipe. Yet all three of the submarine boys watched their prisoner, cat-like, for any new outbreak.

"Now, roll over on your face, if you want us to believe you're going to be good," ordered Jack.

Though he swore, under his breath, Millard obeyed. Then something flashed in the night—handcuffs that Jack had brought away from his meeting with Lieutenant Ridder at the hotel.

Click! The steel band snapped into place around Millard's right wrist.

"Hold on—not that!" protested the prisoner, hoarsely.

"Yes; even that!" mocked Eph, picking up a fragment of rock. "And keep quiet, unless you want me to batter your head in!"

It was this rough, vigorous sea-talk, backed by a belief that young Somers would prove equal to his threat, no doubt, that made Millard allow his left wrist to be brought over to meet the right.

"You've got those things on too tight," complained Millard, sullenly.

"No-o-o, I don't think so," retorted Captain Jack, after looking. "We need 'em as tight as we can have 'em, without causing pain, when we have a fellow like you to deal with. Now, what was that explosion?"

Page 45

"Wait a second!" broke in Eph, in a low voice. "Millard had a pal here. It was the pal I shadowed here. And that pal is running, now, with a fair-sized bundle that he came here to get."

"He was running when you jumped into this business?" demanded Benson.

"Yes."

"Then the pal is too far away, by this time, for us to catch him by running after him," decided Skipper Jack. "Now, about that explosion!"

"This wretch had a mine planted up on the hill," explained Hal Hastings. "I was watching, at the rear, you know, and it happened that I stopped right close to the hollow where you found me. Then I saw Millard drop into that hollow, and I took a look-in. I was just in time to see him bending over to reach for the handle of a magneto battery. Now, I happened to know that magneto batteries are made for the purpose of touching off explosives at a safe distance. So I jumped in on him. Just at that second I heard you, Jack, old fellow, striking with the shovel up above there. I had to guess fast, so the whole thing struck me like a flash. Millard had been digging, up there, just to lead on anyone who might be shadowing him. While you were bent over the spot where he had been digging, he meant to touch off a mine that must have been planted and laid days ago. Millard, you rascal, if you suspected that you were being watched, it was your idea to lead the shadow out here, get him over that mine and touch it off!"

The prisoner's eyes flashed.

"That was your game, wasn't it?" demanded Benson, angrily.

"Find out, if you can," growled the prisoner.

"You've guessed it, Hal," nodded Jack, then shuddered. "Had I followed this villain out here alone, and then gone to digging, unwarned, where I had seen him digging, my remains would have come down in four counties. But, you mean scoundrel, you never happened to think that you'd be trailed by three different fellows, all at different points along your trail."

"This is where my account comes in," interposed Eph Somers. "You remember the village you sent me to, Jack? Well, all I could find out was that, a few days ago, a chap named Gray had come along and hired a little schooner that's about twice as fast as any other sailing craft in these parts. He hired two fishermen to sail it for him—when he got ready. His crew have been wondering, since, when he'd be ready. Since he made the deal, Gray has just been hanging around and doing nothing."

"My informant pointed out Gray to me. Right after that, I vanished. But I kept an eye on Gray. When he left the village, so did I. The trail led up here. Gray went to a pile of



dead brush that had been heaped up. He prowled under the brush, brought out a wooden box that had been hidden there, and, from the box, took a bundle. He started off with it. I figured that bundle was what we wanted. I didn't want to take the chance of tackling him and having him get the best of me, so I started to follow. Just then I heard the rumpus up here. Maybe I did wrong, but I figured we could get Gray again, so I hustled up here to help."

Page 46

"This wretch, Millard, and I had a pretty rough-and-tumble time of it," Hal broke in. "At last, though, he gave me a blow in the wind that put me right down and out, for a little while. Then he got the handle of the magneto and pumped it."

"Glad I started down the slope just when I did," nodded Skipper Jack, dryly. "If I hadn't—well, what's the use of talking about it?"

Forcing Millard to get upon his feet, the boys inspected, first the magneto battery, to which was attached wire buried in the ground. Then up the slope they went, to find a miniature crater, some ten feet deep and at least fourteen feet across, where the mine had been exploded.

"Say, it's hard, even yet, to understand why I wasn't killed," muttered Jack Benson. "But here we are, standing here, thinking about ourselves, when that fellow, Gray, is getting away with a package that we ought to have. Come along, fellows! And you, Millard, if you try to bold back on us, you'll learn some new things in the way of discomfort!"

Thus warned, and realizing that his determined young captors were in a savage frame of mind, the long-legged one didn't try to lag. All four appeared in the village in which Eph had prowled for information. The appearance of the handcuffed prisoner stirred up a lot of curiosity. Eph, however, showed his written authorization for taking Millard in the name of the United States government, so no one offered the captive any aid or sympathy.

But the submarine boys met with disturbing news. They heard that a little more than a half an hour before, Gray, still carrying a big package, had embarked on his chartered schooner, and had put to sea.

"Had we better charter something and go in chase?" wondered Hal.

"What's the use?" demanded one of the fishermen. "The 'Juanita' is four miles or more out to sea, by this time, and the night's dark you couldn't see her. And there's no craft hereabouts fast enough to catch the 'Juanita.'"

"Besides," whispered Jack, in his chum's ear, "we have no power to overhaul a craft at sea."

So, making the best of the situation, the submarine boys hired a driver, horse and wagon at the village, and started on their return to town.

CHAPTER XI

FACING THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

Jack was the first to enter Lieutenant Ridder's room at the hotel. The young engineer officer jumped up out of his chair, looking somewhat angry.

"Look here, Benson," expostulated the lieutenant, "what sort of way is this to use me? Here I've been loafing about here for hours, and you haven't sent or brought me word of any kind. You—"

"We've brought you something better," smiled Jack Benson, throwing the door further open. "Here is Millard, himself."

Millard came in, a policeman at his side, for the submarine boys had hailed the first policeman they met inside the city limits, and had explained to him.

Page 47

"This man is wanted as a United States prisoner, is he, sir?" inquired the policeman.

"Yes, if his name is Millard," replied Lieutenant Ridder.

"Oh, this is Millard, all right," confirmed Jack Benson.

"Then shall I leave the fellow with you, sir?" inquired the policeman.

"Yes, of course; and thank you."

"You'll give me a receipt for the fellow, as a United States prisoner?" hinted the policeman.

"As a United States suspect," corrected Lieutenant Ridder, going to a table on which were writing materials. The policeman was handed the desired document, then withdrew. Then Ridder went to a telephone, calling up Major Woodruff.

"The major will be here in about ten minutes," announced Ridder, hanging up the receiver. "In the meantime we will do no talking in the presence of this suspect."

It was just a little less than ten minutes later when Major Woodruff, accompanied by a corporal and two private soldiers, entered the room.

Millard was at once taken away, under guard.

Then the boys told their stories, quickly, comprehensively.

"I'll have to get a clear wire all the way through to Washington," declared Major Woodruff, promptly, going to the telephone. In a minute more he had arranged matters, and hurried to the table to write his despatch. Ere the major had finished writing a messenger boy was at the door.

"Boy, you'll find my automobile at the hotel entrance," stated Major Woodruff. "Give this card to my chauffeur, and he'll take you on the jump to the telegraph office. Then come back in the automobile, and wait for more work."

"Do you expect anyone in Washington to get that message now, after ten o'clock at night?" Jack asked, wonderingly.

"To-night?" repeated Major Woodruff. "Yes, sir! You haven't much idea, I take it, Mr. Benson, how fast government business travels. Within five minutes the first part of my message will be ticking out on a receiver in the War Department. The Army officer in charge will get the Secretary of War over the telephone. Why, my answer will very likely be here inside of twenty minutes!"

It was thirty minutes, exactly, when a messenger placed a telegram in Major Woodruff's hands. As soon as the messenger had gone outside, the major read this telegram.

"Keep prisoner Millard close confinement pending further orders. Have communicated Secretary of Navy. Latter official says sea chase shall be made to catch fellow Gray on 'Juanita.' If submarine boys will accept sea service, briefly, for Navy Department, have them come to-night's train and report Secretary Navy at nine to-morrow morning. Their expenses borne by government." (Signed) "Secretary of War."

"What does that mean, sir," cried Jack Benson, rising, "about *if* we will accept sea service, and reporting in the morning to the Secretary of the Navy at Washington?"

Page 48

"Why, I belong to the Army," replied Major Woodruff, hauling out his watch, "and this is a Navy matter. However, since one of you youngsters knows Gray by sight, and you're all of you familiar with this business, I imagine the Secretary of the Navy wants to put you out to sea on one of the country's gunboats, to aid in the chase. For any real information, however, you'll have to apply in person to the Secretary of the Navy himself. Are you going to Washington?"

"Are we going—" Jack started to repeat, with mild irony, when a knock at the door interrupted him. Major Woodruff opened the door, to receive another telegram.

"Washington wakes up quickly," he laughed. "Here you are, Mr. Benson—a despatch from our other fighting department at the Nation's capital."

Clearing his throat, Major Woodruff read:

"Send description of schooner 'Juanita,' and of suspect, Gray, as mentioned in your telegram Secretary War. Are submarine boys leaving to-night to report in morning? Secretary of Navy."

"Here you are, and you see you've got to make up your minds quickly," said the major. "The night train south for Washington leaves in a little more than an hour from now."

"Why, there's only one answer possible, sir," cried Captain Jack Benson, his eyes shining. "Of course we'll take to-night's train and report to the Secretary of the Navy in the morning. When it's for the Flag I don't even have to consult my comrades, or look their way. I know their answer as well as I know my own."

"Good enough, young man," applauded Major Woodruff, while Lieutenant Ridder gave Jack a hearty slap across the shoulders. "But, to go to the Navy Department, you'll want citizen's clothes—not your present uniforms, which are not official. I can send my auto to your boat, and you can be back here in forty minutes, if you dress quickly."

"Ready for the word, 'forward,' sir," responded Captain Jack, saluting. Hal and Eph also raised their hands to their foreheads.

It was a swift trip, with some hurried dressing on board the "Spitfire," but Major Woodruff landed them at the railway station ten minutes ahead of train time.

"Good fortune, gentlemen," wished Major Woodruff, pressing the hand of each when the train was ready. "Don't be scared when you find yourselves face to face with so big a man as the Secretary."

It is not to be wondered at if the minds of all were in a bit of a whirl as they made for their berths in a sleeping-car.

“After all,” muttered Jack, to himself, as he undressed in his berth, “it’s strange how some fellows get the cream of things. Here we get the trip to Washington, while Lieutenant Ridder will have only the fun of going out to the cliff above Cobtown tomorrow to have a look at what is left of Millard’s mine.”

Their train brought the submarine boys into Washington just before seven in the morning. There was time for a good breakfast. Then, being strangers at the national capital, the youngsters engaged a cab to take them to the imposing building that shelters the State, War and Navy Departments.

Page 49

Jack Benson sent in his card. Five minutes later the three submarine boys were ushered into the presence of the Secretary of the Navy.

CHAPTER XII

NAVY OFFICERS FOR AN HOUR OR A DAY

"So you're really the three famous submarine boys?" inquired Secretary Sanders, rising from his chair and extending his hand.

"We're submarine boys; that's all I ever heard about it, Mr. Secretary," replied Captain Jack, as he introduced his friends.

"Now, be seated, young gentlemen, and tell me all you know about this matter that has brought you over to Washington."

Jack Benson acted as spokesman, telling the whole tale clearly, yet using up no more time in talk than was absolutely necessary. It was a good, concise, business statement.

"Now, of course," pursued Mr. Sanders, "you wonder what the Navy Department wants you to do. Well, in the first place, we've been asking, by wireless, through the night and early morning, to have all craft on the lookout for a schooner answering to the description of the 'Juanita'."

Secretary Sanders paused, but none of the three boys asked any questions.

"You will wonder, of course, what success we've had so far, and I may say that our success has been ample," resumed the Secretary of the Navy, with an amused smile. "In other words, we've been able to pick up news of three schooners, all of which answer to the general description of the 'Juanita'—but it happens that that isn't the name of any one of the three."

Jack Benson nodded, but did not speak.

"Of course," pursued the Secretary, "it may be that the skipper of the 'Juanita' has tried an old trick, through the night. He may have set a man to painting another name at the schooner's stern."

Again Skipper Jack nodded.

"The schooner that we think most likely to be the 'Juanita' is about fifty miles out at sea, now, according to a report received twenty minutes ago. Evidently she is headed for one of the British West Indies. Now, if the wind continues the same, and the suspected vessel keeps to her present course, she will, at five this afternoon, be off the Norfolk

Navy Yard, and some sixty-two miles out at sea. Now, unless we are otherwise advised, we want a gunboat, the 'Sudbury,' now at Norfolk, to overhaul the suspected schooner and ascertain whether she is really the 'Juanita,' and whether the man, Gray, and his bundle of documents are still on board. The suspected vessel is to be searched, and Gray and the documents, if found, are to be seized, and the schooner then released. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir." Jack answered quietly.

"One of you young men will know Gray at a glance. The other two are familiar with the whole case. Otherwise, it would not have been necessary to have called you into this matter. Yet, to overhaul a vessel, or to make an arrest or a seizure, you require authority. Such authority can be vested only in naval officers. Hence, for the present, it will be necessary to give all three of you appointments as officers in the United States Navy."

Page 50

At this announcement Jack Benson lost, for the moment, some of his cool composure.

“Officers of the Navy, sir!” he gasped, but his eyes glowed at the mere thought.

“You will be officers only temporarily,” returned the Secretary. “You are not of age, any of you, I take it.”

“We are all just about the same age, sir—seventeen, nearly eighteen,” Jack replied.

“Just so. Now, none of you could legally bold officers’ commissions, except by a special act of Congress. However, with the approval of the President, it is legal for me to give you special, temporary appointments under which you have the title, rank, pay and command of officers. These appointments I am going to give and, for a brief while, though you will not have commissions, you will nevertheless be as actually officers of the Navy as are any admirals on the list.”

This astonishing statement almost took away the breath of the submarine boys.

“You are familiar with navigation, Benson, and are a capable enough sea-pilot along this coast. I learned that much, early this morning, through Mr. Farnum’s answer to my telegram.”

“Then Mr. Farnum knows what we are going to do?” asked Jack, quickly.

“He doesn’t,” replied Secretary Sanders, with a shake of his head. “Mr. Farnum knows, only, that you have a chance to be of some service to the Navy. He seemed to be much pleased by our inquiry.”

The Secretary had just touched an electric button on his desk. Now a clerk entered the room.

“Telephone the secretary of the President,” directed Mr. Sanders, “and ask him whether the President has examined and approved the special appointments that I sent over a while ago.”

The clerk was quickly back, to say:

“The special appointments, Mr. Secretary, are duly approved, and are now on their way over from the White House.”

Two minutes later, a messenger entered, handing a sealed envelope to the Secretary of the Navy.

Breaking the seal, Mr. Sanders drew forth three heavy, folded sheets of parchment.

“Here you are, Mr. Benson,” resumed the Secretary, handing over one of the parchments. “This document confers upon you, for the time being, the rank, pay and command of a lieutenant, junior grade, in the United States Navy. You, Mr. Hastings, and you, Mr. Somers, will rank as ensigns under your special appointments.”

Jack’s head swam a bit as he thanked Mr. Sanders; then he started to glance over this marvelous document.

