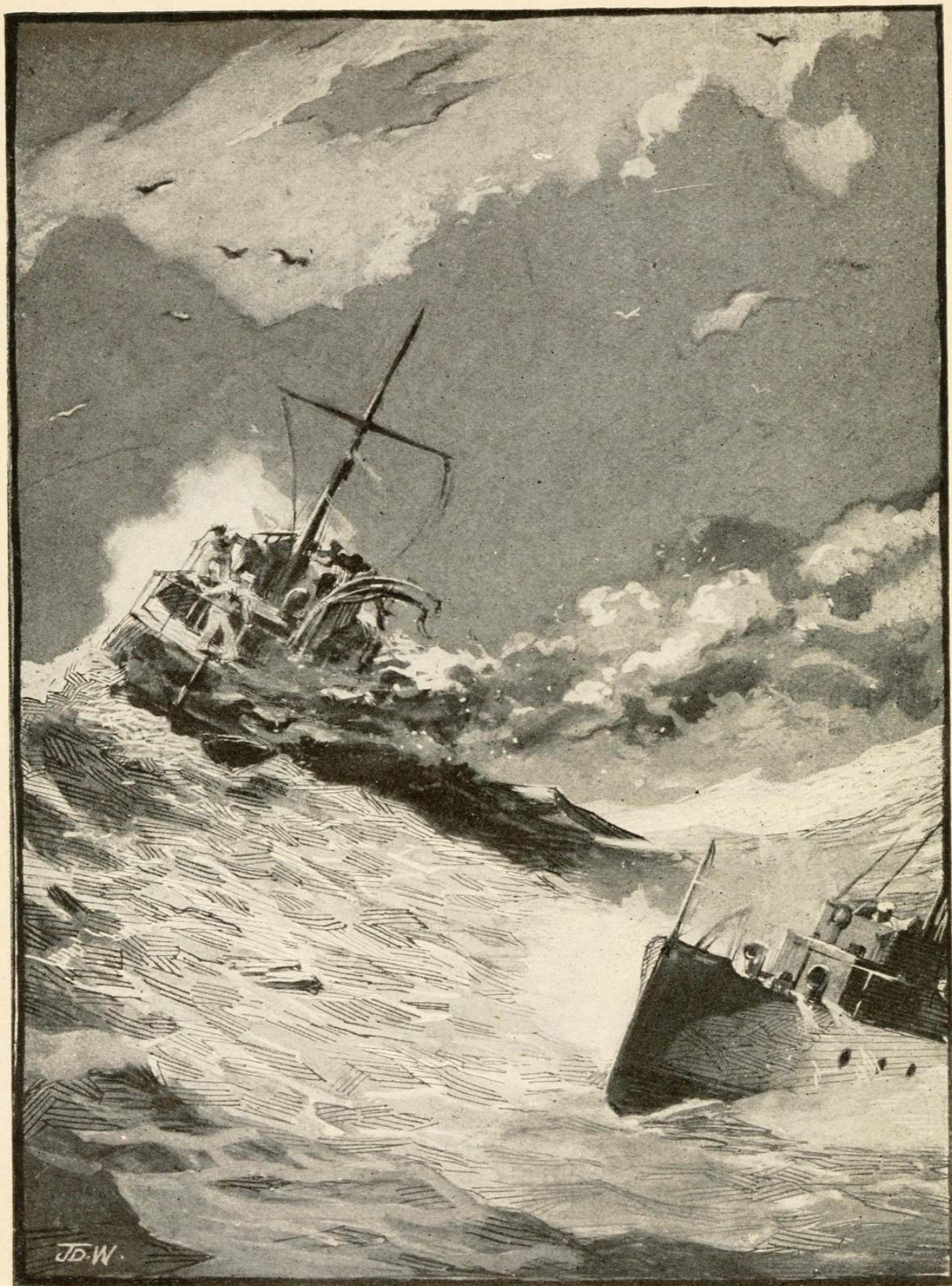




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WON FOR THE FLEET



MEANWHILE HE STEERED THE TWENTY-NINE IN A WIDE CIRCLE TO
WINDWARD OF THE FORTY-TWO.

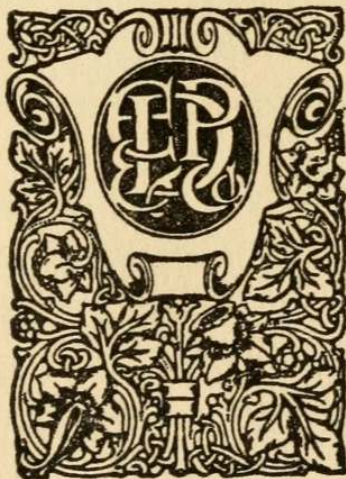
(Page 81.)

WON FOR THE FLEET

A STORY OF ANNAPOLIS

BY
FITZHUGH GREEN

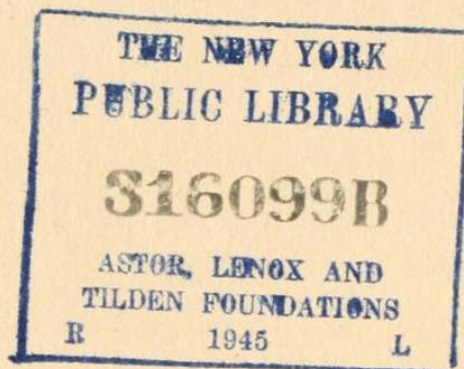
Lt.-Commander, U. S. N.



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FOREWORD

Annapolis is the most remarkable institution of its kind in the world.

The education it provides is essentially engineering: marine and civil, electrical and mechanical, finally naval. Also no midshipman escapes instruction, even proficiency, in less than three forms of athletics.

The Naval Academy is unique in two distinct ways: By intensity of the traditional class spirit is begun that unparalleled *esprit de corps* which makes our Navy the greatest in the world. By the summer cruises is provided a species of education no youth should reach manhood without.

WON FOR THE FLEET is a tale of two boys, one physically brutal, the other physically deficient. Four years at Annapolis moulds and forges, tempers and anneals, their two characters. The bully is refined; the weakling fibred. False standards of both are overthrown. From two awkward young animals are made two men—two gentlemen. From two instinctive enemies are made two fast friends.

It is a tale of adventure and vicissitude, true to the middie's life, by one who has lived and loved it!

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WON FOR THE FLEET

WON FOR THE FLEET

CHAPTER I

ESCAPE

CLOSE to midnight the reader moved his candle a bit nearer to the bed's head. Using his finger as a guide he followed again the final thrilling sentence:

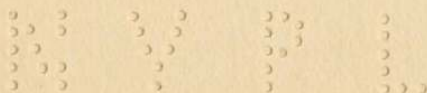
“. . . Having sunk three frigates and a brig, and with half the width of the South Pacific between him and his pursuers, Skipper Byng now dared risk attack the pirate stronghold.”

After a third reading he rose to a sitting position. Such was his caution that not a creak came from the dilapidated old bed. Strangely enough he was fully dressed, this despite the fact that a moment before the bedclothes had covered him to his chin.

He pinched out the candle. Blowing would have made too dangerous a noise, and noises of any kind increased tremendously the peril of the moment. As yet there were no pursuers. But had there been, the luck of Captain Byng with half the South Pacific behind him was tragically impossible.

He tiptoed to the window. Through a crack in the shutter the street was faintly visible. It appeared deserted. He couldn't see the tall figure in dark clothing lurking behind the telegraph post opposite.

The tall figure was that of the Emmitsburg night patrolman. For a week this officer had noticed the



flicker of light upstairs in the house he now watched. Inquiry had told him only that this was the residence of the Poors, a new family in Emmitsburg. Anything new in the tiny village of Emmitsburg was a cause for suspicion.

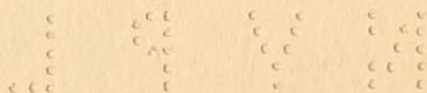
Tonight he had determined to solve the mystery. So, having made the rounds of his regular beat, he returned and concealed himself behind the post. Within a minute after his arrival he was rewarded by seeing the light disappear. Then noiselessly the shutter opened. A shadowy figure emerged and lowered itself to a ledge beneath the window. It crept to a drain pipe a few feet away and slid to the ground with a faint thud. By furtive steps it passed through the little front garden and into the street. Twenty paces behind, the patrolman took up the pursuit. So far he had no cause for arrest. Also his detective instinct told him that greater possibilities of discovering crime lay in covering the full trail.

Near the lower end of Emmitsburg's main thoroughfare, a freight train delayed matters. As a light hung above the crossing, the fleeing figure shrank into the shadows of a nearby building. The policeman had just time to see he carried a bag of some sort. Booty without a doubt.

The rumbling crashing train passed slowly. Its length seemed endless. Suddenly the green tail light of the caboose swung into sight. At the same instant the officer gave a half-shout of dismay.

The figure had darted from its hiding place, leaped to the iron rung of a passing flat car, and was carried into the darkness of the night!

Near dawn the train picked its noisy way through the City's freight yards. The single passenger slipped off



in time to avoid the inquisitive crew. He was cold and cramped and hungry. But he didn't hesitate. Except for stopping twice and questioning pedestrians as to the route, he walked steadily until the sun was high.

In the busy center of the City he entered a massive stone building. On the second floor he accosted a man in uniform behind a desk.

"Want to enlist in the Navy," he announced briefly.

"Name?"

"Thomas Poor."

"Age?"

"Twenty"—he lied without hesitation.

The man behind the desk shot a keen look. He was trying the age of twenty on Tom Poor as a tailor would try on a coat. Stocky well-knit figure it fitted. Heavy jaw and set mouth were those of an older man. Cold blue eyes between their narrow lids, short cropped hair the whole bulldog-like poise were those of a man past twenty. Only the thumping heart beneath was unalterably young. It was invisible; yet hopelessly it beat and clamored to shout the truth:

"He lies—this Tom Poor lies! *He's seventeen—he's seventeen—he's seventeen!*"

Three months later to a day there was great excitement about the decks of the *U. S. S. Alaska*. The huge gray dreadnaught had anchored the night before in the blue expanse of Manzanillo Bay on the south coast of Cuba.

A blazing tropical sunrise had just fired the misty peaks to the north when the officer of the deck dashed to the gangway, shook his sleepy bugler, and ordered reveille blown at once followed by the assembly.

Uproar of boatswain's-mates echoed along the lower decks.

"All—1 hands on deck! Fall in the landing force!"

Without waiting to lash hammocks, six hundred men tumbled sleepily down and clambered up the nearest hatchways. Not since the days of war had any such alarm broken upon the brisk routine of peace.

"Fall in for muster!" shouted the division petty officers and began to call in a hoarse monotone the lists of names belonging to their division or company.

"Tom Poor, seaman, second class."

No reply.

"Where is the beggar? Tom Poor!"

A lanky lieutenant strode up. "All right Johnson," he said crisply; "I've excused Poor from this formation."

Having received a report of absentees, the lieutenant returned at a dogtrot to his stateroom where he found Tom waiting as he had directed.

"I was ordered to report to you here, Mr. Rudd," said the lad.

"Yes, Poor. I have picked you for a serious responsibility. I may as well trust you at once with the truth of this disturbance."

He turned to the open porthole and pointed to a saddle in the distant mountains.

"See that blurred line? That's smoke. An American sugar plantation has been attacked by bandits. The owners cabled to Washington for assistance last night. Twenty minutes ago we received orders to land an armed force and capture the criminals."

"But they've had all night to get away, sir."

"True, except that they are in such numbers that there may have seemed to them no need to hurry. We hope

to surround them by dividing our force. Half will be sent up the river opposite us. The rest will land and make their way across country in order to cut off the bandits from escape by way of the railroad."

Lieutenant Rudd stopped, closed the door and went on in lower tones.

"You and I have a special job in the middle of things. I have selected you to accompany me on a route midway between the two sections. We can follow a road that is visible for nearly its whole length from the ship. Our signals about the positions of the enemy will be repeated to the divisions on either side of us."

At this moment a messenger announced the Captain's gig ready for Mr. Rudd.

Half an hour after they landed, a hard climb brought them to a point from which the smoking ruins of the plantation buildings were plainly visible on the hillside about a mile ahead.

After a long scrutiny through his binoculars, Lieutenant Rudd turned with a smile of satisfaction. "They're still there," he said. "I can't see the men, but their camp fires are quite distinct from the smudge of the burning buildings."

"Shall I signal that back to the ship?" asked Tom.

At a nod from the officer he began a swift series of movements with two small red flags.

"Pretty good at that, aren't you?"

Tom colored slightly. "I try to be," he said after a pause.

"That's why I chose you, Poor. You have impressed me as trying to be good at everything I set before you. Must be the way your mind works. Or maybe it's got to do with the reasons you had for coming in the Navy."

With one eye on the *Alaska* for a signal Tom made an effort to return the confidence of the older man.

"Guess it's the reasons you speak of, sir. I ran away from home to enlist in the Navy. I *had* to go to sea. Seems kind of in me. 'Course I used to be all for this pirate stuff you read about. But the country's coming to be a great sea power and that means law and order. Merchant ships are bound to be monotonous—same routes all the time, and all that. So I took the Navy. Then—"

Tom broke off abruptly with a sharp exclamation. One flag he thrust out at right angles to his body and waved it rapidly up and down. A searchlight blinker flashed from the battleship's bridge.

"Combine—in—attack—at—ten—thirty," he read.

"Gives us just time to make the encampment," announced the other pulling out his watch. "Suppose they've figured the same for the other parties."

From this point it was necessary to strike off across country. The road would not be safe, as parts of it were visible from the bandit camp. Also it was necessary that scouts be avoided in order not to give the alarm.

Tropical vegetation is a terrible tax on the walker's muscles. Rudd's long legs enabled him to avoid many of the snake-like vines and cacti that constantly tripped the sturdier-built seaman. On the other hand, Tom's rugged physique was not to be conquered by anything so trifling as a tropical jungle.

After a half an hour's struggle, Lieutenant Rudd stopped. "We've got to be careful not to lose our way here," he panted. "Even with the sun and our compass we run a risk of running into an ambush."

"Suppose I take a look ahead," suggested Tom. "I see a tree from which I may get a pretty good squint at the neighborhood."

"All right, but be back inside of ten minutes, as we have no time to lose."

Tom's guess was correct. From the tree he could overlook not only the plantation enclosure, now a smoking desolation, but the thickly wooded area on either side. To his surprise he found that not twenty yards to the right of him lay an open trail.

He started down. As he turned, his big Navy Colt automatic caught on a limb. In the few seconds of freeing himself he chanced to take another glance at the trail. His heart leaped.

Four horsemen were coming down it in single file. Beyond a doubt they were the bandits. One was thoroughly drunk. All were loaded down with parcels and bags full of loot. Two had packages of greenbacks protruding from their pockets.

Tom thought quickly. The bandits were slipping through their fingers. By means of this trail they could elude both attacking parties and escape in either direction along the coast. It would be a good fifteen minutes before the main forces would even reach the camp. And even then they would be of no great help unless they knew exactly in which direction to continue the pursuit.

There was but one thing to do. Tom drew his gun from its holster and cocked it. Using the crotch of a limb he took steady aim and fired. The leading horse reared with a loud snort, balanced for a moment on its hindlegs, and fell with a crash into the undergrowth that bordered the trail.

Instantly the other riders swung off the open way. Tom could hear them floundering about in all directions. His single shot had thrown them into a panic.

Then a second shot rang out. It was in the direction of Mr. Rudd and reminded Tom of the predicament his impulsive action might have imposed upon his companion.

A horse screamed. Shouts in Spanish came from all sides. There ensued a tumult of horses and men scrambling to avoid the unseen attackers.

Then to Tom's great satisfaction he heard the noise subside in the direction of the plantation. He clambered down and rushed back to where he had left the officer. Tom's heart stood still at what he saw.

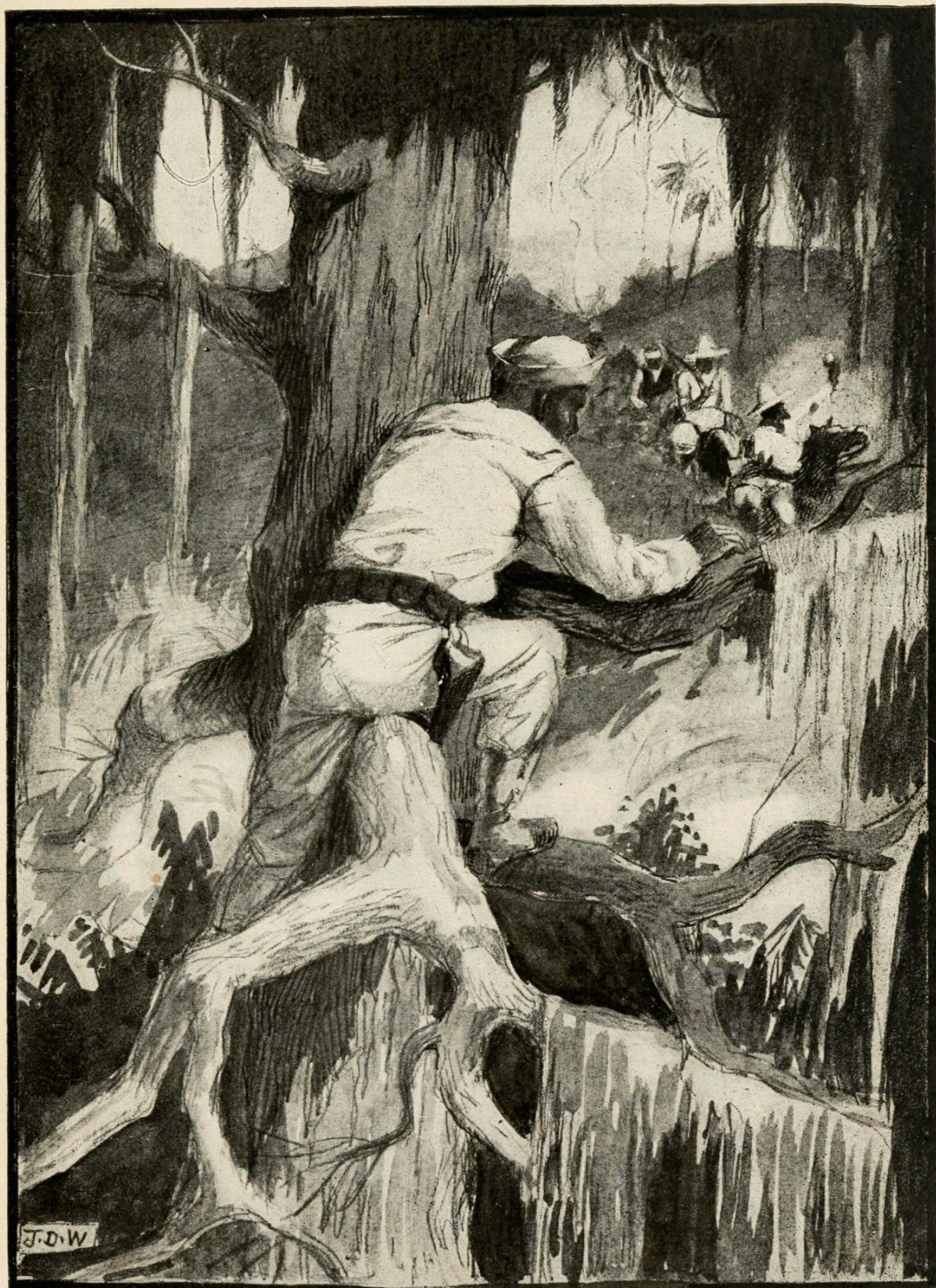
Lieutenant Rudd lay on the ground face up. Blood was streaming from his mouth and nose. His white uniform was torn and dishevelled. No doubt he had been set upon from behind and left for dead.

With his neckerchief Tom bound up the wounds as best he could. Though he could hear a faint heartbeat he was by no means sure that death was not very near to the victim.

This chance that his companion might be saved by prompt medical attention left no room for debate. There was only one thing to do; take him on to the impending battle and trust to luck that the doctor of the landing force would be available.

Tom's unusual strength came vigorously to his aid when he swung the limp body over his shoulder. At that he staggered as he made his way up the narrow sandy trail. Sweat poured down his arms and legs, and he was conscious of an increasing throbbing pain in the back of his cramped neck.

Twice he put down the body to reconnoitre. Sud-



FOUR HORSEMEN WERE COMING DOWN THE TRAIL IN SINGLE FILE.

denly, he realized the time for attack as set by the *Alaska's* signal had come and passed. Could he possibly have read the figures wrong? The thought startled him. If so, his mistake had precipitated the bandits' flight and possibly cost the life of his superior officer.

Then, without warning, a fusillade of shots broke out ahead. There were shouted orders and yells of terror-stricken men mingled with a great stamping of horses' hoofs. The battle had begun!

Hastily placing the body in the shelter of a large tree, Tom crept cautiously ahead. Gun in hand, he was ready should the natives make a rush in his direction.

Suddenly as it began, the firing stopped. Tom waited for a long minute to see if it would begin again, then ran back for the unconscious man. He arrived at the plantation clearing just in time to see the begrimed and heated landing force shouldering their smoking arms and falling into ranks.

"A doctor!" he shouted. "Quick! Here's a wounded man!"

The last words trailed on his lips. The ranks of dirty white uniforms faded into a gray smear. Then, quietly, Tom collapsed. The tropical heat and his superhuman efforts had been too much for him.

He came to in a little iron cot in sick bay, the battleship's hospital between decks.

"Here, lad, drink this," ordered a white-shirted steward. "And as soon as you feel right, let me know. The Skipper has sent for you to come to his cabin."

Tom rose to his wobbly legs. "Might as well go now," he said a little weakly.

"No hurry, son."

"No," wearily; "but I might as well get this off my chest. I gummed the game ashore, you know."

The steward opened his eyes. "That ain't what they say on deck," was his dubious comment.

Tom found to his surprise that Lieutenant Rudd had preceded him. Except for a head bandage the officer looked very much himself.

Captain Barlow rose from his chair. "Let me congratulate you, Poor," he said, holding out his hand. "Proud to have you aboard."

"Wh—yes sir—but—" Tom faltered.

"I've told him all about it," put in Rudd.

"Yes," continued the Captain, "he told me that you singlehanded were responsible for our capture of the bandits."

"But I wasn't there, sir," Tom persisted.

"Guess you don't realize what you did, young man." The Skipper's smile was full of appreciation. "According to Mr. Rudd you dropped the leading scoundrel's horse just as he was taking his party to safety. Of course the others lost their nerve and turned about in time to fall into the hands of our main force."

"Except that one of them managed to creep up behind me," said Rudd, putting a hand to his bloody bandage.

Captain Barlow turned to his desk and drew an official document from one of the pigeonholes. He waved it at Tom and began:

"I have here a notification from Washington that I am to select a seaman for one of the yearly appointments to Annapolis that are reserved for enlisted men. According to Mr. Rudd you are the very one to fill the bill. You have a love for adventure that will make you appre-

ciate life at sea. Further, you have ambition that will keep you out of mischief."

"And the loyalty," broke in Rudd, "that goes into the production of a successful naval officer."

Tom opened his mouth to speak. Nothing came. His cheeks burned.

"Orderly!" sang out the Skipper.

The marine sentry entered.

"Tell the Executive Officer that when he starts his school course this spring to add the name of Poor, Thomas Poor, seaman. Say I've picked him for Annapolis."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Tom stumbled out of the cabin. He felt as though he were walking on air.

The two dreams of his life were coming true: he was going to get a college education and he was going to sea!

CHAPTER II

A DASH TO COVER

FOR a brief space we must now abandon Tom Poor, seaman U. S. Navy, to his books and bandits and Fleet adventures.

A thousand miles north of Cuba another adventure was brewing. And it involved another lad of an age exactly Tom's.

The old university town was breathless with anticipation. More than a thousand young men and boys stood in little knots and groups about the broad college campus and discussed in whispers the coming event.

"It's really tonight?" asked one in an awed voice.

"Sure," said a second student. "They always have the class rush the first Saturday in October."

"Good time, I guess," assented a third, making a weak pretense at being cheerful. "Nice cool night for a roughhouse."

"Roughhouse," sneered the first speaker; "*fight* rather, I'd call it. Why they say sometimes as many as a hundred are in the hospital after it's all over."

"Piffle! Weaklings and kids ought to keep out of such stuff."

"Yea Bo! there's one now."

Simultaneously the group turned. A tall slender boy was coming slowly down the sidewalk. His large brown eyes were roving with vague interest over the little

gatherings of disturbed young men about him. If he sensed any of their anxiety, his indifferent manner certainly did not show it.

"Must be a king, or a president, or something like that," remarked the nearest student in a loud voice. The others roared.

"That's Reggie Van Brunt, the millionaire's son," chirped someone.

The great battle was due to come off at seven-thirty. Torches carried by the juniors and seniors lit up the field. Far overhead loomed a black arch of branches where the great oaks intertwined. A vast multitude of students passed to and fro, while the deep hum of voices spread like a warning for the mighty struggle about to take place.

The sharp note of a bugle cut the night air and echoed against the nearest buildings.

"Sophomores here!" came roared through a huge megaphone.

"Sophomores here!" five hundred voices took up the cry.

In two minutes the mob had formed. The entire second year class gathered in a black mass of humanity. At the center, on the shoulders of his classmates, sat the class president. In the flickering light of torches, his face stood out white and set.

For a second time the trumpet shrieked. Instantly, eight hundred freshmen flung themselves at the solid body of the older class. For a moment there was no perceptible movement of the mass. Men on the edge wrestled frantically. Some fell. Others staggered back panting.

Then, slowly, the writhing aggregation crept forward.

Like a great steam roller made up of human beings it moved heavily ahead, felling and trampling all that dared try to stop it.

Near the university gate the fighting increased in ferocity. While no actual blows were struck, the swaying, grappling wrestlers tore at one another until shirts were ripped from bodies, the shreds littering the ground like a white snow.

Great cheering applause came from the audience. First one side and then the other stood in public favor. Torches were waved and hats flung into the air as evidences of the enthusiasm with which the terrific onslaughts were viewed. At last the freshman line gave way. One final short rush by the supporters of the sophomore president and he was half pushed, half dragged to a standing position on the center of a long wooden bench that flanked the college entrance.

This was the goal: the class that won the rush had the privilege for the ensuing year of sitting on the bench. Thus, besides the joy of victory, there was the undeniable advantage of being able to occupy for the entire winter this ancient relic and undisturbedly scan the passerby.

As the Sophomore cheers of triumph died away, a more ominous cry passed from mouth to mouth among the humiliated freshmen:

“Slackers—!”

“*Get the slackers!*”

“Yea Bo, get the slackers who wouldn’t stand by their class!”

In a darkened dormitory window stood Reggie Van Brunt. The Freshman threat of vengeance fell upon his ear with ominous meaning. *He* was a slacker. *He* had

stood by and seen his fellows ground into the campus turf without making a single effort to help.

"But I am different," he told himself. "I am a gentleman. Why should I be forced to join that rowdy gang out there?"

"Is that the true reason?" whispered his Conscience. "Come now, weren't you just a little bit afraid?"

"Not at all. I had on good clothes; and I could see better up here."

"That's a lie," said Conscience coldly. "You have plenty of old suits in the closet, and the trees prevent you seeing much of anything from this window."

Heavy running steps clattered into the dormitory.

"Reggie Van Brunt!" yelled an angry voice.

"Oh, you slacker! You kindergarten kid! Where are you?"

Reggie's heart nearly stopped. His trepidation at the thought of entering the rough and tumble had been nothing as compared with the fear that seized him now. It was the cry of a hunting wolf-pack that dinned in his ears. Escape was his only thought.

He ran to the bathroom. He locked the door and flung up the window. Ten feet below was the roof of a back addition to the building. He swung out and dropped with a clatter on the tin.

As he landed, the crash of splintering wood above told him that his pursuers had burst in the bathroom door. Even while he hesitated in his terror, he saw the eager look of one who hung out the window.

"Here he is, fellows! He's going to get out by the alley. Go 'round and head him off!"

Reggie did not wait to hear any more. With the des-

perate courage of fear he jumped from the roof to the alley nearly fifteen feet below. He had no plan of escape. His one aim was to distance the mob behind. He turned and raced down the dark passage.

He suddenly collided heavily with a dark body. The shock threw him to the ground and dazed him for a moment. At first he had the flash of an idea he might have struck one of the delivery horses that were sometimes tied up here.

"That you, Slacker?" came a gruff voice from the mass beside him.

Reggie leaped to his feet. He had run headlong into and knocked down the terror of his class, the great McGivern who was slated to make the varsity football team his first year!

Voices and sounds of running feet came from the alley entrance. That way out was cut off. The situation looked hopeless.

Wildly Reggie darted to the brick wall on the side opposite the dormitory. He clambered over and crossed the little yard beyond. In two leaps he was up the porch steps and let himself in by the kitchen door. With trembling fingers he slipped the bolt.

For a few minutes he stood panting and listened. No sounds came. Muffled voices in the alley quickly died away. He had escaped.

To make more sure he determined to sneak out the front of the house he had entered. Although the family living there was evidently out, several dim lights were burning.

Like a criminal Reggie crept to the street door. At the creaking of a board his heart nearly stopped beating. As he passed the door of a side room, he saw a

curtain blow out from an open window. For an instant he was sure it was a ghost and nearly fainted from fright.

He reached the vestibule with shaking knees. Never before had he realized what horror a burglar must suffer who is afraid of getting caught.

He put out his hand to open the door. What was that? A step sounded on the stone entrance way. Reggie gasped. He was caught. It was the owner returning.

Quickly he darted into the nearest room. At the very instant he left the hall, a key rattled in the lock and the door swung open. He hid himself behind a long curtain.

"Aha," came a deep voice from the hall. "What's this?"

Reggie trembled. It must be his handkerchief. He remembered it had been dangling from his pocket when he entered. And it had his name on it!

"'R. D. Van Brunt,'" read the stern voice outside. The handkerchief had betrayed its master.

"R. D. Van Brunt, where are you?"

The culprit squeezed himself against the window jam. Suddenly a blinding light filled the room.

"Ah, there you are my young friend!"

Shaking in every limb, Reggie came guiltily from the hiding place.

"And what have you to say for yourself?"

The speaker's voice was impressive enough by itself. But coming from the huge bearded man confronting the unhappy boy, it threw Reggie into an even greater panic.

"I—uh—" gasped Reggie. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth.

"Very well, sir, if you won't tell me, perhaps you will

inform the police what your presence here means."

The man seized Reggie roughly by the arm and led him out. As they passed down the street he kept up a running fire of abuse.

"One of our college bums, I suppose. Been thrown out on account of bad behavior, and haven't money enough to get home. Thought you would steal a little something from my house and have a little party in the city!"

Instead of replying to these accusations, Reggie shrank behind the larger body of his captor. On the opposite side of the street he saw approaching several of the freshmen who had been bent on his capture and punishment. For a moment he felt almost grateful to the man beside him.

The next instant this feeling was replaced by one of hatred and mortification. Just ahead in the glare of the street light he recognized the figure of Dr. Cromwell, Dean of the University. Upon Dr. Cromwell's assistance Reggie had depended for an easy way through college. The old gentleman had been a lifelong friend of his father. And now he must discover Reggie in the midst of disgrace!

"Why hello, what's this?" he asked cheerily as Reggie was dragged into view.

The big man stopped and looked first at Dr. Cromwell, then at Reggie.

"You know this young man, Doctor?"

"I do indeed, Mr. Jason. He's the son of one of the wealthiest men in Boston. His father and I—"

"Well!" exclaimed the first man. "Well, I'll be jiggered!" He dropped Reggie like a hot iron.

"No trouble is there?" inquired Dr. Cromwell in sudden suspicion.

"Yes and no—mostly yes, I should say. But since you know him, I'll let him go. Will you let me walk with you and explain?"

"Certainly."

Without further word the two turned and left the miserable Reggie.

What should he do? So far as he knew he would be in jail by morning. Or in the clutches of his classmates, which would be almost more painful and humiliating.

He must leave. Absolutely nothing was to be gained by staying at the University. Four years would never be sufficient to live down such a handicap of disgrace as he had started with.

Reggie crept back to his room. Every minute he expected to be seized either by the police or by the vengeful freshmen. He found the dormitory deserted and remembered that a class meeting was in progress over at the assembly hall.

His room was as he left it except for the smashed door and an overturned chair. No, there was something else:

On the table lay a yellow envelope. It was a telegram addressed to Reginald Van Brunt. With nervous fingers he tore it open and read:

Come home at once. Serious.
FATHER.

He read the message over twice. What could it mean? If his father had been ill, someone else would

have sent the wire; something would have been said about the illness.

Half an hour later he was packed. As he took a last look about the room where he was to have passed his long anticipated freshman year at college, he saw the crumpled telegram on the floor.

“‘Serious,’” he said bitterly. “What could be serious after *this?*”

Thirty-six hours later he reached home. The family doctor met him in the library.

“Dad’s ill?” asked Reggie anxiously.

“Yes and no,” was the reply. “I may as well tell you at once. Your father has been wiped out financially. The shock swept him off his feet. For a few days he must remain absolutely quiet. I’m sorry, my boy.”

Reggie rose unsteadily. He managed to murmur some word of sympathy for his father and leave the room. Rage and disappointment at what he had just heard impelled him to seek the fresh air before he broke down and cried like a baby.

Aimlessly he walked about the streets. For the first time in his life he realized what money meant. Since his earliest memory every wish had been granted. He had had nurses and tutors. He had spent a year in Paris, and another in London.

At school age he had gone to the most exclusive establishments. The few clubs he belonged to were those of sons of rich men. No boy whose father was not a millionaire was fit for his acquaintance—at least so Reggie had been brought up to think.

His own motor car, his racing sloop, his dogs and horses, all he had come to take for granted. Never for

a moment had he ever lacked money—actual cash. He didn't even take the trouble to think where it might all come from.

And now it was gone!

He must work for a living no doubt. He must go out and mix with the kind of people he had never associated with except to order them about.

At first this thought maddened him. It brought back the shame he had felt at leaving the University. How could he, a fugitive, a coward in the eyes of his college mates, hope to compete in business with other men?

Then suddenly something hardened inside him. Hazyly he wondered if after all the trouble wasn't with his upbringing. All his life he been taught to avoid just such things as the class rush.

"*I'll do it!*" he declared aloud. "I'll get a job, and make money, and go back when all the other fellows are just graduating; when they haven't even started yet in business!"

Darkness came on. Despite his grief, Reggie's appetite did not desert him. By force of habit he called a taxicab. "Number ten, Park Avenue," he told the driver.

He found he had walked further into the country than he realized. On arrival back he opened his purse to pay the man. All the change he could muster up fell half a dollar short of the actual amount.

"Charge it to my father, Mr. Van Brunt," he said loftily.

The cabby gave him an insolent look, and laughed harshly.

"So that's who you are!" he chortled. "Might ha'

known you was the son of a crook—tryin' to beat me out of the price of a ride!"

"You impertinent—" began Reggie angrily; then broke off with reddening cheeks. So this was what it all meant: the modern high finance he had heard about, wherein men gather and hoard great masses of wealth with honor till they're caught, and then are known as crooks when fortune turns against them.

Next day he was admitted to his father's room.

"Never mind, Dad," he said quickly. "I've made up my mind that it's all right. I'm going after a job to-day."

Mr. Van Brunt smiled. "No, no, my boy. It's not as bad as all that. It is true I have lost everything. Many of my friends have turned against me. But I have not cast you utterly adrift. You can still have your education if you wish."

"Without money, Dad?"

For reply Mr. Van Brunt turned to a white-haired gentleman Reggie had not yet noticed. "Reginald, this is my old friend, Senator Brame," he said. "He has a plan for your future."

The senator grasped Reggie's hand. "My boy, how would you like to go to Annapolis?"

"Why I never thought of it, sir."

"Well, I have an appointment for you. Your father says he can manage to send you to a preparatory school in Washington for the winter. How about it?"

Reggie's face lit up as the idea took root. Here might be the chance he had dreamed of. A naval officer had power and prestige. He was of the highest class socially. He had privileges denied to all except the wealthy class by which Reggie measured the people about him. Cer-

tainly this opportunity would give him the nearest thing to the ease and luxury he had hoped would make his life a bed of roses. At least, so Reggie thought.

"I'll take it, Dad, you bet!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER III

BURIED ALIVE

TOM POOR and Reginald Van Brunt didn't meet at Annapolis. They clashed. Instead of by formal introduction, they encountered one another in a violent head-on collision their fellow midshipmen remembered for years afterward.

This was to be expected. Tom was active, rough, and physically powerful. Reggie was refined and snobbish, undeveloped, and habitually indolent. Tom had been to sea and become a hero. Reggie had been to college and left it in disgrace. Tom had known nothing but poverty and hardship since boyhood. Reggie was a child of wealth, and of all the luxury that went with wealth.

Morning parade had just ended. Bancroft Hall, the great granite quarters of the midshipmen, glared a blinding white in the June sunshine. To one side lay the blue belt of the Severn River; to the other extended a lawn of green velvet to the row of perfectly matched officers' quarters.

Six hundred young men in white uniforms broke ranks with a combined shout of relief. The heat was oppressive. And, as yet, their muscles had not hardened enough to stand easily the strain of prolonged military exercise.

Reggie Van Brunt felt more than tired. The interminable shouted orders of the drill officer had got on his nerves. He was conscious of a desire to snap at someone, to give vent in some way to his irritation.

Directly in front of him he saw a sturdy figure standing with wide-braced legs, his hat jauntily on the back of his head. He was laughing and talking in a loud voice. Here, at least, was one who endured drills without any particular fatigue.

The sight aggravated Reggie's disturbed condition. He stepped around where he could get a better look at this marvel of endurance. One glance and he recognized the bluejacket who had been in the train with him the day he arrived.

He turned to the midshipman nearest him.

"Well," he sneered, "what do you know about that?"

"About what?" was the vague reply.

"Common sailors in this place! Common sailors, mind you! Washed dirty decks and all that. And here I thought this was a gentleman's school!"

Tom spun around. From head to foot he measured up the man who had dared insult him.

He was on the verge of laughing off the unkind remark. A smile twitched at one corner of his mouth. Then, suddenly, he got a full understanding of the feeling behind it. He saw the proud uptilt of Reggie's chin, and felt the cold contempt it stood for.

"Why, you poor simp!" burst Tom hotly; "where do you come from, Germany?"

"I spent a month there once," said Reggie airily. "I've travelled you know."

A chorus of laughter applauded this well-placed retort. Tom's anger exploded at the ridicule. He stepped quickly forward his fist doubled and drawn back to strike.

"Take it back, you fresh kid!" he roared.

As Reggie stood speechless, another instant and Tom would have swung. But the fraction of a second before his fist started, a broad-shouldered, tow-headed boy stepped in between him and the one he was about to annihilate.