But the Secretary of the Navy now cut in, briskly:

“That is all, gentlemen. You know your instructions, in general, Lieutenant Benson. You will now go to my chief clerk, who will swear you into the service. He will also give you an order on a local tailor for the uniforms of your ranks. In one hour and twenty minutes your train starts south. On arrival at Norfolk you will report without an instant’s delay at the Navy Yard. Aboard the ‘Sudbury’ you will receive all further instructions, wired from this Department. Good morning, gentlemen.”

Page 51

Then, indeed, things moved fast. At the desk of the chief clerk of the Navy Department the three budding naval officers stood with their right hands raised while the official at the other side of the desk administered to them the oath binding them to loyalty to the government and to obedience to all lawful orders of their superiors.

“And now, gentlemen,” continued the chief clerk, “I will send for Ensign McGrath, who is on duty here, and present you to him. He will go with you to the tailor’s, and will see that you are properly rushed to the train that you are to take. Remember, you are not to pay for your uniforms or equipment. The bill will be sent here.”

Ensign McGrath looked sleepy, but proved to be a hustler. One of the Department’s autos was out in the grounds, and into this McGrath bundled the three submarine boys. Five minutes later they were in the tailoring establishment, where a good many ready-made uniforms were kept for sale.

What a whirl it was. Yet, in twenty minutes, each submarine boy found himself in the duty uniform of a United States junior naval officer, each uniform adorned with the insignia of the wearer’s rank. In the meantime, dress-suit cases had been procured from a store near by.

“All right and proper,” nodded Ensign McGrath. “And—I’m not throwing bouquets, gentlemen, but you really look as though you had been born for the uniforms. Now, only one thing is missing—the swords.”

“Are we to wear swords?” asked Jack, his face flushing with pleasure.

“Under certain conditions, on duty, naval officers wear swords. You will need them as parts of your equipments.”

The dealer brought these side-arms at once. The naval sword is a handsome one, vastly more natty than the infantry side-arm of a junior officer.

What a thrill each submarine boy felt as he was shown how to adjust his sword to the belt!

“They’re really nonsensical jewelry in these civilized days,” declared Ensign McGrath, dryly. “But the regulations call for swords at some times. Now, gentlemen, you will need to get your uniforms off as quickly as you can, and the tailor’s helpers will pack them in your suit cases. You travel in citizen’s clothes, and don your uniforms as soon as you get aboard the gunboat.”

Ten minutes later each proud submarine boy picked up his suit case and sword, the latter, in each instance, being inside of a chamois-skin carrying case.

In single file they made their way to the street.

“Now, for the last leg of the race in Washington,” announced Ensign McGrath, as they entered the automobile once more.

“I wonder if it will happen on the way, or at the station?” laughed Jack, as the government gas-wagon whirled them down Pennsylvania Avenue.

“Will what happen?” inquired McGrath.

“Why,” laughed Benson again, “I know we’ve got to wake up out of this trance, but I can’t figure when it’s going to happen.”

Page 52

"I suppose all of you do feel excited," nodded Ensign McGrath, understandingly.

"Not excited," declared Jack. "I'm just simply unprepared to believe that any part of this has really happened."

At the railway station they were met by a messenger from the chief clerk's office, who handed each of the submarine boys a small parcel.

"Copy of the Regulations, sir" stated the messenger. "It is required that each officer of the Navy possess a copy."

"You'll want to scan the book good and hard most of the way down to Norfolk," advised Ensign McGrath. "You'll find much between the covers that you'll need to know right at the first jump-off. And now, for the tickets."

These McGrath bought, including parlor car seats. The ensign then saw them safely to their seats.

"Now, you've got enough to do, reading your new books," laughed the ensign, "So I'm not going to waste your time by staying here to talk to you. It's ten minutes, yet, to the time of your departure. Good-bye, gentlemen—*and good luck!*"

When McGrath had gone Jack leaned across the aisle to whisper:

"Eph, can you get at your sword handily—to draw it, I mean?"

"What's up?" said Eph, suspiciously.

"I want you to stick about a sixteenth of an inch of the point of your sword into me, so I can judge how long I've been dreaming."

"What's the matter with using your own sword?" demanded Eph, a trifle gruffly.

"That's just the trouble," smiled Benson, plaintively. "I'm afraid I'll wake up and find I haven't any."

Hal was leaning back in his parlor car chair, his eyes closed. He was dreaming delicious daydreams.

CHAPTER XIII

COMMANDER OF A U.S. GUNBOAT!

"Lieutenant Benson, sir?" inquired a coxswain, saluting.

“Yes,” replied Jack, returning the salute.

“The gig is waiting to take you to the ‘Sudbury’ sir.”

This information was punctuated by another salute which Jack, as head of the party of three young officers, again returned.

“Lead the way,” directed Jack.

For the third time saluting, the coxswain possessed himself of Jack’s suit case and sword, then crossed the wharf to the landing stairs down below, the gunboat’s cutter waited, a natty little craft, occupied by a bowman and four oarsmen.

The three young officers seated themselves at the stern of the gig.

“Cast off,” directed the coxswain. “Up oars! Let fall! Give way!”

With the long, steady, magnificent sweep of the Navy which the sailors pulled, the little gig seemed to race through the water.

“Is that the ‘Sudbury’?” inquired Jack, nodding toward a trim little gunboat some two hundred feet long.

“Yes, sir.”

All three of the submarine boys gazed at the gunboat with secret enthusiasm. Had it not been for the guns fore and aft, and at the rail on either side, the “Sudbury” might have been mistaken for some multi-millionaire’s yacht.

Page 53

In another moment the gig was making fast at the gangway. Then Jack Benson stepped out, and, heading his comrades, went up over the side.

At the head of the gangway a corporal and four marines stood drawn up. At a low-voiced command from the corporal the marines presented arms, standing thus until the three new young officers, saluting, passed.

Just beyond the marines, stood an officer of the Navy. He brought his hand to his cap in a smart salute.

"Lieutenant Benson?" inquired this officer.

"Yes."

"I am Ensign Fullerton, executive officer of this vessel."

They shook hands and Jack presented his comrades.

"I think I had better show you to your cabin, sir," suggested Ensign Fullerton.

"As you please," nodded Jack.

The way was actually led, however, by three of the marines, who, at a word from the corporal, had possessed themselves of the limited baggage of the new arrivals.

In Jack's cabin was a broad double berth, two deep wardrobe closets, a book-case, desk and several chairs.

"I had no idea junior officers had such roomy quarters," murmured Jack.

"They don't, usually, sir," smiled Fullerton. "But it's different, of course, in the case of the commanding officer."

"But I'm not the commanding officer," gasped Jack.

"For the purposes of this cruise you are," smiled Fullerton. "But I forget. You haven't received your orders. There they are on your desk. They arrived less than an hour ago by wire."

Like one in a dream young Jack Benson picked up a bulky telegraph envelope and broke the seal. There, before his eyes, danced the words of the latest order from the Secretary of the Navy.

Lieutenant Jack Benson was directed to take command of the United States gunboat, 'Sudbury,' until further orders. Ensigns Hastings and Somers were directed to assume such duties aboard as were assigned to them by Lieutenant Benson.

"I didn't expect this," stammered Jack. "I—I—we thought our temporary rank in the Navy was given us merely that we might have legal standing in making one arrest that is wanted."

"No one ever does know just what is wanted of him, until the order comes," laughed Ensign Fullerton. "At least, that has been the case since Mr. Sanders became Secretary of the Navy. He keeps all officers on the jump. But I guess that is what a good many of them need, sir."

As the Ensign appeared to be at least twenty-five years old that respectful "sir" struck young Benson's ear queerly.

"Pardon me, gentlemen, but be seated," suggested Lieutenant Jack, suddenly, as he realized that his chums and this one sure-enough naval officer were all standing.

"You have been aboard naval vessels before, sir, haven't you?" asked Ensign Fullerton.

"Oh, yes; but never in the present way," smiled Benson.

Page 54

"Then, no doubt, you understand, sir, that the 'Sudbury' is under steam, only awaiting your order to put to sea."

"The last part of these orders," replied Jack, picking up the telegram, "advises me that sailing orders will be wired soon."

"Then may I make a suggestion, sir?"

"Of course," nodded young Benson.

"At your direction I will have Mr. Hastings and Mr. Somers shown to their cabins. Then I will send for the one other young man left of the gunboat's old equipment of officers, and present him to you. After that I would suggest, sir, that I have the crew piped to quarters for brief inspection by the new commanding officer."

Hal and Eph were quickly made acquainted with their own cabins, which were on the port side of the gun-deck, Jack's being on the starboard.

Ensign Fullerton brought in a slim, very erect young man in a midshipman's uniform—Mr. Drake, just out of the Naval Academy.

"Our engineers are all warrant machinists or petty officers; no commissioned officers among them," stated Fullerton. "Our highest marine officer is Sergeant Oswald. Besides the sergeant we have eighteen other enlisted men among the marines. Here is the ship's complete roster," continued the Ensign, taking a document out of a pigeon-hole over the young commander's desk. "And now, sir, shall I pass the order for piping the crew to quarters?"

"If you will be so good," Jack nodded, rising.

At this moment Hal and Eph appeared at the doorway.

"Pardon me, gentlemen, for suggesting that you had better put your swords on," suggested Fullerton, "Inspection of crew at quarters is about to come off."

Hal and Eph vanished, but soon reappeared, wearing their new swords and trying hard not to look conscious of the fact. Jack was engaged in adjusting his own side-arm to his belt.

"I neglected to state, sir," continued Ensign Fullerton, "that we have no medical officer at present. A hospital steward down in sick bay is our nearest approach, at present, to a medical officer."

"Forewarned is forearmed," laughed Jack. "We'll try not to be ill."

It was time, now, to proceed to the quarterdeck; for, forward, the shrill sound of the boatswain's whistle seemed to fill the air.

Though all the crew, including the marines, had been summoned and formed at the mast, the inspection was but a matter of a moment. Its purpose was more to give the crew a glimpse of their new officers.

Just as the inspection was ending, a marine of the guard approached, announcing in a low tone:

"Telegram for the commanding officer, sir."

Ensign Fullerton received it, returning the marine's salute, and passed the envelope to Jack Benson, who opened it.

"Our sailing orders, Mr. Fullerton," announced Jack, as soon as the former had dismissed the formation at the mast. "This telegram gives, as you see, the latest reported position of the schooner believed to be the 'Juanita,' and her course. You will get under way at once, Mr. Fullerton. Then you and I will work out the course."

Page 55

"This is the starboard watch, sir," continued the executive officer. "Which officer is to command it?"

"Mr. Hastings. Mr. Somers will take the port watch."

"Very good, sir. And I would suggest, sir, that Mr. Drake is an excellent pilot between here and the sea."

"Then direct Mr. Drake to take the bridge with the watch officer."

"Very good, sir."

"And, as soon as we are under way, Mr. Fullerton, come to my cabin and we will figure out our course more in detail."

"Very good, sir."

It was Ensign Fullerton, who, acting as executive officer, transmitted the needed orders to Hal, Eph and Midshipman Drake.

The three young officers now removed their swords, sending them by a marine orderly to their respective cabins. Hal took command from the bridge, subject to Fullerton's directions, while Jack, as commanding officer, also took his station there briefly. Eph, being free to do as he pleased for the time, went to his cabin to try to figure out whether he were dreaming.

Quickly the "Sudbury" left her anchorage, proceeding downstream. As soon as the start had been fairly made Ensign Fullerton reported at the cabin of the young commanding officer. They worked out on the chart the probable positions that the suspected schooner would take that afternoon.

"We should sight her at about five o'clock, sir, if she doesn't change her course, and if the wind holds the same," said Ensign Fullerton.

"If we get the right craft, first off, it will be a short cruise, won't it?" smiled Jack, rather wistfully.

"I—I—" began Ensign Fullerton, slowly, then paused.

"Well?" smiled Jack Benson.

"On second thought, I believe I had better not say what I started to say," replied the ensign.

"Oh, go ahead, Fullerton," urged Jack. "It isn't easy to wound my sensibilities."

"I was going to say, sir," replied the Ensign, flushing a bit, "that I quite understand how you feel about a short cruise. The sensation of holding a command in the United States Navy is one that you would not care to give up too soon."

"I was thinking of something of the sort," Benson admitted. "But—see here! On one point my orders don't quite enlighten me. If the suspected schooner proves not to be the right are we to come back to report the fact?"

"If you were so to order," replied Fullerton. "Yet you do not need to. This vessel is equipped with wireless, and you are in instant communication, at every moment of the day and night, with the Navy Department at Washington."

"I'm glad of that," admitted Lieutenant Benson, frankly. "It will lessen the danger of my making a fool of myself during my first and last naval command."

"Not your last command, I hope," remarked the ensign.

"The only way I could get a permanent command," retorted Jack, "would be to get appointed to Annapolis, if I could, and then work through the long, long years for command rank."

Page 56

"There are other ways," replied Ensign Fullerton, quietly. "And especially, if a war should break out. Young men trained as finely as you and your comrades, and showing as great talent, sir, would have no difficulty in reaching important rank in a war of the future, when so much must be risked on the submarine craft of which you young men are masters."

"We have run a few submarine boats, I suppose," nodded Benson. "But none of us has ever had the Annapolis training."

"Not all of the best American sea-fighters have come out of Annapolis, sir," replied Fullerton, soberly. "If a boy gets through Annapolis there's nothing wonderful in his making a fairly good officer. But my cap, sir, is off to boys who can come through the ordinary machine shop and qualify themselves to command submarine boats or anything else afloat!"

Then, dropping back to his ordinary manner, Fullerton saluted, next left the cabin to carry to the watch officer the orders for the course.

Lieutenant Jack Benson, briefly of the U.S. Navy, strolled out to the after deck for a short promenade. Here he was joined by Eph Somers, who, in his naval uniform, did not forget to salute before accosting the commanding officer of the U.S.S. "Sudbury."

"I'm really beginning to feel that I'm not dreaming," confided Eph, almost in a whisper. "Whee! but it's fine to be out on a craft so big that you don't get a cramp in your leg from walking! Say, do you know, Jack," he whispered, "I am almost crazy to see one of this ship's big guns fired!"

"You may have your wish," laughed Jack. "Who knows?"

Who knew, indeed?

How was it possible, for that matter, for any of these three young officers to guess what lay ahead of them?

CHAPTER XIV

THE BOW GUN BOOMS AND EPH PUTS OFF

In the nineteenth century, when a vessel left port, her destination unknown, that craft might get away from a pursuing squadron scattered over the seas.

At best, knowledge of a marine fugitive's whereabouts could be gained only from the masters of other vessels that had sighted the fugitive. Usually, such information must be delayed until the informing master of the sighting ship reached port.

In the twentieth century all is greatly changed.

A vessel bound for parts unknown, carrying some fugitive from justice, is sighted by some steamship that is equipped with a wireless telegraph outfit. Hours before, perhaps, the master of the steamship has been asked to keep a weather-eye open for a vessel that answers the name or description of the runaway craft. Now, she is sighted by the master of the steamship. Ten minutes later the authorities on shore know the exact whereabouts of the fleeing craft. Should she change her course wholly, her new whereabouts is soon after reported to land by the master of some other wireless equipped steamship.

Page 57

Once upon a time the task of finding and overtaking a runaway vessel at sea presented innumerable difficulties. Nowadays, it is often necessary only that the pursuing craft possess sufficiently greater speed to overtake the easily located fugitive.

As the "Sudbury" turned out into the open sea that little gunboat was in instant communication with Washington, and also with any wireless equipped ocean traveler up to nearly half way across the great Atlantic.

At three o'clock the Navy Department at Washington reported to a gunboat out of sight of land that the last sighting of the supposed "Juanita" placed her on the same course as hitherto reported.

At four o'clock came word that the Navy Department had had no new report as to the schooner by wireless.

At five o'clock another wireless despatch was flashed through the air. Lieutenant Jack Benson, reading, discovered that the "Juanita" had again been sighted on the same course, headed for some port in the British West Indies.

At 5:20 Ensign Eph Somers, port watch officer of the "Sudbury," sent a marine orderly to report to Lieutenant Benson that a schooner's topmasts were within sight.

Benson hurried to the bridge, but found Ensign Fullerton there just ahead of him.

"We'll shape our course in straight pursuit of the schooner, Mr. Fullerton," decided Lieutenant Jack.

"Very good, sir."

As yet the schooner's topmasts were visible only from the military top. After a few minutes had passed, however, the vessel's masts were visible from the bridge.

"Does her rig look like that of the 'Juanita,' Mr. Somers?" questioned young Benson.

"I can't say, sir," Eph replied. "I didn't see her, at Cobtown, under sail. I shall have to wait until I can make out the hull, sir, before I can make even a good guess."

Smoke was pouring heavily from the "Sudbury's" two funnels by this time, for the gunboat was being pushed, under forced draught, to considerably better than twenty knots an hour. The schooner apparently was making between seven and eight knots an hour.

In a few minutes more the hull of the stranger began to show. Eph, with a pair of marine glasses to his eyes, studied the stranger long and carefully. Lieutenant Benson, knowing it would be folly to hasten his comrade's judgment, waited in silent patience.

"That craft looks very much like the 'Juanita,' sir," ventured Eph, at last. "In fact, sir, I think that's our schooner."

"Steer up to windward of her, then, Mr. Somers," Jack directed. "Mr. Fullerton, give orders to have the port bow gun manned. When the order is given, be prepared to fire a blank shot toward the schooner. If, after one minute, the schooner shows no signs of heaving to, then fire a solid shot across her bows."

"Very good, sir."

Without leaving the bridge Ensign Fullerton passed the word for the manning of the gun and loading with a blank cartridge.

Page 58

There was a new, deeper glow in Eph Somers's eyes as he paced the bridge. He was to have, at last, his wish to see the "Sudbury" fire a shot.

In a few minutes more the "Sudbury" was ranging tip alongside the schooner, though a full quarter of a mile away to windward.

"Mr. Fullerton, fire the blank shot at the stranger," ordered Lieutenant Jack Benson.

"Aye, aye, sir."

The order was carried by a simple wave of the executive officer's hand. The petty officer in command behind the bow gun, looking for the signal, saw it and gave a low-toned order.

Bang! Eph was watching for it. His eyes danced as he heard the sharp explosion and saw the cloud of white smoke, with the tongue of fire spitting through the center of it. In most of us there is left some of the spirit of the old Norse pirate; Eph had a lot of it.

"The people on the schooner act as though they were bewildered," smiled Jack, watching the schooner through his glass. "It doesn't look as though they expected any such order from us. I wonder if they mean to obey?"

"Worse for them, if they don't," replied Ensign Fullerton, grimly. "A solid shot across the bows, and a shot through their rigging after that. What schooner has any chance to defy a ship of war?"

"There they go around," cried Jack, barely above his breath, "They'll heave to."

"Of course," smiled Fullerton. "Your orders, sir?"

"Lower the power launch. Send a corporal and four marines, and six sailors, armed, beside the boat-handlers. Mr. Somers will take command, as he's the only one of us who knows the fellow Gray by sight."

Ensign Fullerton accordingly transmitted the orders, also ordering Midshipman Drake up to the bridge to serve as watch officer in Eph's absence. Hal Hastings was asleep in his cabin at the time.

In the meantime the schooner continued "hove to," several men lining her starboard rail.

"Somehow, Mr. Fullerton," muttered Lieutenant Jack, after Eph had departed in the power launch with his boarding crew, "I'm not much inclined to think that's our schooner."

"Somers seemed to think so."

“Mr. Somers said it looked like the ‘Juanita.’ He’s too careful to commit himself to more than that.”

“We shall soon know, sir, anyway.”

It is probable that Eph was disappointed that the schooner had been stopped by anything less than a round shot through her rigging. Yet, as he stood up in the stern of the launch, as it bounded over the waves, he felt a heap of satisfaction in the thought that he commanded the searching party, and that he did so by virtue of being an officer in the United States Navy. And this, too, was a form of duty in which Ensign Somers wore his sword at his side.

“I hope they’re preparing a surprise for us,” chuckled Eph, as he looked about him at his armed crew. “I hope the schooner’s people will try some mean trick for us, or attempt to put up a fight. Whee!”

Page 59

Yet none of these aggressive thoughts showed in the young Ensign's face. Eph knew his place, usually, and the amount of dignity that went with any place.

"Make fast alongside!" Eph sang out, as the launch rounded in alongside the schooner.

"What's wrong with the United States Navy, Midshipman?" came the jovial question from a bronzed, broad-shouldered, bearded man of fifty who appeared at the quarter rail, offering Eph a hand to aid him on board.

But Eph, disdaining the proffered hand, seized the rail, vaulting neatly on board. Then he straightened up.

"I am Ensign Somers, from the gunboat 'Sudbury.'"

"Ensign, eh?" muttered the schooner's master, looking in some bewilderment at Eph's boyish face. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Somers."

"What craft is this, sir?" Eph continued.

"Schooner 'Varia,' from New York, bound for Jamaica."

"We saw 'Varia' painted on your stern, of course," smiled Eph. "But was that name painted there during the night?"

"Sir?" demanded the skipper, in some astonishment. "Oh, I see, Ensign. Your commander thinks we may be sailing under false colors. Will you be kind enough to step down into my cabin?"

Here an elderly man, in yachting dress, stepped forward out of a group of sailors at the waist of the craft.

"This schooner is chartered to convey—" he began, but Eph interposed, politely:

"Pardon me, sir, but I am talking with the captain only."

Then, turning toward the launch, Ensign Somers called:

"Corporal, board with your marines, and wait further orders."

Then Eph followed the captain below.

"The gentleman who spoke to you," explained Varia's master, "is Dr. Herman Barnard. He chartered the 'Varia' at New York for a West Indian cruise for himself and his family. Here are my papers, as master. Here is the 'Varia's' license to carry passengers, and here are our clearance papers, from New York to Jamaica."

The papers were all in regular order. Eph looked them over, noting that the master's name was Walford.

"I don't see anything wrong here, Captain Walford," Eph continued. "Where is your list of passengers?"

"Here, sir."

Eph glanced over the list, noting that besides Dr. Barnard, there were five other men passengers, besides Mrs. Barnard, her two daughters and one other woman.

"I shall have to ask you, Captain, to line your passengers up on deck," Eph continued.

"I had hoped to escape that annoyance, sir," protested the schooner's master. "The ladies were alarmed, and took to their staterooms."

"I am very sorry, Captain," Eph insisted, "but I must look over the passengers."

"Very good, then," sighed Captain Walford.

"And muster the crew forward. I must see on deck every person on this craft."

"Very good, sir."

Page 60

Eph returned to deck, leaning against the starboard rail of the quarter deck. Below, he heard some sounds of remonstrance in feminine voices. Then, as a step sounded on the after companionway, and Eph straightened up, he heard a woman's voice say:

"United States Navy? I would call this a good deal more like piracy!"

"But, mamma—"

"Hush, child!"

Mrs. Barnard, when she stepped on deck, looked as severe as her husband appeared mild.

Ensign Eph doffed his cap quickly to the ladies.

"I know this does not please you," he said, courteously, "but I will ask you to remember that I am acting under orders, and have no choice."

"It is outrageous to stop a pleasure craft in this fashion!" declared Mrs. Barnard, haughtily.

"Do you know why we are making this search, madam?" asked Eph, sweetly.

"Of course I don't," snapped the good lady.

"Then I marvel," replied Eph, with another bow, "that you can have an opinion of something that you don't understand."

One of the girls was so undutiful as to snigger. Thereupon, one of the young men joined in the laugh, which became so general that the severe expression on Mrs. Barnard's face softened considerably.

"Perhaps I owe you an apology, young man, for having spoken as I did of you," admitted the good lady.

"You only called us pirates," smiled Eph. "That wasn't much."

"Perhaps I said more than I should have said, young man," admitted Mrs. Barnard.

"Mamma, wouldn't it be better to address this officer by his title?" asked the elder of the girls. Then, turning to Eph, the same speaker inquired:

"May I ask your title? Are you a captain?"

"Only an ensign, miss," Eph replied, "and only an acting ensign at that."

While this brief conversation had been going on, the cook, stewards and watch below were being routed out. Now Captain Walford came aft to report:

"All hands on board, sir, have been turned out for your inspection."

"All?" insisted Eph.

"All, sir."

"Then, Captain Walford, I am going to do something that may appear very extreme, but I regret to say that I can't help it. I must search this craft. If I allowed one for whom we are seeking to slip through our fingers it would bring a lot of blame down about my head."

Eph now stepped back to the rail, ordering six of the sailors on board. To them he gave his orders. The party spread, going below. Eph, excusing himself to the ladies, went with the sailors.

No more thorough search could have been made. Every nook and cranny of the schooner was searched, but at last Eph was obliged to admit that the man he sought was not aboard.

"My apologies to everyone for all trouble caused," declared Ensign Somers. "I trust you will find it easy to believe that I have only been following my orders; and, therefore, doing my duty."

Page 61

"You couldn't have done less, Ensign," replied Dr. Barnard, courteously. "You couldn't have been more courteous."

"Are we at liberty to proceed on our way, sir?" asked Captain Walford, as the young acting ensign went over the side.

"I shall have to ask you to take the signal for that from the 'Sudbury,'" Eph answered.

On the gunboat's quarter deck, following Ensign Somers's report, there was an anxious conference.

"If this is the craft we've been following all the time," muttered Jack Benson, "we've a lot of hunting yet ahead of us."

"Shall I signal the schooner permission to proceed, sir?" asked Ensign Fullerton.

"By all means."

Darkness came down over the ocean while Lieutenant Jack was sending a wireless despatch through the air to the Navy Department.

CHAPTER XV

"THE RIGHT BOAT AND THE RIGHT CREW!"

Three hours later, under a new order from Washington, the gunboat's launch stole in alongside of a second schooner that had been pursued, overhauled and brought to a standstill.

This craft, however, proved to be a Nova Scotian vessel, with papers all right, a cargo beyond suspicion and no sign of the fugitive Gray aboard.

When news of this second failure had been flashed to Washington, and twenty minutes more had passed, the instructions came back out of the ether:

"Cruise slowly about where you are. Await new instructions, which will go forward to you as soon as we have fresh, reliable information from any source. See that your own search light is freely used through the night."

"'Puss in the Corner,' at sea," muttered Lieutenant Benson. "And we ain't even find a corner."

An hour later the young commander of the "Sudbury" turned in. Hal was on the bridge.

The gunboat cruised along lazily at about eight knots an hour. For some time Hal paced the bridge indolently, while the sailor lookout, forward, manipulated the searchlight, sending its beam in wide circles over the waters.

It was within half an hour of the time of calling the new watch, in fact, when the bow watch reported:

“Sail dead ahead, sir!”

Barely more than a topsail could be made out, even through the marine glass of the young watch officer.

“Hold the light on her; we’ll overtake and examine her, anyway,” was Ensign Hastings’s quick decision. From the bridge he gave orders for the engine room to go ahead with increased speed. While the gunboat was bounding off after the stranger, time came to call the port watch. Eph Somers came up to the bridge, somewhat sleepy.

“Same old story, I guess,” yawned Eph. “Have you passed the word to the executive office?”

“Not yet,” Hal replied. “I didn’t believe it worth while to break the slumber of Mr. Fullerton, or of the commander, until we got close to see whether the stranger looks in the least like the ‘Juanita.’”

Page 62

"I don't believe the 'Juanita' is anywhere on this wide ocean," muttered Eph, stifling a yawn.

"It doesn't look that way," smiled Hastings.

Down before the wheelhouse a bell began to sound briskly.

"Eight bells; your watch, Mr. Somers," announced Hastings. "But I am going to remain on the bridge with you for a while. I want a look at that mud-hooker over yonder."

Within fifteen minutes more the gunboat was running fairly close, though off to starboard.

"That doesn't look even a little bit like the 'Juanita,'" muttered Ensign Eph, disgustedly. "Why, she's longer than the Cobtown schooner. Besides, the 'Juanita' is a two-sticker, while that hooker yonder has a third mast with a yawl-rig leg-o'-mutton sail."

Hal said nothing, but continued to study the stranger through his night-glass.

"She is a queer-looking hooker," muttered Hastings. "Say, Eph, somehow that boat doesn't look as though she was built to fit her own rig."

"Why not!" demanded Eph.

"Well, look at her length. Then take a peep at the height of her dory-mast. Does it look tall enough for the length of the schooner?"

"I hadn't thought of that," admitted Somers, also taking a careful look through the nightglass. "Jove, Hal, she is an odd-looking piece of hulk."

Eph turned to pass the order to run in still closer to the schooner.

"What's wrong with her stern-hull?" asked Ensign Somers, three or four minutes later.

"Looks like a patchwork affair," declared Hal, more interested than ever.

"Has she a built-on stern?" demanded Somers, half a minute later.

"By Jove, I half believe she has. Eph, without that stern and the yawl mast, would you say the craft looks like the 'Juanita'?"

"I believe she would," muttered young Somers, excitedly. "Marine orderly!"

A sea-soldier came quickly up the bridge stairs, saluting.

“Mr. Somers’s compliments to Mr. Fullerton, and will the executive officer come to the bridge?”

Again saluting the marine vanished aft. It doesn’t take a naval officer long to report, even when he has to rouse himself out of a sound sleep to do it.

Ensign Fullerton reached the bridge rubbing his eyes, but he listened intently to what the two younger ensigns had to say.

“Marine orderly!” called the executive officer. “Mr. Fullerton’s compliments to the commanding officer, and will he come to the bridge?”

Barely a minute later, Jack Benson stood on the bridge, listening to his subordinate officers and staring across the gap of water at the unknown craft.

“Mr. Fullerton,” directed the young commander, “prepare to fire a signal shot and to lower the power launch. Make up the boarding party as usual. Mr. Somers, you will go in command of the launch. And I will accompany you this time. Mr. Fullerton, when I leave the bridge, you will assume command.”

Page 63

Both officers, as they received their orders, saluted.

Bang! The signal gun barked out, the flash from the muzzle sending a long tongue of red through the darkness.

But the stranger continued on her way through the night. Ensign Fullerton regarded the young commanding officer of the gunboat expectantly.

"Put a solid shot across her bows, Mr. Fullerton."

Again the order was transmitted, with little noise. The gun-crew then awaited the signal from the executive officer.

Bang! This time the solid shot struck the water a bare fifty feet ahead of the strange craft's bows as she forged on through the waves, her bow stirring up a gleaming white foam.

"That ought to stop her!" muttered Lieutenant Jack Benson, impatiently.

"I don't believe it is going to, though, sir," reported Ensign Fullerton, studying the other vessel through his night-glass. "I don't see a sign of motion on the stranger's decks."