"Have a heart, Poor. Can't you see he's half your weight?"

"Get out, Hansen," snorted Tom, struggling to free himself from the big Swede's grip. "He's insulted me and I'm going to make him apologize!"

Public opinion supported Hansen. There was a murmur of approval at his interference. Possibly there were some who felt with Reggie that their ambition to become naval officers had been encroached upon by admission of an ordinary enlisted man.

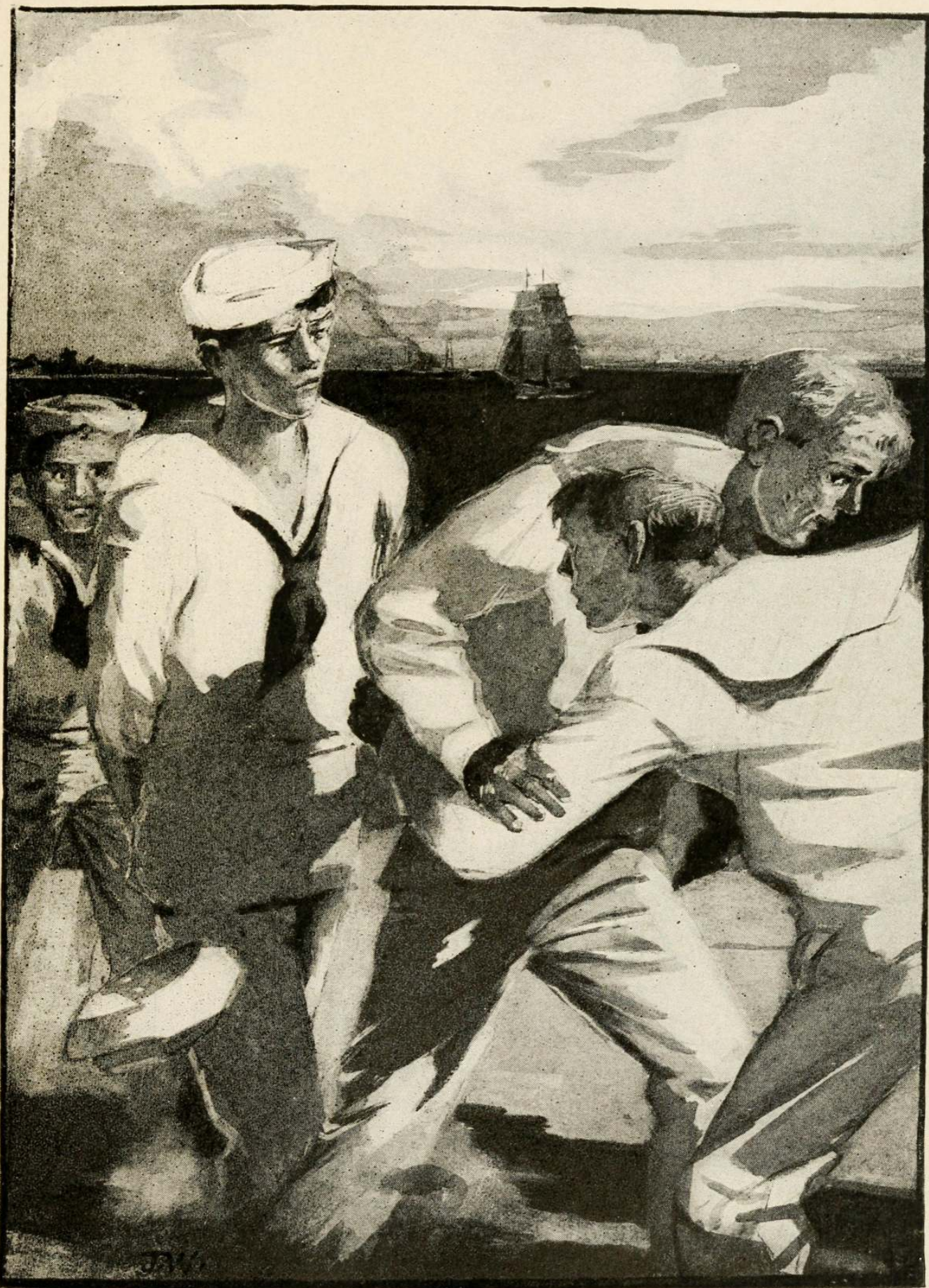
Tom realized with blunt shrewdness the truth of this disadvantage to which his previous career had brought him. But the injustice of it infuriated him. How many of them would have had the courage to break out into life unaided and make good?

After lunch he sought out Hansen.

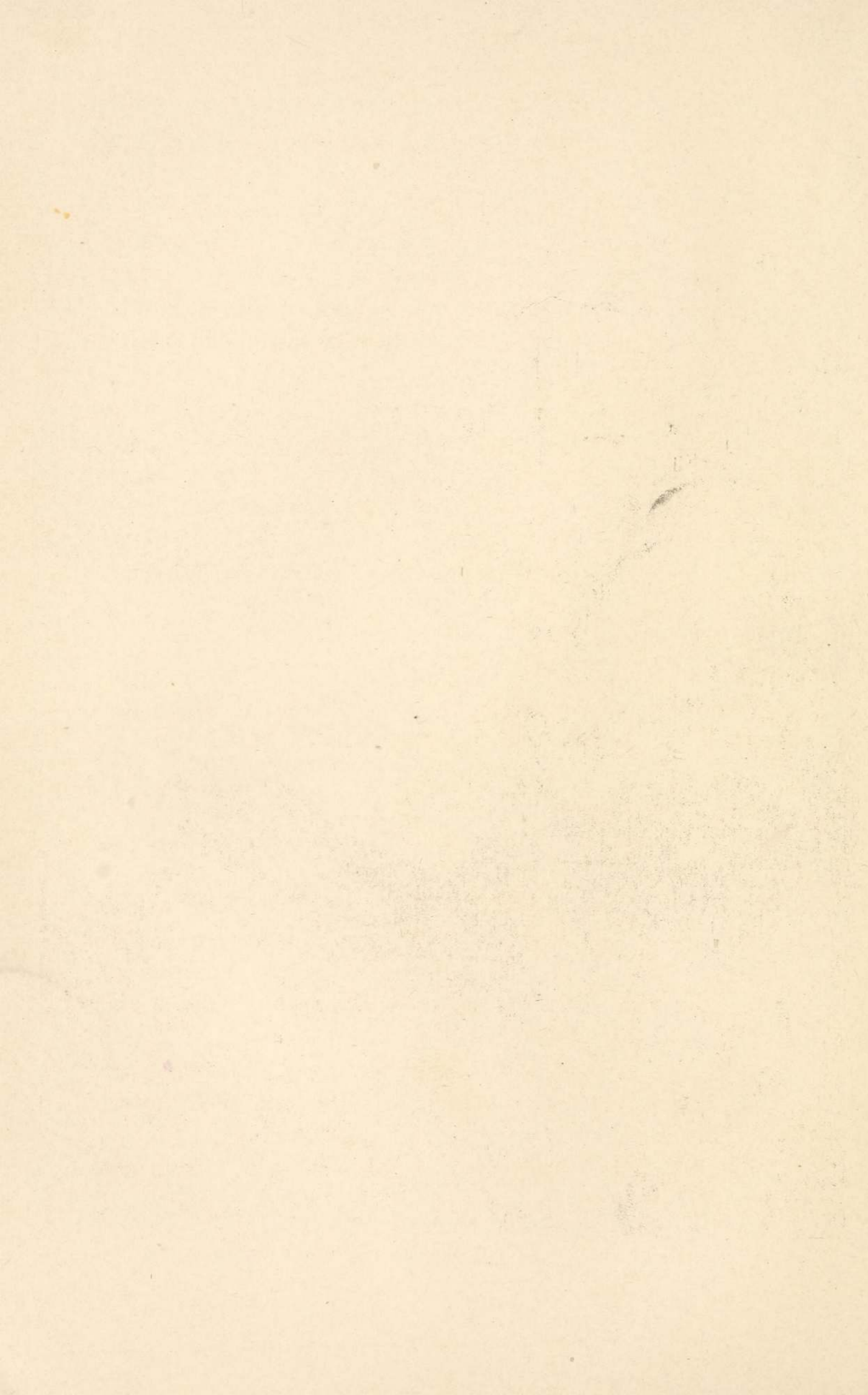
"You're a good sort, Swede," he told him, "in spite of the way you acted before the gang. I think maybe you've knocked about the world a bit like I have. That's why I took the trouble not to lose my temper and knock your block off this morning."

"How about now, Meester Poor?" the big fellow quietly put in. Though born in America he had assimilated some of his parents' native accent.

"I'll take you on in the gym one of these days," laughed Tom. "What I want to tell you now, though, is about that skinny-gadink who bawled me out before everybody. That dear sweet Reggie Van Brunt!" Tom forced



“HE’S INSULTED ME AND I’M GOING TO MAKE HIM APOLOGIZE.”



his voice into a throaty falsetto as he pronounced the name.

"Wait till he grows up," advised Hansen.

"Wait nothing. I'm going to get him. Not bully him or smash him up with my knuckles. You put a crimp into that. No, I'm going to make a fool of him in public. I figure that's about the best way to take him down off his high horse."

"What's your plan?"

"Don't know yet. Got to think it out."

At one o'clock there was a boat drill. Heavy Navy cutters were rowed out around a lighthouse two miles down the Bay and back again. Tom saw with joy Reggie's drooping shoulders as he struggled under the heavy oars in a boat behind. Perhaps he could use this as a means to humiliate him.

But he discovered this plan wouldn't do as soon as the boathouse was reached. Very few shoulders were not drooping. Pulling an oar exercises sets of muscles otherwise little used. Scarcely a boy helped secure his boat on the davits without first rubbing his arms and back, with some remark to the effect that "It's a dinged hard life, this Navy!"

At supper Tom watched Reggie take his place at the far end of a nearby table. He tried to imagine some scheme by which he could catch the assembled interest of six hundred middies and concentrate it upon the bodily weakness of this man he hated so.

After supper there was another drill. It consisted of a series of simple exercises at the gymnasium, followed by a brief instruction in knotting and splicing.

Suddenly Tom leaped from the low bench. "I've got it!" he cried.

"Did it bite?" inquired his neighbor with affected interest.

"It will," laughed Tom. "You'll see it too! They'll all see it."

He hunted up Hansen. "Plan's made," he confided. "That poor kid again?"

"Sure. Want to get in on it?"

"Not if it'll hurt him. Tom, my word on it, force doesn't pay in these days and times. Brains are what count. That's what this Naval Academy is for. Why in the old Navy days—"

"Aw, pipe the sermon. I'm not going to hurt the infant."

"Well, I don't know but what sweet Reggie does need a lesson. I'm with you in spirit anyway."

Tom led his friend to a secluded corner. For ten solid minutes he whispered in his ear. Twice he made him shake his head. Once his words caused the other to whisper back a suggestion. But in the end the two of them fell into each other's arms with a roar of heavy laughter that brought the officer in charge to his feet.

The next day was Saturday. All midshipmen were accorded the weekly privilege of visiting the town. Except for a change of scene from the reservation, the little old-fashioned place had small value in the way of entertainment. True, for those so inclined, there was a mild degree of inebriety in the over-eating of ice cream and cake. And very occasionally the moving pictures were worth seeing. On the whole it was known to the midshipmen as a "sell," and always referred to as "Crab-Town."

Little wonder was therefore occasioned when Tom

Poor and Ole Hansen announced their determination to spend the afternoon quietly in quarters.

"Got some letters to write," said Tom. True enough as far as he went. He had not communicated with home for nearly a month.

"Guess I'll sleep," was Hansen's excuse.

But when the building was well cleared of midshipmen, neither sleeping nor letter writing occupied the conspirators.

"First we've got to get the line," noted Tom.

"And a sack of some sort," contributed the other.

With an eye out for the "Jimmy-legs" or master-at-arms the pair went on a search in the vast galleries of the basement.

Back in Tom's room they laid out their finds. A coil of stout rope and two gunny sacks made up most of the equipment. To this Tom added a short stick he took from his laundry bag.

"Guess this'll be about the right dope," he concluded, after a survey.

"Looks so to me," agreed Ole.

From then till one o'clock the following morning everything proceeded in an orderly and normal naval manner. Supper formation at 6.30, supper at 6.40, (oatmeal, milk, and cold roast beef) and taps at ten.

Beginning at one, Sunday morning, things began to happen in the lives of three midshipmen: Tom, Ole, and one Reginald D. Van Brunt.

Tom moved first. He slipped out of bed, opened the door of his study, and peered down the broad corridor. The midshipman-in-charge had gone to bed. All was quiet save for the distant footsteps of a Jimmy-legs making his half-hourly round.

He tiptoed down to Ole's room and shook the proprietor.

"Wake up, you sea-anchor," he whispered.

"Ump—what time is it?" was the sleepy reply.

"One o'clock in the morning; but we've got to hurry at that. Neptune only knows how long this job's going to take."

They were able to reach Reggie's room undiscovered. It was on the floor below. One of the tremendous wings of Bancroft Hall had been given over to the new class or "plebes" as they are called. Each room is really a suite consisting of a central study, two tiny bedrooms, a bath, and a large closet. Two boys occupy a suite.

This arrangement made it possible for the kidnapers to reach Reggie without disturbing his roommate.

Tom took the lead. Probably his incentive was greater than Ole's. He crept up to the bed dimly visible in the darkness. In his hand he carried a towel. Having located the head of his victim, with a quick movement he wrapped the cloth tight about his head.

"B-r-r-r, g-r-l-p, Urlph!" choked Reggie.

"Urlph yourself," snickered Tom.

"Don't fool about it," hissed Ole, still a little anxious about the dangerous possibilities of the episode.

"All right; where's that rope?"

Tom took the proffered coil and unwound a fathom or so. Meanwhile he sat upon his squirming captive. Skilfully he bound him with good seagoing knots about his knees and wrists. This enabled Reggie to walk without giving him the slightest chance to escape.

Before removing him from the room, the towel was exchanged for a gag and blindfold.

"For heaven's sake be careful of talking," whispered

Ole. "If he recognizes us, he'll squeal as sure as shooting."

Stealthily the trio made the basement four floors below. Tom and Ole each held an arm of the stumbling Reggie. From time to time a nudge or a shove were necessary to urge upon him greater efforts at speed. No actual physical punishment was applied.

It wasn't that Tom wouldn't gladly have thrashed the boy then and there. His rough code of ethics fully approved of such a course. But Ole Hansen as well as the others had not backed him up in this kind of brutal discipline which he knew would have been perfectly proper among the sailormen he had become used to in the Fleet.

At first he had thought this was a class difference. These boys entering Annapolis were mostly sons of well-to-do families and had had years of schooling. But that was also true of a great many of the new enlisted men. No, the difference was more an attitude of mind; the blue-jacket was used to settling his difficulties himself; the midshipman had become previously accustomed to have those in authority settle things for him.

"Now for the moat," said Tom when they had forced their way into the lowest level.

Bancroft Hall is surrounded by a deep concrete alley which is supposed to admit light to the kitchens and laundry and other activities necessary to the midshipman's home life. As a fact, though, this alley provides in most cases an effective means of preventing the escape of the boys.

The moat was gained by forcing a window. Tom then brought a ladder he had spotted on their afternoon exploration. With considerable difficulty they finally succeeded in getting Reggie up it.

"Have you counted on the watchman?" cautioned Ole.

"I've figured it all out ahead," Tom replied. "He passes here twice an hour on the quarter hours. If I'm not mistaken there he comes now."

The three criminals dodged low in the shadow of the moat's retaining wall while the man passed.

"Right across Lover's Lane from here," Tom directed. He referred to that main portion of the campus which had always been the chief attraction for midshipmen and their girls who came down for Saturday night hops. On Sunday after chapel the benches were usually fully occupied.

The chapel itself faced one side of the Lane. It was a massive white building to match Bancroft Hall. Hundreds of feet in the air its mammoth dome of gold shone a ghostly yellow in the pale moonlight.

Across the open space they carried Reggie. This way more speed could be made; and speed was necessary. On all sides there was a dangerous lack of cover.

By a little side door they made the cavernous gallery under the chapel. In the center, showing dimly, was the great stone crypt that held the remains of John Paul Jones.

"Wonder what *he* thinks of this business," queried Ole in awed tones.

"Thinks it's silly," replied Tom promptly and with no sign of nervousness. "He'd have done just what I wanted to do, and *you* wouldn't let me; knocked the man down who dared insult him."

"Yes," observed Ole sagely, "he had the time to develop his fists and footwork. Our time we must put in on our brains. There wasn't any radio or electrical engineering in those days."

"Preach ahead, Swede, we're in the chapel you know." Tom's intolerance of the other boy's reasoning never failed.

With a feeling of relief they left the region of the dead and mounted the stairway to the main chapel. Here another kind of discomfort assailed them. The enormous size of the dome, lit only by the ghastly paleness of the moon that filtered through the long windows gave them a sort of creeps.

"I'm not specially superstitious," mumbled Tom, "but gosh! this kind of gets next to me. I can feel it under my skin. Can't you?"

"You bet," returned Ole, keeping a little closer than was necessary to Tom and the victim. "Guess it's better this kid doesn't know where we're putting him."

On the raised platform, between the choir stalls, Tom stopped.

"Here it is," he said, and leaned over. After a short struggle he lifted up a kind of trap-door disclosing a black hole underneath.

"So that's where you're going to put him?"

"Yes," explained Tom. "I remember the repair gang were fixing the light connections down here this week. This hole is only three feet deep and the lid is temporary."

"But how are you going to make this bird stay there?"

For reply Tom gently tripped and threw Reggie to the flagged pavement. He took the remainder of the coil he had brought along, and passed a series of peculiar turns about the arms, legs, and wrists of the prostrate boy. With the stick these lashings were made into a sort of truss that left him utterly helpless.

"Trick I learned in the Fleet," said Tom when he had finished.

"But you swore not to hurt him," protested Ole "This will be torture."

"On the contrary he will be perfectly comfortable—for several hours anyway. That's the object of these knots—'prisoner's splice' it's called. They taught it to us down south when we used to round up some of those rioters in Haiti."

Ole bowed to the superior knowledge and experience of his companion. But when he helped lower Reggie into the hole, he still had doubts.

"How are you going to get him out?"

Tom shoved the trap-door in place with a chuckle. "Simple enough. Here's my jackknife and lanyard. I have laid Mister Van Brunt in such a position that if the knife falls through this hole at the edge of the door it will land within reach of his hands. That splice I used is such that he cannot untie himself, but he can handle a knife freely enough to cut the lashings."

"All very well. But who's going to drop the knife?"

"The battalion adjutant, Harry Gill. Tomorrow's the first Sunday in the month you know. He reads *Rocks and Shoals** at the beginning of chapel. Hank's a nervous shrimp. Right here is where he stands. While he reads, he shuffles all over the place. If I shove my knife in the hole and leave it sticking out the eighth of an inch he'll knock it down sure."

"And what then?"

"Oh boy!" Tom hugged himself at the prospect.

* *Rocks and Shoals*," i. e. the Navy regulations which are read on the first Sunday in every month to the assembled crews aboard ships, and to the midshipmen at Annapolis.

“Why dear sweet little Reggie will think he’s been tied up in the basement of one of the academic buildings. He will cut himself loose with joy. The cramp in his legs will make him have to get up and move about. And then—”

“Paul Jones rises from his grave!” exploded Ole.

CHAPTER IV

AN ADMIRAL AT BAY

SUNDAY came serene and calm and hot.

Admiral Lacy, the Commandant of Midshipmen, was also hot; he was anything but serene and calm.

His day was ruined from the outset by the arrival of Commander Hill, his aide.

"Another anonymous letter, sir," announced the Commander, holding out a dirty and crumpled envelope.

The Admiral fairly snatched at the missive.

"Dere sir," he read, "i've seed lately many of your mids commin' in and out uv the place where Charley the cobbler lives. Looks like they ain't behavin themselves as they should. Plese take this as it is ment. Sig. a frend."

"I have investigated, sir," began the Commander, "and find that nothing is wrong. A good many of the midshipmen have been going to this Charley Simmons to have rubber heels put on their shoes. Our own cobbler shop has run out of them."

The Admiral slammed his fist on the table. "It's the rotten spirit of the thing!" he barked. "The writer of this letter probably pictures our boys getting filled up with liquor at that place. And he hasn't the courage to come and tell me about it face to face!"

"He's a coward all right," agreed the aide. "He has already spread the gossip all over town that midshipmen are getting out of hand."

An inarticulate gurgle of rage escaped the furious Admiral. His predecessor had been removed the year before after just such baseless slander.

"If I catch that fellow, I'll jail him!" he roared.

At this moment a knock came at the door followed by the arrival of the marine orderly.

"A lady to see you, sir."

The unhappy Admiral groaned. He turned to his aide with a hunted look. "Hill, I really doubt the wisdom of this Sunday morning plan. I thought it a good idea to let parents and interested friends come to me between nine and ten because many of them cannot arrange to reach me during the week. But—"

A sudden rumpus arose outside the office door. In the reception room, parents were supposed to wait their turn. From it now came the angry tones of a woman's voice. An instant later the door burst open and there entered a tall angular lady with her hat awry, her face purple with wrath. In her hands she gripped a large umbrella.

Behind her came the other marine orderly, his hair mussed and his stiff hat crumpled. Very evidently he had been in combat with the visitor.

"Beg pardon, sir," he stammered, "but she wouldn't see fit as to wait 'er turn, sir."

Before the astonished Commandant could open his mouth, the excited woman exploded in a stream of shrill abuse.

"I wouldn't wait my turn, wouldn't I?" She glared from the orderly to the Admiral, both speechless. "Why should I wait my turn with *this* on my mind?"

Dramatically she put her hand in her bag and drew out a large and bloody handkerchief.

"It's my boy's!" Her voice broke and tears filled her eyes. "He's being tortured. He's being murdered in this—this—*penitentiary!*"

The Admiral sighed with relief. This kind of thing he could deal with. As the lady had played her trump card at the very beginning, he knew exactly where he stood.

"Sit down, madam," he said courteously, and waved her to a chair. "Now tell me, please, who your boy is."

She dabbed her eyes with the corner of the gory evidence she had brought. "George Melville Audrey Johnson," she moaned.

"Orderly," commanded the Admiral gravely, "tell the Officer-in-Charge I wish George Melville Audrey Johnson here at once. And have him bring the conduct report."

"Aye, aye, sir." The orderly saluted and departed with a grin that broadened with every step.

"The bloody handkerchief, madam?" inquired the Admiral. "Er—did he say how it er—happened?"

"No" was the indignant reply, "his sense of honor is too fine for that. I found it in his coat pocket when he came to visit me at the hotel."

At this juncture there were ushered in two midshipmen. One wore a duty belt; the other was attired in a rather untidy uniform.

"Audrey!" murmured the fond mother. The boy gave her a cold glance and glared with keen interest out of the window where a Jimmy-legs was adjusting the flagpole halliards.

"Mr. Johnson's conduct report?" brusquely demanded the Admiral.

The duty midshipman took a roll of white paper from under his arm and began to read in a monotone.

“June first, neglect of duty, fifteen demerits. June second, smoking in quarters, fifty demerits. June third created disturbance after taps, ten demerits. June fourth,—”

The Admiral held up his hand. “That will do for the report.” He turned to the sullen Audrey. “Mr. Johnson are you afflicted often with nose bleed?” He pointed to the bloody handkerchief in Mrs. Johnson’s lap.

“No sir, I—” he suddenly caught the accusing eye of the duty midshipman who had moved a step nearer. “Well, sir, I uh—I took a piece of cake outa the locker of another fellow’s room and he—he—” Audrey’s voice failed him.

“Yes?” invited the Admiral in a fatherly note that caused the aide to bite his tongue.

“Yes, yes?” echoed Mrs. Johnson pathetic in her sympathy.

“Well, he uh—” went on Audrey. The duty midshipman gave him a slight nudge of encouragement. “He busted me in the nose, sir; and called me a thief, he did, sir!”

“Well, weren’t you?” was the Admiral’s suave inquiry.

Mrs. Johnson rose from her chair and rushed across the room. She stretched her arms protectingly toward the youthful criminal. “My Audrey a thief?” she cried. “Never! Never!”

But Audrey saw her first. He dodged and sidestepped. With a look of agonized pleading he caught the Admiral’s stern eye. The Admiral rose.

"Open the door, orderly," he said quietly.

Nimble George Melville Audrey Johnson escaped, followed by his heartbroken mother and the convulsed duty midshipman.

The Commandant mopped his weatherbeaten brow. "Who's next, Hill?" he asked wearily.

"Senator Brame, sir."

The Senator entered and bowed slightly. He stood in awe of no military rank. The National Congress of which he was a distinguished member ruled both the Army and the Navy. Indeed, this Admiral before him held his rank only by and with the approval of the august body of the Senate.

"Good morning, Admiral," he said running his gaze appraisingly over the old sea-dog's well-knit figure, square jaws, and keen unwavering eyes.

"Good morning, Senator Brame," greeted Admiral Lacy. He had encountered political shrewdness before and was on his guard at once.

"I come to you about the son of an old friend of mine. Reginald Van Brunt. I'd like to know how he is getting along."

The Admiral bowed assent and rang for the orderly. "Send Reginald Van Brunt to my office."

The Senator took in the marine's sharp "Aye, aye, sir," and smart salute with unmistakable disapproval.

He shook his head. "Too Prussian," he commented.

"What would you have?" asked the Admiral pleasantly. "The soldier in war, the policeman in peace, both must learn implicit obedience. In no other way can we fully utilize their value to the country in time of emergency."

"That's all very well, Admiral. But such matters can

be carried too far. Take this boy I am inquiring about. While perfectly able to stand your course here, he is undeniably delicate. He has also what is called a nervous temperament."

"Annapolis, Senator, is just the place in the world for that type. It strengthens the boy's character as well as his body."

"I agree with you in principle. What I doubt is the means by which such a change will be brought about."

"They are approved by Congress—our rules and regulations."

"Yes, the official ones. But how about hazing?"

"Not a stone left unturned to stamp it out."

"You don't say, though, that it is stamped out."

For a moment the Admiral did not reply. To debate such a delicate subject with a Senator compelled him to exercise his utmost care not to be misunderstood.

"Senator," he said at last. "I don't wish to beat about the bush. You are in a position to hold against me what I say. Therefore I will try to be very frank. There are two kinds of hazing."

"There can't be!" was the sharp retort.

"I insist there are," continued the Admiral firmly. "First, there is that concerted action by a whole upper class or classes to coerce the lowest class into a code of discipline not sanctioned by authority. Special painful punishments are devised to make fourth-classmen or plebes obey. They are compelled to perform in some silly manner; to stand on their heads; to carry out various other absurd, though seldom dangerous antics."

"Agreed, Admiral, so far."

"This kind of hazing we have nearly eradicated. It is a kind of mutiny. It attempts to substitute the will of

a body of immature students for the matured will of the Superintendent backed by the Navy Department."

"Quite right, sir."

"The second kind of hazing I approve."

The Senator raised his eyebrows. He made a mental note to look up the Commandant's record as soon as he got back to Washington.

"It is that unavoidable nature of a boy which will not endure certain caddish traits in other boys. It is that which makes the sneak, the coward, the er—what my young men call 'sis,' have a hard time when they go to Annapolis or West Point, to Yale or to Harvard. And for the good of the country at large it is quite right such boys should have a hard time."

Before the Senator had a chance to offer his own opinion on this point, the orderly returned and announced that Mr. Van Brunt was not to be found in his room.

"Have the word passed about the decks and on the terrace for him," ordered the Admiral. Then turning to the Senator, "And what do you think, sir?" he said.

"There is truth in what you say, Admiral. No group of boys ever lived who do not take the first opportunity to play pranks on the weak and gullible. The danger lies in the extent to which such things are allowed to go."

"Which is just where the discipline comes in," interrupted the Admiral.

"Yes, if you are able to forestall the brutality of boys older and stronger than the average, I should have nothing to fear. But with over two-thousand midshipmen, not a few of whom have been to sea as enlisted men, permit me to say that you have nearly a superhuman task."

"Our system is the best in the world," announced the Admiral proudly.

When just here the orderly returned for the second time with the report that Reginald Van Brunt was not to be located in or out of quarters, the Commandant could not conceal his anxiety.

"Send the Officer-in-Charge here at once" he directed.

It was aggravating enough to have the Senator prying into the Academy's affairs. But for anything to happen just now to the very boy in question would be terrible.

Perhaps Senator Brame read some of the disquiet in the naval officer's mind. And, though a middle-aged man himself, he could not resist the temptation to bully a bit just like any boy.

"You understand my position, Admiral," he declaimed pompously. "The Naval Academy is supported and run by the taxpayer's money. Its responsibility is far beyond that of the ordinary school or university. It is my duty as a representative of the people to inquire into your methods."

"Yes; quite right, quite right," was the absentminded reply. The Admiral was cudgelling his brain to imagine what mortifying stunt had been arranged by the midshipmen at the expense of Reginald Van Brunt. He well knew no punishment lay within his power that would offset the effect of such a prank on the Senator. Dimly he regretted having boasted so openly about the success of his disciplinary system over the obstreperous midshipmen.

"And," concluded the Senator with meaning, "if I see anything suspicious, I shall certainly report it."

The Admiral fervently prayed he should find Annapolis at its best.

But even Admirals can be disappointed.

The Officer-in-Charge, Lieutenant Commander Kilduff, here appeared with a serious expression printed all over his ordinarily jovial countenance.

"Admiral," said he, "I'm afraid Mr. Van Brunt is guilty of frenching."

"Frenching—taking French leave;" interpreted the Admiral. "That is, absent from the ground without authority." His voice had regained its customary briskness. His relief was great to learn that the Senator's pet was like Mrs. Johnson's erring boy, a culprit in the eyes of the law.

"I strongly doubt this officer's information," was the Senator's unruffled reply.

"I have sent out a searching party," spoke up Mr. Kilduff somewhat hurt. "I expect a report inside of an hour."

"In the meanwhile, let's have Sunday parade and inspection," suggested the Admiral. "It's time." He felt by this means he might divert Senator Brame's unpleasant suspicions and possibly entertain him until substantial evidence could be got that Reginald Van Brunt deserved none of the high-caste sympathy being wasted on him.

Evidence came soon enough: but it was of a dreadful and unexpected kind.

CHAPTER V

THE DISASTER

LET us now return to Reggie. How was he passing the long and painful hours between the moment of his capture and the visit of Senator Brame on his behalf?

In the first place, Tom and Ole were mistaken when they thought Reggie didn't recognize them. Reggie hadn't said a word or struggled simply because all his life he had been a weakling. He had long ago learned that when in the hands of stronger boys he might as well take what they had in store for him. Resistance only meant punishment.

On the other hand, they had been successful when they bandaged his eyes and ears. As he lay bound and helpless in the chapel he had not the slightest idea where he was.

Just before Tom replaced the board cover to the hole, he had removed the bandages in order that Reggie might not miss the knife when it fell.

For a few minutes Reggie heard the two whispering over his head. A little later the door creaked. Then all was still.

With the knowledge that he was alone Reggie's fear left him. In fact, the only timidity he had ever had was of a physical kind. He possessed a cynical disbelief of ghosts and superstition.

He began to make efforts to free himself. Though his hands were tied in front of him, he soon found the

knots too firm to unloose. His knees and ankles were in one tight mass with the stick.

After a bit his squirming gave him a cramp in one side. This made him anxious. If he was to be left until daylight, small pains might easily grow into acute and unbearable agony.

His imagination began to torture him. He remembered all the books about men captured by pirates and bandits and cruelly forced to confess the whereabouts of hidden treasure.

Suppose anything happened to Tom and Ole? How would other people know where to look for him? In the old days his father would have immediately expended large sums to organize search parties and to provide rewards for information. There was no chance of that now!

The pain in his side grew worse. He wriggled first one way and then the other. Finally he managed to get over on his back.

As he did so he felt his knees strike something above. Simultaneously there was a slight thud alongside him as if some small object had fallen.

He lay still listening intently. There was no further sound. He made the discovery that a faint light was visible through a crack directly above his face.

Another few minutes passed—they seemed like an age to Reggie—and his cramp forced him to roll over again on his side. This time he felt something cold near one hand. As his fingers were free he picked the object up.

To his great joy he realized he had hold of a knife.

It was the work of a comparatively short time to saw

through the lashings on his wrist. Those on his legs were heavier but finally came off.

Every few moments he stopped to listen. If the kidnapers were still about, it wouldn't do to let them know he was getting free.

When the last shred of rope fell clear, he closed the knife and put it into his pocket for future service. He felt cautiously overhead. For a moment the awful thought assailed him that he had been buried alive and this was a coffin in which he lay.

The board door lifted easily. Reggie slowly stood up. His eyes, accustomed to the darkness, quickly told him his prison was the chapel. The tall windows under the dome were distinctly outlined by the moonlight.

With care to keep in the shadows, Reggie made his way around the central pews to the entrance. The massive bronze doors proved to be locked. Next he tried several of the windows without success.

Then he recalled the basement entrances. Down the winding stairway it suddenly occurred to him that Paul Jones lay buried there. He wondered if this had anything to do with the joke.

The side basement door proved to be unlocked. Outside no one was in sight. Apparently there was going to be no great difficulty in getting back to Bancroft Hall unless the watchman caught him.

He was almost to the terrace when one appeared. Instantly Reggie dodged behind a tree. But he was too late. The man had seen him. He waited for a few seconds to be sure the watchman was going to give chase. Then he ran. Instinctively he took the direction from which he had just come. Twice he looked over his shoul-

der. He could hear the thudding steps of his pursuer. Then with delight he realized he was holding his own. He was able to run as fast as the watchman!

This discovery gave him an unaccustomed sense of confidence. Always in the past he had run with the greatest terror of being overtaken and punished. Now he realized that escape did not depend upon his fleetness of foot so much as the strategy which he might use to throw the man off the trail.

By this time he had reached the chapel again. Thinking rapidly he ran straight for the wall. Just before he reached it, he was for a moment out of sight of the watchman in the shadow of a nearby building. Instantly he doubled back and reentered the chapel by the door from which he had escaped but a few minutes before. Instead of going upstairs he crawled behind the crypt that held the bones of our greatest naval hero.

Reggie was panting and somewhat exhausted after the race. But his customary fear in such flights had left him entirely. Instead, he remarked out loud to himself:

“The old beggar, I fooled him that time all right!”

Although no one appeared, Reggie knew he could not venture out again for some time. No doubt the watchman thought he had escaped over the wall into town. But that would not prevent him from spreading the alarm and setting others to search all possible hiding places.

In the security of his position, Reggie's thoughts drifted back to the original difficulty. Why had Tom and Ole taken him here? No doubt it was some form of punishment for what he had said about Tom's previous life.

And, by the way, what right had he to criticize? Wasn't he the same Reggie Van Brunt who was known as a coward by the whole freshman class in a certain university?

As for Tom Poor, even though he was a common sailor, he had possessed the courage to go out into the world alone and make a living.

"But I did it, too," Reggie reminded himself. "I would have got a job the very next morning if Dad hadn't stopped me."

This idea somewhat dispelled the shame of the other memory. Perhaps if he, Reggie, had a chance he would get ahead just as fast as Tom or Ole or any other stronger boy. He couldn't help being weak. He wasn't built for fighting. Then there was this little brush with the watchman. Hadn't he put it over on the fellow by sheer cleverness?

"Then why can't I turn tables on those other nuts?"

Reggie actually laughed. If he had only known it, the medicine of Tom's practical joke was working with miraculous rapidity. At last he was beginning to see life in terms of brains rather than brute strength.

Something white caught his eye.

He tiptoed around to the other side of the crypt and found a cardboard placard propped up against the door. Turning it over he could make out large lettering illegible in the faint light.

He took the placard to the door which was still open a crack and read:

LEAVE YOUR
CAPS HERE

The card had been used in the recent crowded grad-

uation week when several classes had reunions. Uniform caps were on these occasions always difficult to retain. The thousands of them were so absolutely identical.

Reggie's imagination was still hard at work. He had also reached a state of self-confidence wherein he felt nearly able to cope with even such bullies as Tom and Ole.

Suddenly he ejaculated "Wow," And again he exclaimed with perilous loudness: "WOW!"

Deliberately he closed the door. He returned to the scene of his imprisonment. From the hole in which he had lain he fished out several old nails. With the help of these he fastened the sign to the under side of the board cover. Then, drawing the knife from his pocket and opening it, he began to scrape at one of the letters.

About six hours after this, the long corridors of Bancroft Hall echoed with the strident notes of the bugle. Twice the call to rooms was sounded accompanied by a great confusion and running about.

"Clear the deck and stand by for inspection!" shouted the midshipmen-in-charge of floors.

In five minutes all was quiet.

"Quarters ready for inspection," announced the Officer-in-Charge.

"Very good, sir," replied Admiral Lacy. And turning to the Senator. "Come," he said "and I will show you what discipline can be."

At each study door stood a midshipman at attention in full dress uniform. Inside was his roommate whose turn it was to be responsible for the appearance of the room for the ensuing week. In the center of the study stood a plain deal table and two chairs. By each wall

was a three-story book case, likewise of the simplest construction. Books were arranged with microscopic attention to size.

In each small bedroom on either side were a small white iron bedstead, a locker, and a metal washstand. By the bed was a tiny piece of carpet, the only floor covering in the whole room. Under the bed were two pairs of shoes polished till they glistened.

Not a speck of dust in sight. Not a piece of furniture or a book, or a windowshade the fraction of an inch out of alignment. Even the clothing in the locker was arranged according to size and kind.

"They do it themselves," said the Commandant proudly.

"Chambermaids are scarce these days," dryly commented the Senator. "May I ask why such austerity of existence is necessary for these young men?"

The midshipman by the door bestowed a pleased wink upon his roommate.

"Certainly," returned the Admiral. "Some day these lads will be officers. Their duty will be to keep our naval vessels in the same condition of irreproachable cleanliness as they now keep their rooms. Such a state aboard a man-of-war makes for contentment of the crews as well as economical upkeep of the whole ordnance and engine installation."

To the Admiral's disappointment, Senator Brame seemed to have missed the full weight of this impressive speech. He was scrutinizing one of the lockers, apparently overcome by its almost superhuman tidiness.

Suddenly he turned and with a look of great sternness addressed the Admiral.

"Cleanliness is next to Godliness," he pronounced

solemnly. "But even Godliness has been known to wane in the face of insufficient nourishment."

"My dear sir," hastily interposed the Admiral, "just wait till you see the magnificence of our kitchens."

Senator Brame hereupon placed his hand under a pair of beautifully pressed and folded white trousers and drew it out.

"I don't need to," he said, and handed the Admiral a thick, rich, and juicy cherry pie!

"Put Midshipman Jones on the report for 'food in room!'" was the Admiral's icy comment.