"Load again with solid shot, then," directed the gunboat's young commander. "This time hit her square in the fore-rigging."

"I'll step below and sight the piece myself," replied Ensign Fullerton.

A few moments later the executive officer reported the port bow gun in readiness for service.

"Fire whenever you are ready, Mr. Fullerton," called Lieutenant Jack, in a low voice.

Bang! barked the bow gun, a moment later. Over aboard the stranger there was a crash, a tearing sound, and then her foretopmast toppled, hanging loosely in place by the stays.

"That'll stop her, I reckon," chuckled Jack Benson.

And "stop her" it did. There was no choice but to stop. This gunboat of the United States Navy was in a position to shoot every standing stick out of the schooner, if provoked too far, and the legal right to go to such lengths existed.

"Stranger is heaving to, sir," reported Ensign Somers.

“Very good, Mr. Somers. Order the power launch lowered. Put off as quickly as possible.”

“Very good, sir.”

Ensign Fullerton hastened back to the bridge, to assume command, while Hal Hastings stood by him.

Boat-handlers and armed sailors and marines scampered over the side. Down the gangway followed Jack and Eph, looking very stately as they held their swords clear of their legs. Busily the launch chugged across the intervening water gap.

“Schooner, ahoy!” hailed Eph, as the launch ran in alongside “What craft is that?”

“Schooner ‘Malta,’ Cooper, master, from Sidney, N.S.,” came the reply of a man at the after rail.

“Seems to me I’ve seen you before, in Cobtown!” suddenly exclaimed Eph Somers, as he leaped over the rail in advance of his marines.

“C-Cob—town?” demanded the schooner’s master, falteringly.

“By the great Constitution! We’ve caught the ‘Juanita’ in disguise!” bellowed back Ensign Eph, turning to Jack Benson, who was just boarding. “See! There’s the false stern structure.”

Page 64

"You're making a huge mistake of some sort, gentlemen!" protested the vessel's master, tremulously.

"Marines, lay aboard," thundered Eph. "Take the deck, Corporal. Round up all the crew you see, and make 'em stand at attention along one of the seams of the deck! Sailors aboard, you down any man who tries to block or balk you. Lively, now! I've seen this master in Cobtown, and I'll take my oath this is the 'Juanita' with a pieced-out, false stern and a faked third mast!"

"We hold you responsible for the deck, Corporal," spoke Jack, in a low tone to the noncommissioned officer of marines. "We're going to take the sailors and go below."

A rush was made for the companionway leading down into the schooner's cabin. A man's white, scared face showed below, for a moment.

"Hurrah!" yelled Eph Somers, drawing his sword and making a bound below "There's Brother Gray. Oh, we've the right boat—and the right crowd, too!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE DUEL THROUGH THE DOOR

Bang!

A stateroom door closed just before the two young officers reached it.

Click! That told the story of a bolt shot into place.

"You may as well open!" called Jack, coolly. "We have ample force for breaking down that door!"

Crack! In that confined space the discharge of a pistol sounded almost deafening. A line of red shot through the stateroom door. The bullet from the weapon whizzed between Jack Benson and Eph Somers, the missile burying itself in wood across the passage.

Crack! Crack!

With that desperate fellow the other side of the door, shooting through the key-hole, it was worse than folly to remain in line of range.

Yet Jack and Eph retorted coolly, with the dignity of officers.

“My man,” requested Lieutenant Jack, turning to one of the sailors, “hand me your revolver.”

Taking the weapon, Benson glanced at it a second or two, then raised the weapon, sighting for the top of the stateroom door.

Bang! The shot that Jack fired sent a bullet crashing through the door close to the upper framework.

“You see, Gray!” Jack called coolly, “we’re armed, too, and in overpowering numbers. Resistance is worse than foolish.”

Bang! came the hostile answer.

This shot was fired through one of the panels of the stateroom door—fired at an angle, too.

Plainly the shot was intended to hit the young naval lieutenant. It passed Benson’s right side by a margin of barely two inches.

“Pass me another revolver,” whispered Benson, in the stillness that followed.

All through the day and evening these seamen, though outwardly respectful, and wholly well disciplined, had cherished a great deal of amusement over their boyish officers.

Now, however, these bronzed men of the deep beheld Benson and Somers at work in a manner worthy of any product of Annapolis.

Page 65

The second revolver was handed to Jack.

"I want to be in this, too," muttered Ensign Eph, and held back his hand for weapons.

"Are you going to surrender, Gray, and open that door?" demanded Lieutenant Jack.

"Never—to you," came the ugly defiance.

Bang! Again Gray fired, straight in the direction of the voice the bullet, crashing through a panel of the door, fanned Jack's left ear so that he felt the breeze.

"Open up on him, Mr. Somers," directed Benson. "Slowly. Fire high, and fire low. Try to get him somehow."

Two more shots came from the other side of the locked door.

Then pop-pop-pop! began the fusilade from outside, Jack and Eph firing with either hand as they sighted their weapons for new spots.

R-r-rip! crash! A long enough bombardment of this sort was certain to reduce the panels to splinters and leave the way clear—if they didn't riddle Gray with bullets in the meantime.

Pop-pop-pop! The air was becoming heavy with the white fog of smoke. Breathing was somewhat difficult, with so many shots being fired in the confined space.

Then both young officers stopped, passing back one revolver apiece to be reloaded.

Bang! came a defiant shot from inside the stateroom. The bullet struck the cabin floor just behind Jack, having passed between his feet.

The sailors, back where they were comparatively safe from harm, looked on in admiration at these two grit-full young American officers.

Pop-pop-pop! began the fusilade by Jack and Eph again.

"Ouch!" came a sudden yell from the stateroom.

"Hit you, did we?" called Jack, calmly. "Well, we're going to riddle you unless you stop that nonsense."

The answer was another shot from inside the stateroom. The bullet clipped off a stray lock of hair at the left side of Eph Somers's head.

Both young officers fired slowly, searchingly, until their weapons were emptied. Then they passed the hot smoking revolvers back for new loads.

From the other side of the stateroom door came no sound.

As soon as he and Eph had received the reloaded weapons, Jack motioned Eph Somers not to fire.

For a few moments they listened. Then Jack turned, selecting the two most stalwart-looking of the husky sailors back by the companionway. A nod of Jack's head brought them stealthily to his side.

"Put your shoulders to the stateroom door, and force it," commanded Lieutenant Benson.

At the same time Jack and Eph moved up with the sailors, holding their revolvers ready to fire at the first sign of renewed hostilities from within.

Bump! Two pairs of sturdy shoulders went up against the door. From within there came no sign of defiance. Bump! At the second determined assault the door flew open.

"Step back, men! We'll go in first," commanded Lieutenant Benson.

Page 66

Revolvers in hand, and ready, the two young officers of the “Sudbury” pressed forward into the battered-looking room.

“Where is the rascal?” growled Eph Somers.

“Here, hiding like a cornered rat,” replied Jack, aiming both revolvers at a huddled figure well in under the lower berth. “Come out, Gray! You won’t be hurt unless you try tricks on us.”

The answer was a groan.

“Are your hurt?” inquired Lieutenant Benson.

“Yes.”

“How badly?”

“You hit me twice.”

“Where?”

“Once in the left arm; once in the right thigh. O-o-o-h!”

Jack Benson felt a swift twinge—almost a guilty jerk of his conscience.

To be sure, Gray had been defying properly appointed officers of the government engaged in performing their sworn task. Gray had attempted to kill or injure the young officers.

Still, Gray was a human being. Benson, despite his fighting spirit, at need, was not fond of gazing upon misery.

“I guess you can get out, with a little aid,” coaxed Lieutenant Jack.

Gray’s answer was another groan.

“We’ll help you out, then,” Jack continued. “But don’t you dare to open fire upon any of our party!”

“I would, if I could,” snarled the wounded man.

“Why can’t you?”

“Fired my last cartridge!” snapped the wretch, defiantly. “Else you wouldn’t have got in here without losing a few men!”

Jack signed to the two men who had forced the door to lend a hand in moving Gray out from under the berth. As they got the wounded man out on the carpet he presented a sad picture in his bloodstained clothing.

"Will the Lieutenant pardon a suggestion?" spoke up one of the sailors, saluting.

"Yes."

"I have a first aid package, sir. With some help I can, bind this man's wounds until we get him over to the sick bay on the 'Sudbury.'"

"A fine idea," agreed Lieutenant Jack. "Go ahead."

First of all, the wounded prisoner was taken out into the passageway. Jack and Eph had yet important work to do here. For a few minutes they searched in vain. Then, in turning over the lower berth's mattress, Eph's hand touched something hard.

"Wait until I get my pocket-knife out," he smiled.

Rip! r-r-r-rip! As Ensign Eph tore open the mattress and thrust his hands inside, the grin on his face broadened.

"I reckon we've got the object of the whole expedition," he announced.

He drew out a package wrapped in heavy paper. Jack broke the string, unwrapping, and pulling out to the light, a bundle of charts, layer upon layer.

"Yes. Here we have what we're after," nodded Lieutenant Benson. "And here are two books written chock-full of notes to go with the charts. Gracious! That fellow. Millard must have stolen plans of every important fortified harbor on the Atlantic coast. And here are charts of some of the gulf ports as well."

Page 67

Gray, his wounds bound, had been laid on the door of the stateroom, which had been taken from its hinges. On this stretcher, the prisoner was taken over the side into the launch.

"Who's going to pay for the damage done here, sir?" asked the skipper of the Cobtown schooner, stepping forward.

"Hm!" muttered Jack. "It seems to me you are lucky, my man, that we don't put a prize crew aboard this craft and take you back to Norfolk."

"I haven't done anything," protested the fellow, "except to stand for a lot of damage on board because you're backed by sailors and marines."

"My man," retorted Jack, grimly, "if you think you have suffered any unfair damage, then lay your case before the Navy Department. But my private advice is for you not to attract the attention of the authorities to you in case they seem likely to overlook you."

"Is my vessel at liberty to proceed?" inquired the man, sullenly.

"Yes; I have no orders to seize your craft. I'd like to, however," Lieutenant Jack Benson added, dryly.

CHAPTER XVII

THE LAST HOUR OF COMMAND

Through the night the "Sudbury" rolled lazily over the waves.

A wireless message had carried the news through space to Washington. Orders had come to return to Norfolk, there turning Gray over to the United States authorities.

Benson and his comrades were instructed to return to Washington with the charts and record books.

Down in a berth in the sick bay, lay Gray. The hospital steward had made the wounded man as comfortable as possible. The latter was painfully but not seriously wounded.

At the speed at which the gunboat was now proceeding the "Sudbury" was due at anchorage at six in the morning.

Lieutenant Jack had turned in, after leaving orders that he was to be called a few minutes before five. He wanted to be on deck to enjoy the sensations of his last hour of command on the cruise of a vessel of the United States Navy. Forward, the sailors of the watch were talking in low tones of their very youthful officers.

“There’s the real stuff in those boy officers, mates,” grunted one sailor who had been in the boarding party. “It don’t make any difference whether they’ve been through Annapolis or not. Look at the way the lieutenant and Mr. Somers went up against the shooting. Kept us back, and took the medicine themselves, like real officers.”

“You’d expect it of Somers,” rejoined another sailor. “There’s a bit of the bull-neck about him, and such men always fight. But the lieutenant makes a real officer that I’d be glad to foller anywhere.”

“Mr. Hastings didn’t get a chance to show what was in him,” suggested another of Uncle Sam’s old salts.

“Oh, you leave Mr. Hastings alone for fighting, if he saw any need to,” retorted the sailor who had been the first to speak. “He’s one of your very quiet chaps. Your quiet ones always sail into a fight while a brawler is getting his mouth wound up to do some talking.”

Page 68

"Hanged, if I don't wish them lads could remain on board!" muttered another old salt.

"With the young lieutenant to command the ship?" asked another.

"Him as well as anyone. He knows what he's doing, for which reason I don't care for the number of the year he was born in. Why, mates, the lieutenant is the head of them submarine boys we've read so much about in the newspapers when layin' in port. And the other two are his messmates. Now, I'll stand for it that the submarine boys are good for any kind of a job on salt water. I'd foller their lead on a battleship!"

It would have been fine for the three submarine boys had they been able to know what great opinions the crew held of them.

But Hal was again on the bridge in the last watch, and Eph had gone below for an hour's sleep ere he, like Jack Benson, was to be called.

Then, at last, two sleepy-eyed boys came from their cabins, going up to the bridge for what they felt was their last hour of real sea-glory.

Ensign Fullerton appeared half an hour before anchorage was made.

"You have the satisfaction, sir, of knowing that your task was put through in record time," said Fullerton, by way of congratulation.

"For which I'm truly glad," smiled Benson. "Yet I could wish our experience with the Navy had not ended so soon."

"Why, it hasn't ended yet, sir," smiled the executive officer.

"It will, in a few minutes more, however," sighed Jack. "My last official act will be to order the gig into the water to take us on shore. We're under orders to take the next train for Washington, you know."

"Very true," smiled Ensign Fullerton. "But, sir, you are commanding officer of the 'Sudbury,' no matter where you may be, until you receive an order to relinquish command. Also, sir, your present appointments as officers in the service run until the orders appointing you are revoked."

"But that will all happen before the day is much older," replied Jack, with a forced smile.

It was going to come harder than he had thought, after this brief taste of real naval life, to give it all up!

No sooner had the "Sudbury" let go her anchors than Jack called for the gig. He and his comrades hurried below, doffing their uniforms, which went back into the dress suit

cases. Then, in citizen dress, with their precious swords again wrapped in chamois skin, the three submarines went over the side.

There was the same ceremony, however, which had attended their coming aboard. The marine guard turned out, presenting arms as Lieutenant Jack Benson passed to the side gangway. Ensign Fullerton and Mr. Drake stood by to salute Jack, and to receive his formal acknowledgment of their courtesy.

Their feet touched the bottom of the gig. They seated themselves, and the short row to the landing stage commenced.

On the landing stage stood an orderly, who promptly saluted.

Page 69

"The Commandant's compliments to Lieutenant Benson, and will the Lieutenant and his comrades report at the Commandant's office."

Early as the hour was, the commandant was at his desk, in uniform, and received the young officers most graciously.

"Mr. Benson, and gentlemen," declared the commandant of the navy yard, "you have done your work well, and as quickly as it could have been done. I congratulate you. The Secretary of the Navy, I believe, will thank you personally, It was splendidly done. And now, if you will come around to the officers' club with me, you will find that your breakfasts have been ordered. It will be an hour and a half, yet, before it will be necessary for me to furnish you with the carriage that will convey you to the railway station."

In the presence of this much older officer the lads did not attempt to make too merry at breakfast. Seated in the dining room of the officers' mess, they listened respectfully to whatever the commandant saw fit to discuss.

The meal was about over when a marine orderly entered, crossed the dining room, stopped at a respectful distance, and saluted.

"Telegram, sir."

The commandant received the envelope, drawing out the sheet it contained.

"Lieutenant Benson, this will interest you and your comrades," pursued the commandant.

"The order revoking my command of the gunboat," thought Jack. Oddly enough, though he expected it, knew it must happen, the arrival of the moment brought a strange sinking at heart.

"I wonder how on earth it could have happened?" pursued the commandant, his eyes again turned toward the paper. "Millard has escaped from Fort Craven, and, so far, has eluded recapture!"