The inspection party passed grimly out.

By the time parade call was sounded the Commandant had regained his composure. He led the Senator to a point of vantage on the terrace. To the east lay the grassy drill and athletic field. Beyond for ten clean blue miles spread the broad waters of Chesapeake Bay.

"Can you imagine a more beautiful environment for the education of a boy?" he asked.

"For once I agree with you, Admiral," was the bantering reply. "Your task as I see it is not only to teach these young men to shoot guns and operate engines. More important almost is to convince them that a naval career is the finest in the world; to breed in them a love of the sea. I cannot imagine a happier situation for such a school."

By this time the hundreds of future naval officers were flooding from the various doors of the quarters. As if by magic they fell into two long parallel lines.

"Makes soldiers out of them, too," muttered the Senator.

The Admiral laughed. "It's all in the day's work," he suggested. "In the Navy we've got to be prepared to

fight ashore as well as afloat. Our lines of activity combine those of nearly every technical profession known."

As the roll call began with a loud clattering of names Senator Brame was reminded of the cause for his visit.

"Anything of my young friend yet?" he inquired.

The Admiral sent his orderly to investigate. Lieutenant Commander Kilduff himself came to report.

"My scouts say they have covered every district in Annapolis without finding a single trace of Midshipman Van Brunt. It's very strange, sir."

The Admiral nodded slowly. With growing satisfaction he felt the value of proving to the distinguished visitor that even the boys of most refined families, with the best previous breeding and education, may go astray.

"One thing more, sir," continued the Officer-in-Charge. "I forgot to say that main gate watchman reports he chased a midshipman over the wall behind the chapel about three o'clock this morning. He believes the fellow tallied with the description of Van Brunt."

At last the Senator seemed inclined to weaken. "Well, 'boys will be boys,' " he quoted. "It's an old adage, but a very true one. And there's no accounting for it."

With great pride the Admiral led the way down the stiff ranks. Now and then he stopped to examine a boy's cap or uniform more closely. Very occasionally he asked one his name.

Opposite Tom he stopped for a full minute. In his mind he said: "Here's a fine looking young man. I'll have to keep my eye on him. Some day he'll make me a good flag lieutenant."

Tom returned the Admiral's gaze without flinching. In his mind he imagined the Admiral was saying:

"Here's a guilty-looking young cuss. Wonder what

he's been up to. His eyes show he needs sleep. That means he's been up all night. Probably he can tell me where that Van Brunt is we've been passing the word for all morning!"

The Admiral passed on.

Inspection done, bugles sounded again and rank broke up into squads. With mechanical precision the whole six hundred stepped off together in time to the music.

"Fine sight, fine sight indeed!" exclaimed the Senator much moved by the spectacle.

"Inspiring it is," agreed the Admiral. "So many young men, healthy and strong, with all their future ahead of them." His eyes blinked with emotion. "It glorifies the duty of us who guide them!"

The Senator recovered first. "Don't forget the sheep that's out," he laughed.

As the marching columns approached the chapel entrance, a crowd of visitors parted to let them through.

"Aren't they handsome!" came the shrill voice of a girl.

"So highminded," whispered a mother to the father of a fat plebe in one of the rear ranks.

"Possibly," returned the father in a dubious tone.

The central pews were quickly filled by the battalion. With quiet efficiency the long rows were occupied. Each midshipman sat erect and stiff as if a ramrod had been poked up his back before leaving quarters. The combined solemnity fixed upon the six hundred young faces would have made a graveyard seem jovial by comparison.

A few minutes were occupied by the entrance of the visitors. At the rustling of gowns and hushed feminine voices a slight tremor seemed to pass along the flat broad

uniformed shoulders. But the discipline was perfect. Not a single one of those close-clipped heads turned the hundredth part of an inch.

When the Commandant and Senator Brame had taken their seats at the front and center there was a moment of dead silence. The Cadet Adjutant Gill marched grandly up the aisle. Under his arm he carried the Navy Regulations.

At the top of the steps leading to the chancel he came to a halt and smartly faced about.

Immediately he found his place and in a clear carrying voice began to read:

“‘The Navy of the United States shall be governed by the following articles.’”

Imperceptibly six hundred bodies between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one settled themselves for the ordeal.

“‘The Commanders of all fleets, squadrons, naval stations. . . .’”

To the great joy and entertainment of six hundred pairs of watchful eyes a fly lit upon Admiral Lacy's bald spot.

“‘Or strikes or assaults, or attempts or threatens. . . .’”

The Admiral struck and assaulted the fly. In so doing he jolted unpleasantly the Senator next to him who was just dropping into a peaceful doze.

The aroused Senator drew himself upright and looked about. By turning half around he could see the row upon row of set bored faces behind. One boy he thought he recognized. He looked like—

The Senator closed his eyes and opened them again. The countenance he was studying had suddenly taken on a look of horror and amazement. The eyes pro-

truded. The jaw dropped; and by the nostrils' quick movement he knew the boy was panting.

Instantly the Senator turned to warn the Admiral that one of his midshipmen was on the point of having a fit of some sort. Better get him out before a disturbance was created.

To his astonishment he found the same wild look had seized upon the Admiral. Evidently he too was in the throes of some terrific internal emotion.

Senator Brame followed his gaze. And *his* face followed suit.

Just behind the Cadet Adjutant near the chancel a square board had been raised by some invisible agency. On the board had been nailed a large white placard on which in tall black letters was the remarkable inscription:

LEAVE YOUR CATS HERE

Intense silence held the stupefied assemblage.

Then slowly, gruesomely, there rose before the placard a dreadful sight. It was the tall figure of a man. He was dirty and dishevelled. A cruel gag filled the space where his mouth should have been. A blindfold blotted out the eyes. His wrists and body were twined with torturing knots that would have gratified a hangman.

The apparition came to its full height, then emitted a long and heart-rending groan.

A woman in the rear screamed and fainted and had to be carried out. It was the mother of Audrey Melville Johnson.

The apparition disappeared behind the organ sup-

ported on the shoulders of two choking members of the choir.

But not before the Senator had recognized Reginald D. Van Brunt!

CHAPTER VI

COURT-MARTIAL

TOM enjoyed exactly twenty-four hours of sweet satisfaction in the glorious success of his deed before the blow fell.

During Sunday lunch excitement ran high. Naturally the first flush of public sentiment favored Reggie.

"Oh, you old cat!" his twenty-one table mates assailed him.

Reggie bestowed a superior grin upon the crowd.

"Hey, John Paul Jones, how does it feel to be buried two hundred years?" inquired one wit.

"Hot stuff, boy," retorted Reggie.

On the other side of the mess hall midshipmen craned their necks to catch a glimpse of the hero. And hero Reggie was, strange as it may seem. Consensus of opinion agreed that only considerable presence of mind on his part as well as a good deal of downright nerve could have made it possible to work the chapel stunt with such huge success.

Secretly Tom and Ole agreed. They had never dreamed their plot could have been carried out so magnificently.

"The only thing that worries me is that fool sign," said Tom. But the less imaginative Ole merely took this phenomenon as a contribution by Providence. "Should have thought of it ourselves," he growled.

As for Reggie his self-respect had been swelling like a balloon ever since that thrilling moment when he found he could outspeed the watchman. That he now had outspeeded two bullies like Tom Poor and Ole Hansen he took almost as a matter of course.

During the afternoon, the midshipmen on sailing parties and cross-country walks discussed the great sensation from beginning to end.

"What'll the Supe do about it?" was the question sooner or later everyone asked everyone else. The Superintendent was absent; and the Commandant, Admiral Lacy, had not yet been able to impose any extreme fear upon the battalion.

"Find out who pulled the stunt, of course."

"But how can he?"

"Easy enough."

"Sherlock Holmes stuff, I suppose."

"Not at all. Simply seek the motive." Not without results had the speaker stayed up half the night over a harrowing detective story.

"Say, you're some little sleuth, now ain't you?"

"Not at all. Who do you think had it in for Reggie Van Brunt? Why that gink, Tom Poor, of course. Poor wanted to beat him up; but the gang wouldn't stand for it. So he got even by making a fool out of Reggie."

Thus it was that by supper-time the fickle admiration of nearly six hundred youthful detectives abandoned Reggie for Tom Poor. They realized that beyond a shadow of a doubt Tom Poor's was the master mind behind the whole circus.

Desperately Reggie sought to retain his midday prestige.

"Any cats to dispose of?" he facetiously inquired of several of his recent most ardent admirers.

But it was of no use. All eyes were on Tom. All minds were hard at work picturing the tremendous physical strength and the super-intelligence required to kidnap a live man, then to arrange a trap that would spring with such divine consequences at the exact moment it would be most effective.

Tom took this hero-worship as a matter of course. He had been a public character before.

For the same reason he was amazed to see Reggie's pride in having been the victim. In fact he called Ole's attention to it as they drifted up to Recreation Hall after lunch.

"Anybody would think he had planned the thing himself," he said.

At that minute Reggie hove in sight. To the kidnapers' profound astonishment he favored them with a condescending bow.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" gasped Tom.

After supper the situation was reversed. Reggie had regained something of his former uneasy manner. Truth was that the attention which had bolstered him up earlier in the day was now entirely diverted to Ole and Tom.

These two took pains to seek him out just before the evening call to rooms. Some maneuvering was necessary to avoid making a public spectacle of the encounter.

"Say, Van Brunt," said Tom menacingly, "maybe you might explain who was responsible for that sign."

Reggie glanced over his shoulder. A group of midshipmen stood reassuringly near.

"Maybe I might, and maybe I mightn't," was the daring reply.

Before Ole could stop him Tom had swung out with all his force. Reggie was half prepared for the attack and ducked. But his unpractised eye was too slow. The blow missed his chin but caught him with a thud on his right shoulder. He spun and fell sprawling to the floor.

"You fool!" cried Ole. "I'm done with you, Tom Poor!"

Whereupon Reggie, who by this time had rolled unhurt to a sitting position and saw the gathering crowd, seized the opportunity to make the only defense he knew how. His eyes narrow with hatred, he hissed:

"I'll get you, you *thug!* You watch!"

And he did.

It was next morning. The fourth class had been out in the sub-chasers for tactical and signal drill. Sixteen of these small gasoline-driven craft were organized into regular battleship divisions. Midshipmen formed their crews. From bridge to bridge semaphore signals were flashed back and forth.

Having been a signal boy himself, Tom instinctively caught many of the silly sentences that were spelled out by the bits of fluttering colored bunting. The message that passed most frequently made him dig his finger nails into the palms of his hands. It was:

"L-E-A-V-E Y-O-U-R C-A-T-S H-E-R-E!"

"Children!" he sneered.

As Reggie had not yet mastered the code, he missed this particular part of the morning's exercises. He had his medicine though. At least two hundred times the

sub-chaser to which he was attached received the meaningless inquiries:

"How is the old cat?" or "Does she smell yet?" All of which were repeated with emphasis to the irritated Reggie.

Scarcely had the boats tied up to the sea-wall at ten-thirty, when a duty midshipman appeared bearing a slip of paper and a megaphone. With impressive loudness he announced:

"All the fourth class report to Mahan Hall after drill."

This word was greeted by a chorus of cheers.

"Old Man's on the warpath again!" shouted one.

"He ought to be," growled the Lieutenant in charge of the drill, "after yesterday's performance."

Tom overheard this remark and caught the sinister tone of the speaker. A vague apprehension came over him. Could it be possible that a snob and a weakling like Reggie Van Brunt might triumph over a man that played as square as Tom felt he had played?

The midshipmen nearly filled the large auditorium in the Academic Building, or Mahan Hall as it was known. After a noisy roll call, the Commandant's Aide ordered silence.

On the stage sat the officers, about forty in all, who were being retained for the summer in connection with the new class. All other officers had gone to sea on the ships of the practice squadron for the annual midshipmen's cruise.

As the whispering died away, Admiral Lacy advanced to the front of the stage.

"Gentlemen," he began in his best deep-sea voice, "I

have brought you here for a serious purpose. My theme will be evident when I request that Midshipman Van Brunt join me up on the stage."

He paused while Reggie, invisibly assisted by those who sat on either side of him, extricated himself from a back row and awkwardly climbed over the footlights.

"The presence of Mr. Van Brunt before you," continued the Admiral, "will refresh your memories in regard to the sacrilege which profaned our chapel yesterday morning."

"Get the dictionary!" came a hoarse but audible whisper from one side. A suppressed titter ran across the hall.

The old sea-dog took one stride nearer his audience. "Silence!" he roared. "Gentlemen, stand up!"

This time the vibrant command had its full effect. Instantly and with a minimum of commotion the six-hundred boys rose to attention.

With his feet braced wide, his jaw protruding, and fists clenched in two muscular knots, the Admiral then gave the newcomers their first taste of a "salt-air tongue."

For a good five minutes the walls resounded with the short sure sentences that sprang from the Admiral's powerful lungs. From nearly the very first word he made each single boy feel guilty of disrespect to higher authority.

"And some day," he concluded with rasping slowness, "you will remember what I say; you will use my very words; and you will thank me for having taught you while you were young!"

For a moment one could have heard a pin drop.

Then, "Seats," ordered the Admiral quietly. Obedience was prompt and quiet. After forty years of practice it was no great task for him to handle men.

"Now we come to the chief business of the day," he next announced. "But before we begin let me say that till this moment I have made no inquiry, no investigation. Except that this young gentleman appeared yesterday at a most solemn moment in a most disgraceful condition, I know no more than you do." For an instant his eyes twinkled. "Probably not as much," he added.

He beckoned to Reggie. The latter stood at attention before him. Admiral Lacy looked him up and down; took in the delicately cut nose and mouth, the brown eyes, the slender figure and tall ungainly legs.

"I thought so," he said at last. "You're the pestiferous kind the big fellows can't punish by rough methods. So they took it out by trying to make a fool of you."

He turned to the audience. "Gentlemen, I can read the six hundred of you as plainly as you read that placard in the chapel. And what I read is almost as amusing. This lad, I take it, has got himself disliked. You have sought to punish him. . . . You haven't given him a chance."

He paused to let his words sink in. He knew this was the hardest point of all to make. Well he realized there are times when no man deserves a chance.

"One year from today," he continued, "you—whoever was responsible for the trick—would have had no cause for what you did. Van Brunt's muscles would have caught up with his frame and his age. His heart would have overtaken his muscles. His digestion and nerves would have been there to back them all up. And he

would have played the man with you instead of having to be treated like a child."

To the Admiral's intense satisfaction he saw a general expression of approval come over the faces before him.

He cleared his throat. His next move he hated. But his position forced him to uphold the law by legal means.

"So far I have been personal," he put it. "Now I shall be official. Public desecration of divine service is punishable by severe measures. Furthermore, it can cause a deep and lasting injury to the school of which you all sooner or later will become very fond."

He turned to Reggie. "It is my duty, Mister Van Brunt, to investigate the breach of discipline of which I take it you were the unwilling victim. I intend to make this investigation here this morning. Further I intend to punish the guilty ones to the fullest letter of the law—" he stopped and looked over the spread of upturned faces—"if I find out who they are."

There was no mistaking his meaning. The Admiral had thought the difficulty out through a long and sleepless night. And he had concluded that as it was the first serious offense in the life of an entirely inexperienced and undisciplined body of young men, he would be safe in letting them off with a warning.

"The Old Brick!" burst one middy involuntarily.

The Admiral turned to Reggie with a kindly and expectant smile. He thought he knew his boys pretty well. Now for the finishing touch to prove that, after all, this one before him would be a man when he had half a chance.

"And now Mister Van Brunt, will you tell me who they were?"

He could almost hear Reggie reply bravely:

"Why no, sir, I'm afraid I can't."

Instead, his words were met by a cold and withering look. Reggie then turned and fixed his eyes upon one of the side aisles. Slowly his arm came up. His long finger stretched accusingly at the man he was determined to revenge himself upon.

"There's the one that did it," he said. "Tom Poor!"

The Admiral stepped back astonished. A series of gasps could be heard over the audience. Then someone hissed. As if by command the whole assembly took it up.

The Admiral held up his hand for silence.

"Is it so, Mister Poor?"

Tom rose. His face was white with anger. For a moment he could not speak. Then, with an effort, he regained his self-control.

"Yes, sir, I am the man," he replied.

For at least a minute the Admiral appeared non-plussed. Could it be possible that the standard of young men had so changed in recent years that they dared betray one another at the slightest provocation? At any rate the others were certainly not in sympathy with Van Brunt.

He turned to the Officer-in-Charge.

"Put Mister Poor under arrest at once," he commanded. "I will appoint a board of investigation this afternoon."

A few hours later Tom faced the court with a feeling of utter hopelessness.

"Do you expect to plead guilty?" asked the senior officer.

"Guilty?" Tom repeated vaguely. He looked around

the room at the stern faces. "Why yes—of course," he said.

"And you understand what the charges are going to be?"

One of the younger officers stood up. "I object, sir," he said firmly. "This young man need say nothing that will incriminate himself."

"Quite true," countered the other. "But since he has already admitted having bound up the midshipman who appeared in chapel, I see no reason for our not making the court's procedure as simple as possible."

It was all Greek to poor Tom, this legal argument that went on heatedly about him. A certain amount of sympathy the officers had for him, he knew. His past record was splendid. And he had been given to understand that his powerful build bid fair to gain him a place on the football team.

"But we've got to keep up the good name of the Naval Academy," he heard one declare.

That seemed to be the gist of it. He was to be made an example before his classmates. He was to be sacrificed that other midshipmen would be warned before it was too late.

At last the session was brought to an end. Tom was led away under guard. Just as he reached the door the senior officer called him back.

"A minute, Poor," he said.

Tom turned to find the others had left by another entrance.

"I just wanted to tell you, Poor, that you may as well prepare for the worst. After our trouble about hazing last year the Superintendent has directed that the new class shall be put right in the beginning."

"Yes, sir," Tom nodded sadly.

"It looks as if you had better try to use any influence you may have in Washington."

Tom shook his head. What influence had he—a run-away from home, an enlisted seaman in the fleet, a miserable plebe at Annapolis?

"I'm sorry then," concluded the officer. "You may as well make up your mind that you are to be dismissed."

With dry and burning eyes Tom studied the floor seams for a moment, then turned and rejoined the private of marines, his guard.

CHAPTER VII

FIRE

ON the third day of his confinement, Tom became desperate. The trial irked him to madness. It was dragging along. Mostly because every effort was being made to discover what midshipmen were in the plot besides Tom.

"It took about a dozen of us," he gravely informed his examiners. Then, later, he was forced to admit the falsity of this statement, and declared he had done the trick singlehanded.

Now as he sat in the little bare room, with his face buried in his hands, the future looked absolutely black. Dismissal from the Naval Service meant that he could not reenlist. And without doubt his reputation would be passed along to the Merchant Marine.

"But I *am* going to sea!" He clenched both fists and pounded the wall in front. "I'm going to sea yet!" he exclaimed through clamped jaws.

Suddenly a wave of uncontrollable anger swept through him. He saw red in reality. Abruptly he realized that the man who had caused his downfall was now enjoying the fullest liberty.

"But before I do anything else," he muttered, "I'm going to give Van Brunt the thrashing of his life. That's the medicine *I* need!"

Tom rose and tiptoed to the door. He could hear the marine guard pacing slowly up and down outside.

He opened the transom and called: "Hey you, outside."

"What do you want?" came the insolent response.

"There's a water pipe leaking badly here," said Tom in the pleasantest voice he could muster. "I think you'd better have a look at it."

The marine turned his key in the lock and stepped in. As the door closed behind him he was seized by the collar and jerked sharply to one side.

The same moment he felt a stinging pain in his shins. Tom had used a tripping trick he had learned in some of the seagoing riots he had taken part in on the Boston waterfront.

As the marine was both lighter and weaker than the sturdy Tom, it was the work of but a moment to roll him into the shower bath and hold him by sitting on his chest.

"Now I'm going out for a bit," said Tom shortly. "And I'm going to tie you right here under the shower. If I hear a sound of your trying to get loose I'm going to come back and turn the cold water on."

The threat did its work. The marine nodded assent.

On his way out of Bancroft Hall Tom boldly asked a duty midshipman where he could find the battalion.

"All of them at the Engineering Building," he was informed. "But I thought you were in jail?"

"You're not paid to think," replied Tom caustically.

He made his plans quickly. Engineering Building was on the other side of Mahan Hall. He could conceal himself by the old bleachers near the back entrance. This, he knew, was the place Reggie and others were accustomed to come for a stolen smoke after drill. Here

he could capture and destroy Reggie at his own free will.

Just as he reached the crossing at Maryland Avenue he was accosted by a fat dressy lady accompanied by a small boy in a sailor suit. He failed to see them until the last moment because he was mentally engaged in picturing the joy that would come with getting his fingers on Reggie Van Brunt's throat.

"Oh, you nice looking boy!" in a feminine voice brought him suddenly out of his murderous thoughts.

"Wha-what?" stammered Tom, reddening more with anger and embarrassment.

"I'm Mrs. MacMichael of Baltimore," explained the lady with an ingratiating smile. "And this is little Jimmy MacMichael. I want him to grow up and be a sailor. Now couldn't you tell him something about the life?"

At this moment a marine sergeant passed. "What's him, Ma?" inquired Jimmy.

The fat lady turned to Tom. "He had U. S. M. C. on him," she observed. "Now wasn't he some kind of soldier?"

The exasperated Tom tried to pass on. But the ponderous lady blocked the way. "Do tell me what those letters stand for," she entreated.

"Useless Sons Made Comfortable, Ma'am," said Tom with dignity.

"Oh!" exclaimed the lady. Then with a bow and a smile she drew a coin from her bag and pressed it into Tom's hand. Before he could protest she had passed on.

Tom gazed at the piece of silver for a moment. "Tipped, by heck!" he ejaculated. Then a thought struck him.

"Hey there," he hailed a negro mess attendant that was on his way to the main gate. "Want to make a quarter?"

"Yessuh, yessuh. You bet, suh!"

"Well, here it is. Now when you see the midshipmen come out of the Engineering Building—that big white one over there—you come over and let me know. I'll be under this end of the bleachers."

Inside the building Tom had set his spy upon was being held the routine summer instruction of the new midshipmen. They were detailed into groups of about thirty. Each group was in charge of an officer.

The first floor of the building was arranged for practical demonstration. One large room was filled with row after row of lathes. About the walls stood carpenter benches, each fitted with sets of beautiful tools.

Another spacious room was given over to machine tools of all sorts. Through great sliding doors was the boiler-making shop. And beyond that was the foundry with a real blast furnace, moulds, and anvils.

Thus, by actual work with his own hands, is the midshipman taught the fundamentals of his many-sided profession.

The room in which Reggie's group were gathered was most interesting of all. In it were hundreds of engines: large engines; small engines; ship engines; launch engines; aeroplane engines; every kind of engine Reggie had ever heard or dreamed of. And Reggie's past series of motor cars had brought him into what he had considered a really unusual intimacy with engines operated by gasoline.

He discovered his mistake when Lieutenant Ruggles

began to describe the action of a simple little two-cylinder affair.

"Gentlemen, we have here the four-cycle, compound exhaust, overhead valve type of low-pressure gas engine."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Reggie. "As many names as an English duke."

At this remark the midshipman nearest Reggie looked up for a moment without the sign of a smile. Then he edged slightly away.

"The internal stresses," went on the officer, "are balanced by a series of dynamic moments."

Reggie missed this. He was interested in the midshipman's peculiar effort to be unfriendly.

"A moment, gentlemen," from Lieutenant Ruggles, "and I will get hold of some gas for an actual demonstration."

During his absence Reggie attempted to engage several of his fellows in conversation. To his surprise not one would listen or reply. And in each case the one addressed turned his back upon the speaker.

Finally, one came forward. "Van Brunt," he proclaimed icily, "the class met last night and put you into coventry."

"Into what?" Reggie inquired curiously.

"Into coventry. Means we intend to have nothing further to do with you. No one will ever speak to you again. Maybe now you understand what we think of a man who'd squeal as you did!"

Before Reggie could reply Lieutenant Ruggles had returned. "No gas," he announced. "Besides the hour's up, so we shall have to go. The schedule has been

changed this morning. We are to have squadron drill in the boats at once instead of this afternoon."

While the squads were forming Reggie tried to figure out this latest unhappiness in his life. He had "squealed" on Tom Poor simply because he felt his feud with Tom was entirely between the two of them. He had never considered the ethics of the contest. All his life he had done absolutely as his own conscience had dictated.

Now, suddenly, he discovered that he and Tom were being refereed. The whole new class stood together to see that the fight went on exactly as they wanted it to. First they wouldn't let Tom attack Reggie with his fists. And now they were combined against him, Reggie, because he had been clever enough to have Tom put under arrest by giving his name to the Admiral.

It was all very confusing to Reggie. At none of the schools *he* had attended had he been forced to put up with this sort of business. The fact that he was Reggie Van Brunt, son of the multi-millionaire, was sufficient to give him all the privileges necessary to a free and easy life.

"It's none of their blasted business," Reggie told himself. "And if they think I care whether this lot of muckers ever speak to me again they're very much mistaken!"

As Lieutenant Ruggles swung the column into fours he spied Tom.

"Why hello, Poor!" he sung out in a friendly voice. "Out of the jug?"

"Not exactly," was Tom's halting reply. His spy had been faithful all right. But this change in the drill

schedule prevented Reggie from trying his customary smoke under the bleachers. All prospects of the great thrashing had disappeared.

“Oh, I see,” continued the officer. “Just out for a bit of air.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Tom having nothing else to say.

“Very well then come along with us. We’re going to have some real maneuvers with the sub-chasers this morning.”

With pleasure Tom joined the column. He was sea-going enough to love these short cruises down the bay in the speedy little vessels. And there lurked in his mind the feeling that by sticking with the crowd he might yet have his chance to beat Reggie Van Brunt into a “ripe-peach pulp” as he framed it.

This day there was a fleet of twelve boats divided into three divisions. Tom took the helm on the flagship, with Lieutenant Ruggles acting as the Admiral in command.

“Now we shall assume that there is the enemy,” explained the latter. He pointed to an ocean liner outward bound from Baltimore about eight miles to the eastward.

A flutter of flags ran to the yard-arm.

“Enemy on starboard bow!” read the signalmen on the following boats.

“Divisions column right,” was the next hoist.

A little later the formation was swung into line again and deployed in such a way as to cut off the enemy’s retreat.

“Open fire when within range. Concentrate on the leading ship!” sang out the acting admiral.

Tom thrilled. All the zest of a real high-sea action boiled up in him. His heart beat faster. He could almost hear again the drone of the fire-control parties, the singing of the turret motors, the clash of shell and rammer, breech and lock, he had learned to love so in the real Fleet.

"Breakdown on the *Forty-two*!" yelled the starboard lookout just when the enemy was about to be annihilated.

Lieutenant Ruggles sprang to his engine-room telegraphs. "Hard aport!" he shot at Tom.

"Both wing engines disabled," signaled the stricken chaser. She was veering wildly out of column to the great peril of those behind her.

With accurate promptness Lieutenant Ruggles met the emergency as befitted a steely-nerved naval officer.

"Signal *Twenty-nine* to take charge and lead back into port," he directed. Then turning to Tom: "Put us alongside *Forty-two*," he added. "Think you can do it?"

Tom nodded with a smile. For several months of the previous winter he had been coxswain of the *Alaska's* fifty-foot picket launch in the fleet. Work in the Chesapeake Bay was child's play compared to the great seas that he had fought so many times on the Southern Drill Ground off Cape Henry.

At least so he thought.

He got alongside all right. The officer had but a foot to jump when Tom slid the vessel under him up across the quarter of her helpless sister.

Then came the breeze. For an hour this breeze remained a breeze.

And still Tom lay off while Lieutenant Ruggles struggled over the stubborn gas engines of the *Forty-two*.

All his knowledge of the theory of them could not overcome their war-worn cylinders and bases racked to pieces by a terrific service two years previous in the English Channel.

By noon the breeze had freshened to a strong nor'west wind. The little vessels began to roll as they drifted in the trough of the seas out into the middle of Chesapeake Bay.

Thirty minutes later the wind had become a half-gale. Water began to slop across the main deck.

Tom took real command at once. "Secure everything," he ordered. "Haul over all your hatch-hoods!"

Dumbly the midshipmen obeyed him. Several were already feeling the effects of the rolling. None were yet accustomed enough to the water to feel at ease under such circumstances.

"Over she goes!" roared Tom gaily, as one greenfaced lad rushed for the rail.

In five minutes more he mustered his crew on deck. He discovered that only four out of the dozen could be counted on for work. The rest were ready to give up the ghost—and breakfast, too—no matter what the danger.

Somewhat worried, Tom put his spy-glass on the boat he was standing by. Was he going to have to tow her in after all?

As he looked he saw a white figure hanging over the *Forty-two's* lee rail. Something about the long legs struck him as familiar. Suddenly he brought his hand down on his leg with a loud smack.

"Why it's dear sweet little Reggie!" he shouted.

Joyfully Tom gazed at his intended victim's convul-

sions. And, when Reggie staggered to a forward hatch and disappeared, he complained as though he had been deprived of a rightful entertainment.

At this instant someone aft on Tom's own boat let out a screech that startled him. "Fire!" bawled the midshipman.

Tom left the bridge and darted aft. "Where? Where?" he shouted.

"There!" the boy replied, and pointed at the *Forty-two*.

To his dismay Tom saw the yellowish-white fumes of burning oil issuing in great clouds from her engine-room hatch.

His heart sank. Not three months before he had seen a sub-chaser blown to atoms ten minutes after the first alarm. Such a vessel carries *three-thousand gallons of gasoline!*

CHAPTER VIII

DILEMMA

TOM's first impulse was to attempt a rescue by boat.

"Clear away the dory!" he shouted.

Only three men were able to answer the call. Two of these did so half-heartedly. They were not seasick, nor did they lack courage. Simply did they realize how slight a chance the tiny shell of a boat would have in the great crashing waves. The sub-chasers themselves were being tossed about like a pair of toothpicks.

"Get hold of those falls, you *sheep!*" roared Tom.

"Not a chance with this match-box," one of the midshipmen retorted.

"Chance with anything," Tom bellowed back, "if you've got the guts to take it!"

Fully he realized how desperate the risk was to launch the dory. But with equal sureness he grasped the terrible predicament of those aboard the burning *Forty-two*.

While his men were clearing the tackle he glanced across at her. He saw two blackened figures emerge from the engine-room hatch. Between them they dragged the body of a third. It looked like Lieutenant Ruggles.

"Explosion!" muttered Tom. And back to him came the dreadful recollection of the other accident he had seen: men torn and scorched; groaning, screaming men; men without eyes; men begging for death.

He saw two midshipmen clear the other chaser's dory.

He saw it swung out. He saw the chaser itself lift into the air on one gigantic sea till half her keel was exposed. And, to his horror, he watched her drop with a sickening swiftness into the following trough, carry the flimsy dory with her, and crush it to a handful of splinters.

Tom realized at once he must act quickly or his own boat would share the fate of the *Forty-two's*.

He rang up full speed ahead and put the helm hard over. Slowly the chaser gained headway. He swung her up into the wind. Then "full speed astern," he jingled.

The maneuver placed the running sea on the chaser's starboard bow. On her port quarter was a lee; not calm by a whole lot. But enough shelter to allow the dory to be launched.

"Overboard with her! Quick!" ordered Tom.

With maddening slowness the little rowboat swung out on her single davit. Like the tail of a kite she waved and twisted in the gale. Then with a splash she dropped safely into the water.

"Here, Cummings," yelled Tom. "Take the wheel. Jones and I will go in the boat." He realized that his leadership was necessary there.

The Cummings thus addressed spun about with a look of vast relief on his face. In fact, he was so relieved he forgot for a moment to tend the boat painter he was holding.

At the same instant a huge wave lifted the *Twenty-nine* to its crest. Cummings was not ready. The painter tautened. The dory was shot into the chaser's side like a catapult just in time to meet the descending hull. It was crushed to kindling.

"You fool!" roared Tom, "you landlubber!"

"Better so," was the sullen reply. "Was crazy to think of our going over there in the dory."

Tom ignored this speech. With a set face he turned again to his engine telegraphs and again rang up full speed ahead. He was desperate. Each chaser carried but one dory for abandoning ship in emergency. Now both chasers had lost them.

Any moment he might hear the awful explosion of the *Forty-two's* gas tanks and see both men and chaser scattered in gruesome remnants about the surface of the Bay.

Again he took his place at the wheel. While the boat slowly gained steerageway, he rang up the engine-room.

"Give her all she's got!" he entreated. "If we don't take that crowd off in three minutes, we may never see any of them again!"

The timid Cummings clung to Tom's elbow. "Why can't they jump?" he asked.

"It's the wounded, you imbecile," said Tom shortly. "If everyone goes over the side and deserts the injured men—well, is that your idea of doing a job?"

"No—but if we run into them in this sea we're going to cave in the side of our own ship."

Tom spun the wheel viciously. "Right you are—right as to the chance we stand of being hove square into 'em when we pass. But that's where yours truly is going to cross his fingers and spit. It's our one best bet for saving them and I'm here to see it through."

Meanwhile he steered the *Twenty-nine* in a wide circle to windward of the *Forty-two*. The latter was drifting nearly broadside on to the sea. If he went to leeward the drifting boat might ride down on him even in the few seconds it would take him to pass her. Such collision

would undoubtedly stove in the sides of both boats. They would sink in five minutes with all their heavy engines aboard. And the crews would drown in the wild seas long before any help could come.

Twenty-nine quivered as she gained speed. "Hoist 'stand by to be picked up,'" commanded Tom. The bunting popped in the vicious gusts as it snapped to the yard-arm.

Men on the *Forty-two* clustered to the rail when they caught the signal. Three white figures lay helpless on the deck.

"Down rail and stand by to lend them a hand!" sang Tom, never taking his eye from his jackstaff. Did he miss the exact course by a degree and he would not only fail to rescue the crew on the burning vessel, but likely he would send both craft to the bottom of the Bay.

Several of the seasick midshipmen roused themselves up. A sense of the tragedy that threatened compelled them to forget for the moment their own misery.

Tom stood braced and calm at the wheel. His brain was clear and cold. He wasted no misgivings on the boldness of his plan. Never for a moment did he dream of what failing would be like. If death was at hand, one would never have guessed it from his quiet concentration on the course. If he stood a little tensely, it was no more than the physical effort any man might make when the deck under him is bucking like a western bronco.

The *Twenty-nine's* stem slid even with the smoking stern of the *Forty-two*.

"Stand by!" warned Tom.

No man moved. Each was braced and clinging to some staunch bit of deck gear in order to give all possible aid to those jumping for their lives.

A touch of rudder toward the other boat; then a hard helm away. And neatly the *Twenty-nine* swung her main deck to a clean two feet away from her sister.

The two chasers balanced giddily on the crests of a gigantic sea. Between them the green water was churned into a white froth.

Someone cried "Jump!" But the word was unnecessary. First came the three injured men. One was almost flung across. Then simultaneously the dozen others leaped.

Six seconds later the *Twenty-nine* swerved clear. She had not so much as touched the *Forty-two*. Danger was past and all hands safe.

"Gosh!" was Tom's only comment as he left Cummings at the wheel and sought Lieutenant Ruggles who was being deposited in a comfortable bunk below.

"Good Boy!" sung out the latter, as Tom stuck his head into the stateroom. "Not a man in this bloomin' Navy could have done any better!"

"Thank you, sir," said Tom relieved to find the other's injuries consisted mostly of a twisted ankle got when the flame had burst out. He glanced at the two scorched midshipmen. They too had escaped providentially with but superficial burns.

"What now, sir; shall we stand by her?"

"Yes," directed the officer. "But keep well clear. She's likely to go up any moment."

"Aye, aye, sir." As Tom reached the door curiosity overcame him. "What happened anyway, sir?" he asked.

Ruggles smiled. "Carburetor flooded. Youngster in the engine-room lost his head and didn't shut down in time. Backfire naturally caught the waste oil on the bilges. Next time that young idiot Van Brunt gets—why what's the matter, Poor?"

Tom had gone ghastly white. He staggered up against the bulkhead. "Wh—why he's not aboard, sir." In the excitement Tom had completely forgotten that he had last seen Reggie disappear down a forward hatch of the other boat. He could swear he had not come aboard the *Twenty-nine*.

"Good God!" exclaimed Ruggles.

"Yes," groaned Tom, "I remember now that I watched him go forward just before we saw the fire. He must have been seasick. And he's probably curled up in one of the bunks this minute entirely unconscious of the danger. No smoke is getting forward. The wind is keeping it aft."

A look of even greater horror came into the Lieutenant's eyes. "And the gasoline tanks are just on the other side of the bulkhead. Poor, poor, kid—he *hasn't a chance in the world!*"

At the word "chance" Tom stiffened as if he had been struck. It brought back his contempt of Cummings' timidity, and how he had condemned Cummings for not being willing to take any sort of chance in order to save the life of another man.

"He *has* a chance, sir," snapped Tom, "if you'll let me take it."

"Of course I will, boy. But is it worth it? Is it a *real* chance? And can you say you are not selling the lives of many for the sake of one?"

"Yes, sir; my word on it! I promise!" stuttered Tom in his wild desire to save time.

Lieutenant Ruggles nodded assent.

Tom sprang up the ladder. He rushed to the pilot house, rang up full speed again, and headed a second time for the blazing ship.

Flames were darting from her hatches and ventilators. Great clouds of poisonous vapors rolled from her engine spaces and spread upon the stormy waters for half a mile to leeward. Only the bow was plainly visible through the conflagration. High wind swept the angry gases and devouring flames to a point just clear of the hatch down which the fainting Reggie had crawled.

Tom set his teeth. An uncontrollable nervousness kept him clenching and unclenching his hands. It was not fear. It was the terrific battle of emotions within him:

He had given his word to save the very man he had set out that morning to destroy!

And now without warning, his spirit was failing him. His whole soul revolted at the thought. Burning would be a just fate for the coward who had betrayed him. He didn't have to save Reggie. Why couldn't some of the others try it? Why should anyone try it? Wasn't it risking the lives of the whole crowd just as Ruggles had pointed out?

"Heaven have mercy on me!" exclaimed Tom half in prayer, half in the hopelessness of his dilemma.

He knew well he would have gone without question to the aid of any other living man. Hadn't he risked his life before for the sake of a companion? But now before him like a demon stood this dreadful hatred of

Reggie; this inhuman desire to have the revenge of death fall upon the one who had ruined his career.

"You're the real stuff, Tom Poor!" exclaimed a voice in his ear.

He turned to find Cummings, the weak and frightened Cummings, staring up into his face with eyes swimming in tears of admiration.

It may be said that these words saved Reginald Van Brunt's life. To Tom Poor's fevered hesitation they brought instant and unwavering decision.

But Cummings never knew it. All he got from Tom was a look of such undisguised ferocity that he shrank back bewildered.

"Right—keep her right!" barked Tom to the midshipman he had put at the wheel. "Don't you know she'll go up any minute now?" He smiled grimly. "Go up any minute now," he repeated to himself. A queer sense of triumph was creeping over him. It was as if he had conquered something.

Opposite the *Forty-two* and a safe fifty yards to windward Tom slipped off his shirt and jumper and dived into the sea. Wave after wave swept clean over him. But with powerful strokes he drove his lithe young body closer and closer to the flaming derelict.

All hands came on the *Twenty-nine's* deck and stood in silent agony. Tom's was a race with death. The burning engine-room must be a fiery furnace. Hotter and hotter were growing the metal casings of the gasoline tanks. Let them once reach the proper temperature and no power in the world could save so much as a stick of timber of the ill-fated craft.

Tom reached her bow. A sea lifted him and threw him heavily against the deck combing. For a moment

he hung stunned. Then painfully he crawled up and over. He dashed aft ten feet and plunged down the hatch.

"He's got him! He's got him!" cried a dozen voices.

Tom had appeared again dragging the long limp form of Reggie Van Brunt. With a frenzy of haste he rushed forward and flung himself and Reggie into the very body of an oncoming comber.

Then came the explosion. Broad tongues of blinding flame shot a hundred feet into the air. Beams and timbers, pipes and pistons, deck-gear, sheathing plates, and chain were hurled in a great fountain of wreckage to all sides.

Miraculously the *Twenty-nine* was unhit though fragments fell all about her.

Lieutenant Ruggles had dragged himself on deck. "Head her down!" he cried. "We've got to get them out of the oil!"

He pointed to the yellowish flickers that were springing up all about where the *Forty-two* had been but a moment before. Floating oil was rapidly catching fire in all directions. If Tom and Reggie were still alive, they must be soon burned to death or asphyxiated in this new terror.

But even in the very jaws of death, Tom had kept his head. As he went under the surface dragging Reggie after him, he felt the terrific concussions made by the exploding tanks. He knew his safety lay in keeping down. So with bursting lungs he swam under water until Reggie's struggles indicated that he would drown if submerged any longer.

On reaching the surface, he found he had cleared the danger. A few minutes later *Twenty-nine* bore down on

him, backed, made a lee, and picked the pair of them up with heaving lines.

By noon Tom was in his room again. Outside paced the marine orderly. So far as appearances went, the morning's adventure was but a dream.

Tom knew that it wasn't a dream though. "Take more than any dream to stop me hating Reggie Van Brunt," he laughed to himself.

Which was what had happened: for all the thrill and excitement of the explosion, the rescue, the cheers, had none of them seemed as strange to Tom as the fact that when he got back to his room the overpowering and venomous abhorrence he had had of Reggie Van Brunt had evaporated. And in its stead had come a curiously peaceful and contented indifference.

Tom had met the worst that a man may meet; the necessity to sacrifice himself for an enemy. And he had made good.

A knock on the door broke into his reverie.

"Guess I'm not needed any more," grinned the marine guard as he handed Tom a slip of paper.

On the slip was scrawled in pencil:

I gave the Admiral a full account of your heroism. As a result he says the service can't afford to lose such material for an officer. He's going to dismiss the charges against you and let you off with fifty demerits and a warning—You lucky plebe!

Ruggles.

And scarcely had he read the signature than the room was filled with a roar of cheers from the terrace outside.

“What’s the matter with Tom Poor?” Six hundred voices in unison.

“He’s all right!”

“Who’s all right?”

“T—O—M— P—OOOOOR!”

“Speech! Speech!”

CHAPTER IX

HAZED

TEN weeks later, October second to be exact, a strange scene took place in Tom's study.

A chair had been placed on top of the table in the center of the room. In the chair sat a large and impressive-looking man in an extraordinary costume. About his shoulders was draped a white bedspread. On his head was perched at a rakish angle an inverted wicker basket.

The man drew heavily from time to time upon a large corncob pipe. From this it could be told that he was a first-classman. None of the under classes at Annapolis are permitted to use tobacco.

Directly in front of the improvised throne and on the floor knelt a line of plebes. Just as one would recognize the first-classman by his pipe, so one could not mistake the plebes by the expression of idiotic helplessness that hung upon their faces.

Grouped about the room were other upperclassmen, laughing and talking and thoroughly enjoying the performance they had been invited to witness.

It was a trial; a trial of base criminals by the King himself.

"Salute, O Pieces of Cheese!" commanded the King, adjusting the wastebasket more comfortably upon his royal head.

The five plebes salaamed until their foreheads touched

the bare floor. "Live long, O King; live long!" they chanted together.

The King stamped angrily on the base of his throne. "More enthusiasm!" he roared, "you—you human cobwebs."

A murmur of approval went through the audience. The King's choice of epithets was amazingly apt.

"Name the crimes, General," hastily interposed Sam Peabody. Well he knew the possibilities of a scene if the King and his General got started in a private row.

The General, otherwise known as "Midget," drew a dirty piece of paper from his pants pocket, and proceeded to read in a melancholy voice:

"George Melville Audrey Johnson, having in his possession and continuing to hold in his possession without division or sharing thereof, either to his friends or classmates, one gigantic chocolate cake."

"What?" roared the King. "Ah, the baseness of the wretch!" He glared at the kneeling Audrey who, terrified, salaamed and murmured his desire for the King to live forever.

"Has he still got it?" came a raucous voice from the audience.

"Scum of the Universe, hast still got this cake?" asked the King.

"Yes, sir," weakly from Audrey. "I'll get it, sir."

"Do so at once—at once!" commanded His Majesty. And turning proudly to his fellow aristocrats. "The Royal revenue increases, by heck!" he boasted.

"Reginald Van Brunt," continued the General, "squealing on a classmate, blowing up a man-of-war—"

"It isn't so!" burst the horrified Reggie.

The King leaped to his feet. "SILENCE!" he bel-

lowed in a voice of thunder. "What manner of louse is this that would betray his own brother?"

"Pretty low, if you'd ask me," put in Sam.

The King majestically waved the General to proceed. "The sentence of death is too mild for such an one," he proclaimed. "Next!"

"Thomas Poor, tin hero; swelled head; becoming great before his time; general rough-neck and thug!" enumerated the General.

"Aha!" said the King, "a fitting mate in torture for the previous prisoner."

"Live long, O King; live long!" chorused the prisoners, this time with a fervor that brought the flush of satisfaction to him whom they saluted.

"That's a blame sight better," growled the King. "And now for the document of crime." He glanced about the room. "Where's Sam?" he asked bluntly. "Bet the fat goop's gone to sleep."

A series of grunts came from one of the little side bedrooms as the porpoise-like Sam Peabody was dragged out.

"Aw, lemme 'lone!" he groaned. "You're makin' bigger fools of yourselves than of the plebes."

"Hold!" roared the King, ignoring the insult to his royal state. "The Court Orator approacheth."

He turned viciously to the protesting Sam. "You get up here and do your job, Tubbo, or I'll have you given the watercure by your own classmates."

Sam grinned. Having thrown off the grip of slumber, he appeared more in spirit with the proceedings. "Got to have a uniform," he said.

A long dark bathrobe was handed out. This he draped over his ponderous figure after the fashion of a Roman

toga. A bath towel he wrapped about his head in a kind of turban. He then mounted the table.

"What ho, General?" he bawled.

Whereat there stepped from the rear of the row of kneeling plebes a little fierce-looking man wearing a false moustache and a sword.

"Sire," droned the General, "me and my intrepid band have captured these here wicked scoundrels." Evidently grammar was not the General's strong point. "We were about to put them to death at once. Then suddenly I be-thought me of the joy their proper torture might bring our beloved King." He shifted his gaze to the King and winked. "How 'bout it, dear King?" he inquired coyly.

"Cut the sideswipes," retorted the King.

At this dramatic moment the ringing of bells along the corridor outside announced that seven-thirty had arrived. The evening call to study hour echoed from the bugles.

The King leaped to his feet. "Hey, you plebes," he directed. "Get up and clear out. But don't think it's over with. "You're going to be sentenced and punished!"

For five minutes a human earthquake shook the gigantic catacombs of Bancroft Hall. Midshipmen seemed to have been loitering in every room but their own. From every door there issued groups of rugged-looking young men, talking and laughing.

On October first, the day before, nearly two thousand upper-classmen had returned from their "September leave." This is the yearly vacation which comes at the end of every summer cruise.

Tom's class felt swamped. For nearly four months they had practically owned the place. Despite the rigor-

ous routine, they had done pretty much as they wished out of hours.

Now all was changed. Customs and traditions of the Naval Academy handed down for nearly a century hemmed them in with a wall of restrictions.

Ole and Tom had selected one another as roommates. They were not always congenial. But each had a bigger and broader way of settling differences that made an enduring friendship possible.

This night they settled grimly to the impressive mass of new books before them. "We'll be raving lunatics inside of a month!" cried Ole in despair.

"Or bilged!" said Tom in the vernacular, meaning bounced for failure in studies.

The door opened and a pleasant-visaged older midshipman entered. According to custom the two plebes stood instantly to attention, staring straight ahead.

The visitor looked from Tom to Ole. "Which of you is Hansen?"

"Me, sir," replied Ole.

"Well, carry on."

The two took their seats.

"My name is Billings," the stranger introduced himself. "I'm from Oregon too, Hansen, so I'm going to *spoon* on you." He held out his hand. "And you too, Poor, as you're Hansen's roommate."

Having shaken on the pact and thereby wiped out the formality that must hold between an upperclassman and a plebe—'*spooning* on a man' as it is called—Billings went on.

"While I'm here I may as well give you both a little advice. You're going to have a tough time these first

few months. Grind of studies is enough to wear out a new man till he falls into the swing of it. You see recitations start at eight in the morning and the day is not over until four in the afternoon, with but an hour out for lunch. Then there's an extra hour of drill till five on top of it all."

"I see my finish!" exclaimed Ole drearily.

"Don't worry old man," laughed Billings. "You'll be surprised how quick you will become a regular bookworm. In three months you'll be *batting* the tar out of seven different kinds of math."

"Or the tar'll be dripping out of us," suggested Tom.

"The greatest danger is this hazing business. Last year we had all that official scandal and the first class knocked off hazing. That is, they agreed not to permit it to go on. But they have graduated now. And, as always happens, the next class takes up where they left off."

"We've just had a taste of it," said Ole.

"Well, then you know what I'm talking about. It's a good thing, too. No real harm is possible. And it helps work out the rawness from undesirable boys in a way the authorities could never reach."

Billings turned to Tom. "You're the kind," he explained frankly, "that is sure to get an extra share of attention from the hazers. Your exploits last summer are a matter of common knowledge. It is to be expected that your head is slightly swelled."

Tom grinned at the insinuation.

"Naturally, then, steps will be taken to set you down a peg. It will be made clear to you that bravery and courage are nothing to boast about. They are the simple duty of every Navy man. And doing your duty doesn't

lift you out of the class of common plebes, any more than the victorious admiral of a fleet would be removed from the conventional routine of his rank."

"And how about that shrimp who started all the trouble?" asked Ole, slightly peeved at this seeming depreciation of his roommate's valor.

"I was coming to him. He is at the opposite end of things. He is the undeveloped kind. He's still tied to the apron strings of his past life. It's up to Annapolis to put some backbone into him. To stiffen up his ideas of what is right and wrong. To make a man out of him—or send him back to the kindergarten."

Tom's jaw clicked. "That's what I tried to do."

"I know you did," continued Billings gravely. "But your methods were wrong. You've been an enlisted man I believe. You're used to a rough and tumble justice that served its purpose among the tougher natures one is bound to find on deck. A finely-tempered nature like Van Brunt's, which all its life has been protected from the seamy side of life, you know nothing about. You tried to handle him by plain brutality. It wouldn't work in a hundred years. His pride is our only chance to change him. To appeal to the finer instincts in him, even though they are undeveloped, is the only possible means by which we can hope ever to make a naval officer out of him."

A step and the clank of a sword sounded in the hall.

"Crickets! The O. C.!" exclaimed Billings and darted into Ole's bedroom.

The door opened. Lieutenant Ruggles stuck his head in. He was nosing about on his evening inspection.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," he said pleasantly.

"Good-evening, sir," replied Tom and Ole stiffly at attention.

When the officer had left Billings reappeared.

"Got to be careful," he explained. "Visiting during study hour is five demerits now. My best girl's coming down for the next hop and I've simply got to keep off the conduct grade."

Next afternoon after infantry drill, Tom received notice to be at the boathouse at five-thirty. On his arrival there, he found the King and the General with a group of their retainers preparing to get under way in a cutter. Behind the cutter was fastened a canoe.

"Ha!" cried the General, "One of the criminals."

Tom eyed the little man. In his mind he was wondering just how many of the gang he could clean out in a free-for-all fight. But he remembered Billings' caution about the brutality of his code and put on the best air of respect he could attain.

"Take your eyes off me, you dirty plebe!" piped the General.

Further trouble was avoided by the arrival of Reggie.

"Oh-ho!" chuckled the King. "Our hero arrives."

The words "Our Hero" were quickly explained. Sam was permitted to frame the sentence to be imposed upon Tom and Reggie for their crimes against naval tradition.

"Mister Van Brunt," he announced, "is to have a great and salutary practice in executing the old proverb: 'greater love can no man show than to give his life for a friend.'"

"Ahem," coughed the King. "He's your *best* friend, now isn't he, mister?" he inquired of Tom.

"No, sir!" said Tom savagely.

“Haw, make ’em kiss and prove it!” shouted someone. Sam seized Reggie in an iron grip. “Hug him!” he commanded.

Tom submitted to the indignity with a disgusted look. “Kiss him,” added the King, displeased with Tom’s want of reverence.

Tom touched his lips to the cheek of the boy he despised. Down his back he felt his flesh rise. His mouth worked. Only by the greatest self-control was he able to keep from exploding into action. Nothing would have given him greater pleasure for the moment than to wade into the whole jeering crowd and knock them down one after the other. The worst of it was he knew his physical strength was equal to the task.

The tense moment passed by someone reminding the party that it was getting late and the work in hand must be started.

“Yes, we must execute the sentences,” agreed the King. “Justice,” he added in sinister tones, “must not be delayed another hour.”

The expedition embarked and headed out into the river. Reggie and Tom were detailed to the stroke oars at which they could do most of the pulling.

Halfway across, the gas buoy was reached. This buoy was a new installation and had immediately fascinated the eyes of the midshipmen. Its value as an aid to unofficial activity was instantly recognized by all.

From under a thwart the King pulled out a laundry bag. He handed it to Tom. “Your disguise,” he said laconically. “Put it on—and shake a leg.”

Not knowing what to expect, Tom drew out the contents of the bag. They consisted of a woman’s skirt,

a large hat with several dilapidated plumes rising from its circumference, and a long gauze veil tinted a rosy pink.

Amid cheers and tremendous laughter Tom clothed his magnificent physique—as the gymnasium instructor had described it—in the humiliating array of feminine garments.

“Ready for the shipwreck?” inquired the King, trying vainly to keep a straight face.

“The what, sir?” asked Tom crossly.

“Don’t *what* me, young man,” was the sharp reply. “You’re not a young man anyway, just now. Your hero days are over. You’re a beautiful princess—”

“Washerwoman’s daughter’d do better!” jeered Sam.

“ . . . in distress,” continued the King. “This—” indicating the gas buoy— “is a desert isle. Upon it you are about to be shipwrecked. After many moons—”

“Fifteen minutes is the most we’ve got,” prompted Sam.

“ . . . you are to be rescued by this gallant, resolute, audacious, chivalrous, intrepid, er—er—”

“*White-livered!*” growled the General.

“ . . . er—darling knight of the sea.” The King turned and bowed ostentatiously to Reggie.

Tom was assisted to the rail from which he stepped to the buoy. He tripped on the skirt and almost went overboard.

The cutter then rowed away about twenty yards. Tom saw Reggie unwillingly hoisted into the canoe. To his waist was strapped a cutlass and a jaunty hat of felt with a duster feather in it perched upon his head.

In accordance with instructions Reggie paddled away

a little distance. Then he turned and headed for the buoy.

"Pep up! Pep up!" shouted the King. "Be what you're supposed to be!"

Whereupon Reggie for the first time entered somewhat into the spirit of the occasion. He rose to his knees in the canoe and, shading his eyes with his hand in best wild-indian style, announced in a feeble voice: "Land-ho! And a princess in distress. I'll save—"

The canoe at this instant gave a violent lurch to one side and Reggie just saved himself from capsizing. His hat flopped off and floated gently with the tide.

"Save my hat first!" roared Sam.

"No!" yelled the audience.

Reggie awkwardly continued upon his valorous mission.

At the buoy he balanced his craft with one hand and emitted some sort of feeble announcement as to the meaning of his fortunate visit to the desert island.

To the great delight of the audience the Princess showed unmistakable signs of being about to kick her rescuer overboard.

Reggie heard the snickers in the cutter behind him. And a new kind of resentment was roused within him. It was bad enough to submit to being made a fool of at the hands of upperclassmen who had the whole two-thousand midshipmen behind them. But to sink still lower by suffering the other victim, a plebe like himself, to abuse him was unbearable.

Then, without warning Reggie put one foot on the buoy, balanced for a second, and dived headlong at the Princess.

Tom had no time to sidestep the tackle. His upflung hand caught the pipe by which gas was fed into the lamp. The struggling pair swung like a human pendulum with the rolling of the "desert isle."

Cheer after cheer rose from the cutter. The upper-classmen's delight was boundless. To draw from the shrinking Reggie some demonstration of true masculine spirit had been their chief aim.

The summer's work had done wonders for the weakling. Constant drill and exercise had put fibre into his muscle and weight upon his bones. Tom was amazed at the tenacity with which his assailant held on. He himself dared not lose his hold upon the pipe. Did he do so and they would go overboard at once.

The early October twilight closed in as the pair of plebes struggled on. The audience roared their praise of the battle.

Suddenly the dark blotch of the two bodies left the buoy. The pipe had broken. And, as they submerged in a great splash, the darkness was lit by a burst of lurid flame that fell like a searchlight upon the white walls of Bancroft Hall, half a mile away.

The escaping gas had become ignited and blown up!

Hastily the rather frightened hazers pulled up to the wrecked beacon. Tom and Reggie were hauled in over the side unhurt. Then, lest the law overtake them, the party set their backs to the oars.

That night was the occasion of a great ceremony. Immediately after supper nearly a hundred first-classmen crammed themselves into Reggie's room. Tom was present in all his ruined finery, the pink veil having run to white with bloody blotches.

“And now,” concluded the King after an impressive description of the thrilling rescue, “let me present the brave Sir Reginald with his well deserved reward.”

Amid a tumult of cheers and clapping the King drew from his robe a resplendent medal fashioned from the tin top of a jelly glass and a cast-off garter, and pinned it upon Reggie’s heaving breast.

On the outskirts five less fortunate plebes, secured for the occasion, lifted their hats into the air and proclaimed in a rather strained chorus:

“Hail to Sir Reginald! Hail!”

CHAPTER X

N! N! N! N!

"Oh, you *lambs!*"

"Put some juice on!"

"Heave around! Heave around!"

"Now once more—all together, and let's see you bite holes in it!"

"No, Billings. Wait a minute. Now listen to me, plebes. Don't lean too far forward. That just ties knots in your lungs. Keep your bloomin' chests up. Take deep breaths. Use the weight of your shoulders to give volume to the sound. . . All right, Billings."

"Now once more, all together. Four N yell, one Navy, and three teams!"

The speaker threw down his megaphone. After the megaphone he threw his cap. With a jerk he unbuttoned his blouse and collar. His hair stood up in a wild ridge. He raised his hands—raised himself on tiptoes—balanced tensely for half a second, then descended to a stooped knot.

Simultaneously and in rhythmic unison there poured from the throats of six-hundred lusty-lunged young men the following cheer:

N! N! N! N!

A! A! A! A!

V! V! V! V!

Y! Y! Y! Y!

N-A-V-Y!

TEAM! TEAM! TEAM!

"That's somewhat better," commented cheer-leader Billings, wiping the sweat from his brow.

Below the stand at another kind of practice stood Tom Poor.

Tom went out for football for three reasons: First, he considered it his duty. Second, he saw in athletics success, the road to that fame which every boy dreams for himself from the time he can kick a ball or swing a bat. Third, he liked it.

There was a fourth reason which Tom didn't know was a reason, but which was the most important of all. This reason was whispered by Coach McGee to Scotty the trainer just after the Army-Navy game the year before. And it was discussed again this very afternoon:

"Scotty, we lost that Army game for just one reason."

"I think I know, sir."

"Likely.—Would you say it was Grimes?"

"Yes, sir. I've figured that by his selfish desire to make himself a star last year he sacrificed the team-work that would have won the game for us."

"More than that, Scotty. He got the team into a state of mind where they didn't know whether they were to blame me—or the system we've got up for them."

"But what can we do, Mr. McGee? Grimes is a first-classman this year. He's had three years to impress his value on the midshipmen. And they haven't supplied us with a single man that can compare with him."

"You're right. And he's stronger than any fourth classman could possibly be—barring a farm hand."

"Who wouldn't have had the football training?"

"Yet he's going to make us lose—I am positive of it!"

"Best player on the squad, sir, and going to make us lose! Wouldn't that jar you?"

"Well, Scotty, take a look at those plebes this afternoon and let me know what you think."

So while his class was toughening their lungs for the great day, Tom was entered in a contest for the position on the Navy team held for three years by Harrison Grimes, the greatest fullback Annapolis had turned out in many a season. And yet, curiously, this Grimes was at the same time the Navy's surest means of defeat—due to his stubborn refusal to play any but a one-man game.

Scotty called the plebe candidates to one side of the field.

"Now divide yerselves up by positions," he directed.

Tom joined the group of those who desired to be fullbacks. There were four others. Only one was within thirty pounds of Tom's weight. He was too fat to be promising.

Scotty came at once and studied the fullback material. Grimes was a fullback. Grimes had to be displaced if it were humanly possible. Public opinion would prevent the coaches from displacing him. Only a miracle in the shape of a worthy plebe could save the team by driving the older man out of his job.

"Too lank," muttered Scotty, as he looked at three of the men. "Too fat," he sized up the fourth. "Too short," was on the tip of his tongue for Tom when he realized he must look *up* to see Tom's eyes. The latter's broad shoulders made him look shorter than he really was.

"Grown up to that frame?" was the curt inquiry.

"Doctor once told me we grow till we're twenty-five," laughed Tom.

"This is no time for foolin'; have ye had any footballin'?"

"Played half on the *Alaska's* football team last year."

Scotty's face brightened perceptibly. "Why that's where our old captain of the 'sixteen went, wasn't it?"

"Yes. Lieutenant Rudd coached us."

"Let me feel ye, laddie." Scotty's hands trembled as he ran them over Tom's stringy arms, well-filled shoulders, and solid but not too thick thighs.

"Will ye trot a pace for me an' back?" He pointed to the goal posts fifty yards across the turf. Tom turned and ran as directed. His long clean stride brought joy into the old trainer's eyes. On the way back he let himself out a bit. Bits of dirt shot from his cleated shoes. Like a gust of wind he passed the man who knew a runner when he saw one.

To Tom's surprise, Scotty turned and hastened away as fast as his old rheumatic joints would let him. Not a word of praise or approval for the one he had shown such marked interest in.

"Mister McGee," panted Scotty a minute later. "I've got him! I've got him!"

"Lead me to it," was the doubtful reply.

On the way across the field the coach picked up Grimes.

The fullback was tall, well-knit, handsome, and a born athlete. Except for the look of patronizing conceit that never left his face, he was the typical football hero one sees pictured each fall on the covers of magazines.

"Come on, Grimes. Want you to try out a few plebes for me."

"Right!" said Grimes. Nothing pleased him better

than to run with the ball while the men tried to tackle him. Not only had he great speed, but he had cultivated a trick of handling his legs that was pretty close to foul play. Few inexperienced men had ever been able to down him without laying themselves up for a week or two.

Tom had his back turned when the trio arrived. Looking suddenly around, he found himself face to face with the "King" who had superintended the hazing.

"Why hello, Princess," greeted Grimes. "Your head shrunk any yet?"

Tom was too taken aback to reply. He had never connected the famous Grimes with the hazing crowd, particularly with the King. For that one individual had been petty and mean enough to take advantage of Tom's past every time he met him. He never lost an opportunity to call Tom a "hero" or "princess," or some unpleasant name that insinuated a conceit Tom had never had.

Scotty nudged the coach. "There he be—the one lookin' so mad at Mister Grimes."

Without further parley the plebes were lined up. Grimes took the ball down the field far enough to give himself a start; and then, on signal, ran at full speed toward the plebe whose turn it was to tackle.

To Tom's great satisfaction his turn came late enough to give him some idea of what the fullback could do. Thus, by the time he was called out, he knew exactly what to expect.

"Now watch him," whispered Scotty.

The coach's keen glance measured Tom's apparent indifference. "Guess he's a bit leery of Grimes," he muttered. "These kids always get stage-fright when the first team shows up."

Grimes gathered speed as he came. Though he

weighed nearly two-hundred pounds, his long and rather light legs enabled him to cover the ground like a sprinter.

The fraction of a second before he reached his adversary, Grimes caught Tom's eye. Something in the glint of it warned him to look out. So instead of trying to mow the tackler down by sheer momentum as he had the others, he swerved slightly from his path.

Tom took a quick step. Like an arrow his body left the ground and shot towards the runner. There was a heavy thud and a grunt as the two bodies slammed to the ground. And then, to the amazement of both Scotty and the coach, the ball went spinning merrily away down the field.

Tom rose with a smile. By a perfectly legitimate means he had wiped out a personal score that the Annapolis code did not acknowledge; the occasional advantage an upperclassman may take of a plebe.

Grimes did not rise. For nearly a minute he lay where he fell. Then with a look of real shame and unconcealed anger he sat up.

"Think you're funny—you fresh plebe, don't you?"

Scotty and the coach betook themselves to cover of the dressing room and embraced. "We've got him!" they claimed in chorus.

That night Tom received orders to report to Grimes' study after supper. Suspecting that the fullback was going to take his feelings out on him by means of a little private hazing, Tom reported the matter to his friend Billings.

"It isn't done!" said Billings promptly. "Hazing is hazing, and it has its uses. But we don't stand for any private grudges settled that way. Just don't report and I'll tend to the matter myself."

Thus it came about that Tom not only found himself in open competition with one of the foremost athletes of his day, but was forced to be an unwilling antagonist of a competitor that hated him personally and with an open bitterness.

Naturally, the head coach and Scotty gave Tom what backing they dared. But this was dangerous due to the fact that Grimes might suspect a put-up job. He was strong enough politically to carry almost any point. Furthermore, any advantages that came to Tom only increased the fullback's determination to discredit him every chance he got.

Tom's success dated from his first practice. He ate with the squad on the special training table. He was made a permanent fullback on the second or scrub team. He received the admiration of his class and the greatest attention of the whole corps of coaches.

"Gee, but you're some notorious character!" Ole told him one night after about a dozen visits from upper-classmen, coaches, trainers, and other interested parties.

"Yes," admitted Tom. "But that doesn't help me any in the classroom."

"The heck it doesn't!" said Ole. "Seems to me the profs have their eyes on you to help you out every chance they get."

"And there's this constant trouble with Grimes," continued Tom. "I never feel safe any more. Regular crook that fellow is."

"Careful, old man," warned Ole.

Tom laughed. "Careful—I should think I ought to be. Do you know that scoundrel hid my shoes before the Georgetown game the other day when he heard the coach say I was going in after the first half?"

"Are you sure of it?" exclaimed Ole. "That's the most outrageous thing I ever heard!"

"Yes. The rubber told me he saw Grimes put them behind the towel rack. He thought Grimes wanted to take them to the cobbler's and pulled them out to do it for him. When he found they were mine, he brought them over. I could tell by Grimes' face as he saw me with them that he had meant to cripple me that way."

Next Saturday came the Princeton-Navy game. Next to the Army contest it was the biggest event of the football year at Annapolis.

"You've got an even chance," the head coach told his men. "That Princeton bunch is a bit older than you; but they're not an ounce heavier as a team. As for speed, I'd say we had a shade the best of it."

One of the alumni coaches stepped up.

"Excuse me for butting in, fellows," he apologized, "but I've got a point for you—you in particular, Grimes."

Grimes condescended to nod.

"It's Hale, that big Princeton tackle. You know I went up as scout for the Princeton-Yale game. Hale carried the ball over every third play nearly. He never failed to gain a first down either. I don't know what it is about him. The tacklers simply can't seem to upset him. I remind you, Grimes, especially, because the Princeton interference will smother our ends often enough to make our back field take Hale."

Grimes nodded again indifferently. Tom, however, on the outskirts of the circle of players drank in every word. He knew what a football tip can mean.

The game was a sensation from beginning to end. Princeton swept the Navy off her feet in the first quarter

and scored a touchdown. Navy came back with two goals from field in the second.

The third quarter was a battle royal. Time after time the gigantic Hale was called back of the Princeton line. A few sharp signals and he would be off around the end like a human cyclone. Navy defenses crumbled before the onslaught. Five plays in succession, fullback Grimes alone stood between Hale and the Navy goal line.

The head coach called Tom. "Warm up, Poor. The Brigade won't stand any longer for the way Grimes is bungling his tackles. He's let that fellow Hale get an extra twenty yards or so on every run."

Tom threw off his heavy jersey and began to trot up and down. His chance had come. Further, he thought he knew what he was up against: Grimes was simply saving himself. By letting Hale get past him each time he could tackle without risk of crippling his own arms or legs and thus guard his coveted chance of playing in the Army-Navy game.

Such a play had just come off when Tom got the word to go in. He dashed out to the referee. Having been recognized he turned to the man he was to relieve.

"Why—what the dickens!" exclaimed Grimes. "I suppose you *asked* to come in, eh?"

Tom ignored the insult.

An expression of crafty resolve flashed across the humiliated first-classman's face.

"I tell you, Poor," he said in sudden friendliness. "the only way to get that bird Hale is to dive for his knees."

Tom was taken in. With his great and undying loyalty to Annapolis he could not conceive of a man deliberately misleading him at such a time as this.

"I'll do it!" he said fervently.

Two plunges through the Navy center followed. Then Princeton lost the ball on Navy's ten yard line. Rather than risk a rush back, Navy kicked. Tom warmed up thoroughly on the dash down the field.

Then came the expected attack. Tom was twenty yards behind the line and could not make out the play for a moment. The next thing he knew he saw the towering Hale bearing down upon him, having dodged the whole force of Navy battlers bent on stopping him.

Tom was cool enough. Also he knew how terrific his responsibility was. If Hale passed him, the game was as good as lost.

The runner bore towards the sidelines, forcing Tom to trot across to meet him. Then, as Grimes had advised, he plunged his takeoff toe into the soft turf and dived.

Measured in time the space between the instant Tom leaped and when he struck the ground was about three-fifths of a second. In actual experience it was a matter of hours, even days.

The exact point his toe dug in for the tackle was just a tiny bit softer than the rest of the field. His toe slipped about four inches. These four inches were sufficient to throw him off his balance. Instead of a clean performance, Tom half-whirled in midair and missed his man by nearly a foot.

In that fifth of a second he saw suddenly the truth. Hale, the unconquered, took a stride of extra length at the moment Tom should have struck him. And in the stride he drove his broad knee upward with the force of a battering ram.

If Tom had made his tackle as he planned, he would have been knocked completely out!

Of course the trick was against the rules! but, if done as skillfully as Hale had learned to, no referee would have suspected the truth. Grimes knew. And Grimes had done his level best to arrange for Tom's obliteration by advising him as he did.

Tom saved the situation by a superhuman wriggle. He shot one hand out just in time to catch Hale's ankle. The latter tripped. Like a rubber ball Tom was up and on him.

Next play Hale ran again. Again Tom alone was there between the runner and the Navy goal. This time there was no slip. And the cheers that went up after the perfect tackle he made echoed against the granite walls of Bancroft Hall.

Tom had simply met trick by trick. He had tackled high and had turned his shoulder as he struck. It took just two lessons of this kind to hand the famous Hale enough punishment to keep him out of over half the plays that followed.

In the final quarter Tom placed himself on the roll of fame by carrying the ball over for a winning touchdown. For the second time he heard his name on the lips of the multitude:

"He's all right!"

"Who's all right?"

"Tom P-O-O-R!"

And for the second time in a month the head coach and trainer silently embraced one another over their prospects for getting the fullback they wished.

CHAPTER XI

CATASTROPHE

THE door crashed open. Billings rushed in, followed by Ole and several other alarmed-looking plebes.

"Tom!" exclaimed Billings.

"Oh, Tom, Tom!" groaned Ole.

Tom leaped to his feet and with mock desperation placed his hand over his heart.

"Out with it! Tell me the worst! Is she sinking, or is she only afire? Or has the good ship Cuspidor blown her boilers up and scalded the engine force to death; or—"

Ole held up his hand. "Oh, don't be silly; it's awful!"

"I know it, Admiral Hansen. That is, I would know it if you and these other pall-bearers would pipe the secret into my waiting ears."

Billings stepped forward and placed his hand kindly on Tom's shoulder. "I'd rather it be anyone but you Tom," he said sympathetically. "Old Man, *you're hung on the skinny tree!*"

"You mean I'm posted unsat. in Physics?" Tom's ruddy cheeks whitened slowly.

"We've just this minute come from the main office. The list is on the bulletin board. You are down with a one-five for the month."

Tom made a rapid mental calculation. Marks were on the basis of 4.0. as perfect, and a figure of 2.5. was necessary for a passing grade. With a 1.5. to date and

the poor showing he felt sure of making on the monthly examination, he stood a fair chance of coming out unsatisfactory for the term. As there are no such things as "conditions" in the Naval Academy, this meant he would be dropped.

But even more grievous was the fact that he was on the ragged edge in one or two other subjects. In consequence he would not be permitted to continue his football. This catastrophe struck at the hearts of every one of the two-thousand three-hundred-and-one young midshipmen so set on winning the Army-Navy game.

"It's rotten!" moaned one of his sympathisers. "McGee has said in public that your being at fullback would save the game for us!" The speaker didn't add that he himself had saved his official monthly allowance since September to wager on the game.

"Who did you have last month in Skinny?" inquired Billings.

Tom scarcely believed his own words when he answered. "Ruggles—why I thought he was the best friend I had here!"

"Go see him at once," urged Ole. "Make it clear to him what your position is on the team."

"Ought to know it," snorted the plebe, "without having to be reminded."

That afternoon when the last recitation was over Tom hunted up his old skipper of sub-chaser days, Lieutenant Ruggles.

"Hello, Poor," was the quiet greeting; "had a hunch I'd see you soon."

"Yes, sir, I wanted to find out if there wasn't some mistake about my mark in physics."

The officer shook his head. "Some day you will realize

what duty means, Poor. And I hope, too, you'll some day realize what it means to me to have to put you down as unsatisfactory."

"But is it necessary, sir?"

"Absolutely. You have been doing worse and worse. I warned you. I gave you assistance I wasn't giving the others. I knew what it meant to the team, to the midshipmen, to the whole Academy. I even couldn't forget for a moment that you saved my life last summer."

The speaker paused and a look of inexpressible pain came into his face.

"Tom Poor, you have made an unsatisfactory mark. It is my duty to report exactly the mark you made. If I knew the whole world were to fall in pieces for what I've done, I'd do it just the same."

"But can't the report wait till next month?" faltered Tom.

"No."

"Can't I do some extra work this week and catch up?"

"No."

"Do you think it would help if I went to the Commandant and explained that I had got behind because I was too tired to study nights after the long football practices?"

"No."

"Then the Navy can't win just because I—one single midshipman—haven't soaked up enough force of gravity and such stuff to suit my instructor?"

"Correct."

"And you believe that's the way things ought to be run?"

"I do."

Tom crept back to quarters. And he went through the tortures of soul no man can describe who hasn't been

bounced from a winning Navy team for the sake of a cold 2.5.

And Tom went to New York with the 'Brigade. And he sat in the Polo Grounds bleachers; and—

No, he didn't cheer. Something in his throat made him afraid to trust it.

And he saw the Navy win—in spite of Grimes.

"I've got three more years," he choked to himself when it was all over. "I've three more years. But—"

A fat tear gathered in the corner of his right eye. Before he knew it it had slipped over and down his cheek. Hastily he flicked it off and in a panic of embarrassment looked around to see who saw.

CHAPTER XII

A DESPERATE ATTEMPT

As soon as news of Tom's misfortune got about, a wild scheme to save him formed in Reggie's mind.

"I don't despise him like I used to, Bob," he announced that night.

Robert Cary had agreed to room with Reggie despite the latter's unhappy reputation for being a cad.

"Pretty much of a man, I'd say," was the reply. Bob was the son of an old Baltimore family and could give Reggie tit for tat when it came to recounting luxuries of their past lives. On the other hand he was much broader when it came to judging his fellow men.

"Powerful brute," agreed Reggie. "But that's not the point. Tom Poor saved my life after I squealed on him. I've told you before I wouldn't have done so had I known what a decent sort he was. Now I want to even up by doing something for him. Till I do, my conscience won't be clear."

"Didn't know you had a conscience," laughed the other.

"Haven't, when you come right down to it. But when Tom Poor passes and takes no more notice of me than if I were a tack in the corridor linoleum it makes me feel sort of creepy."

"Well, what's the game?"

Reggie rose and began pacing the floor. "Can't say exactly, except that I'm going to pull him out of this hole he's got himself into in Skinny."

"Coach him?"

"No, that wouldn't do. He dislikes me too much. Besides you and I with our previous schooling have got by so easily in our studies that neither of us would know just how best to boost another bird along."

"How about a few tips on the examination? Think you could pump some out of Ruggles?"

"Not a chance in the world. Besides I've got a better hunch than that."

"Shoot."

But Reggie continued his nervous pacing up and down. "I'm afraid to tell you," he said at last.

"Oh, go on. Do you think I'd mind anything after I took on a roommate who was in coventry?"

"Well, I'm going to steal the next Skinny exam paper!"

Bob started. "Great guns, man! Please don't go and get yourself into another row."

"Not a chance. I'm simply going over to Mahan Hall tomorrow night during the hop and lift a copy of the paper off the Boss's desk neat as a whistle. My marks are so high that I don't risk my own reputation; and, by slipping the questions to Tom Poor without his knowing where they came from, I can make sure he'll not bilge on the semi-ans."

As "bilging" or getting dropped from Annapolis on the semi-annual examination is the fate of a goodly percentage of every plebe class, Reggie was thoroughly justified in his concern.

Despite Bob Cary's protests he made ready to carry out the robbery.