CHAPTER XVIII

EPH BETS AN ANCHOR AGAINST A FISH-HOOK

"The government possesses the fellow's charts and notes, anyway," observed Jack Benson, rather proudly.

“Yes, thanks to you, gentlemen,” nodded the commandant. “Still, I fancy the authorities, will be fearfully annoyed over this escape.”

“There are no particulars, sir, you say?” queried Jack.

“No; the mere announcement of the fellow’s escape, and a request to military and naval authorities to be on the lookout for the fugitive The despatch also states that description will follow by wire.”

“We can give you a pretty fair word-portrait of Millard right now, sir,” offered Lieutenant Benson.

“And I wish you would.”

Jack proceeded to do so. He had about finished, when the carriage stopped punctually before the door of the officers’ club. The commandant took cordial leave of his young guests, after which they were driven to the railway station. Just a little later they found themselves leaning back in parlor car seats, bound for Washington.

Most of the way back the youngsters dozed in their chairs. Now, that the excitement was over, all felt need of rest.

Page 70

Not even at the railway station in Washington could they escape the watchfulness of the Navy Department. The same messenger who, the day before, had handed them their copies of the Regulations, now met Benson with a note.

"The Secretary will not be at his office until one o'clock this afternoon," announced Lieutenant Jack, looking up from the order. "We are directed to report at that hour."

"What shall we do until then?" demanded Eph, blankly, when the messenger had departed.

"Why, since we're still in the service," laughed Jack, "and as I've heard that the Arlington is much patronized by Navy officers, suppose we treat ourselves to a carriage, go to the Arlington and register. That will be the last grand feeling we'll get out of this."

His comrades rather merrily agreed. So, a few minutes later, the trio marched through the lobby of the Arlington to the desk. Jack picked up a pen, and registered:

"John Benson, U.S.N."

Hal and Eph followed suit. Then they were led to their connecting rooms.

"We'll have luncheon at half-past eleven," smiled Lieutenant Jack, as he dropped into an easy chair. "In the service one never knows when his next meal is coming."

"Good!" chuckled Hal, though there was a sad ring to his tone. "Keep up as long as you can, old fellow, the fiction that we're still in the naval service."

"Well, aren't we?" demanded Jack, stoutly.

"Surely," assented Hal, meekly.

"Say," demanded Eph, taking out notebook and pencil, "what is an ensign's pay, anyway?"

"Seventeen hundred dollars a year," replied Benson.

"I don't suppose the Navy Department will try to spring less than a day's pay on us," hinted Eph. "If that's right, then the government now owes me three hundred and sixty-five into seventeen hundred. Let me see—"

"Oh, cut it!" laughed Hal.

"What? My pay?" demanded Eph, "Not much, sir! I want the only money I ever really earned."

“One of us ought to drop Mr. Farnum a line,” hinted Jack, presently.

“Oh, well, let Hal do it,” offered Eph. “He carries the only fountain pen in the crowd.”

Without a word Hastings crossed to a table on which were envelopes and paper, and began to write. Perhaps he welcomed something to occupy his mind; for, truth to tell, each of these submarine boys had a woefully “blue” feeling. Though all were naval officers, still, at this moment, all realized that they would cease to be such as soon as they had received the thanks of the Secretary of the Navy. However, “blue” as all three felt, none of them hung back when half-past eleven arrived. They descended to the dining room, where they refreshed themselves heartily.

The meal over, there was just about enough time left for them to walk comfortably to the Navy Department.

They had walked a couple of blocks of the way when Hal suddenly felt the stamped letter in his pocket. He drew it out, and glanced hurriedly down the avenue.

Page 71

"I don't see a letter-box ahead, fellows, but I saw one, half-way down the block, at the last corner we passed. You two keep right on. I'll join you."

Presently Jack and Eph halted in their walk to look back.

"Where is Hal?" demanded Somers.

"He can't have lost us," muttered Jack.

"Oh, I guess he has simply taken a short cut to meet us ahead on the way."

Yet, though they continued to look for their comrade until they had neared the State, War and Navy Building, Hal Hastings had not again appeared in sight.

"Say, but this is fearfully careless of good old Hal," muttered Jack Benson, uneasily, as he glanced at his watch. "We've no time to go back to look for him, either, for we've barely time to reach the Secretary's office."

"We'll have to go in without Hal, then," grumbled Eph. "It makes me feel like a fool, too!"

Had the two lads but known it, there was still plenty of time. For the Secretary of the Navy may make an appointment with an understrapper, and then find that he must first see some more important personage.

There were "big" callers ahead of the boys that day, so that it was nearly two o'clock when Lieutenant Jack and Ensign Eph were admitted to the presence that they were to leave shorn of their brief rank and command.

"Good afternoon, Lieutenant Benson. Good afternoon, Mr. Somers," was Secretary Sanders's swift greeting. "You were most successful, and I must congratulate you heartily. But—where is Mr. Hastings?"

"We don't know, Mr. Secretary," Jack admitted. "He left us for a short time, as we thought, and, since then—"

Mr. Sanders wheeled sharply as the door opened and a clerk came in.

"Pardon me, sir," apologized the clerk. "But a note has just come for Lieutenant Benson, sir, and the messenger was insistent that it was a most important matter—"

"You may take your note and read it, Lieutenant," suggested the Secretary of the Navy.

Young Benson gave a start when he recognized, in the address, the handwriting of Hal Hastings.

In another instant Jack gave a much more violent start. For these were the words that met his astounded gaze.

"Dear Jack: I am in a Washington police station, feeling like a number-one idiot. Soon after leaving you I ran into Millard, face to face, There was a policeman within two hundred feet at the moment. I let out a full siren yell and dashed at Millard. He held on to me until the policeman reached the spot. I let him hold me, thinking that the easiest way. But Millard produced a paper—a request from the military authorities at Fort Craven, to arrest and hold anyone pointed out by the bearer. I talked—some—to that policeman, but it did no good. He took me to the station house, and here I am! Millard vanished, after saying that he'd wire the news of my arrest to Fort Craven. You'll have to explain me out of this. Yours disgustedly, Hal."

Page 72

"May I read this to you, Mr. Secretary?" begged Jack Benson.

"Do so, Lieutenant."

"I will be back in a moment," muttered the Secretary of the Navy, rising, and hastily quitting the room.

The instant that high official was gone Eph caught at his sides with his hands.

"Oh, wow! Woof! Umpah!" chuckled young Somers, his face distorted with glee. "Some one catch me! I'm choking! Great Scott, what wouldn't I have given to see that? Hal, the quiet, the dignified? Oh, dear! Oh, dear. Hal pounces on the fellow, to arrest him, and Hal is the one who gets pinched Woo-oo! I can see Hal's face right now I'll wager an anchor to a fish-hook that the astonished look is stamped on Hal's face so hard that it won't come off for a week. Oh—woof!"

Eph was laughing so hard that the tears streamed down his face.

"Quit that!" commanded Jack, stepping over to his comrade, his own face stern. "It's no laughing matter."

"Why, they won't hang Hal!" sputtered Eph, as soon as he could talk. "Hal will be at liberty almost at once. But fancy the shock! Imagine the dear old fellow's astonishment, and the jolt to his feelings."

Again Eph Somers went off into a paroxysm of laughter. It seemed uncontrollable, for Eph had a strong sense of the ludicrous, and Hal's face, as Somers pictured it, must have been a tremendously funny sight at the instant when Millard so neatly turned the tables.

"Come, quit your nonsense!" grumbled Jack, disgustedly.

"I can't," roared Eph, going off into still another burst of laughter.

Just at that instant Somers gave himself the lie. The door opened, admitting the Secretary of the Navy. In a fraction of a second Ensign Eph had straightened up, while his face was solemn enough for an Indian chief's countenance.

"I have just been straightening out that little matter," explained Mr. Sanders. "I have talked with the police, and have described Hastings. The police are in deep chagrin over their blunder. Mr. Hastings is now at liberty and on his way here."

At a motion from Mr. Sanders the two young officers seated themselves. The Secretary turned to his desk to sign some papers.

From Eph, suddenly, came a suppressed, explosive sound. Jack seated beside him on a sofa gave Somers an indignant elbow jab. The Secretary glanced up, then resumed his writing.

A minute later there came from Eph the sound of another smothered explosion. The picture of Hal Hastings's indignant astonishment had once more been conjured up before young Somers's face. Poor Eph was red in the face with all the effort of keeping back his laughter.

"I fear you must have caught some cold, standing watch on the gunboat's bridge," said the Secretary, sympathetically.

That sobered Somers in an instant. The notion that he—he a sea-dog accustomed to stand watch in all weathers, could catch cold through exposure of the kind just mentioned made Eph feel a sense of ghastly humiliation.

Page 73

Five minutes later Ensign Hal Hastings was shown into the office. The Secretary of the Navy greeted him kindly, though with a twinkle in his eyes.

"The paper that caused my trouble was one that was taken from Mr. Benson when he couldn't help himself," Hal explained. "For some reason, the military authorities never discovered that Millard had that paper about him. It was enough to save him from arrest an hour ago."

"And Millard is still at large," nodded Mr. Sanders. "It's a matter for the military authorities and the Secret Service, I imagine. I don't see how the Navy can be drawn into it. However, I am going to ask you young gentlemen to retain your special appointments a little longer. I may yet have considerable need of you in this affair. You are stopping at the Arlington? Perhaps, for this afternoon, you would enjoy going over to the United Service Club, where you are likely to meet a good many Army and Navy officers. I will send some one along with you who will see to it that you have ten-day cards at the club."

At any other time this all would have meant to Jack Benson that he was still an officer in the Navy. Just now, however, it meant that Millard was at large, and Benson had a strong notion that it would yet fall to the lot of the submarine boys to put that wretch where he belonged.

CHAPTER XIX

JACK'S CALLER AT THE UNITED SERVICE CLUB

"Ho-ho! Haw-haw! Woof!"

Eph found himself started again, the very instant the boys found themselves in the lower corridor of the building.

"Let him alone," uttered Jack, scornfully. "The poor fellow had better work it all out of his system."

"But, Hal, your face—when the policeman took you, on Millard's complaint!" sputtered Somers, next going off into another burst of laughter.

"It didn't seem funny, at the time," returned Hal Hastings, quietly.

"Ho-ho! Haw! Of course, not. Say, Hal, can you do me a tremendous favor? Can you look, just for a moment, the way you did when that blue-coat pinched you?"

Hal began to laugh, despite the fact that his loss of Millard still rankled under his quiet outside.

“Now, hush up,” warned Benson, suddenly. “Here comes Lieutenant Ulwin, who has undertaken to present us at the United Service Club. Idiots are barred from the club, you know, Eph.”

By a great exercise of will power Eph managed to straighten his face by the time that the lieutenant overtook them. They entered a cab. By this time the young naval officers were beginning to understand that it is the usual custom to go about Washington in a carriage.

“Have you ever been at a Service Club before?” inquired their guide.

“We breakfasted at the club at Norfolk this morning?” Jack answered.

“Your acquaintance with our Service clubs is not very large, then?”

Page 74

"We have also been at the club at Fort Craven."

"Oh!" smiled Lieutenant Ulwin. "I guess you gentlemen have been about a little more in the two branches of the service, than I had suspected. You have seen the officers of both the Army and the Navy at play?"

"Mostly at table, I should say," laughed Benson.

"The club is the only place where we can go and get away from shop-talk," continued Ulwin. "As a rule the Army and Navy men at our club do not talk much shop. It may be different to-day, however."

"Why to-day?" asked Jack.

"Because—well, you see, I am introducing three rather famous strangers to-day."

"Meaning—" began Hal, quietly.

"You young gentlemen, of course. The whole nation has heard much about the submarine boys. Yet it is in the Army and the Navy, after all, that the deepest, most abiding interest in you exists."

"This red spot on my cheek isn't a blush," explained Ensign Eph, suddenly. "It's where a mosquito bit me."

"I am not joking," replied Ulwin, with a friendly smile. "All the officers of the Navy know about you by this time."

"They'll be greatly disappointed, when they see us, then, won't they?" laughed Hal Hastings.

"Now, see here," protested Eph, earnestly, "I can stand a good deal. But, if they see us walking around the club, and ask who left the lid off the can of shrimps—I'll fight!"

Ulwin laughed heartily.

"I shall have to pass the word to our worst jokers," he smiled, "that it won't be safe for the fellow who starts in to tease you young men."

"Why, if anyone does start, we've got to keep our tongues behind our teeth," returned Hal. "We're only boys—kids—and we can't say anything smart to men who have been a good many years in the service."

"You can answer back, if anyone starts to have any fun with you," replied Lieutenant Ulwin. "Remember, a club is where all men stand on an equal footing. If an admiral

gets after you, you will do well to swallow any witticism he may try on you. But with any officer below an admiral you don't have to be so careful."

Eph Somers immediately began to look thoughtful. Now, Eph did know how to say caustic things when occasion seemed to demand.

"Here we are," announced Lieutenant Ulwin, suddenly, as the cab stopped before the club building.

Hal went in at Ulwin's side. Jack gripped Eph by the elbow, pulling the auburn-haired one back a few paces.

"Now, see here, Eph, remember that we don't want any funny answers inside."

"But Ulwin says—"

"You listen to what I'm saying, Eph. I've known you longer than Mr. Ulwin has. Just remember that we're boys—b-o-y-s—boys. Not one of us is quite eighteen yet. If we've gained a little fame for five minutes, we mustn't begin to imagine that we're eight feet high and on a par with men forty years old. So be careful, Eph. If anyone starts to have any fun with you, come back at him a different way."

Page 75

"How?" whispered Eph.

"Look stupid."

"What?"

"Look stupid."

"I don't see much in that."

"Why, it's the funniest answer possible; and, besides, it isn't fresh or forward."

"How do you make that out?" Eph inquired.

"Why, Eph, boy, if you're half as famous as you may think you are, then folks will know you can't be stupid. So, if you pretend to be, you'll have everyone guessing what you mean by looking that way. On the other hand, if you look stupid, and no one is surprised, then you'll discover that that's just the way the crowd had you sized up in advance."

"I see," nodded Eph, but it was plain that Jack's almost direct command was not wholly pleasing to Somers.

The two comrades now caught up with Ulwin and Hal at the elevator.

"We'll go up to the reading room, first," proposed Lieutenant Ulwin. "That's where the afternoon crowd is usually found."

Anyone who had been looking for "color" or pomp would have been disappointed. The only uniforms in sight were those worn by two bell boys. The officers of the Army and Navy present were all in citizen dress. They looked like a lot of cheerful, prosperous business men.

"Hullo, Ulwin, what are you doing with my friends from Dunhaven?" eagerly called one young man, rising hastily and coming forward. "Benson, I'm glad to see you. And you, Hastings. And you, Somers."

"Didn't know you knew the young gentlemen, McCrea," broke in Ulwin.

"Don't know them? When they made me the laughing-stock of every mess-room crowd in the Navy for months!" retorted McCrea.

Jack, Hal and Eph were shaking hands with the speaker with a good deal of pleasure.

It was Lieutenant McCrea, one-time watch officer on the battleship "Luzon." At one time McCrea had doubted that submarine boats were, in all respects, as wonderful craft as was claimed. The submarine boys had paid him back in most laughable fashion. Lieutenant McCrea, at one time, had felt himself much aggrieved over the wholesome teasing of his brother officers in consequence; but he had long since learned to accept the whole incident as a good and deserved joke.