No plebes are allowed to attend Saturday night hops. Special liberty is granted upperclassmen to visit the town and escort their partners down to the magnificent gym-

nasium where dances are held. This creates a constant traffic through the grounds on hop nights without involving the fourth class.

By keeping in the shadows Reggie reached Mahan Hall safely. He brought a bayonet under his coat. Using this as a jimmy he pried open one of the first floor windows.

He had taken the precaution of wearing rubber overshoes which made no noise on the carpetless floors. A bunch of skeleton keys which he had secured from town the same afternoon enabled him to reach the offices of the Head of the Department of Physics without any great effort.

In the darkness he felt his way to the desk. It was locked. He could have used the bayonet. He didn't dare though. Should it be discovered that a copy of the examination were missing, a new one would of course be made out and Tom would be as badly off as ever.

The top drawer finally answered to one of the keys. A bundle of freshly printed papers lay in front. Reggie extracted one; lit a match for a moment to identify it; then folded it up and placed it in his cap. A midshipman's service uniform has no pockets.

To restore the desk to its original condition was the work of a few seconds. Another minute and Reggie had reached the corridor. Then his heart missed a beat.

On the floor beneath he heard a door close!

He crept to the stairway. Someone with a flashlight was walking below. As the flare passed near the balustrade he recognized the watchman making his evening rounds.

The watchman tried two doors while Reggie peered through the railing. Then something happened to his

light. It went out. While he stood fumbling with it the idea came to Reggie that he might make the stairs on the opposite side of the building.

He started. On his second step a loud creak came from the floor.

"Who's that?" asked the watchman instantly. At the same time his light came on again.

Reggie held his breath.

"Sure I heard something," muttered the man.

As he started up to investigate, Reggie made another effort to pass down the corridor and reach the other wing. To his horror a second time he betrayed himself by stepping on another loose plank.

"Halt!" cried the watchman. "Halt or I'll shoot!"

Reggie wasn't so afraid of gun play as he was of being discovered. His conduct record was already groaning under too great a burden of demerits.

His position was growing more desperate every moment. Either he must make a break for the other wing or risk dashing past the watchman at the moment he reached the head of the stairs.

Reggie chose the latter plan. He might be headed off if he tried to go around.

As the watchman put his foot on the landing, Reggie leaped from behind the rail-post and dashed downwards four steps at a jump.

"Stop! Stop, or I'll shoot!" bawled the guardian.

Reggie paid no heed to the warning. He was covering the last flight before the man had a chance to pull his gun.

As he reached the window by which he had entered, he realized he was not being pursued. The same moment he heard a window above thrown up and a voice shout:

"Get that fellow—he's going out the side!"

So they had discovered the window and were on his trail! Reggie gave one look at the pair of dark figures on guard.

He took to the basement. By a coal hole he wormed his way into the area in rear of the building. He sped across the side yard.

"There he goes!" came from the window guard.

Without hesitation Reggie continued, not in the direction of quarters, but towards town. His retreat was cut off.

"Anyway, I can get in through the main gate when the big crowd goes back after the hop," he told himself.

This hope was frustrated soon after. He fell in with two other midshipmen on College Avenue. They were walking ahead of him and talking in tones just loud enough for him to hear.

"No chance on the gate," said one. "They've got word we're out."

"You mean they'll be watching for anyone that's not had permission to take hop liberty?"

"Yes; Sam told me there was an extra guard on."

"All right, we'll go over the wall."

Reggie slowed down and dropped astern. "Me too, I guess," he muttered.

But at that moment even the wall was an unhealthy spot for frenching midshipmen.

Grimes, of football fame, had been the senior midshipman on duty that evening when the alarm came that at least three people were out in town without proper authority. Grimes himself had been nearly willing to break the law in the same way due to the presence in

Annapolis of a particular young lady. Naturally his humor was at its lowest ebb.

"Mr. Grimes, here's a little job," announced the Duty Officer about ten p.m. "I wish you to picket the main wall near the Superintendent's office and see if we can catch some of these young scoundrels."

Grimes shivered with injured dignity as he thought of a personage like himself being selected for such a vulgar detail.

"May I call upon some of the fourth-classmen as assistants?" he asked without enthusiasm.

"I don't see why not."

Which of course placed in the hands of Grimes a satisfying means of taking out a little spite upon certain members of the new class he disliked.

He chose ten. Tom Poor headed the list.

"Your duty is to walk post along the main wall," he instructed them. "I will station you close enough together to make it impossible for a man to get through. I'll stay in the main gate office. As soon as one of you catches anybody, sing out for help and the others will close in. And send word to me at once."

Tom had the blackest and muddiest stretch. Grimes saw to that. Also Grimes took pains to lurk in the cover of the office building to see if he could surprise Tom off his guard. To be able to report him for neglect of duty would be a pleasant little return for some of the football prestige Tom had robbed him of.

It happened that at this very moment Reggie was making his way back to the reservation by a devious route. He planned to reach the wall at a well-shadowed section.

It is a matter of note that a wind was stirring which

kept dry overhanging branches of the trees in motion. This caused quite enough noise to hide the footsteps of anyone walking in soft mud on the far side of the wall.

Reggie carried a long pole. This piece of gear he had lifted from the backyard of a nearby dwelling. It would enable him to gain the top of the wall.

Another coincidence unfortunately occurred just here. Two officers emerged from a town house facing the spot at which Reggie was making his ascent. Their presence disturbed him.

He glanced apprehensively over his shoulder, made an extra effort, and reached the top of the wall. Not daring to hesitate he leaped.

His foot struck something soft almost the same instant. His fall was broken by the body of someone just beneath. But so vigorous had been the takeoff that his momentum carried him down on top and left him nearly straddling the man beneath.

He heard a familiar voice give a stifled exclamation. He saw the glimmer of a duty belt. Then he knew what he had done. Snatching his hat from the ground, he sprang up and was away almost before the alarm could be given.

Tom sat up half-dazed by the unexpectedness of the assault. Something white lay on the ground beside him. It was a piece of paper, illegible in the darkness. Mechanically he picked it up and put it in his only pocket, the top of his cap.

A rough shake of his shoulder roused him to action.

"Aha, let him break through you! Thought you could get away with it, didn't you?" Grimes coarse voice grated in his ear.

"Why no, sir," said Tom honestly. "Whoever that

was landed square on my head and stunned me for a moment."

"None of your guff," was the sneering answer. "We'll let the Duty Officer settle that!"

Shortly afterwards word came that the three culprits had been caught trying to get in the main gate. Grimes, however, was determined to make the most of what he considered Tom's perfidy.

"There was another one, sir," he told the Officer-in-Charge. "He came over right alongside Midshipman Poor. Poor pretended the man jumped on him and let him escape."

To Grimes' joy the D. O. commanded that Poor be brought to him at once.

Tom, who had been told to wait outside, entered and, removing his cap, stood at attention. A white paper fluttered to the floor. In the unfortunate dispute with Grimes he had quite forgotten having picked it up.

He leaned over to regain the folded sheet. Instantly Grimes' foot shot out.

"Not so fast, my lad! That paper looks familiar."

Grimes unfolded it and ran his eye over the printed lines. "Well, sir!" he exclaimed to the O. C. "We have one criminal if we haven't another. You probably know this is the fourth classman who has just been put off the football squad for unsatisfactory marks in Physics. Here, sir, we find in his possession the questions for his next examination!"

Tom's look was one of utter bewilderment. Even the O. C.'s expression was more surprise than condemnation. It seemed so utterly unbelievable that a man of Tom's character and reputation should stoop to means so low.

"Shall I put him under arrest?" inquired the smiling Grimes.

The D. O. shook his head. "Just a minute Mr. Poor, haven't you anything to say about this?"

Something in his enemy's pleasure at his discomfiture brought the bulk of Tom's courage back.

"I can say, sir, pretty much what I said to Mr. Grimes. But if my word stands for nothing, why bother with explanations?"

"Don't be disrespectful, Mr. Poor," warned the D. O. "This business looks pretty disgusting and I want to save you the humiliation of it if there happens to be any mistake."

"How could there be a mistake," put in Grimes, "when we find the paper right on him? Why you don't even need my report about his neglect of duty."

"Silence, Mr. Grimes. Mr. Poor, what have you got to say for yourself?"

Tom set his jaw. "I was standing under the wall, sir, just where I had been posted by Mr. Grimes. I had stopped for a moment to tie my shoe. Suddenly a man jumped on me from above. I was knocked down, although I think the man was much lighter than I. When I rose I saw that paper beside me. I picked it up and put it in my cap."

Grimes here laid back his head and chuckled. The O. C. joined in for a moment; then turned on Tom with almost fierceness. "You young crook!" he said; "it takes just one like you to give this whole place a bad name. Go to your room at once. I'm not even going to put you under arrest. I think the Commandant can handle your case by wire to Washington. You'll be a civilian by noon tomorrow!"

Tom turned and walked blindly through the door. Just outside he passed Reggie Van Brunt. He didn't see the strained look on Reggie's face. He didn't even see Reggie.

Back in his room he turned on the lights and hauled Ole out of bed. "Look at me," he commanded. "Look at me!"

"Handsome as ever," growled Ole sleepily.

"Do I appear insane?"

"A little queer," said Ole, waking up a bit at the strained voice of his roommate.

"Well, I am. I'm crazy as a bedbug. I see things. I hear things. I am going to be a civilian tomorrow. Think of it—tomorrow noon! Ask the D. O. if you don't believe me."

By this time Ole was thoroughly aroused. He knew Tom had been studying long after taps by a candle hidden under his bed. No doubt the strain was beginning to tell. He smelled Tom's breath. No, he hadn't been drinking.

"Turn in, old man," he advised. "We'll talk it over, or ask the doctor about it in the morning."

Silently Tom made his way to his bedroom and threw himself face down on the pillow. The burden of his sorrows was pretty close to the crushing point.

On the floor below Reggie paced up and down. When Bob Cary offered him some cake he mechanically accepted a huge piece, then forgot to eat it. Twice he took books from the shelf. Once he went into the side room and closely studied his face in the shaving mirror. Then he returned to his pacing.

"For heaven's sake!" protested Bob. "What kind of nervous itch have you anyway?"

"By noon tomorrow—by noon—" was the inane and broken reply.

Then abruptly Reggie left the room.

"Off his noodle," remarked Bob with feeling.

About twenty minutes after this Ole Hansen heard a knock at his door, followed by the clank of a sword. "Gosh, what's up now?" he wondered, and rolled over into a pretended slumber.

He heard the steps of two men pass into Tom's bedroom.

"Poor?" It was the D. O.

"Yes, sir."

"I have come up here to apologize to you. It isn't often the privilege of an officer of the Navy to apologize to an Annapolis plebe. But never has there been a situation equal to the present one. Do you accept my apology?"

"Why, sir—yes, sir—of course," stammered the astounded Tom.

"And Mr. Grimes here wishes to apologize also. Don't you, Grimes?"

"Yes, sir," was the sulky answer.

"The trouble is, Mr. Poor, that we can't explain just why we are apologizing. Rest assured, however, that our recent discussion is cancelled. You will hear no more about the charges I mistakenly laid against you tonight."

But Ole's bewilderment at what he heard was more than doubled by that of Bob Cary who was also suffering from an attack of insanity in his family.

Reggie had appeared again after a short absence. He looked as if he had been drawn through a keyhole. He came up to Bob and made a short speech:

"I'm a fool," he said. "A great towering imbecile of a fool. And yet—"

"Oh," said Bob, "it's your plan to help Poor that's on your mind?"

"To help Poor," echoed Reggie. "No, I didn't help him. I almost finished him. I almost finished myself. Yet I think I did help myself—when I told 'em the whole story."

"You got caught?"

"No. I surrendered."

"But what for? What could you get out of that?"

"Clear conscience—about all I can see," faltered Reggie. "Only it cost me a hundred and fifty demerits: third conduct grade till the end of the year!"

Reggie had squealed again, but not on Tom. This time he squealed on himself—to save Tom.

CHAPTER XIII

NEARING THE END

Two plebes sat by the window talking, their feet on the radiator, chairs tilted back. Though it was study hour, one strummed softly on a banjo. From time to time the other took up the refrain in a low whistle.

"Man, I can't study when the 'Bay looks like this."

"Me either."

"Some month, May is."

"Yea Bo."

"With baseball and crew and sailing and hikes."

"And the cruise; and the next year the hops."

"And Sundays up the river."

"Or down to the Point."

"How's your tennis?"

"Better. Cleaned up Van Brunt yesterday."

"That boob?"

"Some player though. Got the build for it."

"About all he does, isn't it?"

"Yes; the stuck-up bird won't play around with the gang."

"Course not. Think's he's a peg higher than most of us."

"Ha! Remember when Tom Poor took him down?"

"Sure; but he evened up I heard later. Got himself into a fix trying to boost Poor up on Skinny."

"And he didn't have the brains to get away with it."

"There's Poor now. Some build he's got."

"Gosh yes! Wish I had his beef."

"What would you do with it?"

"Clean you out for one!"

"By the way, what'd you make on that last math exam?"

"Busted cold! Got to pull a three or over this month to be sat. for the term."

"No worse than I am in Dago. Spanish always did get the best of me."

"French is what I like."

"Can that stuff! Now when it comes to seamanship you're talking. Real business! Take mooring ship. The book gives you what you need to begin. Then you go out and do the real thing!"

"Righto! That's what I hate about all this math and other theoretical stuff. Don't mean anything."

"Humph! Do you know our math prof last month gave us a spiel on that very point? Said we'd wake up one morning about the middle of next year and find out what it was all about."

"Wish I'd wake up next Thursday before that exam."

"Said we'd see how all these formulae fit into a battleship like so many nuts and bolts."

"Oh, gee! Let's talk about something pleasant."

"All right, how about a canoe party next Saturday?"

"Can't. Got an aunt coming down."

"That's tough."

"Not altogether. She always brings a couple of cakes. Whole turkey last time. And five pounds of candy."

"What's the big idea? You must have an awful drag."

"Not quite. It's Captain Waverly. Old Wave's

pretty soft on her. She pretends to give him the boot, and that she's just come down here to see her poor little plebe nephew. Only I notice the poor little plebe always passes Cap. Wave when the poor little plebe's liberty is up."

"Like a woman."

"Sure. Queer creatures."

"Holy Smoke! Can't you talk about anything pleasant?"

"Hang it all, I spooned on the picnic idea. It's got to be Saturday after the aunt, that's all."

"Where'll we go?"

"How about that sandspit above the big bend?"

"Corking! That's where the old road comes in. Chance at that fellow's cherries too."

"Not for mine. I've got just five demerits to run on for the rest of the year."

"I'll do it. I got fifty to get before they boost me on to the conduct grade."

"No joke to miss liberty June Week—graduation, West Point game and all."

"Right you are. How'd you run so many this month?"

"Beale's fault. Invented that fool electric stove. Said we could cook and blow the smell out of the window with an electric fan."

"That's what some of the first-class crowd down my way are doing."

"Well, as an electrical engineer Beale's a fizzle."

"Wouldn't cook?"

"Sure, flap-jacks and sausages and all sorts of things."

"Get caught?"

"Should say so. The O. C. stuck his head in the first

night. The big fan we'd got was sitting on the table pumping air through the room to beat sixty. Just then the fuse blew and the O. C. got all mixed up in the stove and the fan and the sausages. Cost him eight dollars and a half to get the uniform ungreased, the tailor told me."

"And cost you twenty-five demerits?"

"Fifty!"

"Crickets!"

"For heaven's sake can't you get on something pleasanter than aunts and demerits?"

"Your depressing influence, I guess."

"Well, bounce back to the picnic."

"Bounce yourself. What'll we eat?"

"Will you stay the whole day?"

"Sure thing. How about a chicken?"

"Right! And a pot of that apple butter the canteen's got."

"Pie too. Wonderful apple ones there last week."

"Something in the cake line?"

"Here, something in the substantial line I'd say first."

"All right. Dozen ham sandwiches—couple of cans of beans."

"Good. Take the coffeepot, too. I can always get away with twice as much when there's something to wash it down."

"You talk like an old drunk."

"Gee, that reminds me. The Aunt always carries a medicine flask of whiskey with her. I'll try to hook it. Ever taste the stuff?"

"Once or twice. Pretty rotten, I think."

"Not if you hold your breath. And it makes the party perk up so."

"None for me, thank you."

"All right, Mr. Sunday-School."

"That reminds me, I promised the Chaplain I'd see him about the Y. M. C. A. meeting tomorrow."

"There you go again with your gloom."

"All right—back to the food business. How about a quart of peanuts?"

"And a few potatoes for roasting. Say—"

"Gosh! the D. O."

"Quick, douse the banjo!"

A heavy knock thudded on the door. The door opened. Entered the Duty Officer. The two plebes stood at attention.

"Good morning, gentlemen, I see you don't have to study in this room. Both of you loafing. One of you playing the banjo from what I heard."

The D. O. turned to his duty midshipman alongside.

"Midshipman Smith, playing musical instrument during study hours. Midshipman Riley, wearing non-regulation sweater."

The officer and his companion left.

"Golly!" from one plebe. "Five demerits. That fixes me!"

"Fifty's mine," groaned the other. "Third conduct grade rest of the year."

"Anyway—"

"Anyway what?"

"We can eat the grub in here."

"The heck we can! I don't hold half indoors what I do out!"

CHAPTER XIV

EUROPE!

"AND then Tom, single-handed, kidnapped forty-eight French midshipmen! I was there when the French Admiral heard about it. I thought he'd choke!"

Ole Hansen laid his head back and roared. The eager group around him pressed closer for continuation of the yarn.

It is better, though, to tell the crazy story from its beginning.

First of all, plebe year finally came to an end. The dreadful winter's grind at last culminated in a series of head-splitting examinations, a hectic carnival of June Week drills, and the grand magnificence of the Farewell Ball.

On June tenth there appeared in the roads off Annapolis a squadron of battleships. These vessels had been designated to take the Brigade of midshipmen on their annual three-months' summer cruise.

Great confusion prevailed in quarters on the day of embarkation. Mountainous piles of laundry bags full of clothing lined the sea-wall. There was a continual dashing back and forth, an unending series of shouts and cheers.

Happiest of all were the plebes: they were no longer plebes. At the moment of exit from the graduation hall they became officially the new third class, or "youngsters."

And a youngster rates nearly as much as any upperclassman.

At last, as in all military movements, order came out of chaos and the great gray men-of-war got under way, their destination Europe.

"Oh Boy!" exclaimed Tom the third day out. "Ain't this the life?"

"I'm not so sure yet," said Ole, who had not Tom's previous sea experience to show him all the little inconveniences of ship life were trifling as compared with the freedom of it.

The fourteen days across passed swiftly enough. Midshipmen were detailed to the engine and dynamo rooms, to lookout and bridge stations, and all the other parts of the ship. Changes were made frequently so that all might have the fullest experience.

Daily drills were had at the guns, in seamanship, and other professional subjects. Though there was a certain amount of book work, it could not be likened to the unending lessons and recitations that made the winter months a nightmare to many midshipmen.

On the fifteenth morning, there was a cry from the foremost lookout.

"Land ho!"

"Where away?" from the bridge.

"Broad on the starboard bow, sir!"

Reveille had just gone. In the gray dawn a looming mass ahead marked the point where beautiful France rose out of the sea.

The squadron's rails were white with excited midshipmen. Thrill of new land rouses something in a man's soul like nothing else in life.

The port was Cherbourg. A roaring gun salute was ex-

changed with the black fortress. Launches darted back and forth carrying those upon whom fell the duty of making official visits.

Just before lunch, the Commanding Officer sent for Tom.

"Mr. Poor, I understand from Lieutenant Ruggles that you were in the Fleet before you entered Annapolis, and so have had some experience in foreign parts."

"Yes, sir; but I have never been here before."

"That's all right. I want you to help me out on a party the American Consul is giving here for the French and American Midshipmen. The French training ship is due here tomorrow."

After lunch Tom was sent in by special boat to get his instructions from the Consul.

He was fascinated by the old French town with its queer winding streets, all so roughly paved with cobblestones. Everywhere he went he was an object of interest to the foreigners. Their curious glances he returned by glances equally interested.

One pretty French girl shouted: "*Vive l'American!*"

"You bet your boots, Sweetheart!" was Tom's quick and smiling retort.

Mr. Weatherill, the Consul, greeted Tom with the enthusiasm one countryman always has for another when met upon foreign soil.

"It's a great treat, Mr. Poor, to have you lads with us this week."

"We're just as glad to be here, sir."

"The French like it, too. You young gentlemen have the reputation of being the finest of your kind in the world. That has to do with what I have asked you here for."

He seated Tom in a little window overlooking the street.

"Over there," he continued pointing to a large stone building, "is the hall in which I am going to give a real American party to the American and French midshipmen. I am sorry to say that only about a hundred of the Americans will be able to come. With half that many French middies from the cruiser *L'Aiglon* the hall will be crowded."

Mr. Weatherill drew a slip of paper from his pocket.

"Here is a chart of the hall. The party is to be held on the first floor. On the right will sit the Americans. On the left will be the French. On the low platform in front will stand the Christmas tree I have arranged for."

Tom smiled at the mention of Christmas in the middle of June.

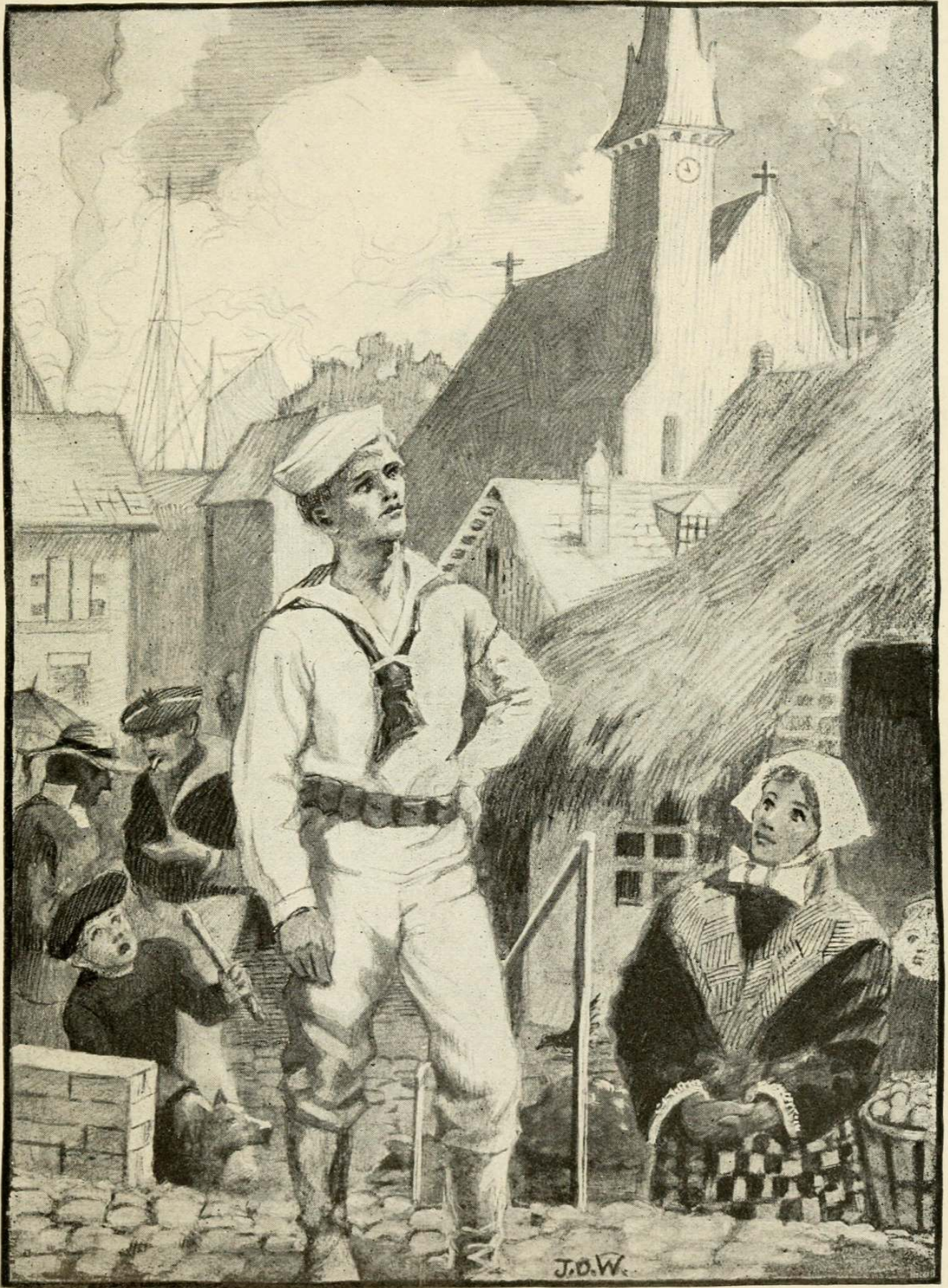
"I know it's out of date," laughed the Consul. "But I thought it was a nice way to distribute some small gifts. At the signal you all may come up and get the packages off the tree. Afterwards there will be refreshments."

From the Consul's house Tom went to the French cruiser with a note to her Captain. He was received with sideboys and a gracious salute from the officer-of-the-deck.

Tom presented his note of introduction. Although he had had a year of French in his first winter at Annapolis, he was a little shy at trying it out.

"Good evening, my dear young man," was the Captain's profuse welcome in excellent English. "And I understand you to be the—er—what you call him? Oh yes, the chaperon for our boys this evening—tonight at the Consul's magnificent entertainment."

"Yes, sir," said Tom. "I have been detailed to sit with



HE WAS FASCINATED BY THE OLD FRENCH TOWN.

your midshipmen and explain to them what to do as the party goes on."

"It is fine! It is splendid, my friend! And such kindness shall not be ever forgotten. Now will you permit me to give you a small glass of wine?"

"I'm sorry, sir," said Tom a little hastily, "but I must hurry back to my Captain and tell him the result of my visit with you."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Frenchman with a wink. And, putting his finger up, he said, "I understand the point with perfection. It is that M'sieur dare not blow his lovely breath in the Capitaine's face upon hees return."

That night the hundred American midshipmen selected to attend the Consul's entertainment marched directly to the hall. Tom remained on the dock to meet the French party.

When they arrived, he introduced himself to the senior midshipman in charge. Unfortunately, that individual was unable to understand English. Tom was forced to rely on his rather limited knowledge of the French language.

For a moment he smiled to himself as he contemplated the situation. His lessons the previous winter had consisted largely of fables in French, not unlike the kind of stories he recalled were in the reader of his early school days; certainly just as childish and uninteresting. He wondered what the lively young Frenchmen would think if he started to declaim one of the fables for their benefit!

Judging from the convulsions of merriment that met his painful attempts to argue with the leader, even a fable would have amused them.

"We go now to hall," said Tom, after struggling through his memory for the words.

"But the officer that is to meet us?"

"No officer meet you. I meet you," said Tom awkwardly.

"You are not officer."

"No. But I meet you. I take you to the hall."

Finally, the Frenchman shrugged his shoulders and beckoned his followers to come.

"You know what to do on arrival?" inquired Tom after a considerable pause, during which he was occupied trying to remember the expression for Christmas tree.

"No, my friend. But I suppose we eat. The Americans always eat."

"You bet your sweet life we do, Froggie!" shot Tom in English.

"Not so fast. And speak the French, my friend," returned the other.

"I said you sit where I show you after we arrive."

"Yes. And then it is what?"

"You wait signal. I give signal. Then all go to the tree and get gifts from the branches."

The Frenchman stopped, his eyes bulging. "You say we all climb trees for the party? And we have our best uniforms on!"

"No," laughed Tom, evidently there was something wrong with his French grammar. He tried again, very slowly. By this time the whole crowd had clustered around him.

His second attempt at explaining the Christmas tree program was even less successful than the first.

"We will not go then!" exclaimed the Frenchman. "It is wrong that we should be asked to pull down trees at this time of night. Also it is against the law. The mayor will arrest us!"

Tom sighed. "It is not outdoors. It is all in the hall," he said.

"Ah, that is better. But the Americans are rough. I am not sure all of us can have the courage to face it," replied the leader.

He turned and in rapid language made a little speech to the party. There ensued a heated dispute for some minutes, followed by the departure of several for the dock.

"Holy smoke!" thought Tom. "I've gummed the game now. No telling what they think I've said to them. And here part have lost their nerve and gone home!"

Afraid of getting himself into deeper water, he waited silently for the discussion to stop. After a few minutes the leader turned with a grim look and motioned Tom to proceed.

"Gosh!" said Tom to himself. "Looks as if he were going into battle instead of to a party."

The Americans rose and shouted a noisy welcome when Tom and his party entered. He managed to get them to their side of the hall before a return cheer was given. Immediately afterward, the leader uttered a few words to his men in a tense low voice.

Tom looked about him for the Consul. If he could only get an interpreter, he might find out what fool ideas had been placed in the foreign midshipmen's heads by his perfectly well meant efforts to instruct them in their own tongue.

But Mr. Weatherill was at once engaged in making a speech of welcome. He intermingled his remarks in both languages and cleverly brought out the points of several jokes so that both sides were able to understand.

"And finally," he concluded, "let me say that the friend-

ships which are starting here tonight will, I feel, be the basis of a stronger future bond between the two great countries you young officers represent."

A deafening applause met this expression of international good will.

Mr. Weatherill waited until the noise had subsided. Then, holding out both arms, he announced in loud tones: "The tree, my friends, the tree!"

It was the signal. Tom turned to the leader of his flock. "The signal," said Tom, "the tree!"

The Frenchman sprang to his feet.

"En avant, mes enfants!" he cried.

Instantly his fifty countrymen were up. Chairs were hurled to the floor. Some fell. Tom himself was thrust roughly to one side in the mad scramble.

The Americans who had started to rise and approach the tree sank back in their seats bewildered.

Straight for the tree dashed the foreigners. They cheered loudly as they ran. They swept it from its moorings. Borne upon their shoulders, its green gift-laden branches brushed the ceiling.

Before Tom could sing out "Stop them!" they had reached the window—a great double window which opened level with the street.

"Stop!" screamed Tom. But his voice was drowned in the clatter of broken glass as the tree's trunk crashed through the framework into the open air.

Like a flash of terrible truth he realized the cause of the French midshipmen's mad behaviour: they had understood him to say that, on signal, both nationalities were to rush forward and seize their presents from the tree. Tom's violent gestures, made in his effort to impress his meaning upon them, had been interpreted as a

description of the struggle. And now he recalled that when one had asked him something about football he had said "yes." He thought he was being questioned as to whether he played or not.

In reality the French leader had asked him whether the idea of getting the gifts off the tree was not about the same as the American football game!

Naturally when Tom gave back an enthusiastic "yes" the Frenchman coached his faithful followers to make the best showing they could. On arrival he pointed out the window. When the signal was given, he overcame his disadvantage of smaller numbers by the strategic plan of simply rushing the tree out the window before the Americans could reach it.

Tom's loud cry and the fact that he started after the fleeing Frenchmen was at once taken as a clever move of leadership. With instant energy the Americans roused into vigorous action. On the heels of the barbarians—so they now seemed—and not fifty yards behind, tore the Annapolis men.

Luckily Tom reached the window first. But his shouts of protest were caught in the general tumult only as words of encouragement.

By a great burst of speed he finally managed to place himself at the head of the galloping column.

"Stop!" he roared. "It's a mistake I tell you! A terrible mistake!"

A man ran into him and pushed him angrily out of the way.

"Traitor!" bawled the youngster.

For a moment Tom also lost his head. With a vicious blow on the jaw he knocked the midshipman down.

This incident caught the wild mob's attention for a

moment and enabled Ole Hansen to stop them. He knew Tom well enough to realize something was wrong.

Tom sprang to his side and panted out an order. "Hold them for two minutes!" he cried. "It's a terrible misunderstanding. I'll come back and explain."

He then turned and dashed after the fleeing Frenchmen. Over his shoulder he saw Ole haranguing the tempestuous and angry Americans.

Gifts lying scattered along the street provided an excellent trail. Tom overtook the triumphal crowd just around the corner where they were stripping the ruined tree.

"Quick!" he shouted. "They're coming! They're coming! They're terribly angry—they will murder you! Quick—follow me and I will explain."

The desperation in Tom's voice instantly caught the impressionable ear of the French boys. They followed him at a run.

Tom had no idea where he was going. His scheme was simply to avoid the massacre sure to take place if the enraged American midshipmen overtook the Frenchmen. If he could dispose of the latter long enough to explain matters to his own ship-mates he felt a peaceful reunion were possible. Otherwise how could he ever account for the dreadful outcome of Mr. Weatherill's happy plans?

"Here we are!" he cried, as they came to a small building. Its door stood open. Inside was dark, but to all appearances it must have been some sort of warehouse.

The Frenchmen crowded in. Tom slammed the door shut, and to be on the safe side, snapped the huge padlock which hung open upon its hasp.

When he reached the spot where he had last seen Ole and the Americans, the whole crowd had disappeared.

Evidently Ole's argument had been successful in convincing the Americans they had best return to the hall.

Tom hesitated. Had he better release the Frenchmen at once? Or would it be better to return to the hall first and make sure his own crowd had calmed down? It was a difficult question; and there was the additional anxiety of not knowing what sort of place it was he had so impulsively locked the former in.

Fate decided for him. A carriage turned the corner and came towards him. It stopped.

"Mr. Poor, isn't that you?" sung out a familiar voice.

"Yes, Captain." It was the Skipper of Tom's ship, the *Connecticut*!

"Get in," commanded the Captain. "I am on my way to a little reception at the house of the wife of the *L'Aiglon's* Commanding Officer. He says he met you today and asked me to bring you along if I could."

There was nothing to do but obey.

Once more Tom received the gracious advances of the French Captain.

"Ah, M'sieur Poor," said the old gentleman, "I theenk you are the personification of the youth of the new world."

"Yes, sir," replied Tom a little vaguely. He could not rid his mind of the nightmare that beset him. He had kidnapped and made prisoners half a hundred young Frenchmen. What dreadful penalty would be his when the crime was discovered?

In the course of the evening, the hostess became more and more ill at ease. Although there were several other officers as guests besides Tom and his Captain, she seemed to be impatiently waiting for someone else.

She called the American Captain to her side and whispered in his ear. Immediately he came over to Tom.

"Mr. Poor, Madame Grielle says that she invited a number of the French midshipmen here this evening. She understands from her husband that they went to the Consul's party first, but with orders to leave early and come here. Do you know anything about them?"

"Yes—no, sir," stammered Tom. "I mean, sir, they were there. I saw them. But I don't know whether they are on their way here or not."

Tom's obvious confusion aroused the Captain's suspicions.

"Don't beat about the bush, Mr. Poor," said he sternly.

At once Tom realized there was nothing to be gained by keeping his secret.

"If you will hear my story, sir," he said after a moment, "I think you will understand."

Before he could go further there came a sudden confusion at the door. At the same instant a strong odor of dead fish pervaded the room.

"Heaven's!" exclaimed the Captain under his breath. "And I had fish for dinner!"

To Tom's dismay a dozen of the French midshipmen he had so lately imprisoned filed nervously into the room. They had lost their customary neatness. Some had smudged faces; others had mussed hair and soiled collars. All bore the marks of their recent experience in some form or another.

And each smelled frightfully of fish!

Tom looked about for some means of escape. But, before he could move, the surprised silence in the room at the strange appearance of the motley arrivals gave way to a voluble flood of angry questions and replies. At once the leader of the midshipmen stepped forward. He pointed his finger at Tom. "There is the pig!" he cried.

As if by Providence, Mr. Weatherill turned up the next moment. He understood perfectly not only the French language but the people. With the utmost gravity he heard the French midshipman's story.

At its conclusion he turned to the American captain. "It's quite clear sir," he said in French, "that these boys have been the victims of an unfortunate misunderstanding. It is, indeed, outrageous and quite unnecessary for Mr. Poor to have locked them up in the fishhouse. But they are magnanimous. They will forgive, provided an apology is presented."

Tom's captain bowed an acknowledgment of the hint. Turning to Tom he said: "Mr. Poor, you have unwittingly damaged the success of our visit in this port. No official course is open to me to express my disapproval of your failure to execute a truly diplomatic mission. Till we sail you will be restricted to the ship. Now please apologize to those present."

Tom did so in stumbling French.

As he turned to go Captain Grielle called him back. "No, no, my dear young friend," he said in a voice loud enough for all present to hear. "Do not so melancholy be. I thenk—" he looked over the top of his glasses at his own boys—"that if there has been any mistake in diplomacy, it was on the part of those who first used force."

He faced about to his wife.

"Open the windows, my dear," he continued, "I am about to laugh. And when I do I shall the glass break—so heartily shall it be." He chuckled and wiped his eyes. "The feesh-house—oh! the *feesh-house of all places!*" he cried, and went off into a gale of real sea-going mirth that nearly shook the chandelier from the ceiling.

CHAPTER XV

MAN OVERBOARD!

DURING the Squadron's stay in Cherbourg, leave was granted many midshipmen to visit Paris. Chaplains of the various ships organized parties with proper guides. This enabled all to see the places of greatest interest with the least expenditure of time and money.

"Glad to get back, though," was Bob Cary's tired comment the morning after his week in the famous capital. "Museums and art galleries all day and the theatre every night. Exciting, all right; but the old ship seems pretty good after it's all over."

"Right!" agreed Ole Hansen. "A Navy man certainly is in luck in being able to travel and take his home around the world with him."

"I should say so!" echoed Bob. "After a few days of hotel grub and worrying about where to go and what to do next, a good deck and our busy routine certainly hit the spot."

Sharp bugle notes broke into the conversation.

"All hands up anchor!" bawled the Boatswain's Mate. The cry was immediately taken up by mates of divisions, and their hoarse voices filled the 'tween-deck spaces until men were skurrying from every nook and corner of the great man-of-war.

"Where are you stationed now?" asked Bob as the two parted.

"Starboard life-boat crew," sung out Ole over his shoulder.

"I'm port—beat you to it this afternoon!" was the prompt reply.

Bob meant that he was a member of the crew of that whaleboat which swung aft on the other side of the quarterdeck. Each battleship keeps two of these boats rigged out at all times and ready for instant call in case of accident. In the practise squadron this summer, it had been the Admiral's habit always to have a life-saving drill on the same day that he put to sea.

As the anchors appeared in sight under the bows, a signal flashed to the Flagship's yardarm.

"Form column—speed ten knots!"

Slowly and evenly, as if toy boats drawn by an invisible string, the monstrous craft slid along one after the other and swept clear of the crooked channel.

Next port of call was to be Weymouth, England. But instead of standing directly northward an afternoon of maneuvers was held. Bright bunting shot up the ship's halliards every few minutes. When it was hauled down as a signal of execution, the six vessels would steam gracefully to their new positions and hold them until the next command from the old tactician in charge. Occasionally there would be a signal of commendation. And once or twice a ship had to be told to take her proper position in the formation. But, on the whole, the maneuvers were no more than a silent drill of massive floating dummies which seemed as docile and responsive as a squad of well-trained soldiers.