Now, McCrea stood wringing the hands of the boys as though he had found long-lost friends.

"What are you doing these days?" McCrea wanted to know. "Anything besides testing new boats at Dunhaven?"

"You must greet them as comrades, McCrea," continued Lieutenant Ulwin.

"What? Cadets at Annapolis?"

In this case McCrea wondered at their being there, for cadets would be considered forward who visited an officers' club.

"Benson is a lieutenant, his friends ensigns," replied Ulwin.

"Come, come!" laughed McCrea. "I'm easy—these boys know that. But don't tell me—"

"Fact, though," replied Ulwin. "They hold special appointments, for some special duty or other. I'm here, at the direction of the Navy Department, to introduce these young brother officers of ours, and to procure ten-day cards for them."

Page 76

By this time the news had spread. A score of officers, young or middle-aged, were crowding about. Ulwin had his hands full introducing the submarine boys. Yet they stood the ordeal well. The habit of command, based on discipline, had given these boys plenty of poise and self-possession. Nor were any attempts made, at that time, to have any good-humored fun with them. Half a dozen officers representing foreign navies were present. These, too, came in for introductions. The foreigners were, mainly, military or naval officers attached to foreign embassies at Washington.

"By Jove, Benson, I've had it in mind, for some time, that I wanted to meet you and grasp your hand," murmured Lieutenant Abercrombie, of the British Navy, as he drew Lieutenant Jack to one side. "By Jove, old fellow, I want to meet you soon and have a good old talk all by ourselves."

"That will be most agreeable to me," nodded Jack, pleasantly.

"And your comrades, too," added Abercrombie. "You know, you're already known on the other side. Fact, I assure you. Only the other day I picked up a London magazine and read quite an account of the doings of you three. I was especially interested in an account of how you three discovered a way of leaving a submarine at the bottom and swimming to the surface; then diving and re-entering the craft while she's still on the bottom. But your method is a secret, I suppose?"

"Yes," smiled Jack. "At least, the American Navy alone shares the secret with us."

"Oh, I'm not asking it, you know, old fellow," Lieutenant Abercrombie assured him.

"Is Mr. Benson here?" called a bell-boy, from the doorway.

"Very much so," replied Lieutenant Ulwin, dryly.

"May I give you a message, sir?" asked the bell-boy, coming closer.

After excusing himself, Benson stepped aside with the boy. Yet the latter spoke loudly enough for several to overhear.

"There's a lady, downstairs at the door, would like to see you, sir. She says it is very, very important, sir."

"Did she give any name?" inquired astonished Jack.

"No, sir; she begged you would overlook that, sir, and just step down to the door for a few moments."

"All right; I'll go," nodded Benson. "But it looks queer."

Excusing himself to his host, Ulwin, and to some of the officers with whom he had been chatting, the leader of the submarine boys went quickly to the coat-room for his hat, then descended in the elevator.

“Vairee strange place, zis, for a lady to follow a zhentleman—to hees club,” drawled a French captain.

One or two of the others laughed, imagining that this was some flirtation in which the submarine boy had been engaged. But Eph flared up a bit, looking very red, as he muttered:

“It’s only fair to tell you, gentlemen, that we submarine boys don’t appreciate jokes at the expense of the finest fellow who ever lived—Mr. Jack Benson!”

Page 77

"Good boy" murmured Teal.

Yet, when an hour had slipped by, and Benson had not returned, even his loyal comrades began to wonder a good deal. From that frame of mind they passed on, at the end of another hour, to worry.

CHAPTER XX

THE GIRL IN THE CAB

As Jack reached the door of the United Service Club he found no one at the doorway.

"That's strange," he muttered.

But in another moment he looked down the street. A hundred feet away stood a closed cab. From it a woman leaned, beckoning slightly.

Had she been veiled, Jack would have been instantly suspicious.

But her face showed, and it was a young, fresh, pretty and wholesome looking face.

"I don't know her, but she is very evidently a lady," thought Jack Benson, quickly.

Accordingly, he stepped along the sidewalk, lifting his hat courteously as he neared the vehicle.

"You are Mr. Benson?" inquired the young woman.

"Yes, madam."

"I trust you will pardon my calling here, and sending you a message. But it was very urgent that I see you at once—how urgent you cannot yet understand."

"I am here, madam," Jack replied; not knowing what else to say.

"I am going to make another strange request of you."

"It is granted in advance, if possible."

"Will you step inside with me, and drive a little way?" inquired the young woman.

Jack glanced quickly at her. Her face was flushed; evidently she was embarrassed.

"Won't you tell me a little more, madam, about your reason for wishing to see me?" he suggested.

“Yes; but not here—*please!*” she begged. “I do not want to be seen about here. I shall not detain you long, Mr. Benson. All I ask is that you sit here beside me, and that we drive a little way, while I say a few words to you.”

Jack hesitated. He did not like the look of the adventure. Yet, on the other hand, it was hard to see harm or danger in it. The young woman was evidently, as he had at first guessed, a lady.

“Then you do not feel able to tell me, here, what you wish to speak with me about?” he inquired.

“I shall begin as soon as we start on our drive,” she promised. “Oh, please do not refuse me. You cannot imagine how much is at stake—for me!”

Though Jack Benson felt the peculiarity of the request from a stranger, he was unable to see how harm could result from his being kind.

“Very good, then,” he agreed. “I will do my best by listening to you.”

After he had entered the cab, and had taken the seat, beside her, the young woman turned to look at him keenly.

Jack, for his part, saw that she was rather better dressed than the average. He imagined her to be the daughter of a family in comfortable circumstances.

Page 78

"You do not know who I am, of course?" she began.

"No, madam."

"But you do know one in whom I am much interested," she continued.

For some reason that he could not explain to himself, Jack Benson began to feel very uncomfortable under the witching battery of her handsome eyes.

"Who is he?" inquired the submarine boy.

"You know him as—"

She paused, as though stricken with sudden reluctance.

"Well?"

"The name by which you know him is Millard."

Had Jack Benson been lashed at that instant with a whip he could not have been more astounded.

"Who?" he cried. "What? That in fam—"

He checked himself abruptly.

"It was kind of you to stop as you did," the young woman declared, gratefully. "The man whom you know as Millard is my promised husband."

"I'm sor—I mean, I'm astonished," sputtered Jack Benson.

Then he turned to take another keen look into her face.

"What do you want to say to me about Millard?" he demanded.

"I ask you—I beg you—to aid him to escape from Washington—from the country. Yet, to do that, all he needs is to get safely out of the District of Columbia. You know that he is here in Washington, or I would not have told you as much."

"Does Millard find it so very difficult to get out of Washington?" queried Jack, grimly.

"If he did not, Mr. Benson, believe me I would never come to the enemy to beseech mercy. Probably I am not telling you anything you do not already know," she went on, rather bitterly. "But every avenue of escape from Washington is blocked by Secret Service men. It is not so difficult to hide in the city, but to get out of it is impossible—today."

“Madam,” Jack answered, softly, “it would be my desire to give you every bit of aid and comfort possible. However, what you ask is simply impossible. For one thing, it would be in direct defiance of my—”

“Oath” he was about to add, but checked himself. On account of their knowing that he was to be sought at the United Service Club it was possible—even likely—that the enemy knew of his actual connection with the Navy. Yet, Benson did not propose to supply the other side with any gratis information. So he added:

“Contrary to my duty as an American. I am loyal to the Flag, madam,” the boy continued. “Do you know the nature of Millard’s offense?”

“No-o-o-o; that is, not exactly.”

“Do you wish me to tell you?”

“Why—he—he—told me it was some dispute over international affairs,” stammered the young woman.

“Do you feel yourself a loyal American?” asked Jack, looking at her curiously.

“Yes!” she answered, without an instant’s hesitation, looking straight into his eyes, almost defiantly.

“And you love this man, Millard?”

Page 79

"Yes!" Yet her declaration was not so emphatic as it would have been a few moments before.

Jack Benson sighed.

"Would you love a man who had betrayed his country's flag?" he asked, presently, in a very low voice.

"Has Don—has the man you know as Millard offered to do that?"

It was not suspicion, but incredulity that rang in her voice.

Jack Benson knew, now, that he was dealing with a woman who knew herself to be a patriot—a lover of her country.

"I don't know that I have any right to say anything," Jack answered, evasively. "Mr. Millard is a civil engineer, isn't he?"

"Yes, and a mechanical engineer, too," the girl admitted, without attempt at concealment. "As you also doubtless know, he served, once, with a revolutionary army in Guatemala. It is in some sort of scrape like this that he finds himself now. Some trouble that he has gotten himself into with this government in order to befriend the revolutionists of some Central American republic."

"Did Millard tell you so?" demanded Jack Benson, his eyes now very wide open.

"He let me believe as much," the girl replied, one hand toying with a fold of her dress, while she glanced down. "And that is the truth, is it not?"

"No!" broke, half-angrily, from young Benson. The passion would have rung in his denial, but he remembered that he was talking to this girl about her betrothed husband.

"You spoke of the Flag a moment ago," cried the girl, suddenly, and gazing searchingly into the boy's eyes. "Do you mean to tell me that Don—that Mr. Millard would be engaged in any work hostile to his own country?"

"Is the one we call Millard an American citizen?" asked Benson.

"Yes."

"Then—"

Jack came to an abrupt stop after that one word. He would not tell the dreadful news to this spirited young woman. It was not necessary.

But she became insistent

“Mr. Benson,” she cried, “this has gone too far not to have a full explanation. Has—has Mr. Millard done aught to betray the United States? For that matter, how could he?”

“Madam,” Benson replied, gravely, “no Central American republic would want charts of our fortified harbors, or notes concerning the fortifications, the harbor mines, and so on, for the very simple reason that no Central American republic would ever be equal to the task of attempting to invade the United States.”

“Did Mr. Millard steal such plans—make such notes?”

She hissed the question sharply, her face now deathly white.

“That is the charge against him,” Jack nodded.

“Did he do it?”

“I caught him at it, opposite Fort Craven,” young Benson answered.

A low, smothered cry escaped the girl. Her head rested against the side of the carriage as though her brain were reeling. But at length she spoke.

Page 80

"You—you would not deceive me," she faltered. "Yet tell me more."

"I can't," answered Jack, with a shake of his head. "Further than that, I cannot go."

"Oh, I see," she nodded, "and I do not blame you. You feel that, whatever you told me, I would tell him. But I wouldn't!"

Though the girl's face was still fearfully pallid, her eyes, as she turned to gaze into the submarine boy's face, flashed with a new fire.

Then, after a brief pause:

"Whatever he is, or has done, I am an American," she added, quietly.

"This has been a miserable fifteen minutes for me," responded Jack Benson. "I have been torn between the impulse to mind my own business, and the fear that you may be throwing yourself away on a man whom you would promptly learn to despise."

"I shall never give Donald Graves another thought as a lover," the girl rejoined, promptly. "Nor shall I shelter him. I am going to him now!"

"Then you have an appointment with him? You know where to find him?"

"Yes," replied the girl, looking at the submarine boy rather queerly. "Do you care to go with me to meet Donald Graves—the one you knew as Millard? But I am stupid, or worse. That would be to run you into needless danger—for such a man as I now know Donald Graves to be would be desperate."

"I am not afraid of him," retorted Jack quietly. "If you fear only for me, I beg you to take me to him!"

CHAPTER XXI

DAISY HUSTON DECIDES FOR THE FLAG

"It is a somewhat lonely place, on the outskirts of the city," warned the girl. "Mr. Graves had thought that, if no other chance offered, he might possibly get away by leaving that house and taking to the country roads. For he knows that, if he takes a train at any point, he won't ride five miles before he'll find himself in the clutches of a Secret Service man. Oh, he knows how well the trains and the steamboats will be watched. He dreads, even, that the country roads will be watched."



"I don't know anything about the Secret Service lines that are out," Jack confessed, honestly. "Yet I imagine that every possible precaution has been taken to capture Millard—or Graves."

"You do not know my name," cried the girl, as though struck by a sudden thought. "Mr. Benson, you have been wrapped in so much mystery, so much deceit, so much lying and treachery that I won't even have you guess whether I am telling you the truth. Here is my card-case. Take out a card for yourself."

The request was so much like a command that Benson obeyed. On the card, in Old English script, he read:

"Miss Daisy Huston."

"I thank you, Miss Huston," he acknowledged, gravely, handing back her card-case.

"Will you signal the driver to stop?" she requested. They were now driving through the western part of Washington.

Page 81

When the driver found himself signaled he reined up, then came to the cab door.

"You know where to go?" she said.

"Yes," nodded the man.

"Drive there, then."

The driver whipped up his horses to a better speed, the vehicle bowling along now.

"I very much fear that I am running you into danger," declared Daisy Huston, soberly.

"Mr. Benson, if you decide to leave the cab, or to have me take you back to the center of the city, I shall not imagine you to be lacking in courage."

"I cannot be in any greater danger than you are, Miss Huston," Benson ventured, with a smile.

"Oh, it is much different in my case," argued the girl. "Donald Graves would not attack a woman, especially the woman he had professed to love."

"Miss Huston, do you feel like discussing this matter any further?" hazarded the young acting naval lieutenant.

"Yes; as much as you wish."

"I confess to being a bit curious."

"About what?"

"Did Millard—Graves, I mean, have any great reason to need money? More, I mean, than he could earn by honest work?"

"Yes," admitted Miss Daisy. "My mother is dead. Under her will I inherit a considerable little fortune when I am twenty-five. But it is solely on condition that I have my father's permission to marry the man of my choice. I could remain single until twenty-five, but I am only nineteen, and Mr. Graves complained that it would be an eternity to wait."

"Then your father did not approve Millard? I am going to call him that because the other name is unfamiliar."

"My father feared that Donald was a fortune hunter. He said he would be satisfied if Donald could show that he were rich in his own name."

"So, then, Graves, or Millard, hit upon the plan of stealing our harbor fortification secrets and selling them to another government," said Jack, meditatively. "Yet I am puzzled to

understand how he found the chance. There are no foreigners openly engaged in buying our national secrets."

"I think I can explain all that, though it will be but guess-work," replied Daisy Huston, thoughtfully. "My father was for some years minister to Sweden. He is still well acquainted among foreign diplomats here in Washington. Some of them are often at our house. Donald must have met one there who tempted him, or pointed the way to a fortune. Yes; I am certain that must be the answer."

"Did—but perhaps you don't like my asking such questions?"

"No; I do not mind—now," replied Daisy Huston. "I began to feel as though I had been an innocent party to Donald Graves's wrongdoing. When I went to try to see you, this afternoon, I supposed only that Donald had gotten into trouble through some filibustering expedition to Central America. I did not look upon that as so serious, you see. But selling the national secrets is quite another matter," she added, bitterly. "I shall never care for the man again. I have wrenched him from my heart in these last few minutes. So you may ask me any questions that will help to clear up the matter."

Page 82

"Thank you, Miss Huston. Then did Graves, or Millard, as I call him, express any hope of becoming suddenly well to do?"

"Yes; and now I can understand how he has lied to me. He let me believe that he hoped to profit through mining concessions to Americans that would follow the overthrow of one of the petty despots in Central America."

"Yet Millard has been away from Washington much, has he not?"

"Most of the time during the last four months. He generally managed to get over here for one day out of the seven; sometimes two days at a time."