"Who'd ever want to be a soldier!" exclaimed one midshipman after watching breathlessly a particularly intricate exchange of positions by the ships.

"Heavens, man," retorted someone at his elbow, "mean to say you didn't know that soldiers are all those fellows who wanted to be sailors and couldn't—and just for spite they joined the Army files?"

"Whoa there!" laughed a young ensign standing nearby. "Neither of you know what you are talking about. The Army's the best friend we've got!"

"Except the day of the game," muttered the midddy.

"Then too," continued the officer. "Who'd give us a clean fight like that every November? And what—"

Before he could finish a shout rang out from the bridge. At the same instant a checkered blue and white flag had been released at the Flagship's masthead.

"Man overboard!"

Expected as it is at drill, this cry always brings a thrill of real anxiety to everyone. Despite the readiness of life-boats, even in the best of weather, the peril of tumbling into the ocean far from land is great. Almost before the unfortunate man has come to the surface, the spinning propellers are thundering by him with the threat of a terrible death.

It is the officer-of-the-deck's duty to put his rudder over to swing the ship's stern clear. Also he must stop his engine on that side. And he must drop the life-buoy, man and get away the life-boats, and maneuver the vessel so that he may lower them in safety. But no officer is so efficient that he does not run some danger of being a few seconds too late and seeing the victim throw up his hands for the last time even before the life-boat falls are manned.

"Away both life-boats!" came the order.

By this time all ships in the column were sheering out and stopping their engines.

It was of course only a drill. The Flagship had thrown

overboard a marked buoy to indicate the man. Other ships were expected to lower boats and rescue him. The lucky boat would be reported and its coxswain receive a special bit of praise for his work.

Bob's crew were in their boat before Ole's. But Ole had been clear enough to station his best men at the cleats to which the boat falls or ropes were made fast. In consequence the boat dropped evenly and with almost giddy speed into the waiting seas beneath. Bob, on the other hand, had to stop his lowering twice to clear the falls of kinks.

Meanwhile the other ships were getting their boats under way with all possible speed. Five minutes after the first signal had been made, ten whale-boats were foaming along over the heavy Biscay swells toward the white slip of a buoy.

"Give it to her, lads!" roared Ole.

But he was a boat's length behind Bob, and all the power of his lungs couldn't shorten the distance an inch. Suddenly he saw a pair of feet flung up in the very center of the other crew.

"Crab in Cary's boat!" he roared. "Now we've got 'em!"

He was right. One of the other oarsmen had forgotten how great care must be used in handling an oar in a seaway and had got his blade snagged in the face of a green comber.

But the race was lost after all to a boat from the *Minnesota*.

"She was closer to the buoy anyway," explained the beaten crews on their return to the ship.

Half an hour later mess-gear sounded on the bugles and shortly afterwards the midshipmen streamed down all

hatchways for a good old Navy supper of beans, corn-bread, rice pudding, and coffee.

"What watch tonight?" sung out Ole to Tom Poor.

"Eight to twelve. Anything on?"

"Nope. That is, nothing but a sing-fest on the fore-castle. Come on up after hammocks."

At seven-thirty the call to hammocks was given and all hands stood by the long troughs where the rolled bedding was stowed. As the mates "piped down" on their whistles, each boy took his hammock from its place and swung it to the hook on the steel beam overhead that had been assigned to him for the cruise.

In the gathering twilight a score or so midshipmen grouped on the upper deck forward and began to sing. The evening was calm, and a new moon made a shiny slit in the western sky. Astern could be seen the red and green running lights of the squadron against the following darkness behind.

"If you want to join the Navy,
Just come along with me,
By the light—by the light—
Of the silver-ee moon!"

sang the voices. And up on the bridge the officer of the watch leaned against the windshield rail to catch another earful of the old song that it might bring back again to him the sweet memories of when he was a midshipman with no more cares or worries than to count the days till the beginning of September leave.

A touch on his arm interrupted the reverie.

"Life-boat's crew all mustered and accounted for, sir."

"Oh, hello," said the officer a bit vaguely, his memory still heavy on him. "Hello, Hansen, that you?"

"Yes sir."

"Very well. And be sure that your releasing gear is all clear and the falls neatly coiled down. Never can tell when some young idiot is going to tumble in."

Ole had his mouth open for an "aye, aye, sir," when he caught out of the corner of his eye the shadow of a white figure balanced on the rail forward. Apparently the life-line had come loose in some way or had not been properly secured when the ship was getting under way. As he looked the figure toppled and fell.

"There's one now, sir!" he blurted.

The officer whirled about in time to see the midshipman throw out his arms in a frantic grasp to save himself, then tumble backwards into the sea.

"*Man Overboard!*" And no drill this time!

He leaped to the engine-room telegraphs. As he thrust them down and up to "stop" with a vicious movement, he spun the helmsman's wheel to the right and ordered: "Right, man, right!"

In the first second the signal quartermaster had flashed on the electric signals and sounded the whistle for the ship astern to sheer out.

But Ole had seen none of these things. In the brief interval of time it had taken the midshipman to reach the surface of the water, just one thought had flashed into Ole's mind: the *life-buoy*.

Quick as a flash he remembered his instruction earlier on the cruise that the releasing trigger of the patent life-ring was exactly where he was standing. He leaned down and felt the small toggle in the dark. He gave it a violent yank.

At the same moment he was thrown fiercely against the end of the bridge.

"For God's sake, not that one!"

The officer-of-the-deck fairly screamed the words in his ear. Then he sprang to the rail and looked into the boiling water below.

Ole's gaze followed. To his horror he saw how terrible a mistake he had made. The patent life-ring, a large copper buoy, had been freed at *exactly the proper moment to fall squarely on the head and shoulders of the man overboard.*

"You've killed him, you young fool!" groaned the officer. Then, with a wrench, he came back to his duty, and in long-practised words brought the ship around and passed the word to ease away the lee life-boat.

One thing he did not see: At the words "you've killed him," an awful desperation had seized Ole. The whole accident, buoy and all, had taken less than three seconds. Yet he had time to think, "well, if I've killed him there's not much use of me being alive." And in the same flash had come the feeling that the boy might be only stunned and would drown before the boat could reach him.

Without hesitation he vaulted to the rail. For the tenth of a second he balanced there far above the water and took note of the bearing of the buoy light astern. Then he dived.

Meanwhile Bob Cary had dashed across the quarter-deck and up into his boat. "Tumble up! Tumble up!" he cried to the others. "Some lubber *you* are!" was his caustic comment as one of them missed his footing on the narrow rail and nearly went overboard.

As a matter of fact, to race across a dark deck, leap up two spans of rail, clutch the steel davit and swing dizzily across the blank space between ship and boat was

more in the class of a trained acrobat's tricks than anything else. Yet these midshipmen did it with a perfect grace and joy as if they were exercising in a gymnasium instead of racing with death on the high seas.

"Bear a hand aft!" came roared from the bridge.

"Shake it up, Spike!" called Bob to the coxswain. Then, "Lower away," he added almost immediately. The boat dropped into the inky black water with a splash.

"Steady—mind your pin!" For a moment it looked as if the tiny craft would capsize from the headway of the ship and the cross-current of the ground-swell. But with as much instinct as skill Bob threw all his weight against the steering oar and with a tremendous effort swung her clear.

"Now give 'way and bust her!" he bawled. But the words were unnecessary. All realized that this was the real thing; that out there in the chilly black water some classmate or friend was struggling to make himself seen or heard above the wash of the sea.

Searchlights soon flashed from the nearest ships. Their white beams swept back and forth across the area between and finally came to rest at a point about a quarter of a mile from where the Connecticut had been brought about.

"I see it!" proclaimed Bob. He meant the buoy. On either side of the metal ring, automatic lights were fitted in small tubes that stand up in the water and burn with a glare which is visible for a long distance.

But only on the crest of the seas was he able to head directly for it. Deep in the valley-like troughs he could only guess his course by the glare of the searchlights overhead. Also the enthusiasm of his crew made steering more difficult than usual. Before he knew it he

caught a glimpse of the glare off to one side. He had nearly passed it.

"Easy starboard," he ordered. "Give away port. Mind your stroke now, men, we've passed the blooming thing."

"Yes," growled the stroke oar, "and time may mean a lot to that poor devil out there."

Two minutes later the buoy was just ahead. The bow oarsmen manned the boathooks. Then, abruptly, in a voice of dismay one shouted:

"He's gone!"

"What?" exclaimed Bob. "Hook her in. He must be there!"

But the bow men were right. When the dripping ring was hauled into the boat, it gave no sign of there ever having been anyone even near it.

"He's drowned!" groaned Bob. "And we're to blame. We didn't row fast enough."

But he would not give up yet. With practically no hope left he had the boat pulled about with a vague idea that he might find the body floating.

For fifteen minutes the search continued. Then one of the crew aroused him.

"Hey, Cary, they're recalling us."

Bob looked up at the ship. "One-two-return," flashed the blinker.

"Given him up, I suppose," he commented sadly and put about.

If he lives to be a hundred Bob will never forget that pull back to the ship. He had had his chance to do a big thing, to save a man's life. And now, he felt, he had dismally failed.

"Stand by to hook on," bellowed the deck officer.

Bob could detect a terrible condemnation in the tones. Slowly the life-boat came up. In silence its crew clambered over the rail and coiled their long falls down.

"Good work, Bob," called a voice in the dark so suddenly that the one addressed jumped a foot.

"Tom? What—why—"

"Yes, it's me," said Tom Poor. "Haven't they told you yet?"

Bob's heart leaped. "Was he saved after all?" he exploded, hope flooding back into his heart.

"Sure thing. Ole Hansen beaned the poor devil with the life buoy and then jumped in after him."

"But why didn't he make the buoy?"

"Said the fellow was unconscious so he couldn't swim with him. *Minnesota's* boat picked them up together."

Bob tried to speak but his voice failed him.

"I meant to tell you, though," concluded Tom, "that the Skipper took time out on praising Ole to say that he liked the way you got your boat out. Congrats!"

"Thanks," murmured Bob weakly.

CHAPTER XVI

NECK AND NECK!

WHEN the practice squadron reached Weymouth the following afternoon, it anchored and exchanged courtesies not only with the British commander ashore but with the British battle cruiser *Inexorable* lying further up the roads.

After the bustle and confusion of getting away boats and landing parties, things settled down once more about the deck for the regular port routine. Then it was an old boatswain named Merrill called a council of war near the forward 12-inch turret of Tom's ship.

"Fellows," he explained, "over there is one of the crack ships of the British Grand Fleet. She has a well-deserved reputation of being the leading athletic star of her class. Last year I was over here on the *Nevada* and she pretty well cleaned us up. I'd like now to take a fall out of her if I could."

"How about our cutter crew?" suggested Bob Cary.

"Exactly what I had in mind. If we can collect a fair squad and get her to accept a challenge, I know a sure way of winning."

For a moment the listeners looked dubious. It wasn't quite in keeping with Annapolis athletic traditions to enter any contest where the outcome was a sure thing.

"Oh, don't be worried," laughed the old boatswain.

"It's fair enough. The Limeys invented it years before a Yankee used it."

However, just what the trick was he refused to disclose.

"I'm a little leery," confessed Tom later. "It would be great stuff to beat a British crew all right. But I wish I knew just what Merrill means by his plan to make it a sure thing."

Finally Tom mustered up courage enough to inquire.

"Come out with us after supper," agreed the Boatswain, "and I'll show you. I am anxious for you to take an oar if you really haven't any objections. But right here and now I want you to understand that this strategy of mine is something that is practised the world over. If we get away with it, our luck is good, that's all."

Just before sundown the racing cutter was lowered and dropped aft to the gangway. It was one of a long sharp-nosed type common to all navies, and thus particularly well fitted for international races.

A crew of husky midshipmen had been selected not only for their strength but for their experience and training on the regular crew squad back at the Academy.

"Cast off," commanded Merrill. "Stand by your oars—out oars!"

As the boat drifted away from the ship, Tom caught sight of the huge gray battle cruiser nearly a mile away across the harbor. The red rays of the low sun painted her queer rectangular fire-control masts with a dull glow. She looked the part of a conqueror and he thrilled to think of her glorious record in the late war.

The Boatswain's voice interrupted his thought. "See this, fellows?" He held up an ordinary deck bucket.

In its bottom were bored a number of holes. By a line he dropped it over the side and attached it to the boat's stern.

"Works as a drag," he explained. "When a base-ball player is about to face a pitcher he swings an extra bat for a moment or two. Then when he goes to the plate the single stick in his hand feels lighter than it really is. The bucket is our extra bat."

The speaker held up his hand. "Stand by!" he ordered sharply. "Give 'way together!"

Twelve powerful backs swung into the stroke. The lean boat quivered, rapidly gathered headway, then plowed along with a foaming bow-wave shot from either side.

"Oars!"

The dripping blades cut one deep sweep, then hung exactly horizontal to the surface of the water.

The Boatswain leaned over and drew in the bucket. Then once more he set the boat in motion. This time there was a marked increase in speed. Smiles flitted across the oarsmen's faces. Each felt the relief of having the drag lifted from his burden.

"Oars!" again sung out Merrill. "Now do you see the point?" he asked. "If you train with the bucket trailing astern you can develop a good stroke and good muscles. Then, if you pull in a race without it, the relief is so great as to make the job seem half as hard."

He turned to Tom who was sitting beside him. "Isn't that fair enough?"

"Splendid idea!" exclaimed Tom.

Tom then took an oar near the bow and the boat was started off with a good long practise stroke. And although the bucket was once more overboard encouraging progress was made.

Merrill steered them directly toward the *Inexorable* and along her port side about fifty yards away. Just under her bow he gave the command to cease rowing and toss oars. The latter is simply that each rower raises his oar to a vertical position with its handle resting in the bottom of the boat.

"It's the signal of a challenge," the Boatswain told his men. "Gives them a chance to look us over and size up our speed."

On the warship's deck a crowd of officers and sailors collected. Near the rail stood a group of British midshipmen talking earnestly among themselves.

"They've got us!" suddenly sang out Merrill. And giving the order to put out oars and row he brought his boat around the bow and down the other side of the vessel.

"Pull up!" he snapped. "Show 'em what you can do."

Oars crackled and the rush of water was like that under a motor-boat's bilge. A babel of shouting broke out across the space that separated them from the battle cruiser. It died away, then exploded into a concerted cheer for the American midshipmen.

"Great!" commended the old Boatswain when he had brought his crew to a stop for breath nearly a mile astern. "Couldn't you see how keen they were on the prospects for a race?"

"But what a shame to have the bucket on," protested Tom. "They couldn't see us at our best."

"Yes," added Bob Cary, "I hate to have them think that was the fastest we could pull."

But Merrill only laughed and muttered something about a midshipman's vanity.

That night a visiting party was permitted to go to the

British ship after evening drill. A minstrel show was being given on deck and an invitation had been sent to the American Squadron for fifty midshipmen from each battleship.

Tom and Bob were lucky enough to be among the number. A sub-lieutenant of about their own age took them in charge on arrival and escorted them down to the midshipmen's mess aboard.

"Our lads come in earlier than you do," he explained. "Some of them are just past twelve years in age."

"But they go to a naval school later, don't they?" inquired Bob.

"Yes. The advantage as we see it is in having a boy grow up with the sea. If he finds he can't stand for a navy life, he is still young enough to go into something else."

He went on to explain that he meant no reflection on the American system. "Only you may have four years of finest training and then discover that you don't want to be a naval officer."

"Right, in a way," stoutly contended Bob. "But that is what our summer cruises are for. And, after all, it is good for the naval service as a whole to have as many graduates of Annapolis as possible out in civil life. It tends to increase the country's sympathy and understanding of our Navy."

Suddenly Tom had an idea. "Bye the bye, sir, did you know we gave you a challenge this afternoon?" he asked.

The officer laughed. "Should say I did. I wasn't on the topside when you came by, but I heard talk of it all about."

"I ask," Tom went on, "because I've an oar in the

boat. All of us would like you to understand it is a midshipman crew."

The Sub-lieutenant gave Tom a keen glance. He opened his mouth as if to speak, then shook his head. Suddenly he spied one of the other officers. "I say there, Conrad," he called, "who did you tell me was coxswaining that American boat this afternoon?"

"Why, old Merrill. Don't you remember him at Scapa?"

The Sub turned again to Tom. "Might as well make a breast of it," he said. "If you don't know it already, your Boatswain has the reputation of being one of the cleverest raceboat men in any navy. When our gang saw him in charge of your crew this afternoon, they were delighted. Knew it was the real thing, and all that."

"Really, I don't quite follow you," Tom put in with a bewildered look.

"That's because you haven't been about much yet," said the Englishman kindly. "You know boat racing is the one game in which sailormen of every nationality can meet on common ground. They bet extravagantly on results. They win and lose as if the races meant life and death. Old defeats are remembered for years. And, provided the rules are kept in the actual race, no scheme is too intricate so long as it encourages the other fellow to put his money up."

An expression of sudden understanding spread over Tom's tanned features. "Now I see it!" he exclaimed.

"You probably do," agreed the officer. "The usual stunt is to row by the other fellow's ship with a great pretense at speed. He times you as you go by. He discovers you are pretty slow and puts up all his savings

on the race. But the truth is you've fooled him by not rowing your best, so the outcome may be quite unexpected."

The truth then dawned on Tom. Merrill's bucket was less a device to strengthen the oarsmen than to deceive his competitors into believing his crew was slower than they really were.

Announcement of the entertainment put a stop to the conversation. Aft had been rigged a full-size stage with regular scenery. An orchestra was seated in front. Nearly a thousand men and officers composed the audience, filling the decks and turrets clear to the funnels.

For nearly two hours the fun continued. Moving pictures and a boxing bout occupied the intermission. At ten the program came to an end and refreshments were served.

It was at this moment Tom happened to glance forward in time to observe several men in rowing costume come in over the boat boom. Surprised, he turned to his friend the Sub-lieutenant. But before he could ask his question the latter laughed and said:

"There you are—the little game I told you of. See that blonde giant? He's stroke oar."

Next afternoon at five Tom understood. The British came over to accept the challenge. They rowed under the *Connecticut's* bow and tossed oars. Then they pulled by with a great show of energy. Tom gave two looks and one grunt. "Not them," he announced. "The blonde giant isn't aboard."

"Not who?" asked Bob Cary.

"Their regular crew." Tom drew Bob aside. "Look here, man, this is a crazy game. The Limey tells me it's played this way all over the world. Maybe it is. But

I'm not going to stand for it. We're no professionals."

Bob frowned and made a face. "Gosh! What's up, Tom?"

"Just this: We're fooling them by rowing around with a bucket tied to our tail. They're fooling us by practising their regular crew at night and sending a fake boat over to show how slow they are. All of it just to stir up a lot of bets we aren't interested in at all."

So the upshot was that Tom went to the Boatswain and declared the midshipmen would stand for no more "bucket games." The old fellow took this attitude in good grace, though, and agreed to use his experience to get the crew into shape.

"Guess we don't need the bucket after all," he chuckled.

And he was nearly right.

For a week, twice a day, the crew pulled over a three-mile course laid across the harbor. Though the race was to be but a mile-and-a-half, the midshipmen wished to bring their endurance to the point it had been after the period of spring athletics at Annapolis.

The day of the race dawned clear with a brisk breeze from the north. Towards noon the wind dwindled. By three the course was like glass. Everywhere lay clean reflections of the glistening warships. Stake-boats with their red finish flags were doubled in the blue mirror in which they lay.

"Now remember, ten fast ones on the get-away!" the Boatswain cautioned his men. "Then settle. Watch my count. Count with me." He went on talking more to steady the nervous oarsmen than to explain what they had heard a thousand times before.

The *Connecticut's* boat jumped ahead at the start.

Merrill's ten fast strokes did the work. But, like the traditional British bulldog, the other cutter hung on with her bow just opposite the tiller clenched in Merrill's gnarled old hand.

Inch by inch the English cutter gained. As she reached the first British man-of-war, such a burst of cheering greeted her that she pulled up nearly a fathom.

Finally the boats lay neck and neck!

"Save it, lads, save it!" cautioned Merrill in a low but tensely audible tone. "Save it till the end."

He knew the game, that old Boatswain, as an old Boatswain should. Well he realized that if only he could hold his own to the finish the youth of his midshipmen would assure a spurt that must win.

A hundred yards from the stake-boat lay the *Connecticut*. Her rails were crowded with a mass of white-clad sailormen. Their roars would have drowned a dozen saluting guns.

Merrill leaped to his feet. Raising his fists in the air he bellowed the last word to win:

"Now give it to her!"

Tom shut his eyes and threw his last ounce of burning muscular strength into the heavy oar. It fairly crackled with the strain. The boat sprang ahead as if released from the bucket used the first day. In a matter of seconds it crossed the line less than a yard ahead of the Britisher.

The race was won.

Back at the ship a signal boy handed Tom a signal. "From the *Inexorable*," he explained.

Tom seized the bit of paper. "Congratulations," it read. "Better a lot without buckets, isn't it?" The signature was that of the Sub-Lieutenant.

CHAPTER XVII

MISSING

WHEN the day came for the *Connecticut* to leave Weymouth, a disquieting rumor flew about the decks. A midshipman was missing.

The Skipper sent for his Executive Officer. "What have you learned ashore?" he asked.

"Absolutely nothing, sir. Midshipman Van Brunt is listed on yesterday's liberty list. Quite a number of witnesses remember seeing him land. But not a single one can I find who will state what course the lost boy took after entering the town."

The Skipper drummed nervously on his desk. Only a few days before, he had boasted to the Admiral about his men. To date not a single midshipman from the *Connecticut* had got into serious trouble.

"I make it impossible for them," had been his explanation. "Before we reach port I begin a series of talks and printed pamphlets about the country we are going to visit. I provide maps of the battlefields and details to go with them. I secure the names and addresses of the best theatres. I list the museums that ought not to be missed, with accounts of the mummies and other freaks they contain. In short, I plan to make the midshipman ashore so busy he won't have time to tangle himself up with police or anyone else."

And now he was going to have to report to the Ad-

miral his plan had failed at last. The *Connecticut* must remain in port to make a search for the missing boy.

"No other way out," he told his Executive Officer.

The latter did not reply. He was staring through the open port above the Skipper's head.

"Good heavens, sir!" he ejaculated.

The Skipper looked up sharply, then rose and peered out. "*Merciful* Heavens!" he snorted, going the Executive one better.

Then, without further parley, the two officers snatched their caps, dashed from the cabin, and appeared on deck just too late to give a dozen orders that should have been given fifteen minutes before.

The reason, of course, was Reggie Van Brunt. His knack of getting himself and other people into trouble had once more been hitting on all six cylinders.

At noon the day before he had joined the liberty party. "Where to, Reggie?" Bob had asked him.

"Oh, just wander about a bit."

Which wasn't the exact truth at all. Reggie had long been fascinated by aircraft of every sort. He had quite made up his mind to apply for the naval aviation corps just as soon after graduation as he would be permitted to enter.

On this particular day, the Weymouth morning paper contained a brief mention that the R-34, the giant British dirigible which had crossed the Atlantic, was due in Bournemouth that same afternoon. Thus it was natural that Reggie could be seen boarding the one o'clock train for Bournemouth just as it pulled out.

One hour later, precisely on schedule, the great gas bag appeared. Reggie first caught sight of it as a longish silvery moth in the north. Rapidly it grew in size as it

approached. The body swung beneath was soon plainly visible. Giant propellers whirled and the broad horizontal and vertical rudders spread out aft like webbed feet of some gigantic water bird.

"Some little bag, what?"

Reggie turned to find himself looking into the eyes of a young English flying officer. "Certainly is, sir," he replied enthusiastically.

"You must be from the American Squadron, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir. Just ran up here to see what this big fellow looked like. Of course you know we are buying one from you for our own Navy."

"I do indeed," laughed the Britisher. "My brother is one of the turnover crew. R-38 is her designation, y'know. Whale too. Carries thirty passengers and has something like six thousand miles cruising radius. Able to cross the ocean and back in less time than one of the big liners could make it one way!"

Reggie's jaw dropped open at the wonder of such achievement in the air. It was difficult to believe how rapid progress was being made.

"By the way, my name is Calvert." The Englishman held out his hand.

"Van Brunt is mine," said Reggie promptly. "Do you think it would be possible for me to see some of your planes?"

"Not a bally reason why you shouldn't. I'm a bit in love with the American Navy myself. Saw a lot of your fellows at one of the air stations during the war. I liked the spirit they had; always ready for a go—anything from poker to a bombing party. Action was all they asked for."

To Reggie's enormous delight the officer led him out of the crowd to a trim roadster bearing the Royal Air Force insignia.

"We'll run over to the blinkin' meadow," he explained, "and see what the Custards can do for us."

The "blinking meadow" turned out to be the aviation field; the "Custards" were simply mechanics in work-suits of an egg-yellow material.

"Like a hop?"

Reggie hesitated. This was probably an invitation to fly. But he had never flown before. The danger of it rushed suddenly upon him and gave him a queer empty feeling about the region of his belt-buckle. On the other hand, what a wonderful opportunity to get some real experience! And there was the adventure he might recount to the gang when he got back aboard ship.

This last decided him. "You bet!" was his emphatic acceptance.

By this time they had reached a broad field that contained not only the offices, machine shops, and storage sheds, but had at least a thousand acres of gently rolling grassy plain. Near the edge of the field stood a series of queer fence-like signals for machines aloft. Here and there were visible the sunken pits for night landing lights.

After a short conference with some of the "Custards" the officer telephoned headquarters and reported his intended flight. "One passenger," he concluded. "American midshipman—observation flight."

Reggie thrilled. Doubtless the incident would be reported in the press and he would have himself "on the map" as the Annapolis saying goes.

Two "Custards" helped him into his flying suit.

"Cold up there," Calvert explained. "Went up for an altitude last week and got twenty-six below zero."

"Not going to try that today, are you sir?" asked Reggie nervously.

Calvert laughed. "Not with that old crock." He pointed to a large biplane being wheeled out into the field. "No, I want to give you a look at your ships and the general layout of Portland Harbor."

The speaker's face suddenly went serious. "There's something else," he said slowly. "Something I can't quite explain unless you know it already."

Reggie's expression was becomingly blank.

"One reason I am giving you a lift is to start you off right towards England. Some people in America are always trying to stir up ill-feeling against us. Yet during the war we fought elbow to elbow. Your battleships and ours put in month after month in the gloom of Scapa Flow. No truer test of friendship could there have been than the dreary grind of that endless monotony. We shan't forget it soon. We don't want you to. And you personally I'd like to have understand that we Englishmen are just about the same as anyone else. We're queer sometimes just as Americans are queer. But there's no real reason for either of us ever letting our queernesses go so far that we have to pile out and kill a few millions of each other to prove who's the queerest."

Reggie smiled pleasantly. He didn't know exactly what to say to this long speech. But he made up his mind that if ever he got the chance he was going to be equally hospitable to an Englishman. It made the world somehow seem much bigger and pleasanter to feel that foreigners could be friends.

A loud explosion behind him nearly split his eardrums. He jumped and dodged sideways.

"Just warming up," chuckled Calvert.

The big engine fired again, then suddenly broke into a continuous roar that made speech of any kind impossible.

Calvert motioned Reggie up the ladder a Custard had leaned against the body. A moment later the machine began to glide forward, slowly at first, then faster and faster, until without perceptible jerk it cleared the grassy sod.

Reggie's heart beat like a snare-drum. He glanced over the side. The green earth was dropping swiftly away. Never had it looked so beautiful. Would he ever see it again?

For a while the plane circled the flying field. The dirigible lay like a mammoth slug at its mooring tower. Around it were visible clusters of black ants that joined and separated with slow movements. A curious sense of unreality came over Reggie as he realized these ants were the crowds of people he had struggled through earlier in the afternoon.

At an altitude of about 5000 feet, Calvert ceased to climb and lengthened out on a course due south. The sea was now visible as a deep blue bank of color below the lighter-hued and cloud-flecked horizon.

Weymouth passed beneath them as a mottled smear on the landscape. "Looks as if someone upset a bucket of paint down there," thought Reggie.

The ships looked more like toys in a bath-tub than like weapons of sea-warfare. Tiny patches of white showed where the crew stood about the decks.

Reggie nudged the aviator. "There's mine." He framed the words with his lips to make himself under-

stood despite the deafening roar of the motors.

Calvert nodded and smiled. For a moment he appeared to be contemplating a descent, but finally shook his head and turned about. He pointed toward the penitentiary on the summit of Portland Hill and made Reggie look over again as the wreck of a war victim passed beneath. Then he brought the plane to a course back home and settled down for the drive.

Up to this point Reggie's afternoon had been unusual and exciting. But there was no suspicion in his mind that anything might happen in the way of real adventure or actual danger.

The first event of the series that were to delay his return to the ship occurred not long after Weymouth had disappeared astern. Suddenly the roar of the motors ceased. The plane tilted sharply downward, then lengthened out on a long spiral volplane to earth. Fortunately there was an open field almost directly beneath. When the machine had come to a jolting stop Calvert turned to his passenger with a word of apology.

"Sorry to dump you here, old top. Tank must be leaking again. We seem to be entirely out of gas."

Examination proved the Englishman was right. He cautioned Reggie that the best thing to do was to stay by the plane while he went and got enough fuel from the village just ahead to take them back. He started off at a fast walk.

At the end of an hour Calvert was still absent. Reggie began to be worried. His liberty was up at midnight and the ship was due to sail at ten the next morning. To overstay leave was serious enough in itself. To miss the ship in a foreign port involved so many difficulties that the very thought of them made him miserable.

Just at dusk the lights of an automobile swung along the road by the field. Thinking it must be Calvert, Reggie trotted over to meet him. As he stood in the way, the car slowed and stopped. But instead of Calvert there stepped out a British naval officer wearing the uniform of a commander.

"Hello," he greeted Reggie. "What's up?"

Reggie explained the situation. "And I'm due back to-night—absolutely *have* to get back!" he almost wailed.

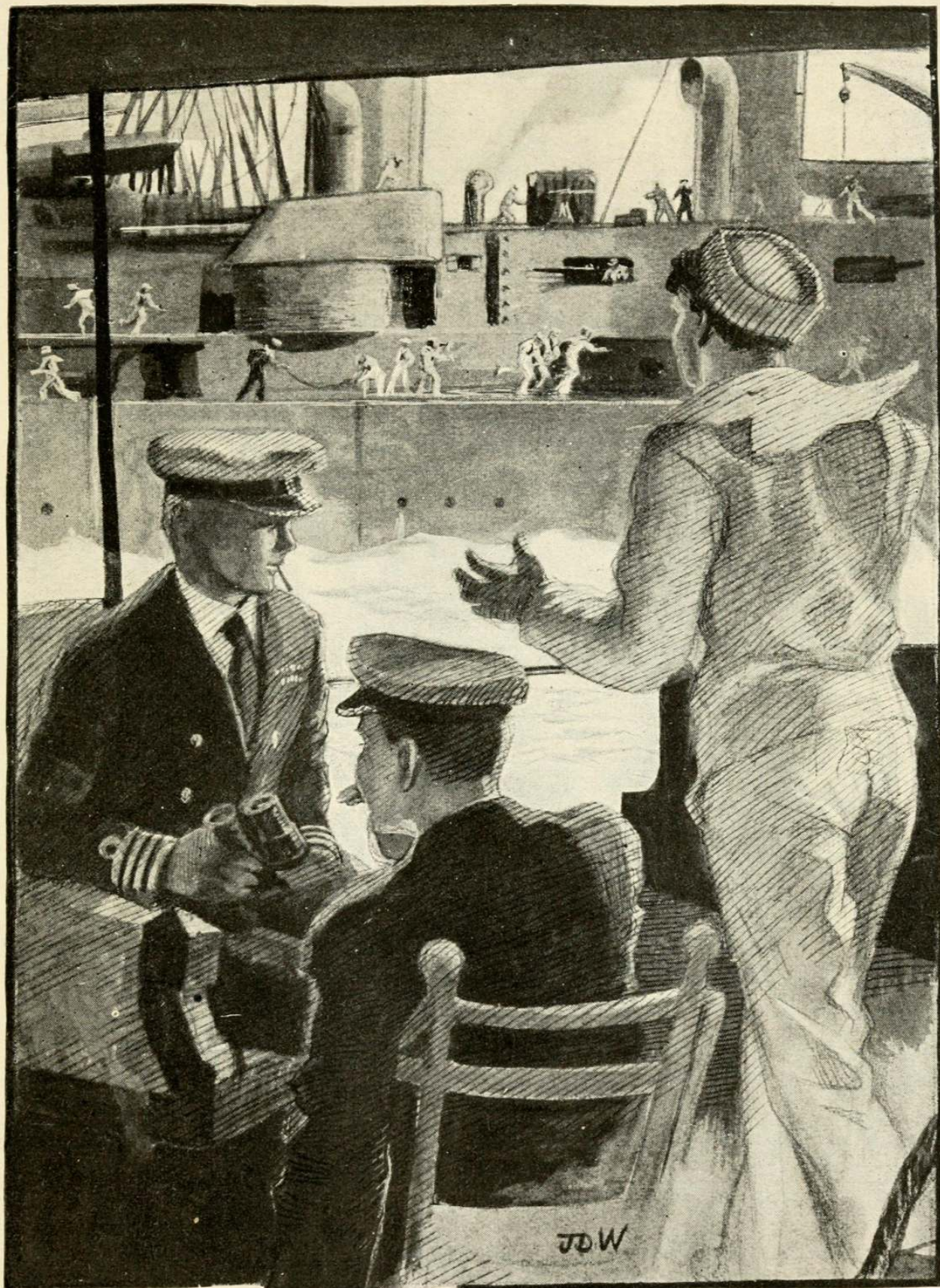
The commander smiled. "Cheer up. Been there myself." He paused. "Tell you what we'll do," he went on after a moment. "Leave a note for Calvert. I know him and will explain next time I see him. I'm going to stop for the night just outside Weymouth. Have a date for dinner, but I can put you up. I know your Admiral and will make it all right for your having stayed over until tomorrow morning."

The officer spoke with such assurance that Reggie took him at his word and consented to be taken to a pleasant little country inn several miles further on. There his benefactor left him to gorge a delicious dinner. As there were no other guests, the inn-keeper sat down with him and regaled him with all manner of tales about the country thereabouts, the war, and other matters of interest.

Next morning, as planned, the Commander returned for Reggie. Though he was friendly enough, there seemed to be something he was concealing. Reggie couldn't quite make out whether he was to be the victim of a practical joke, or whether the officer was simply laughing up his sleeve at the plight of an American midshipman wandering around in a strange country trying to get back to his ship.

"We'll put off at ten," said the Commander.

"But the ship is due to sail then," protested Reggie.



SOME SORT OF EXCITEMENT
SEEMED TO BE GOING ON.

The Commander gave another queer smile. "Don't worry about that," he said.

At Weymouth, Reggie found himself embarked aboard a beautiful little motor-boat that might have been a small cruising yacht. It was manned by a crew of unbelievable cleanliness. Its fittings shone like gold in the morning sunshine. And on its bow, its cushions, its pennant staff, and other parts were placed a curious inscription or coat-of-arms like nothing Reggie had ever seen before.

Promptly at ten the Commander appeared on the deck with a nice-looking British naval captain. To Reggie's surprise the captain appeared a great deal younger than the commander. And, although he didn't catch the officer's name when he was introduced, he found him so friendly and so interested in American ships that Reggie almost forgot the immense difference between their ranks.

On the way out the conversation was general, but mostly on naval topics. Several times Reggie had a feeling that he had seen the youthful captain somewhere before. But he couldn't quite place him.

When the *Connecticut* was close aboard, Reggie glanced ahead to see if anyone was watching his approach. With sinking heart he saw not only the Skipper and the Executive Officer on deck, but nearly all the other officers. Some sort of excitement seemed to be going on. Bugles were blowing and men were dashing about in every direction. There certainly must be a fire.

As the motor boat came alongside, there was a piping of whistles and the "attention" was sounded on deck.

The Commander got out and went up the gangway followed by Reggie. The young English captain explained that he was not going aboard but wished Reggie a pleasant voyage, hoped soon to meet him again.

"We kept one of your young men over last night," Reggie heard the Commander saying to the Skipper.

"Perfectly all right, sir," came the amazing answer. "But the Prince—will he come aboard?"

"Oh no, sir. Just an informal look about the harbor he's having," explained the Englishman.

"The *Prince*," repeated Reggie to himself. "Why that's who it was—the Prince of Wales!" He turned quickly and craned his neck to get another look.

"Get off that gangway, Mr. Van Brunt," ordered the Executive Officer in a fierce whisper.

CHAPTER XVIII

CLASS SPIRIT

ON the night of October fifth, first-classmen at the heads of mess tables in Bancroft Hall knocked for silence and announced:

“Meeting of the third class in Memorial Hall immediately after supper!”

Tom Poor moved uneasily in his seat. A sense of impending conflict stole over him. It was as if the first-classman’s announcement had been a challenge to fight.

In a way it was; but not to fight the first-classman.

“What’s that for?” asked the youngster next to Tom.

“Don’t know,” was the reply. Then, realizing this was not the exact truth, he added: “Unless it’s to elect a new class president.”

“Good thing,” returned the other. “Stiles behaved all right in a way. Trouble was we elected him too soon after entering Annapolis. The crowd who had been in the Washington prep school simply picked this man and shoved him through.”

“Funny,” mused Tom, “when you come to think of it. Here we are from every state and territory in the Union, even Hawaii and Porto Rico. And just let a small part of us have two months together in a prep school and a regular gang is formed.”

“That’s what I mean by saying it’s a good thing,” agreed the other. “We’ve now had a year and a cruise to get

acquainted with each other. And after that came September leave to think ourselves over in."

The speaker turned suddenly to Tom.

"I've thought it over and I'd pick you!"

Again Tom squirmed uneasily; and the sense of coming battle quickened his pulse unpleasantly. This was nearly the twentieth time this evening the same hope of his election had been suggested by a classmate.

"And all because Si Stiles happened to fall from his barn and break his leg," thought Tom, "which crippled him and puts him back a class; and puts me—?"

"Where'd you spend your leave?" broke in the voice next him.

"West," said Tom absently. "Went up to Ole Hansen's place in Oregon. His father is the biggest wheat man in the state."

"Have a good time?"

The question was never answered. Three tables down Tom caught the eyes of a man who sat facing him, studying him, measuring him.

It was Reggie. His chin was cupped in his hand, his elbow on the table . . . a new luxury since becoming a third-classman. Plebes must never dare take hands or arms from their laps except to place food into their silent mouths.

As Reggie stared at Tom, his lips moved. Tom saw the boy next him nod reply. Each time Reggie spoke the other nodded his head.

"What's hit Van Brunt—trying to stare me out of countenance?" blurted Tom. He was used to Reggie's original timidity. This poised self-assurance that enabled him to return Tom's fierce look so calmly was a new development.

"Probably feels a little bloated over being a youngster," continued Tom, answering his own question.

But he misjudged his rival. Indeed he had not yet fully grasped the fact that Reggie was his rival.

"Bob," Reggie was saying at this moment, "do you realize that the class is divided into two camps?"

"I realize that you are getting a leadership you don't deserve," laughed Bob Cary. "Your highbrow manner, your air of being just about the finest thing on deck, is gradually attracting to you all the men who fall for that sort of thing. The curious part of it is that just this kind of weak and silly snobbishness made all the trouble for your plebe year."

"Is still making trouble," corrected Reggie. "The bunch who were so contemptuous of my early physical weakness and my selfishness all the more bitterly resent my getting pretty good in gym work as well as my few late signs of popularity."

"Why not take a crack at this election?" suggested Bob.

"Not a chance in the world. Fellows like Tom Poor with a football career ahead of them have too much weight of public opinion on their side."

"But all hands still talk of the killing you made last summer the time you captured the stolen money."

"Pish! They'll forget that soon enough." Reggie lowered his voice. "I've got a scheme though. You realize that we—you and I—were gentlemen when we came to Annapolis?"

"Better go easy on that line," warned Bob.

"All right. But for the sake of argument call it so. Anyway we've all got to be gentlemen when we graduate because we've got to be naval officers. So why not shove someone across for president who has the makings of a

gentleman in him, who will understand our gang—the 'elite,' I believe they call us—yet will have the kind of bucko brawn that appeals to the rougher element.”

“Have you a man in mind?”

“Ole Hansen.”

For a moment Bob did not reply. He wondered why on earth the class should choose a farmer's son as president. Even though the farmer were wealthy he still was a farmer, a crude product of the western prairies.

“Can't you see he's both?” continued Tom. “Got the back of an ox, the brain of a profiteer, the polish a generation of wealth can give?”

“Reggie!” exclaimed Bob, “you're a political genius! I see it all now. Tom Poor is a good fellow in his way. But he's not the all-around man to represent the class. So you've picked one who not only will appeal to both sections of us, but who also is the one person that could defeat Tom Poor!”

“And Tom Poor is going to take *some* defeating!” concluded Reggie. “*Believe me!*”

As the brigade poured out of the vast mess-hall, six-hundred of the blue-clad midshipmen withdrew to the great east chamber known as Memorial Hall.

About the gray limestone walls were inlaid tablets of bronze dedicated to various naval men who had died in line of duty. Simple inscriptions on each recounted the brief careers of the men who had given their lives for love of country. And in each case was added: “Erected by his classmates.”

“The one true clique in the Navy,” it has been called, this class spirit which develops through the four hard years at Annapolis. Bound by memory of infinite toil, not a little hardship, and a common spirit of defense, each

Naval Academy class carries it through the long years of wandering as a brotherhood which never dies.

"Am I the man to lead them?" Tom asked himself on the flagstone steps. "Can they all be *my* classmates, *my* friends, *my* brother officers, and more?"

He caught sight of Reggie Van Brunt, noted the boy's unconscious grace of bearing, which for all his lack of physical strength made him a marked figure.

Tom shook his head. The old resentment, the old jealousy of social standing, boiled up within him. "I doubt it—I doubt it," he murmured. "*Never* could I like Van Brunt, or even those who are his friends."

The Class Secretary called the meeting to order.

"Fellows," he began, "it is my painful duty to announce that our former Class President, Stiles, will not be able to rejoin our class owing to the accident he met with on leave. He will return sometime next spring and become a member of the present fourth class."

Little feeling was displayed at these words. More and more had the class felt the indignity of the means by which Stiles had been elected. Each man was now determined to put up a strong fight for his own particular friend or hero.

"It has been suggested," he continued, "that we nominate our candidates here tonight. We can take a week to carry out campaigns for those put up. Then, next Monday, we can have the final election."

Instantly several men in different parts of the audience held up their hands.

"I nominate Tom Poor!" they shouted simultaneously. There was great applause.

"Any other nominations?" asked the Secretary.

Then came, one by one, the lesser stars, men backed

by smaller groups of friends. Among these names was that of Ole Hansen. Only a scattered clapping met the calling of it. Ole was popular enough, but somehow no one ever thought of him as a hero. He was too reserved, too slow to impress his will or personality on those around him.

Even Reggie's name went down to the tune of many jeers and shouts of: "Oh, you John D. Rockefeller!"

"Wish I were!" laughed Reggie good-naturedly. He had already lost much of his first sensitiveness about his father's fall from grace.

For seven days the campaign raged. At meals the youngsters talked little else.

If a section marching to recitation was heard to buzz, it was known as a youngster section, and its exasperated leader cried unceasingly: "Here, knock off talking in ranks!"

Notes were passed in classrooms. Whispers were passed at drills. In little knots in the corridors, along the walks, on the athletic field, even under the bleachers, the third class gathered and debated with heated words, sometimes violence, the possibilities of their favorite.

"Swell chance your friend Hansen's got," said Bob to Reggie on the second day.

"Not if my plan works out," replied the latter.

"But I hear everybody agreeing on Tom Poor."

"Not so fast, Bob, old top. Let me put a question to you. Suppose we were going to have two presidents, one for each faction: what kind of men would they be?"

"Well," replied Bob, "The Rough and Readies, as they call themselves, would have a good physical fighter. We Social Lions, as they term us, would have something of a—a—"

"Knight Errant?" suggested Reggie.

"Sounds like what I mean," agreed Bob.

"Very well," said Reggie mysteriously, "you're going to have them—one a physical fighter, as you call him, the other a Knight Errant."

"But we can't have two," objected Bob.

"We won't. One man in two characters—one man named Ole Hansen." Reggie left them, whistling happily.

Between lunch and first recitation next day Ole Hansen was seen by several people walking in Lover's Lane with a rather pretty girl. After drill an even greater number of his class noted him at the same occupation.

"Funny," commented one; "I thought Ole Hansen was a woman hater. And he was to be captain of the class football team. Now he's skipping practice for a skirt! Queer how the best men fall for a flounce!"

Shortly before dark the girl left Ole at the main gate. But even then he shirked his football duties. He hastened to the gymnasium.

Here another and equally unaccustomed kind of behavior marked Ole's presence near the physical instructor's office. He let himself become engaged in a heated and noisy dispute with Buck Mangin, the assistant for wrestling.

"What's the world coming to?" asked a youngster at supper. "Saw the Big Swede fussing a Jane and shooting his face all in one afternoon!"

Others agreed that the combination of woman-hater and clam like Ole Hansen must have been drunk or crazy to spend his time so.

Next day he again paced the walks with the same girl. A delegation from the class football squad lay in wait

for him when she left. They were determined to know if he had deserted them for good.

But Ole eluded the delegation. He got to the gym by a back walk. And in five minutes after his arrival he had called Buck Mangin a liar loud enough for pretty nearly everybody present to hear.

On the last day in the week, after steady attention, Ole ceased to walk with the girl. He *followed* her all over the grounds twenty paces in her rear.

At six P. M. he again visited the gym and picked a quarrel with Buck Mangin. After two minutes of vigorous conversation he planted a short arm jab on the point of Mangin's jaw. The latter took the count, but recovered sufficiently to put Ole on the report for "fighting," "ungentlemanly conduct," and several other items he didn't think of at first.

Just before supper formation, Reggie met Bob in the corridor. He threw his arms about his roommate and started a turkey-trot down the corridor.

"Stop it, you monkey!" cried the outraged Bob.

"She's a jewel! A pippin! A lollypaloosa!" sang Reggie.

"Who's the girl?" asked Bob, breaking away.

"No girl. My scheme, I'm talking about," said Reggie in a hoarse whisper. "It's worked to a fare-you-well!"

"First I've heard of it," returned Bob suspiciously.

"You mean to say you haven't heard our crowd pipe their admiration for the way Ole has copped the Governor of Maryland's oldest daughter?"

"I've seen him trailing a girl all week," admitted Bob.

"And you haven't got the unofficial results of the autumn strength tests, saying Ole is the best all-around developed midshipman in the Naval Academy?"

Bob grunted without enthusiasm. "I know Ole is on the pap for calling Buck Mangin a liar and knocking him down."

Reggie's gaiety remained undamped by his friend's refusal to admire the progress of his candidate.

"Can you keep a secret?" he asked.

Bob nodded.

"Well, I framed the whole thing up on Ole. He's the next class president sure as sunrise! It cost me five pounds of candy every week from now till June to buy the Governor's daughter. Buck Mangin came through for twenty-five dollars—though he may want more after this rumpus. He simply faked a report on the tests."

"You bloomin' idiot!" gasped Bob. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Only that we got the girl to meet Ole and tell him she had been insulted by a midshipman. Asked him to stick around all week and clean the villain up as soon as she could identify him."

"Gosh!" was all Bob could say.

"And Buck Mangin simply started the rumor that Ole was to stand one on the strength tests. We thought it was a failure because Ole happened to get different dope from the real record. But, when he swung on Mangin, he showed up just the caveman stuff we were after to impress the Tom Poor supporters."

Bob Cary gave Reggie a long and solemn look.

"Mister Van Brunt," he declared, "either you're the cleverest political manager in Annapolis, or the biggest lunatic at liberty. If you give me till Monday night I'll tell you which."

Monday night election came. Bob accompanied Reggie to Memorial Hall. He wished to give Reggie his

decision before he had any chance to excuse himself.

The two approached a group of midshipmen known to be friendly to Tom Poor. One lanky individual who would make the varsity crew this year was holding forth on Tom's long list of virtues.

"And as for that other kind, Hansen," he concluded, "I haven't got anything really against him, but—" he lowered his voice, "did any of you deck-hands see him hang to that bunch of ruffles all last week?"

Reggie's face fell.

"It worked, old dear," said Bob in mock praise. "But wasn't the girl stunt meant to *help* Ole?"

"It was," grieved Reggie.

Across the hall they joined another group. Here at least should be voiced a proper approval of a man who could charm the winsome daughter of a governor.

"Can you stand the thought of it?" questioned a low, well-modulated voice. "Can you imagine having for a class president a common thug like the one who started that riot in gym—this Ole Hansen?"

Reggie took Bob's arm.

"I give up," he said dolefully. "Let's don't stay." But Bob held back. "Oh, be a man. Stick around and take your punishment like a sport!"

The Secretary called the meeting to order.

"While not necessary," he announced, "in view of the large number of candidates, we should have a written ballot."

Cries of "No! No!" came from all parts of the class.

"What would you have then?"

"Only one man has a chance!" yelled someone in back.

"Sure!" another took up the cry. "I move we elect Tom Poor by acclamation!" Roars of applause greeted

this suggestion. To all appearances Tom was as good as elected.

But Tom himself had not been consulted. He stood a little back and to one side. Again he was watching Reggie Van Brunt, and the friends like Bob Cary who stood near Reggie. And again he knew in his heart that never could he endure so much as the acquaintance of such a man. There was no use pretending.

He had his ideals and standards. These other fellows like Reggie had theirs. They stood for money and what money could buy. He stood for the strength in a man's back, the honesty in a man's soul. So far as his experience went these society lovers had neither.

While these thoughts raced through Tom's head the applause grew in volume.

"Tom Poor—speech! President Poor! Speech!" roared the multitude.

Tom clenched his hands. His mind was made. He would be true to himself at least. He mounted the speaker's table.

"Fellows," he said when the tumult had died away, "I appreciate the way you've shown your feeling about me. I wish I had some words for telling you how much I appreciate it."

Cries of "Bet your boots we do!" and "You said a mouthful, Tom!" interrupted him.

"But I can't take the honor."

"The heck you can't!" and "Why not?" from all sides.

"Some day, maybe, I'll explain. It's a private, personal reason though. And I'd rather you wouldn't ask me."

Silent amazement held the audience. Surely Tom Poor of all people had nothing to hide.

"There's one thing I wish to add," he went on. "From some talk I heard tonight I don't believe one of the other candidates is being appreciated by you men. That's Ole Hansen."

Tom glared somewhat defiantly about him. Then, raising his fist for emphasis, he shouted two questions:

"How many of you people know that Ole Hansen stuck by a girl for a week in order to get the hound she told him had insulted her?"

Not a trickle of sound escaped the six-hundred listeners.

"How many of you know that when Ole Hansen knocked down Buck Mangin he was dealing out the only kind of punishment a bribe-taker and a liar deserves in an institution like this?"

Then in a brief but eloquent way Tom laid bare the two chief objections against the Big Swede this evening.

Possibly it was Tom that did it. For he kept his place on the table and took the vote himself.

"All in favor of Ole Hansen," he cried, "right hands up!"

He didn't stop to count them.

"Contrary!" he shouted.

Not a single solitary hand. Ole Hansen was elected!

"Well," said Bob a little later, "I'll take it all back, Reggie, old skeesicks. You'll be putting 'em in the White House next!"

Then, because he couldn't stand his roommate's growing conceit, he added: "If there's a Tom Poor around to help you out!"

CHAPTER XIX

IN SECRET

A FEW nights after the election there occurred the first of a series of incidents that gave Reggie his greatest chance to serve the class. It was probably the most sensational use to which he put his remarkable imagination during his whole four years at Annapolis.

Through the whole evening study hour, Bob Cary had bent his entire energy on the problems in electrical engineering for the ensuing day. "Juice," as the course was called, promised to be a stumbling block. How to apply abstruse mathematics to an invisible current which shot like lightning through a *solid* wire painfully perplexed him.

Reggie was absent. The whole two hours from 7.30 P. M. to 9.30 P. M. he had been in his little side room tinkering away at some sort of apparatus.

"Got your probs worked out for to-morrow?" sung out Bob, when finally his brain refused to function any longer.

An exasperated mumble came from the bedroom.

"What in Sam Hill are you up to anyway?"

Again Reggie gave vent to an inarticulate sound. Bob determined to investigate.

He found his roommate on his stomach reaching under the radiator. From the window ran a network of wires and strings. On the sill was clamped a small wooden box containing an alarm clock connected by a series of tiny

pulleys and threads both to the window and to some invisible mechanism behind the steam coil.

"Good heavens, Man!" exclaimed 'Bob. "Are you going in for infernal machines?"

For reply Reggie rose triumphantly to his feet and announced: "Wait, Impatient One, and thou shalt see."

Whereupon he removed the alarm clock carefully from its refuge, wound it, and set its warning bell. Next he opened the window. Which done, he proceeded to get into bed, shoes and all.

"We shall now assume it is that sad minute before reveille," he explained. "I am dreaming of—of, let us say, interminable ranks of chocolate cakes. Now watch."

Bob patiently eyed the machinery. The minute hand reached the hour for which the alarm was set. Instantly there arose from the vitals of the radiator a strange buzzing noise. Miraculously strings and wires moved. The window shuddered. An invisible force was compelling it to move, to break from its lifeless trance.

Then, so suddenly that Bob himself jumped, the window leaped from its seat and closed with a crash that shook the washstand. Splintered glass flew dangerously into the room. Then the entire pane tumbled out of its frame and clattered upon the iron radiator below. Destruction was complete.

Sharply Reggie rose from his bed. For a moment he eyed the wreckage. Ten demerits it stood for: "damaging government property," the regulations listed it.

"It worked!" he said at last.

"It sure did," agreed Bob with enthusiasm. "How much, may I ask, do you expect to make out of this noble window-closing device?"

Reggie opened his mouth to answer.

BANG!

A sudden sharp explosion like a pistol shot rattled the glass door.

"What's that?" For a moment Reggie forgot his own devastation.

Bob had already reached the door. "Across the hall!" he cried, and rushed out. Two plebes lived opposite. Several other midshipmen had preceded Bob in reaching them. The plebes stood at attention.

Their room was a mess. Ink splattered the walls, the ceiling, the occupants, the one remaining electric lamp. Blood ran from cuts on the cheeks and hands of the plebes.

An upperclassman at once began the investigation.

"Who did this?"

"Don't know, sir," from the plebe.

"Don't know—you've got to know!"

"Guess the ink bottle blew up, sir."

"How?"

"Somebody put a lithia tablet or something in it."

"Who?"

"A third-classman, I think, sir."

"You think—do you *know*?" was the angry question.

"Yes sir, it was a third-classman."

The upper-classman turned to Bob and Reggie who had recognized him as Bradley of the second class.

"'Bout time you youngsters learned when and where to stop!" he blurted; then stalked out of the room.

The next incident that bore heavily on Reggie's future occurred two weeks later. It was hop night. Reggie had no girl. But the unaccustomed privilege of attend-

ing hops which he had been denied as a plebe made one almost an adventure.

Music and lights, swirling couples, gay laughter, and subtle perfumes combined to make an atmosphere of brilliant social activity which struck at the roots of Reggie's romantic soul.

"Most beautiful place for a dance!" exclaimed a feminine voice at his elbow.

"Nothing like it on the Atlantic coast!" agreed her partner with geographical abandon.

Reggie shuddered. Could there be any pleasure in talking such namby-pamby stuff when the very air was surcharged with deepest human emotions?

"Go easy, you ham!" in a tense whisper behind him broke into his reverie. He turned to find that a rather stern looking young lady had been backed up against him by the movement of the crowd.

To his astonishment this most unladylike remark appeared to have come from her. For at once her escort replied in quite a different and far less exasperated voice: "Excuse me, dearie, I couldn't help it." Then he snickered and winked.

There was something so uncouth in the whole performance that Reggie followed the couple with his eyes. Even when they took the floor their dancing was not entirely what could be expected of the dignity of an Annapolis hop.

As the girl left her coat at the door to the ladies' dressing-room Reggie determined to discover her identity. He soon found her partner, one of his own classmates, waiting in the passageway.

"Say, Smythe," he asked as pleasantly as he could, "who's that goodlooker you've got?"

Midshipman Smythe turned a stern gaze on Reggie. "What's it to you?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing," replied Reggie, taken aback. "But I rather liked her looks and was interested; that's all, I promise you."

Abruptly Smythe broke into a chuckle that shook him first, then made him speechless.

"It's Beverly!" he gasped finally. "Beverly, with his sister's clothes on—and a wig—and real corsets and all! And you didn't recognize your own classmate! Oh, that's rich!"

Reggie tried to laugh. When he found he couldn't laugh he tried to say something. Speech failing, he turned and hurried away. He was of half a mind to report the outrage. "Low mucker stuff!" he thought to himself.

The climax of his growing sense of class humiliation came on the following Monday. Due to a strained knee from too much flying ring work he had been excused from marching to recitation with the regular section. In consequence he reached the chemical laboratory slightly ahead of the others.

Outside he removed his rainclothes and overshoes, the uniform of the day. Within stood the two instructors, lieutenants. Said one lieutenant loud enough for Reggie to hear: "Who's next?"

"Youngster class in chemistry," replied the other.

"Oh, that fresh bunch!"

"Fresh is right."

"Haven't got over being plebes yet, have they?"

"Or else not into being officers and gentlemen."

"Let's throw the hooks into them, what do you say?"

"Hooks is right."

Reggie lost the rest. With burning cheeks he turned and walked out of earshot.

As soon as the afternoon drill was over, he got hold of Bob Cary. "Something important I've got to tell you," he explained. By one of the great portico pillars he bared his secret.

"You mean our class is getting in bad?" asked Bob.

"Exactly. And a very few are responsible for the whole thing. They're up to tricks that can't be covered either by hazing or regulations. Yet so long as we wear the same number of stripes on our arms, and are known as belonging to the same class here, we've got to share the mortification of being partners in the fool stunts they're pulling off."

"Agreed. But what are you going to do about it?"

"Don't know, except in a general way." Reggie waved one hand as if reaching for some invisible object. "Do you remember," he continued after a moment, "how they used to do out west before the law got on its feet?"

"Shoot 'em on sight?" suggested Bob.

"Not entirely," grinned Reggie. "No, they used to organize a sort of secret gang who could be depended upon to hate all sorts of lawlessness. This gang was called the Vigilance Committee. That's what we need to bolster up the rep. of our youngster class."

Bob looked serious. "I agree with you. I'm just as ashamed as you of being a youngster these days. But I'm hanged if I can see my way clear to any such scheme as yours. Clubs or fraternities are not allowed at Annapolis. Also we don't know who'd stick by us."

"Watch me!" said Reggie with the same sort of swagger he had used on the occasion of promising Ole Hansen's election.

"I am, you bet!" Bob was looking with growing admiration upon the singular genius of his friend who could figure out things the other fellows never even saw—till they were all over.

Next morning Tom Poor received a typewritten letter in the mail. It read:

DEAR POOR—I address you as an influential member of the third class. Your class needs jacking up. They can't be hazed. And the law doesn't cover all the crimes they are committing. In a word they're too fresh. Such a thing as a midshipman attending a hop disguised as a girl is outrageous! I suggest you do something about it. If you don't the authorities will. Signed—AN INTERESTED SPECTATOR.

He read it a second time to Ole. "Now what do you know about that!"

"I know it's true," said Ole promptly. "It'd be truer if we knew some of the other things that are going on around here. First time I ever heard of the girl business."

"I suppose one of the officers wrote it."

"Of course," agreed Ole. "An upperclassman would have come to us direct."

"How about one of our own class?"

"Don't believe any of them realize how bad we're getting in with those above us."

For two days Ole worried over the problem. As class president it was up to him to discover a remedy. On the third day Bob Cary stopped him on the terrace.

"Hansen, some of our class are playing that 'inkwell-bomb' game again. I don't like to tell tales, but it's a

dangerous trick. Some day a plebe is going to lose an eye. As a class we're getting in bad over it."

"What would you suggest?" Memory of the anonymous letter leaped to Ole's mind.

"A sort of Vigilance Committee," advised Bob, just as Reggie had coached him to. Reggie felt his own position was too delicate for him to approach Hansen. So after he had sent the anonymous letter, he simply watched Hansen for signs of its effect. Having given him two days of anxiety, he now sent Bob with the suggested scheme for a way out.

Ole took the bait, hook, sinker, and all.

"Just the hunch I am looking for!" he exclaimed.

"But how are you going to pick them?" Even Reggie was in doubt about this point.

"On the representative basis, of course. One from each company in the brigade. Also one athlete and one fusser. Would you be sore if I put you down for the fusser?"

Bob laughed. "You couldn't make me sore, old man. I'll take the appointment even if it's half an insult."

Ole put his hand on the other's shoulder. "You know what I really mean, don't you? You're the best one to represent the crowd that does go in for girls and that stuff more than Tom Poor and I."

"Look here, Hansen," burst in Tom, "let's cut this idea that the class is divided. The sooner we realize that we're third-classmen, everyone of us, the sooner we'll make life here the best it can be."

Ole held out his hand. "Right you are! And, if what Lieutenant Ruggles says is so, this class spirit is going to follow us around the world. And further, he claims that it is at the bottom of the wonderful way

Navy men hang together no matter what their class. From New York to Melbourne, Australia, when one officer meets another, each knows the other has a whole blooming class behind him—and always will have!”

Bob's face glowed. “Think of the years we've got!” he cried.

“I do,” said Ole. “Is there a job to beat it?”

On the following evening fourteen men met after evening study hour in Ole's room. In low and earnest tones he explained the reasons for which he had called them together. He emphasized the absolute need for secrecy. He also described the necessity for him, as class president, to be kept out of the society.

“And finally,” he said in conclusion, “this must never be considered as any sort of spy system. This is not Russia. It is the United States Naval Academy. We are bonded together to protect the honor and good name of the class.”

“But we can act, can't we?” asked one.

“I should suggest you punish an offender against the class in such a way that everyone will know it. Let the news get about that we won't stand for such behavior as a few dubs have been guilty of.”

“We can meet here, can't we, and let you in on the cases?”

“I'd rather you wouldn't,” said Ole with some regret.

“It isn't that I'm not all for you. But if the class loses faith in me, it will do as much harm as some of the low tricks I've told you about.”

After the taps inspection, Bob got quietly out of bed and went into Reggie's room to relate the progress of the plan.

“Man,” he told him, “you're a highbrow of the high-

browest type! Why the way this scheme is working makes me think you'd carry off a Central American revolution with one hand tied behind you!"

Reggie held up his hand. "Off with the slush," said he. "There's a job on hand this very moment."

"Not tonight!"

"Pretty nearly. Ought to be planned tonight."

"Shoot—what is it?"

"Chemical job."

"Gee! Are we able to handle anything as deep as that?"

"'Tisn't deep—it's high. Highest stink that ever stunk!"

Reggie held his nose and waved an expressive hand in the semi-darkness. Then leaning close to Bob, he whispered:

"It's that same crowd who go in for the inkwell game. I saw them after chemistry class this morning. They mixed a pot of the foulest stinkerino that ever tanned a morgue. One winked at the other and said something about guessing this would make 'em roll over and flop!"

"You mean these youngsters are going to haze with poison gas?"

"Can't tell yet what they're up to. You have got to have one of the committee watch them close. Stand by to nab them and lay 'em out for such a rotten trick."

"I'll do it first thing in the morning."

With a vast pride at his roommate's mental superiority, Bob crept back to his little iron bedstead.

CHAPTER XX

TRAITORS!

NEXT morning's recitation of the third-class selections in chemistry were the same as usual except that the instructor gave a brief talk on the nature of the molecule beforehand.

"Take the most infinitesimal particle of water known to man," said he. "Break it up into smaller particles quite invisible. Then divide these into ten-thousand even tinier particles. And still you would fall short of the ultra-microscopic form of the molecule itself."

Silence of intense interest pervaded the room.

The officer turned to his blackboard. With a piece of chalk he drew a circle. "Take this as the molecule," he continued. "Imagine—"

But his back was turned. Imaginations didn't have to work so hard when not under the direct eye of the master.

One midshipman watched him intently. Two more midshipmen tiptoed quietly to one side. When the instructor faced about from time to time the watcher snapped his fingers lightly. At which signal the other two came instantly to a halt and assumed an air of the most rapt attention.

A fourth midshipman, partially concealed by an intervening desk, watched the antics of the other three. It was Reggie. The other three were the "ink-well" gang.

The two moving midshipman reached a cabinet which

was locked. One inserted a key that fitted with strange ease. The cabinet door opened without attracting the attention of the instructor. From it the midshipmen took several bottles. Each bottle was secreted on their persons by means of slipping them in the slack portion of each sock.

Socks make excellent pockets on occasion.

At noon Reggie cornered Bob. "They hooked the bottles of reagents and brought them back to quarters," he said.

"Who did? What reagents?" Even Bob had trouble keeping up with Reggie's extraordinary sleuth work.

"That inkwell gang. I told you they were concocting some sort of stinkerino yesterday. Well, today they carried off enough of the ingredients to make a quart or more of the stuff."

"What stuff?"

"Don't know, unless it's something like potassium isocyanide, I believe they call it, a mixture of several chemicals that makes the most frightful stench when poured out and allowed to evaporate."

"You think they're going to use it around here?"

"That's what we've got to find out!"

"But what if they should? They may not get caught—and it won't hurt anyone."

Reggie shrugged his shoulders. "Gosh, but you're hopeless, Bob. Don't you know that it's only the youngster class that has a chemical course this time of the year? If such a stunt were pulled, say in a public place like the auditorium, everybody in Annapolis would know it was one of us that did it. It wouldn't be a practical joke with any real humor in it. Simply we get in worse and worse with all hands and the ship's cook. It's

just this sort of ruffianism we're out to put an end to."

Bob lost no time reporting the conspiracy to Ole.

"But where would they try such a thing?" Ole was skeptical.

"Some public place," said Bob, using Reggie's own words.

"Theatre you mean?"

"Possibly."

Ole shook his head. His faith in his classmates somehow couldn't be killed with the ease these would-be detectives killed theirs.

"The only thing to do is to shadow them," he finally agreed. "You and Tom live nearest them. Suppose you two keep your eye on them."

Tom assented at once. His sense of public welfare induced him to snap at any weapon to use against a common enemy.

"But suppose we do catch them," he said after thinking for a minute, "will that help any? If they pour out a bottle of stink and we land on their necks even a second later, won't that just make four third-classmen instead of two involved?"

This view of the problem was too much for the three. Bob returned to Reggie in some discouragement. But when he explained the weakness of the scheme, Reggie's only retort was, "use your bean!"

"I have."

"It's a poor quality bean," chuckled Reggie.

"Go on," growled Bob. "What's the catch?"

"Why lead the mob away of course. It's a trick we used to get off at prep school. Gilbert has flashlight pellets for sale in his drug store. Take some with you when you are trailing the villains. Soon as they drop the

stinko, light a pellet and yell 'fire.' All hands will get out of the way long enough for you to throw some ammonia on the stinko and neutralize it."

"Sounds crazy—certainly sounds insane!" returned Bob. "But so do all your other ideas."

Tom took longer to convince than Bob. Stubbornly he clung to the idea that throwing the flashlight pellet was just as bad as what the other rascals were doing.

"But by the time everyone finds out it isn't serious we shall have dumped on ammonia and killed the odor."

"Too deep for me," protested Tom; "but I'm game, I will say that."

By Saturday noon Tom and Cary representing the Vigilants, were equipped with half a dozen flashlight pellets and a pint bottle of household ammonia.

They came to dinner with their best uniforms on prepared to follow the suspects out in town if necessary. The minute the meal was over they rushed to the main entrance of Bancroft Hall and waited.

Not till nearly an hour later did the three "inkwell" criminals appear. They passed without noticing their classmates Poor and Cary, lurking behind the massive bronze doors.

"Did you see that one carried a package?" whispered Bob. "Bottle of the stuff, I guess."

The three youngsters took the main walk, not towards the town gate, but exactly bound for the Superintendent's quarters.

"Thundering Cats!" ejaculated Bob. "They're going to the Supe's!"

Then he remembered the football game had been called off for that afternoon, and a reception was being given at Admiral Treadwell's house.

Attendance at such affairs is by no means compulsory to any midshipman. But it is desirable that members of the brigade take advantage of their privilege to call upon officers and to be present at certain afternoon functions. In no better way can early social training be distributed among the boys. Thus is laid the foundation of a future social poise that shall be called into service in the courts of all lands.

The large and well appointed house was crowded with officers and their wives, midshipmen and their visiting girls, and just plain stags. To the latter belonged the small group who were in course of making Annapolis history.

Bob and Tom entered a few minutes later than the other three. They didn't wish to appear to be following. Also there was no sure evidence that this was to be the scene of the coming crime.

"Think of the outrageousness of it!" exclaimed Tom in a low voice.

"Unspeakable!" agreed Bob.

They spoke to the Superintendent's wife within sixty seconds of the others' presentation. When the others took ice and some punch, Tom and Bob took the same ice and the same punch.

The three "Inkwellers" gathered in a corner. Instead of politely mingling with the guests, they stood together and whispered. Then one left and slipped through the door into the hall.

"Quick," directed Bob. "Stand by with your pellet at this end of the hall, and I'll chase down with the ammonia. I've got it in my sock."

By the time Bob reached the vestibule, the man he sought was fumbling in his coat pocket. A paper parcel

suddenly slipped to the floor. Bob dived for it. It must be the bottle. He might yet save the situation if he could prevent its horrible contents from spilling.

"Hands off!" snapped the owner.

He snatched for the parcel and tore part of the wrapper off. Through the hole was visible the toe of a shoe.

"Just trying to be decent," growled Bob, as the best excuse he could invent.

"Excuse me, too," said the other with a silly grin. "I thought it was another package I have. One I couldn't afford to drop!"

Bob turned away quickly to hide the satisfaction he knew must be in his face. He nearly collided with Tom.

"I lit it!" exclaimed the latter. "Ought to go in a moment."

Without replying Bob dashed for the end of the hall. He realized that Tom had seen the parcel drop and, thinking the "stuff" must be out, had lit his pellet. Bob's only chance was to douse the flashlight before it exploded and created a scandal that would involve the innocent ones instead of the guilty.

He dived for it on his hands and knees. By sheer good fortune the pellet's fuse had gone out.

"About enough of that behavior!" said a stern voice above him.

Bob turned to find himself face to face with Lieutenant Ruggles.

"You may leave at once!" commanded the officer. "We shall discuss this matter later."

Crestfallen and discouraged, Bob sought Tom and told him what had happened. Luckily, the three villains were also taking their leave so the pursuit could be continued.

"I haven't much heart for it now," confessed Bob. "We've got ourselves in pretty nearly as wrong for running races up and down the Supe's front hall as if we had let off a stink bomb."

At the gate one of the three in front said good-bye to the others. The midshipman who had practically admitted to Bob his having the bottle of "stuff" in his possession continued with his companion into town.

At the Colonial theatre they bought tickets to the afternoon movies. Bob and Tom entered a moment later.

The two ahead took seats on one side of an aisle near the front. Shadow of an overhanging box nearly concealed them from the audience. An exit door opened within a few feet of them.

Bob and Tom dropped silently in the next seat to the rear.

For ten minutes the criminals made no move that in any way could be connected with the suspicions of the watchful pair behind.

Then one glanced at his watch. "A quarter past three," he whispered. "By twenty after it'll be time and we can get out right here."

Bob and Tom caught the words. They were on their toes at once. Tom drew one of the pellets and his matches from his pocket.

Twice more the midshipman in front studied his watch. Then, "Now, it's all right," he said in a low voice.

Instantly both leaned over for their hats. A clinking sound came from under the seat. Both rose quickly and strode through the exit into the air.

"They've done it!" exclaimed Bob. "I heard the bottle break."

Without wasting time to reply, Tom dived low, struck

a match to the pellet, and sailed it under the seats ahead where it landed with a slight thud against the orchestra rail.

“Puff!”

A blinding flash of light filled the hall. Clouds of smoke rolled up across the screen, obliterating the pictures.

“Fire!” screamed a woman.

Instantly the lights were turned on. The audience leaped to their feet. There was every evidence of a serious panic.

“Silence!” thundered a voice. Tom sprang to the backs of two seats. “*Slowly out—slowly—women first—slowly—lots of time—*”

He called the words in the heavy well-controlled tones he had learned two years before when heaving the lead from a battleship’s deck, while the whipping gale did its best to snatch his voice from his very throat and toss it far from the anxious navigator on the bridge above.

“*Slowly—*”

And, to the amazement of those who feared the greater danger of a terrified mass of people, the audience took heed.

“*Slowly—lots of time—*” here and there were saner minds who took the cry up.

Suddenly a civilian stepped up to Bob. “Who is that fellow?”

“Tom Poor, third-classman,” replied Bob, before he realized what he was doing. His only thought at the time was in praise of the great presence of mind and command of voice his friend was displaying in the emergency.

Then it was all over. The crowd were out. The stranger had disappeared. The volunteer firemen that ar-

rived had voiced their disgust and disappointment.

"Better make the side door," suggested Bob. Before he went he looked under the seat ahead of him. On the floor, instead of the bottle of chemicals as he had expected, he found *an empty candy jar!*

The bomb had never been sprung!

"Heaven help us!" groaned Bob on the way back.

"Take more than Heaven to clear us out of this afternoon's work!" was Tom's dismal reply.

"You don't know the worst yet," continued Bob. "I was fool enough to tell a stranger your name. I thought he was going to thank you for your sense in quieting the audience."

"And instead," supplied Tom bitterly, "you just let him know who set the opera house on fire!"

With a heavy heart Bob went up to his room. He hoped Reggie wouldn't be there. At this moment he hated his roommate. The whole plan had been so impracticable, so silly, from the very beginning he felt ashamed for having let the other drag him into it.

"It's just I'm so stupid that when a simp like Reggie busts out with an idea I fall for it at once, no matter how imbecile it may be!"

Having delivered this self-denunciation, Bob threw himself upon the bed and fell asleep.

He was awakened by the bugle call for supper formation. He had just time to throw on his uniform and dash down the four flights of steps.

Near the Duty Officer's room he saw the crowd breaking up. By the time he reached the point where they had been standing he caught a sniff of a dreadful stench. He stopped dead.

"Not here!" he exclaimed.

He stepped up and, opening the door a crack, peeped in. The room had been lately swabbed out. A uniform suit was hung over the back of a chair. It was streaked and burnt with what looked like acid. Despite that all windows were open the odor that filled the room was suffocating and horrible.

Bob stepped into ranks just as the "late bugle" blew. He was conscious of a queer sense of unreality. The bomb had been sprung. But all the trail that he and Tom had followed so faithfully had led to nothing!

An awful suspicion crossed his mind. Could it be possible that Reggie had put them on it on purpose to conceal the villainy in quarters?

At the table he leaned across to Reggie. "Look here, you fool," he whispered fiercely, "how about all that dime novel stuff you hung on Tom and me? Didn't you know the game was to be played right here in Bancroft Hall?"

The insult missed its mark entirely. "Keep your shirt on," returned Reggie calmly.

After supper third-class meeting was published for seven-fifteen.

Tom and Bob went silently and with the gloomiest forebodings to the hall.

Ole took the table. "Fellows," he announced, "the Duty Officer, Lieutenant Ruggles, asked me to have you all up here tonight. He has something to say to you. Here he is now."

The officer climbed up and faced his audience with the pleasant smile that had made him so popular with them. Every midshipman well knew this smile, and how it was worth a square deal on every occasion. Not that Ruggles wasn't as strict as the strictest. But somehow he hadn't entirely forgotten his own midshipman days, and he made

an effort to see the midshipman's point of view in every difficulty.

"Gentlemen," he began, "I have got you here for a purpose that cannot be covered in any possible way than by an informal talk. The talk will be brief. It has to do with class spirit."

Tom and Bob heaved sighs part relief, part anxiety.

"Yesterday," continued the speaker, "one of your chemistry instructors, a classmate of my own by the way, informed me that he suspected a certain three midshipmen of making what I believe you call a 'stink pot.' He had no basis for making an official report. Yet he felt that not only the third class but the whole Academy would suffer by the perpetration of such a nasty and pointless joke in some public place. I agreed with him."

"Me too," echoed a score of youngsters under their breath.

"Today I spotted the three scoundrels on their way to the Superintendent's house. This was in the nature of an alibi. Two of them went on out to the theatre for still further evidence that they were in no way connected with the crime. Then, between three and three-thirty, when it was known I would be on inspection, the third man, who had remained behind, sneaked into my room in quarters and smashed the bottle against the wall. I caught him red-handed."

For a moment there was silence. Then, with one accord, the class broke into a storm of honest applause.

Ruggles smiled and held up his hand. "Thank you," he said, "for feeling that way about it. I truly believed that the class as a whole was against such behaviour."

He fumbled in his pocket and drew out a paper.