"I believe the whole matter is becoming rather clear in my mind. I do not mind telling you, Miss Huston, how I first came to know the fellow. He was over at our shipyard in Dunhaven, trying to get employment on the construction of submarine boats. But something in his manner made us suspect him, and he didn't get near the secrets of any of our boats."

There was one other thing, however, that Benson felt he would like to have cleared up. So he inquired:

"How did you know that I was at the United Service Club? Did Millard know? Did he tell you to go there?"

"He guessed where you might be. He asked me to drive to the club first; if you were not there, then I was to drive to the Arlington. Failing to find you at either place, I was to go back to the hotel in the evening. In the event of my finding you at the hotel I was to see you in the ladies' parlor. But, oh! What can you think of me, Mr. Benson, to have come to you on such an errand—on a mission to save a betrayer of his Flag?"

"You came innocently, Miss Huston; that is all that I can understand. And your whole attitude, since you discovered the truth, has been that of a loyal American girl who would crush her heart, even, for her country's honor."

"It isn't going to be as hard as you think, perhaps," she smiled, bitterly, "to cast the man out of my heart. The man that I now know Donald Graves to be never was in my heart. There is no room, there, for a traitor."

She glanced out of the cab at the scene through which they were passing. Jack Benson looked at the same time.

"I am terribly uneasy," she confessed. "Perhaps, even now, Mr. Benson, you had much better leave this carriage and let me go forward alone. I am a woman, and therefore safe. But I fear—yes, actually fear for your life when he finds out!"

“Don’t be at all uneasy about me, Miss Huston,” begged Jack, with cool confidence. “I have had rather a sturdy training in the art of taking care of myself.”

Though he did not allow the girl to see the motion, Jack felt stealthily at his right hip pocket. Yes; the loaded revolver was there. Jack did not believe much in the practice of carrying concealed weapons. He had great contempt both for the nerve and the judgment of fool boys who carried revolvers, loaded or otherwise. But just now the situation was different. Jack Benson was an acting lieutenant in the United States Navy. Just before leaving the Navy Department he and his comrades had each been advised to take a proffered weapon and carry it against the chance that they might find Millard—or Graves—in Washington, and find themselves under the necessity of taking him prisoner.

Page 83

"Spies and traitors are taken alive or dead," the official had remarked who had handed them the weapons.

"How much further have we to go?" Jack inquired, as the cab turned down a country lane.

"Only a very short distance, now," replied Daisy Huston.

"Jove, but she's a stunning girl for nerve and principle," thought Lieutenant Jack, admiringly. "She's going, now, to what must be the tragedy of her plans and hopes, yet she has her color back again, and looks as composed as though out only for an airing!"

"There is the house," almost whispered the girl, at last, resting a steady, cool hand on his arm.

Jack looked and saw the place—a little, oldfashioned house, standing in among trees, some hundred feet from the road. In that swift glance he also noted that there were no other buildings near.

Daisy Huston did not ask whether the young man at her side proposed to try to arrest the man he sought. She was too discreet to pry into his plans.

Up into the little yard before the house the horses trotted. Then, just as the cab was coming to a stop, the driver cracked his whip-lash twice.

Immediately the door flew open. Millard, as Jack Benson knew him, stepped out jauntily, a smile of delight on his face.

"Good enough, Daisy," he cried, as he strode toward the cab. "I see that you have won Benson over to our side. He shall be my friend, after this. But, Daisy, *what*—"

For the girl had sprung lightly out ere Jack Benson could assist her. The girl now stood, drawn to her full height, yet without affecting any theatrical pose. But over her lips hovered a smile of cool disdain that the look in her eyes heightened.

"Don't lie to me any more, Donald Graves," commanded the girl, steadily, "and don't deceive yourself. Both tasks, I know, will be hard for a man so vile that he'd sell his country's Flag!"

Millard stared at her in growing horror. Then anger rushed to his face.

"Daisy!" he gasped. "Have you betrayed me? Have you brought Benson here as an enemy?"

Daisy did not answer her former lover. She continued to gaze at him with an irony of expression that sent the hot blood mounting to his head.

"Can't you speak?" he demanded. "Then, Benson, why don't you talk?"

"Because," replied Jack, "I am waiting for Miss Huston to say to you all, or as little, as she cares to say."

"Speak, then!" commanded Millard, turning imperiously to the girl.

"And my command to you," retorted the girl, "is different. Silence! Never again address me, you traitor to your Flag!"

Millard was swift to realize the fullness of the girl's contempt. He knew that everything between them was over.

"Come, come, then, girl!" he uttered, harshly. "It is time for you to be gone! Step to the cab and get away from here, for I would spare you what is to follow—my reckoning with Benson!"

Page 84

He clapped his hands. The door opened, and four men stepped out. Their type was not hard to determine. They were of the scum of humanity—ready for any desperate deed.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PART OF ABERCROMBIE, R.N.

“Come, girl, you must go!” commanded Millard, harshly.

“I will not,” she replied, coldly, “until my escort is ready to go with me.”

“He will not go with you,” replied Millard, significantly. “And you must not remain. What is to be done here is no thing for a dainty woman to see.”

“Mr. Benson,” appealed the girl, “will you enter the cab first?”

“If he does, the cab will not leave,” sneered Millard.

All this while the four men who had just come from the house were stealthily grouping themselves. Jack watched them alertly. He did not intend to be taken unawares, yet he hesitated to draw his pistol while Miss Huston was there.

“Go, girl!” Millard ordered again.

“I have told you, already, that I shall go only when Mr. Benson gives the word and accompanies me,” replied the girl, white but courageous.

“Then we won’t waste more time,” laughed the wretch, harshly. “Since you will stay, then you must be a witness of what you have brought on my worst foe! Close in, men—get him!”

As the men sprang to obey, and Jack dodged nimbly back, Daisy Huston uttered a piercing scream. The next thing she did was wholly natural. Under the intense strain of her feelings the girl fainted.

“Take her!” nodded Millard, to the driver, who was plainly one of the desperate lot. “Take her from here as fast as you can.”

The driver, ready for his work, snatched up the girl’s light form.

“Have a care what you do—all of you!” cried Jack Benson, warningly, and now, in his hand, the revolver gleamed.

But one of the wretches, darting in at Jack's right, from behind, aimed a blow with a cudgel at the weapon. He struck it from the young lieutenant's hand.

Down to the ground it fell, but Lieutenant Benson was as quick as thought, now.

He bent over, snatching up the weapon, then ducked away from a follow-up blow at his own head, and sprang back.

"You first, then, Millard!" cried the young acting naval officer.

Full of purpose, Lieutenant Jack pressed the trigger. It stuck. No report followed. That blow from the cudgel had jammed the cylinder.

Having dropped the senseless form of Daisy Huston in the cab the driver sprang to the box, lashing the horses, just as Lieutenant Benson discovered the uselessness of his weapon as a firearm.

Then, indeed, young Benson knew that this must be a fight to the very death. Yet he was a naval officer at heart, as much as by special appointment. At a time like this he held life cheaply.

The first man to get within reach was laid flat by a blow with the butt of Jack's revolver.

Page 85

Instantly young Benson wheeled, to strike at another pressing foe. Instead, he received a glancing though painful blow on his own left shoulder. Ere the assailant could recover, however, Benson leaped at him and would have felled him had not Millard himself leaped in, striking up the young naval officer's arm.

Once more Lieutenant Jack leaped back. His whole body was alert, nerves and muscles responding magnificently. He fairly vibrated defense.

"Close in on him, men—surround him!" snarled Millard. "You've got to get him! We haven't many minutes left. We don't know at what instant to look for interference."

Jack landed effectively on another of the rascals. Just as he was wheeling, however, to ward off the attack of another, a stick landed against his left knee, partly crippling him.

In moving backward Benson almost stumbled over a stone half the size of his head.

Right there, in the same movement with which he thrust the revolver into one of his pockets, he bent down, snatched up the heavy stone, and held it poised over his head.

"Now, come on! Now, close in!" cried Jack Benson, exulting. "The first man who gets too close has his head split open! Who wants it?"

His usually, good-humored face was transformed by the fiery rage of battle.

Surely there was some of the old Norseman streak left in Jack Benson's make-up.

As he stood there, keenly alert, ready to heave the rock, he looked like a young Thor armed with massive stone hammer.

"Spread! Get in back of him!" yelled Millard, hoarsely. "I'll take the position of attack in front. Down him!"

"Guess which way I'm going to heave this stone!" cried Jack, tauntingly, as he half wheeled, so as to watch those trying to steal a march in his rear.

"Bosh! You can soon stop that, men!" jeered Millard, suddenly. "Fall back and get a fistful of stones. Rain them in on the youngster at a safe distance. One of you will soon hit him and send him down!"

Young Benson gasped inwardly with dismay, though his face did not blanch. Millard's followers drew back to obey.

Yes! These fellows could throw small stones from a much greater distance than the young lieutenant could hurl the large one. They had but to keep up this fire for a few

seconds when one of them was certain to hit him in the head, putting him out of the fight.

Jack Benson dropped the big stone, though he stood over it. Like a flash his revolver came out again. Aiming at Millard, the young naval officer made frantic efforts to make the cylinder revolve. But the weapon proved to be hopelessly jammed.

"Now, keep on volleying the youngster with until you have him down and wholly out!" yelled Millard, hoarsely.

The air seemed filled with stones. Jack hopped about as nimbly as possible, dodging all he could. Yet one part of his body after another was hit.

Page 86

Rat-a-tat-tat! Jack hardly comprehended what this new noise meant when it grew in volume. Then a horseman rode into the yard at a charge.

“One down!” yelled the rider, with savage glee, as he drove his mount squarely against one of the wretches, bowling him over and underfoot.

Hardly seeming to veer, the rider made for another fellow, and barely missed him.

Just a second later, so it seemed, this valiant rider hauled the horse on its haunches, and swung back, heading for another wretch.

Millard leaped at the horseman, a stone in his uplifted fist.

But Jack Benson saw him, and a well-planted blow sent Millard to the ground.

“Bully good of you, Benson, old chap!” called a hearty voice. Then the horseman spurred forward, running down another of Benson’s late assailants. The two remaining bolted as fast as they could, go.

“Mr. Abercrombie!” cried Lieutenant Jack.

“Yes, it’s I: and jolly glad I got here in good time,” laughed the British naval officer, whom this brief rollicking battle had made as gleeful as a boy.

“But how on earth did you happen to turn up?” asked Jack, a feeling of mystery coming over him after he had glanced at Millard and had made sure that the latter would “sleep” for some time to come.

“Why, I was out for my afternoon canter, dear old fellow,” bubbled Lieutenant Abercrombie, R.N. “I was coming down the road at a hard trot, don’t you know, when a cab rolled by. A young woman—and a deuced pretty one—thrust her head out and shrieked at me. What could I do? It was deuced extraordinary, and I had to do something quickly, so I rode alongside the cab and told the driver to hold up. I must have looked unusually menacing, don’t you know, for, by Jove, the fellow obeyed me. Then I reached up and yanked him down off the cab. The fellow really started to blackguard me, while the young woman was shouting something at me at the same time I had to silence the fellow, don’t you know, so I could understand the young lady. So I struck him over the head with the butt of my riding whip. My word, I must have hit the blackguard hard, for he just curled up and lay down. The young lady sprang out of the cab and begged me to hurry down here. She looked able to take care of herself, so I just left my revolver with her, and, by Jove, here I am—and deuced glad of it. Upon my word, Benson, dear old fellow, all the luck seemed to be running against you.”

“It was,” Jack admitted, dryly. “But now I’ve got the man I came after. I’ve got to keep him, too,” added Lieutenant Benson, gravely.

As he spoke, the submarine boy drew a pair of handcuffs from an inner pocket.

“By Jove, do naval youngsters in this country carry such jewelry?” murmured Lieutenant Abercrombie, R.N.

“They do, I guess, when they’re engaged on work like mine at present,” smiled Lieutenant Jack, United States Navy.

Page 87

"Now, then, by Jove, I think I'd better go back to the young lady," suddenly decided Abercrombie, for Millard still showed no signs of recovering his senses. One of the other two men who had been ridden down now recovered enough to begin to crawl away furtively.

"Do you want that chap?" asked Abercrombie.

"I have no facilities for keeping him a prisoner," Jack answered. "For that matter, I guess he's nothing but a hired tough. The Washington police can find and take care of him at their convenience."

"Good enough," nodded the British lieutenant. "And now—"

"Would you mind if I go to her, instead?" inquired Benson, hastily.

"Not in the least, dear old fellow. And, while you're gone, I'll constitute myself a special 'bobby' to look after this chap of yours in the bracelets."

So Jack hurried off up the road, wondering how Daisy Huston fared with a revolver and a hostile cabman.

CHAPTER XXIII

"FOREIGN TRADE" BECOMES BRISK

The cab horses were browsing quietly by the roadside.

Miss Daisy looked anything but perturbed.

In fact, she had passed all uneasiness of spirit on to the cab driver. That worthy had come back to his senses, but Miss Huston had compelled him to sit on the ground, his back to a tree. She stood a few yards away, watching the surly fellow and holding the pistol as though it were not the first time she had had such a weapon in her hand.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come, Mr. Benson!" cried the girl, with true feminine relief. "I was so worried about you. But you're not hurt—badly. I hurried a horseman on to you. He reached you?"

"Yes, thank you," nodded Lieutenant Benson. "And now, Miss Huston, I must inform you that we have Millard—your Donald Graves—a prisoner and manacled. I must first find a way of getting you back into town. Then I must turn Millard over to the authorities."

"Why can't he go back in the same cab with me?" asked Miss Huston, quickly.



“You—could you endure that?”

“Yes,” replied the girl, bravely. “I took you to him. I sent the assistance that enabled you to take him prisoner. Do not fear for me, Mr. Benson.”

“By Jove, but you’re clear grit, Miss Huston!” Lieutenant Jack cried, admiringly.

“Clear American, I hope,” retorted the girl. “Why should men be the only ones who can do or dare for the Flag?”

“Will you let me have the revolver, Miss Huston?”

“Gladly.”

“Thank you. Now, if you will get inside the cab again.”

“And you?”

“I’ll sit with the driver and watch him,”

Jack kept his eye on the surly fellow until Miss Huston was inside the cab.

“Now, fellow, you get up on the box, and handle the reins from the left side,” ordered the young naval officer.

Page 88

"I always drive on the right side o' the box," came the sulky retort.

"Undoubtedly; but you're driving on the left side this afternoon," returned Benson, with a look of significance. "By the way, did I mention the fact, yet, that I have an uncertain and bad temper? Now, climb up into your place, and don't you attempt to start until I'm beside you and give the word!"

A moment later Jack Benson sat beside the driver, holding the revolver in his right hand.

"Now, back to the house," spoke the young naval officer.

Without a word the driver turned his horses about, heading back.

"Here we are!" came, cheerily, from Lieutenant Abercrombie, R.N.

Millard was sitting up, a black scowl on his face as Jack and the others appeared.

"Now, I've got to get this outfit back into Washington, somehow," mused Jack, after noticing that Abercrombie had allowed the other thug to crawl away to safety.

"Why, of course, dear old fellow, you under stand that I'm helping," hinted the British officer.

"That's mighty good of you," murmured Jack. "Then we can do it easily."

Daisy Huston had stepped from the cab. She stood regarding the scowling captive.

"I'm glad I know you, Donald; glad I found you out in time," she said, quietly, gazing hard at him.

"I thought you a friend," Millard retorted, bitterly. "Great Heavens, Daisy, if you had been on my side through thick and thin, in good report and ill, I could have defied all these idiots in Washington. What an ally you would have been! But you chose to be an enemy."

"An enemy to my country's enemies, yes," replied the girl, steadily.

"Do you hate me, Daisy?"

"I don't know," the girl answered, thoughtfully. "Do you hate me, now, Donald Graves?"

"I wish I knew," uttered the man. "But it's hard to turn love like mine into hate at a moment's notice. Daisy, the nights are coming when you'll wake up with a frightened start, and sob as you remember how you turned me over to—"

“To the officers of the country that you have done your best to betray,” broke in the girl, firmly. “No, no, Donald! Do not imagine that I shall shed any tears for you, seen or unseen. Mr. Benson, I am ready, if you wish to place—your—your—prisoner in the cab beside me.”

“It seems like a beastly outrage to do it,” muttered Jack, full of misgivings.

“Not at all,” declared the girl, steadily. “I am glad to see this man on his way to the bar of justice.”

Jack assisted Daisy Huston, with the utmost deference, to a seat inside the vehicle. Then he turned to motion to handcuffed Millard—or Graves—that he was to take the seat beside the woman he had hoped to make his wife.

“I’ll ride close alongside, to make sure there’s no unpleasant conduct toward Miss Huston,” volunteered Mr. Abercrombie.

Page 89

Jack Benson again climbed to the cab box.

"You know I have the pistol," muttered Jack, showing the driver the weapon. "There's no need to ride through the town with the weapon in my hand. But, if you try to cut up any tantrums, you may be sure you'll find your own wrists inside of handcuffs."

"I know when I ain't got no show at all," growled the sullen driver.

"Drive ahead, then—into Washington, and straight to police headquarters."

Lieutenant Abercrombie, R.N., jogged his own mount steadily alongside, so that he could at all times command a view of the interior.

Millard—Donald Graves—would have opened some conversation with Daisy Huston, but the disdainful girl cut him short.

As the cab rolled into the busier streets of Washington Lieutenant Abercrombie drew a little further away from the cab, in order not to attract attention, though he still remained actively on guard.

The prisoner's manacled hands did not show to the people passing on the sidewalks.

So, altogether, no passersby thought to turn to look after the cab.

Just as the little procession turned a street corner to drive direct to the door of police headquarters, Abercrombie waved a hand carelessly to three pedestrians on the sidewalk.

"Abercrombie!" cried Lieutenant Ulwin. "And there's Benson on the box of that hack!"

"Come right along into headquarters," whispered Abercrombie. "Don't make any noise."

Wondering until they were fairly agape, Ulwin, Hal and Eph drew up at the cab door as Jack, after only a brief nod to them, opened the door and handed out Miss Daisy Huston.

Lieutenant Abercrombie, having given his horse to a boy down the street to hold, now came forward, raising his hat, to take charge of the young lady.

"Come along, Millard," called Jack Benson, quietly, and the prisoner got out, while the British officer stepped down the street with his fair companion to find another carriage in which she could return home.

Inside Jack marched his prisoner up to the railing in one of the rooms. The young naval officer at once produced his credentials and displayed them to the police official in charge.

"Now, with your permission, sir," Jack went on, courteously, "I will use your telephone, and inform the Navy Department of the prisoner who awaits their action here."

Five minutes later this had been done. Benson turned to Lieutenant Abercrombie, saying:

"I must apologize for not having thought to return your revolver as soon as we entered."

"I would beg you to keep the weapon, dear old fellow, if it would be of any use to you," replied the British officer.

And now Hal and Eph found chance to explain that they, worried by Jack Benson's disappearance, had at last started down to headquarters to see if they could learn of any mishap to him, or of any other explanation for his long absence.

Page 90

"Well, it's all over now," muttered Hal. "Millard—or Graves—or whatever other name the fellow may be using at this moment—is safe in a cell downstairs."

"We thought, once before, that we had him bottled up safely," chuckled Lieutenant Jack. "Mr. Abercrombie, how am I ever going to express my thanks to you?"

"I should feel extremely insulted, dear old fellow, if you thought it necessary to thank me," retorted the Briton, heartily.

"It will be dark, soon," interposed Lieutenant Ulwin. "I suggest that the best thing any of us can do is to turn toward the club. I feel certain that the chef will have a famous dinner there to-night."

"We haven't any evening clothes, either citizen or uniform, in Washington," interposed Jack Benson, who knew something of the formalities of the service during the dinner hour.

"Come, just the same," begged Ulwin. "The members don't expect too much of fellows who are traveling."

Jack was glad of the walk, because it helped to take the stiffness out of the knee that had been struck.

"You let the cab driver go, did you!" asked Eph, as the submarine boys walked along together.

"Yes," nodded Jack. "I had no orders concerning anyone like him. He's only some worthless character hired for the job. He didn't have any hand in the bigger job of collecting and selling harbor defense plans, you may be sure."

As the party re-entered the club they found a large attendance. Nor was it many moments before a be-moustached German officer approached the group.

"Oh, Herr Ulwin," he asked, "can you oblige me by excusing Herr Benson for a moment or two? And will you come with me, Herr Benson, to meet a friend who wishes to shake your hand?"

Jack slipped away with the German officer, who conducted him to another room.

"I think you have met my friend before," explained the German, and wheeled the submarine boy straight up in front of Herr Professor Radberg.

"You see," smiled the professor, "we meet again."

"It is a great pleasure, surely," declared Jack, as he shook hands. The officer stepped a few paces away.

"And now, when, my dear young friend, are you going to give me your word that you and your comrades will enter the German torpedo service? I have somewhat better terms to offer you than when we last met. I have since been authorized to promise you that you shall enter the German service as commissioned officers, and that you shall all three be in line for promotion as merit earns it. So, then, it is all settled, is it not!"

Herr Professor Radberg rubbed his hands with a self-satisfied air.

"Yes," Lieutenant Jack admitted, "it is all settled. But not the way that you would wish, Herr Professor Radberg. There may be soldiers of fortune who follow any flag, for hire. But we submarine boys would not enter your German naval service if you created all three of us high admirals at the outset."

Page 91

"Admirals?" cried Herr Professor Radberg, protestingly. "Oh, but that, my dear young friend, would be quite impossible."

"You are wasting your time with us, sir," Jack continued, firmly. "We may, one of these days, be asked to enter the American service permanently. We would not enter any other country's service, no matter what the bait. Do not give the matter any further thought, please, for we won't."

The German officer had been standing a few paces away, twirling his moustache and frowning. Now, he came forward.

"Herr Benson," he broke in, "I fear that you are so young that you do not fully understand the honor and dignity of being officers in the German service."

"Very likely we do not, Captain," Jack returned, with a bow. "And it is absolutely certain that we shall never find out from experience."

Lieutenant Jack excused himself, turning to seek his friends. As Benson entered the reading room once more he came upon Eph and another whose face was decidedly familiar. It was the Chevalier d'Ouray.

"Just in time, Jack," nodded Eph. "Tell the Chev. for me, please as he doesn't seem to understand my talk, that we wouldn't even give the slightest consideration to his idea that we should enter the French naval service in the submarine division."

"It is quite hopeless, Chevalier," laughed Jack Benson, shaking his head. "The honor is quite enough to turn our heads, but we can serve only the United States."

The Chevalier d'Ouray made a low bow, then turned away, for others were approaching.

"Where is Hal?" asked Jack.

"Crickety! Look at him over there, talking to that little Japanese," muttered Eph, inclining his head toward a corner.

Hal and a Japanese were talking earnestly. At any rate, the little brown man was. Hal was listening, occasionally shaking his head. Then Hastings happened to espy his chums. He turned to the Japanese, to take his leave, but the little brown man followed him across the floor, still talking in low tones.

"Captain Nakasura has been trying to interest me in the idea that we three go over to Japan, under a three years' contract, to act as instructors and advisers in submarine work," Hal told his comrades.

“And I have high hope that you will see matter same as I do,” smiled the Japanese attache persistently.

“We shan’t,” Jack declared, shaking his head, emphatically. “Captain, you are the third, representing also the third nation, that has just approached us on this matter. We shall serve no other country than our own.”

“But my government,” urged the Japanese officer, “will make you most handsome offer.”

“Do you remember the day when we were leaving Dunhaven, and you tried to overtake us in a gasoline launch?” asked Jack, with a smile.

“Yes; very well,” admitted Nakasura.

“Do you remember that we hoisted the signal, N.D.? That meant ‘nothing doing,’ Captain. Our answer is the same, and will be, to-morrow and the next year.”

Page 92

"Ah, here you are!" cried Lieutenant Abercrombie, as he hurried up and Captain Nakasura vanished beyond middle distance. "Benson, dear old fellow, I want just a word with you before dinner is served," continued the Briton, thrusting his arm through Jack's and drawing him away after a nod of apology to Hal and Eph. "Benson, I've had something on my mind all day; something I have had instructions to broach to you. I have been waiting for the right moment. Now, I must breathe just a word or two, and then let you think it over during dinner, don't you know?"

"See here," smiled Jack, standing back, sudden suspicion in his eyes. "Don't tell me you've been instructed to see whether I'll enter the British submarine service."

"Just that, dear old chap!" beamed Abercrombie, enthusiastically. "But how could you guess? Fact, though! And not only you, but Hastings and Somers as well, don't you know!"

"You're the fourth to spring this on us tonight," answered Jack Benson, soberly. "And the answer will have to be the same for all of you."

"The same for all of us, dear chap?" demanded Abercrombie. "How can that be?"

"The answer in every case is the same," retorted Jack. "If our own government doesn't want us, no other government can have us. We stand by our own Flag."

"Eh? What is this?" muttered Lieutenant Ulwin, coming unexpectedly upon the pair. "Foreign government competing for you lads, Benson? This won't do!"

"Which is what I have just had the honor of telling Mr. Abercrombie," smiled Jack, earnestly.

CHAPTER XXIV

THEIR LIVES DEEDED TO THE FLAG

Secretary Sanders, Secretary of the Navy, looked up at the three young men who stood in line at the right-hand side of his desk.

It was two days later; two days during which Jack, Hal and Eph had had little to do except roam about Washington and see all the sights of the National Capital. This they had varied by dropping in at the United Service Club.

"Gentlemen," remarked the Secretary of the Navy, "you have not yet been relieved of your detail to the gunboat 'Sudbury.'"

"It's coming now," thought each of the three boys to himself, with a great wave of dismay. "We are to be no longer of the Navy."

"I will give instructions at once," continued Secretary Sanders, "to have orders issued relieving you from that duty."

"Yes; it has come," muttered Jack, drearily, to himself. "Our service with the Navy is over."

"Gentlemen," and now, for a few seconds, the voice of the Secretary seemed far away indeed, "I am sensible of all you have done for your country, and above all, of the zeal you have shown. Besides, I have in mind the fact that you have made yourselves among the most expert of all handlers of submarine torpedo boats. If it can be arranged, I wish to keep all three of you actively in the United States Navy."

Page 93

Jack Benson looked up with a gasp. His comrades were not less astounded.

"I am aware," Mr. Sanders went on, "that we could not expect you to enlist as mere apprentices. In your own particular field of submarine work you are amply fitted to hold officers' commissions. Yet, under the law, you cannot be granted commissions until you are twenty-one years of age. None of you are quite eighteen.

"Therefore, it has occurred to me that you can be appointed, specially, with rank, command and pay, until you are twenty-one. The President agrees with me in what I have to offer. You, Mr. Benson, are offered a special appointment as lieutenant, junior grade, in the United States Navy. You, Mr. Hastings, and you, Mr. Somers, are offered special appointments as ensigns. You will all have the privileges of your ranks except the actual commissions. Yet you will be actual officers, and entitled to full respect. Moreover, the President promises that, when you are twenty-one years of age, you shall have regular commissions promptly. In case the President is not re-elected to his office, he agrees to urge upon his successor in the White House the fulfilment of the promise. So, if you accept the special appointments, now, you are absolutely certain of commissions as soon as you reach the age of twenty-one. Perhaps it is only just to add that we are aware that all three of you have already been offered commissions in foreign navies, and that you have refused. Both the President and myself appreciate your loyalty to your own Flag. Now, what do you young gentlemen say to accepting special appointments to run until you are each twenty-one?"

"Mr. Secretary, it's the brightest, the one great dream with us all," Jack Benson replied, hoarsely. "There is just one thing that could hold us back. We really feel in honor bound to Mr. Farnum and Mr. Pollard to stand by their interests, for they have been our best friends."

"What do you say to that, Mr. Farnum?" inquired the Secretary.

From behind a screen stepped Jacob Farnum, the Dunhaven shipbuilder.

"Why, see here, boys," began Farnum, a broad smile on his face, "I received a long wire from Mr. Sanders yesterday. Dave Pollard and I talked this thing over, and we decided that the Pollard boat is now an assured success. You have put the boats where we can now build and run them without you. You are more needed in the Navy. Now, Dave and I both urge you to go where we know your hearts are—into the Navy. And you will go with all our best wishes. The government needs you, now, to handle the boats that we build up at Dunhaven, and to train war-crews for those boats. There is only one objection to your entering the Navy, boys. You will have to pass upon our boats. We know you will do that honestly and fearlessly; yet there are many who would sneer at having boats passed on for the government by young officers who hold stock in our concern. Now, the amount of stock that each of you holds has been growing steadily with each new success that you have won for us, which if you enter the Navy you

should not own. So Dave and I offer you ten thousand dollars each for the shares that you hold. It is a fair valuation.”

Page 94

"I know it is, if you offer it, Mr. Farnum," Jack Benson replied, with feeling.

"Then you'll accept, and take your very heart's-wish—the Navy—all of you?" asked Mr. Farnum.

"I accept both your offer, Mr. Farnum, and, the greater offer of the Secretary of the Navy," replied Jack, his eyes becoming misty.

"I accept," murmured Hal.

"So do I," from Eph.

"Then, sir," declared Jacob Farnum, turning to the Secretary of the Navy, "the Flag is richer by three magnificent young followers!"

* * * * *

Here we must leave the submarine boys for the present, for these events happened hardly later than yesterday, and there are no new adventures yet to chronicle.

Donald Graves—Millard—received a severe sentence in the penitentiary. He is still serving the sentence, of course. Gray, his accomplice, who attempted to spirit the drawings outside of the United States, is now likewise serving a term.

The trial was a swift, nearly secret one. Daisy Huston was not dragged into the case at all. In one respect the trial failed. Neither culprit could be forced to tell for which foreign government the dastardly work had been attempted. The "Spitfire" returned to Dunhaven, and was later sold to the government, with several other boats. Williamson became the new Pollard captain.

Several foreign governments were deeply disappointed over not being able to secure the services of the submarine boys.

But Jack, Hal and Eph could be happy nowhere except under their own Flag.

They are now accepted most cordially by all their brother officers, young and old, in the United States Navy.

For the most part, so far, the duties of our young officers have been aboard the different boats purchased from the Pollard Company. Yet, for the sake of practice and change, they have been, at times, detailed aboard other classes of craft in the Navy.

We shall now encounter our young acting naval officers in one of their new fields of special work, in the next volume of this series, which is published under the title: "*The Submarine Boys And the Smugglers; Or, Breaking Up the New Jersey Customs*"

Frauds." Here we shall find our talented lads engaged in doing some of their finest work for Uncle Sam's Government, and under circumstances that will delight every reader.