"One more thing. Just to show you how the actions of

one or two may reflect upon the whole class, let me read you this. It is a note the Admiral just received from the owner of the Colonial Theatre. 'In the name of my clients permit me to thank you, Admiral Treadwell, for the remarkable action of one of your midshipmen in saving us from a disastrous panic this afternoon. He is a third-classman named Poor, I think.' "

" 'Ray for Tom Poor!' yelled someone.

"Don't cheer him," laughed the Lieutenant. "Any one of you would have done the same I think. The main point is that the Admiral said when he handed me the note: 'Why I thought that was the class giving us so much trouble. Guess I'm mistaken.' "

" 'Ray for the Youngster Class!' came from the back.

"Now you're talking sense!" retorted the officer. "And I'll leave you to cheer it if you'll just let me say for the benefit of one midshipman—" he looked sharply at Bob for an instant too short for anyone to notice—"that a small unpleasantness at the Superintendent's this afternoon has completely slipped my mind!"

Amid the cheers of their jostling classmates and quite unseen by even the men jammed closest, Bob's hand went out to Tom's, then met, gripped, and dropped.

CHAPTER XXI

PIRATES

"I've got to get away!" complained Tom.

"Me too," agreed Ole despondently.

"And have my own ship."

"And sail where we please!"

"No one around to tell us what to do and when to do it!"

"You bet!"

This conversation was the beginning of the most hazardous and yet most nearly naval adventure that befell Tom during his midshipman days.

Football season had been succeeded by basketball, wrestling, and other gym sports. The semi-annual examinations with all their terror were forgotten in the excitement of crew baseball, and track. June week had come and gone.

And then, instead of the cruise, a plan was put in effect to keep a small number of the new second class, to which Tom belonged, at Annapolis for the purpose of helping in the instruction of entering plebes.

"Three months of drill, drill, drill!" Tom described it after it had finally come to an end.

"Or else grinding back and forth over Chesapeake Bay trying to make a lot of farmers' and bankers' sons find out which end of an oar ought to be put into the water," continued Ole.

Now both were in a mutinous mood. Both felt it

necessary to break away from the galling discipline long enough to blow off steam at least.

"How about a cruise of our own?" suggested Tom.

"No boat," growled Ole. "The first-classmen have already put in for the big sloop. They expect to go as far as Hampton Roads."

The same hot August afternoon both boys wandered down to the harbor front of the old town for a mess of Pinkney's softshell crabs. Pinkney was one of the old-time darkies who had been a slave as a boy. His whole life he had spent in oyster or crabbing boats running in and out of the ports of Baltimore and Annapolis.

"The trouble with hiring a boat is the cost of it," continued Tom, as they seated themselves at the little round table.

Pinkney cocked up his ear. "Does you gemmen wish a sailing vessel, suh?" he asked showing his white teeth in a broad grin.

"We certainly do," said Ole quickly. "We've decided to turn pirates, Pinkney, and we're looking for a ship."

The old darkey scratched his head. "I'se got a boat what would be the very thing, suh." He stepped to the door and pointed to a little two-masted schooner lying at anchor near the sea-wall.

"Exactly what we want!" exclaimed Tom.

"You kin have him, suh," continued the proprietor, "on one condition."

"Name it."

"An' dat is, suh, that you give him a coat of paint when you-all's finished an—" he cleared his throat—"an kinda boost up old Pinkney's shop next winter."

Both midshipmen laughed. "Easy enough," agreed Tom. "And I'm glad to advertise you all I can. You've

got the best oyster house in Annapolis right now. These new and flossy places are stealing your trade just because they happen to be up in the more fashionable part of town and burn electric lights."

On Thursday of the following week, September leave began. The two pirates took a third man into their crew in order to lighten somewhat the routine work of keeping the boat in shape and cooking. He was an old retired quartermaster known as Jimmie Reef tackle. He had joined the Navy back in the days of square riggers and still loved a little taste of salt air.

Provisions for three weeks were put aboard and enough gasoline for the little auxiliary engine which was installed. This "kicker" was not powerful enough to cruise with, but enabled the boat to pull out of the glassy calms which always precede a summer gale on the Bay.

"Where to, Jimmie?" asked Ole when the harbor entrance light dropped out of sight.

"Depends upon what you're after," was the slow reply. "I've knowed some as was bound to fetch gold and others what was after good and proper cargoes of merchandise. There's still others what takes to the sea for the fun of it. Them last is what we'd call fresh-water sailors, an' they make for the inside places when it starts to blow."

Tom followed this recital without a smile. He knew the old fellow was half joking. But he also knew that there was a great deal of truth in his words.

"Jimmie," he said after a moment, "suppose you had been in jail for nearly a year; in jail at hard labor. And you suddenly found yourself out. You found yourself aboard a ship and could do anything you wanted. What would you do?"

Jimmie's eyes glistened. He was over sixty, but his

mind was still young. He knew Tom meant the Naval Academy when he spoke of jail. And he well knew how the pair longed for something exciting after twelve months of mental hardship that was far worse than any kind of rock-breaking a convict might do.

"I tell you, sir," his face solemn as a preacher's, "if 'twere me as was loosed from the pen, and if this were the ship, I'd know exactly what I'd do."

"Name it," said both listeners in a single voice.

"Bootleggers!" was the whispered reply.

"Pish!" laughed Ole. "There aren't any."

Jimmie took a turn around the tiller with the main sheet. "There aren't?" he echoed. "Did you ever see a fisherman who couldn't show you a bank where they'd be fish?" He paused for the question to sink in. "Well, did ye ever know an old sailorman who couldn't say as where they was a bootleg full of liquor?"

And then he told his story.

A fresh afternoon breeze filled the sails. The craft was what is known as a "Bugeye," a type peculiar to Chesapeake Bay. Few small sailing vessels in the world are speedier. The warm sunshine beat down on the two tanned midshipmen stretched out on the narrow deck in their undershirts.

It seemed that vessels were coming from Europe with cargoes of wine. Under cover of the fogs off the eastern shore of Maryland, the shore open to the Atlantic Ocean, these cargoes were being landed. The cases were carted across the Bay side and picked up by a variety of boats which transported the forbidden stuff to Baltimore and Annapolis.

"There's ye chance," concluded the old tar, "to make yerselves famous."

"But the risk of it—I don't mean I'm afraid, because I brought along our revolvers—isn't there a chance of our seeming to be implicated in it?" Tom recalled the stink-bomb experience and shuddered to think how close to serious trouble perfectly honest work may bring a man.

"Only that they'll take a pot shot at you," said Jimmie. "But on the other hand the Government's offered a reward of a thousand dollars for the arrest of any boat's crew dealing in this business."

"Big George" broke in Ole; "if that spindleshanks of a Van Brunt could pull off the stunt he did last year in France and come out with a pocket full of coin, certainly two he-men like us ought to."

So by sun-down the plans were made to cruise off a series of small inlets which Jimmie Reef tackle had pointed out on the chart as the most likely place for heading off one of the smugglers' boats.

Neither midshipman realized how seagoing he had become. Of course Tom had been in the fleet long enough to have collected a smattering of nautical information. But the winter's course in navigation, in piloting, in seamanship, in engines, even in meteorology or weather conditions, all lent their aid in making such a cruise as this a matter almost of natural habit with the two boys.

"Can we make that bight before dark comes on?" asked Jimmie. He had a guess of his own on his tongue, but wished to try out the young sailors.

Tom glanced at the chart. "We have to clear a couple of shoals," he mused. "Then we're making about four knots and can count on at least two reaches after we tack."

Ole picked a logarithm book from the little shelf near the companionway. "Just a minute," he asked, and ran

his finger down the columns of figures. A short computation and the answer was ready: "It'll take us two hours and five minutes, working the traverse by trigonometric solution of the triangles," said he.

The weatherbeaten face beside him crinkled with good humor. "Triggernumbertry, sir," he remarked, "is very fine I admit. I seen it used to hit a target on the other side of a hill in Cuba once. But I've a dollar bill in the pocket of my other pants what says we won't reach that place you've picked for as much as four hours."

"Take you!" laughed Ole, his professional reputation at stake.

Four hours later Jimmie Reefackle added a second dollar bill to the one he had wagered. "Mathematics is all right in their place," he explained sagely. "But even on a man-o'-war there's a sight you lads oughta have learned to make her safe on the sea."

As the two boys rolled into their blankets that night Tom turned and with a sleepy voice remarked to Ole: "Does it ever occur to you that we're learning our trade just about every minute of the time we spend in Annapolis or around it?"

"Sure," was the grunted reply. "Only this kind of learning don't hurt the way the chalk and blackboard does."

For nearly two weeks the buccaneers wandered up and down the broad blue waters of Chesapeake Bay. Uninhabited harbors and islands they explored with all the thrill of discovering new land. They fished and swam and crabbed. Several heavy blows drove them to race for shelter. Once the little gas engine went on the blink and all their book knowledge failed to put it right again.

They took it apart and cleaned it and fitted the intricate nuts and valves and screw together again. But still she sputtered and refused to move.

By this time Jimmie Reeftackle was getting interested. He had never seen the inside of an engine before. But he realized that with the low supply of fresh water and no wind in sight he should be uncomfortable before many hours had passed.

He determined to try a little experiment of his own. He got a glass and filled it with gasoline from the tank. Then he chuckled.

"See here, Mister Poor," he said, holding out the glass. "If that stuff ain't floatin' on water I'll eat me bonnet!"

He was right. Water had got into the tank and was getting into the engine so that nothing more than a snort and a wheeze could be produced.

"Once more does commonsense win over the highbrow bookworms," announced Ole. "We're learning faster right out here than ever we did in Mahan Hall."

"A certain kind of knowledge," admitted Tom. "Which is the reason a naval officer has got to be a jack of all trades."

Next morning Tom was awakened by Jimmie tugging at his shoulder. "They've come out!" the old fellow exclaimed.

"Who's come out? Where?" Tom had forgotten that the true purpose of the expedition was to capture an enemy.

"Them bootleggers!"

He shook Ole and dashed up on deck. The sun was not up yet. Way over by Kent Island in the crimson glow of the dawn rode the white hull of a small trim craft at anchor.

"It's them, all right!" agreed Ole excitedly.

Through the glasses could be seen several men on the deck of the suspicious craft. Soon after sunrise a boat pulled ashore from her and returned an hour later. Distance was too great to show whether any contraband was taken aboard or not.

"We'll have to run in closer," suggested Tom.

So anchor was got up and the Bugeye swung in towards the yacht. Care was used to take a course that would indicate that she was a fishing boat and had no interest in any other vessels.

Very soon it was evident that the yacht was a bootlegger without a shadow of a doubt. Every time her boat returned the men on deck could be plainly seen carrying aboard a dozen or so cases.

"Gosh! And they do it in broad daylight!" Tom's convictions about criminals were that they did the main part of their dirty work under the cover of the night.

"Why not?" asked Jimmie. "We're supposed to be a bunch of ignorant fishermen who ain't got any idea what goes on in this here Bay besides the fishes we're after."

Near sunset the Bugeye was brought to anchor around a little sand spit low enough for a watch to be kept upon the bootlegger. As she was evidently going to spend the night there, the two boys determined to slip aboard and look her over. Surely in this deserted spot there would be no question in the criminal's mind about the foolishness of keeping a watch.

By ten o'clock all cabin lights were out on the yacht. Only a dim anchor lantern marked the spot where she swung easily to the tide.

Tom and Ole lowered the little dory with which they were equipped and rowed softly toward her.

"Brought my gun along to be on the safe side," said Tom.

"Me too," said Ole. "But for heaven's sake don't start anything like that unless you're sure we're on the right trail."

"But there's not the shadow of a doubt," Tom replied "Why we even saw them putting their stuff aboard."

Still Ole was skeptical about the identity of the suspects. He was until the dory was brought silently alongside and he slipped on deck. There before his eyes and piled to the rail were several dozen cases. He put his hand down in the darkness and felt the contents.

"Bottles!" he whispered. "Guess you're right."

"Guess we'd better have a look forward and see how many there are," was the low reply.

The two started a stealthy tiptoeing towards the pilot house. In the utter darkness except for the dimmest starlight objects about the deck were practically invisible.

Suddenly Tom put his foot down on something soft. Before he could remove it his ankle was grasped in an iron grip and a harsh voice cried, "Who's that?" immediately several other sleepers about the deck stirred and grunted.

In the fraction of a second Tom realized how small was his chance of escaping. But he took what chance there was and acted. Throwing his entire weight upon the imprisoned foot he swung savagely with the other. His toe encountered what felt like a human jaw. There was a groan and a thud, and the hand on his foot fell limp.

"Quick! Overboard!" he hissed to Ole. Already the crew were awake. Cries of "Stop them! Thieves!" rang in their ears as they plunged over the rail.

Tom swam under water as long as he could. Then

he came up easily so as to avoid a splash. Ole was nearby. "Make for the spit!" he told him. Then dived under. The whine of a rifle bullet sang past his ear and plunked into the water not five feet away.

By the time the pair had made the beach, lights were all about the yacht's deck. Clank of her chain could be heard. She was getting under way. Ole and Tom raced across the sandy neck and reentered the water.

By the time they clambered aboard the Bugeye, the yacht was standing out. Then they stood down in their direction.,

"Slivering bullropes!" cursed Jimmie Reeftackle. "And now haven't you young pirates let yerselves in for a mess!"

Ole and Tom followed his bony finger. The yacht had broken out her mainsail and jib and was crowding on all speed. A small searchlight swept the water.

"They're after ye!" yelled Jimmie and rushed forward to the anchor gear.

While Tom and Ole frantically loosed the sails, the Bugeye was set adrift by freeing her anchor. As she fell away into the wind the men aboard the yacht opened fire. All three of the pirates immediately took cover behind their tiny deckhouse. Jimmie managed the lines by leading them to a cleat near the mast.

In order to pass clear into open water, the Bugeye had to run within a few hundred yards of the entrance. Fortunately, however, the smugglers, in their haste to overtake them, cut the spit too close and ran aground.

The fire slackened while all hands worked to get her off. Meanwhile, the Bugeye fled like a bird before the wind. As she wore no lights she soon disappeared in the darkness.

"Say," breathed Ole when the yacht was well behind, "I'm of no mind to go on with this fool game. Guess we're able to get through Annapolis without capturing any bootleggers."

"Or needing any rewards," agreed Tom.

Jimmie Reef tackle chuckled over their change of heart. "Guess you're right," he said. "But I'd liked to have had some real old rum for myself."

"You old scoundrel!" gasped Tom. "So that's why you put us up to this job. Just for punishment I sentence you to get us up the Severn River and home by morning."

And he did. Sleepy as the two boys were, they stayed awake and watched their companion renew the skill of his windjamming days. Hour by hour the wind increased. Yet not an inch of canvas did he take off. The lee rail was out of sight in the foaming water for minutes at a time.

By eight o'clock they had turned over the Bugeye to her owner and were safely back in quarters changing into civilian clothes for leave.

Near the main gate Lieutenant Ruggles stopped them. "Just the lads I can use," he said.

"At your service, sir," said Tom and saluted.

"An old friend of mine has just arrived and he wants me to bring two people out to lunch."

"Out where to lunch, sir?" asked Tom with a sudden sinking of his heart.

"To his yacht. He's Marbury Jackson, the New York capitalist. Was a graduate of Annapolis back in the seventies and went out into civil life after a few years at sea. Made a fortune in oil."

Thus, to their dismay the two pirates found themselves

a few hours later boarding the very yacht they had so barely escaped the night before.

Would they be recognized? And what about the cases? Could it be possible the respectable Marbury Jackson would descend to any such crime against the laws of his country. But then it was a well-known fact that men who had been accustomed to liquor for years would go to almost any length to get it now.

The cases had disappeared from deck! And, to Ole's and Tom's great relief, there was no sign they had been recognized.

"Strange he doesn't say anything about it," whispered Tom as they descended to the beautiful panelled mess room.

"Guess he doesn't wish it known that he's a smuggler," replied Ole. "That's the way I size the thing up."

But the facts were sufficient to clear both middies' minds:

"One of the reasons I wanted you aboard," explained the old gentleman, "is connected with a little unpleasantness we had last night. I always stop down there at Piny Point for some of that sulphur water the springs there give. Got ten cases of it yesterday."

Tom's foot touched Ole's under the table. In the language of feet it said: "Gosh, what a whopper!"

"And last night," continued the capitalist, "we were attacked by a gang of thieves. We chased them away and would have caught their craft, a small Bugeye, and had them all hung if my fool of a navigator hadn't put us on the beach."

"Hung!" gasped Ole, unconscious that he spoke.

"Yes, hung!" The owner brought his fist down fiercely. "And that's why I felt the need of your company today."

I wanted to realize that we are developing the very men who will make piracy, even such as I met last night, absolutely impossible!" He glared first at Tom and then at Ole.

After lunch he led the boys to a storeroom forward. Without explanation he unlocked the door and opened it. "It would please me," he said, "if you young gentlemen would examine these bottles and see if they contain anything but water."

Tom took one out with a worried look. He wasn't thinking of bottles.

"On the other hand," continued the speaker, "I have a bottle of scotch whiskey in my cabin. Or I did have. Jimmie Reef tackle—my old friend Jimmie—drank the most of it. Took half a bottle this morning before he would tell me who the pirates were I didn't catch."

"We thought we were right, sir," ventured Tom.

"So did the Kaiser!" was the stern reply.

CHAPTER XXII

THE HOP

SECOND-CLASS winter which followed was severest of all. New branches of professional studies developed in nearly all of the academic departments. New lines of engineering and mathematics cropped up. Even the "star" midshipmen, those standing highest in their class, were worried.

"And on top of it all, I've got to have still more trouble!" groaned Tom.

"Go on, you grouch," commented Ole, his nose buried in a calculus.

Tom remained silent. Commander Rudd, the Commandant's aide, had called him in just before supper and added the final burden to his already overwrought nerves.

"Says he's got a girl for me!" Tom shook his fist at his roommate. "Can you beat that?"

Ole dodged in mock terror. "Well, don't punish me," he protested.

Tom rose and began to pace the floor. He faced a new problem. His ill-humor was not really directed at the Commander or the girl, but at himself. In the past two years he had from time to time encountered a number of the nice girls about Annapolis. And he had in a quiet way made friends with some of the ladies of the station on occasions of the infrequent official receptions. But always had he been supported by safe numbers of other midshipmen present.

Now for the first time he was charged with the re-

sponsibility of actually taking a girl to one of the winter dances, or "hops" as they are called. And he was mortified to feel so unequal to the occasion. Commander Rudd had been very reasonable in his request.

"Poor," he said, "you won't mind having dinner next Saturday night at my quarters, will you?"

"Why certainly, sir," assented Tom with undisguised delight. Very fresh was his memory of Maryland fried chicken the Commander's cook was famous for.

"And, another thing," continued the crafty Commander. "My niece is down for the week-end. It would please me if you took her to the hop afterward. I know you will like her."

"Thank you, sir, for choosing me," Tom managed to say. His voice sounded dry and unnatural to himself, but he had a dim feeling of pride that he could manage to produce such a reply when in truth he would much rather have said: "It is an honor, sir, but really girls are not in my line. They're nice enough. Sometimes I wish I knew more of them. But it has just happened that I have never had the opportunity to get used to their ways and I—well, I'd rather not tackle this job if you would just as soon let me off."

And now to Ole he was trying to lead up to asking for help. Before he could go on, the door opened and Bob Cary entered.

"Hello, men!" The newcomer waved a card. "Got a treat for you both."

Ole laid down his pencil and looked Bob Cary steadily in the eye for about ten seconds. Then he said:

"Stack of bibles, Bob, is she as pretty as that?"

"Cross my heart and the royal yard!" promptly swore the gallant midshipman. "She's the daughter of a Con-

gressman. He is one of the big men in the government. Probably in line for the next cabinet."

Tom drank in the rapid words. It was a new game to him, this dance card business, and here was exactly the training he needed.

"That's what you told me about Miss What's-Her-Name's father, King Pin of the Nation and all that," said Ole grimly. "But how about this girl herself? I'm not going to dance with her father."

Bob advanced to the table and leaned over confidentially. "A single word about her is sufficient," he explained in a low tone. "It is rumored that she is to be Harrison Fisher's model for the Navy Christmas calendars this year. Now will you have one—or do I and my lady stand insulted by your quibble?" He drew himself up dramatically.

Tom didn't wait to hear more. In a step he reached his desk, drew out a small blank dance card, and abruptly left the room.

"Is he sore because I didn't ask him?" asked Bob. "I thought he didn't go in for this hop gag."

"He doesn't. But tonight he's in the same boat with you, old man. Lovely girl with a famous father; never set eyes on her, but got to escort her to the gym and see she has every dance taken. Guess he's caught a hint from your line."

Ole was right. By the time he finished speaking Tom had reached the room of a certain "Pip" Colby who from time to time had given evidence of his admiration for all Tom said or did.

"'Evening, Pip."

"'Evening, Tom. What's up, you look busy as a merry little hive?"

"Nothing much, except everybody's chasing me for a dance with a girl I've got down for this week's hop. Just wanted to be sure you didn't lose out."

"Why thanks, old top. Sure is decent of you to think of me."

"Yes, Pip. She's the niece of Commander Rudd. Father's got a yacht or something like that up in New London. Shall I put you down for two?"

"You bet. Say, man, do you think the old skate might be in port when the practice squadron is up there next summer?"

"Like as not."

Again in the corridor Tom stood still for a moment and mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. He could scarcely believe the ease with which he had been able to palm off two dances on his friend.

It never occurred to him to picture the girl exactly. He recalled vaguely all those he had met in the past, how they had stared at him with a kind of chilly curiosity as if he had been some sort of animal out of the zoo. Without exception they had always made him feel as if he ought to hunt up a mirror as soon as possible and find out whether it was his hair standing on end or his collar upside down that was making them look so secretly amused at his appearance.

Not till years afterwards did he realize that in the first instant of encounter the girls had felt exactly the same doubt and discomfort that he did. But when they quickly discovered that Tom Poor lacked the experience or the social poise to do anything but stand silent and embarrassed, they immediately had the fun of making the best they could of his discomfiture.

So now it was natural that Tom should have in mind

one of those superior creatures who might wear pretty clothes and have plenty to say, but not for a moment miss the chance to make him as uncomfortable as possible.

"I'm game," he told himself through his teeth. "And, after all, it's the naval officer's duty to take part in things like dances and receptions. On the other hand I certainly am going to give the gang a chance to help me out."

And he did. In the space of half an hour he had filled every single line on the dance card. He could hardly believe it except that he had made each midshipman write his name opposite the dance numbers as a sort of receipt for the agreement.

"Guess I'm pretty good at talking up a thing," he mused on his way back to his room. But he would have thought differently if he could have heard what went on behind him in each study he had visited. It was something like this:

"Well, what do you know about Tom Poor taking a girl to a hop!"

"Thought he was a woman-hater."

"Woman-hater nothing. That's where you don't understand his kind. Has sense enough to stand back and wait till he can get a pippin for a partner. I jumped at the chance. Would have taken five if he had let me!"

Poor Tom. He had yet to learn the lesson that a midshipman's reputation for taking pretty girls to hops is almost as delicate as his reputation for honor. Let him lug in one single "gold-brick" and forever afterward his friends are leery of his taste. His only hope then is to trade dance for dance with another man, knowing that

sooner or later the other man will palm off his "brick" as well.

Two days later a note from the Commander warned Tom that the young lady was due on the afternoon train from Washington and suggested that she might like to see the Academy grounds. The Commander himself would be absent on duty, but Tom would find her pleasant company and would certainly oblige his superior officer.

"Pleasant company!" growled Tom. "Wonder what he thinks I am?"

Tom found out soon enough what he was: "Plain, simple, undecorated idiot!" were his own words.

This was the way it came about: At three he was at the station. His face was long, gloomy, doleful, and cross. His expression was exactly as if he had given up a date to see the Army-Navy football game in order to be a pall-bearer at a funeral.

The train came to a grinding stop. It was nearly full of girls down for the evening festivity. There were tall girls and short girls, fat ones, skinny ones, and in-between-ones. All wore their trimmest hats and suits. The array of brightly colored headgear roused even Tom from his misery.

"She will wear a brown suit," Commander Rudd had told him. "And is about medium height and medium looks."

Tom counted *eleven* girls that answered exactly to that description!

He thought he spied a twelfth when suddenly someone said: "You're Tom Poor, aren't you?"

Tom spun around to find himself looking into what

he thought were the brownest and shiniest eyes he had ever seen. It was a girl in a *blue* hat. And she was smiling. But she somehow wasn't grinning in that high-and-mighty way that all the other girls had.

"But he said a brown hat," faltered Tom, taking off his own bonnet.

"Oh, I just told him that," chuckled the girl, "because I wanted to have a first look at the man who was to have charge of me. I wanted to see exactly how full of grief he would be over the prospect of taking a strange girl to a hop!"

To his surprise Tom found speech came easily. "Grief is the word!" he exclaimed. "Did you ever try a dark horse yourself?"

"Hitched to one now," was the prompt reply. She took his arm as a signal for him to plow through the gay multitude.

At Commander Rudd's quarters the girl insisted on having a bite to eat. Tom detested tea but took a cup for company. From somewhere his companion dug up half a huge chocolate cake. While he ate she talked.

"I like midshipmen," she said as simply as if she were remarking that it was going to rain next day.

"Do?" popped Tom between bites.

"Yes. You're different from the men at other colleges. You know my brother is a junior at Princeton."

Tom looked at her. He had suddenly remembered that he had absolutely forgotten her name.

"Yes, they are so much older than you midshipmen are. I mean they always seem to know exactly what to do and what to say, and how to do it and say it."

"Jones, Smith, Crosby, Robinson," Tom was repeat-

ing to himself. For the life of him he couldn't bring back that name.

"Of course I realize the reason for it," went on the girl. "Uncle Ruddy has told me about it. He says they teach you to be gentlemen here, to dance and have proper manners. But the system is too mathematical. It's too military. All day, every day, but Sunday you work and study. Then a cruise for more work and study all summer long—with maybe a few days here and there for small afternoon parties ashore. And then but a month to go back home to Maine or Texas or wherever you come from. That's what keeps you *young* and different."

"Holmes, Hammond, Rogers, Butler," ran Tom's mind in time with his cake-filled jaws.

Suddenly he waked up to two facts: First, he could eat no more cake; second, this girl was easy to talk to. She was the kind who probably wouldn't mind being asked what her name was. He tried her.

"Elsie Pepper," she laughed. "I was wondering when you were going to identify me."

"By George!" was Tom's prompt thanks, "you're the first girl I ever met in my life whom I would dare ask her name."

Miss Pepper rose. "Now I know you're a sailor, sir," she declared, "because you have begun to blarney me."

This was the one stroke necessary to create a new self-possession in Tom. He had at last fooled a woman into believing he had the courage to flatter! At least so he thought. It never entered his mind that Commander Rudd had written his niece:—

"Poor is a nice chap. A bit too much of an athlete

and a man's man though. If you are nice to him I believe he will be good company. Jolly him along. He is going to be a leader when he becomes a first-classman next year and you will help him by bringing him out a bit. Some day he will thank you for it."

Thus Tom, all unconscious that he was receiving an essential part of his education, led the girl through the grounds. When he discovered his friends looking hard at the girl and not at him, he began to give her a few sidewise glances himself. He found that he had not half appreciated how pretty she was. The thought of it gave him a glow of satisfaction. He realized that none would see him without being inclined to compliment the taste of Tom Poor in girls.

"Guess they will realize now why I don't take the trouble to bother with the usual kind," he thought complacently.

He took her back just in time for him to reach supper formation. Soon as ranks were broken he dashed up and jumped into his dress uniform. For an unusual length of time he worked over his hair. Never before had he realized that there was a cowlick behind that persisted in sticking straight into the air. Finally, with the aid of Ole's mirror and a cake of soap, he managed to plaster the lock in place.

When he reached Commander Rudd's house, Miss Pepper had not come down stairs.

"Like her?" asked the officer.

"Yes indeed, sir," exclaimed Tom with more enthusiasm than he meant. He could feel his face getting hot.

The Commander kindly looked aside and continued: "I knew you would, Poor. She's a good sort. I have no-

ticed that you don't attend many hops. You should. Possibly girls don't appeal to you much. I can remember the time when I thought they were silly bores. But you will find as time goes on that you will be thrown a great deal with women in the social life the Navy brings. It is necessary for you to understand them not only to be able to entertain them, but because there are times when women have a considerable hand in the destinies of both men and governments."

A light step sounded in the hallway. The curtains parted and a vision in white satin stood before the two men. "Aha!" laughed the lady, "lecturing the young sailor on the wiles of women?"

"Pretty nearly," agreed the Commander. "He may have to buy a million dollar gown like that one of these days!"

The girl put her head on one side and looked gravely at Tom. "Let's see," she said slowly, "you are something of a mathematician, aren't you, Mr. Poor?"

"Finished calculus, and just starting mechanics," replied Tom, quite off his guard.

"Then tell me, please sir, how many times the pay of an ensign in the Navy goes into a million dollars?"

But the jibe didn't hurt. Somehow nothing she said did hurt. Tom joined heartily the laugh that followed. Then dinner was announced.

A week later he tried to remember whether it was chicken or turkey he had to eat that night. He couldn't. Miss Pepper was the only image that remained.

Which explains the real tragedy of the evening: At nine he and she started for the gymnasium where the hop was held. As they approached the great granite building and the strains of the magnificent Annapolis marine

band floated out over the dark campus, he began to wish they still had ten miles to go.

Tom left his partner at the door of the dressing-room. As he turned to give his hat and coat to the attendant he found himself confronted by about a dozen midshipmen.

"Any dances left?" asked one.

"Don't forget those two of mine!" warned another.

"Just one more, Tom," pleaded a third earnestly.

Then the horrible truth flashed over him: He had bargained away every single dance with the girl. In his cocksure opinion that all women were alike Tom Poor had not only arranged to treat this one with rudeness by not dancing with her himself, but he had deprived himself of what he would at that moment have given the friendship of every man he faced for.

But the code held. He had parcelled out the dances. He had to stand by and take his medicine. He took it. Through the whole sad evening he stood in the stag line and watched Miss Pepper dance and talk and sit, and dance again without his help. If she thought anything of this queer arrangement she made no sign.

Only on the way home she once took his arm for a few steps and said: "Really, Tom Poor, wasn't it just that I was a dark horse that made you so foolish?"

"Please forgive me," begged Tom. It was all he could say. "Aren't you coming again?"

"Next year," was the regretful answer.

"I'd wait a million!"

"Sailor talk again?"

"Oh, I *am* a fool!" groaned Tom.

CHAPTER XXIII

AT HIS OWN GAME

TOM's chance came at the beginning of first-class year.

The day the brigade reported back from September leave, all hands clustered around the bulletin boards to see who had got the coveted appointments as cadet officers.

The Annapolis brigade is divided into four battalions, each battalion in from four to eight companies. The Brigade Commander as well as commanders of battalions, are chosen from the first class. These honors are based upon the midshipman's all around record. The "Five Striper," as the Brigade Commander is called from the five stripes on his arm, is usually an athlete, a man of the highest academic standing, and popular both with the midshipmen and the officers.

Tom and Reggie each got three stripes; that is, each was appointed a company commander. Each had some popularity and each had an athletic record. But Tom's standing in the class studies was not high enough to warrant a higher rank; Reggie's limited athletics and one-sided popularity were against him.

The two room-mates were even more pleased than the honored ones. Said Ole Hansen:

"Fine byzonis, Tom old scout! Now you will be able to give 'em a man's work when it comes to drill. You've got the endurance to lead 'em to Chicago and back on the same march!"

Bob Cary was less extravagant, though equally en-

thusiastic. "It may be silly," said he, "but, Reggie, I'm hanged if I don't envy the way you'll be able to bust out there at dress parade and march up and down where all the girls can see you!"

"Piffle!" returned Reggie. "Is that the kind of ambition you've got?" Reggie tried hard to forget he'd had exactly the same ambition for three years.

Tom probably got the hunch about his chance first.

"How about this company competition?" he asked Ole.

"Same as usual. Just another way to make it impossible for any midshipman to escape athletics of some sort."

"I know, but what are the chances this year?"

Ole thought for a minute, then got out a pencil and paper and began to figure. He shook his head.

"Looks like the tenth company's got the prize. They have more of the star athletes with them than any other."

"Who's the three striper?"

"Van Brunt."

"The heck he is!" Tom sprang to his feet. "And just for that I'm going to show him where to get off!"

"Just for that—" chimed in Ole, "he didn't pick his company. It was assigned to him. It's up to him to make what he can out of it."

"Which is what I'm driving at," was the enthusiastic response. "Here am I with the fourth company and not an athletic star among 'em, save possibly myself. We haven't got the spirit and we haven't got the men."

"You haven't got a show is what I'd say," growled Ole.

Tom rubbed his hands. "That's the very finest fix I could be in. I swore I'd beat Van Brunt at his own game. This is exactly the kind of game he's a top-

notcher in: the kind where it takes brains instead of beef, the kind where a fellow has to be a strategic sort of cuss to win out!"

Tom sat down and began to figure himself. He laid out a list of all the items that count in the year's company competition. First were the teams. Company championship in football, baseball, swimming, track, and all the other games each counted ten points for first place, seven for second, and five for third.

"It'll be the same as other years," he told Ole. "Nearly every company will have its specialty. One gang will turn out a cracker-jack company football team; another a first-class baseball team; another a cutter's crew. But none of them will take the trouble to try for more than one or two lines of sport, certainly not all."

"Too much work for the company's commander," commented Ole. "He's the bird that has to organize and put through all the teams."

"Well, I'm going to skin that Van Brunt aggregation if I have to stay up nights to do it!" vowed Tom.

Reggie was equally certain about his own victory, though far from putting the same determination into it.

He did some adding himself. He did it in his head—which was the kind of a head he had, instead of the slower but surer brains of Tom Poor.

"Like taking candy from a child!" he told Bob Cary. "The chief things that count when you add them all up together are the athletes. Each man on a varsity team counts five for the company; each on a second team counts three."

"But suppose some company works up a lot of good company teams?"

"Not a chance. Too much trouble, besides the brains

required. Even Tom Poor himself couldn't pull a stunt like that. And when you add all the stars I've got—Calkins and Bullock on the varsity football, Gerard and Hope on baseball, Faraday crew, and at least five others, they stand for a score that can't be beat."

Tom let his company have a week to get used to him. There were over eighty midshipmen in it of the four classes. Yet despite the company occupied one floor of one wing of Bancroft Hall, there was a diversity of interests among the eighty that made Tom's task a well-nigh impossible one.

One night he called them together.

"Fellows, we're going to win the company colors," he announced.

"You bet, Tom!" agreed one of his own class, a "clean sleever," one who was denied the privilege of wearing any stripes because he had received no rank in the brigade.

Tom shook his head. "No, we're going to win without depending on me—except in a general way."

"But places on the varsity teams count a lot!" protested a second classman.

"I know they do. And that's just the reason I am anxious to clean up without taking the velvet a few stars stand for."

The clean-sleever pushed forward. "Don't be stubborn, Tom. There are at least three companies who have twenty points or more just to start with."

"Yes, and suppose you were out for the heavyweight boxing belt—as I believe you were. And you figured you could win it every year because you weighed thirty pounds more than anyone else. Suppose you counted on those thirty pounds so much that you didn't take the

trouble to train. And then someone came along whom you hadn't heard of, who weighed about as much, and had trained besides. Then, where'd you be?"

The company laughed. Tom's point was a good one. But where did his outfit come in? He soon told them.

"My plan is simple," he continued. "But it must be kept quiet. We're going to be like the fellow who weighs pretty nearly as much as the champion but does extra training on the side to win out."

"But we haven't got the makin's of a team of any sort!"

"You're wrong," returned Tom stoutly. "Every man here has had from one to three years of good hard drill, clean living, best sort of food, sea cruises, and actual gym and field instruction in at least one branch of athletics. That's the Annapolis course alone. Now what is the difference between you people and the varsity teams?"

"Fifteen million miles, I'd say," muttered the cleansleeper.

"Just where you're wrong," laughed Tom. "The difference except for a few pounds here and there is chiefly in training. Why, when I used to be in the fleet, we'd have divisions aboard ship who couldn't have touched this company. Yet they used to go out and clean up the championships at Guantanamo regularly as clockwork. What made 'em do it? Simply that here and there was a divisional officer who recognized what real training meant. He could have made a high-class football team out of a lot of boarding-school girls—so long as they'd do exactly what he said."

Though unconvinced, the company liked Tom well enough to try the scheme he had suggested.

"Prove it with a football team," suggested Ole, "and they'll be docile for the other lines."

"Exactly what I'm going to do," declared Tom.

First of all he measured up and weighed the eighty-five midshipmen. One at a time he got a line on their speed and other physical qualities.

His own varsity football duties—he had been made captain of the team—kept him from handling the problem personally. He divided the company into four sections and appointed leaders instead. Each leader was given the job of turning out a certain number of football men.

Word soon got about that certain companies were going in for football. This discouraged many other companies from trying that line.

"Captain of the Navy team ought to have a company team," was Reggie's personal consolation.

"But he's not playing himself." Bob felt somehow that it was possible to take too much for granted.

Late in the season on a Wednesday afternoon, the championship was played off. The eighteenth company had real talent in it. It had heavy men and fast men, men whose football training had put them on the regular squads. They had easily won all the games up to date.

Tom's team was much smaller. Some had never kicked a football over a goal post in their lives up to the present year. But they had speed. Their plays were smooth-oiled as clockwork. And some of their forward passes and other specialties would have done justice to the Navy team itself.

By sheer merit they also had won up to date. And they faced the far heavier eighteenth-company team with a feeling of collected confidence.

The eighteenth-company team won. But it barely won. And when the game was over there two kinds of public opinion:

The brigade said: "That team Tom Poor made out of his company just shows what an expert football man can do with poor material."

Tom said—and a good many in the fourth company agreed: "If we could make a football team out of this motley crowd, there's no reason why we can't make a basketball team and a lacrosse team, and maybe even some of the other kinds of teams!"

Which was pretty nearly what happened. And, because the company did what Tom asked and kept pretty tight-mouthed about the scheme, the Brigade didn't notice what was going on. The fourth company won first in only one sport—in swimming. That was pure luck too. But in every other line it pulled down a quiet second or third.

And the points kept mounting slowly but surely.

Late in the spring Bob happened to be in conference with Lieutenant Ruggles over some baseball work. He had been elected baseball manager by his class. Lieutenant Ruggles was the Navy Athletic Association representative for baseball.

"By the way, Cary," said the officer, "have you noticed how the company competitions are going? Most surprising thing you ever saw."

"In a general way," replied Bob. "I know we've got the prize pretty well cinched in the tenth company with all the varsity men we've got. Then there's the eighteenth who have pulled down the football and track firsts, as well as boxing and wrestling championships."

Ruggles smiled. "What do you think about the fourth company, Poor's aggregation?"

"Not a whole lot," laughed Bob. "He's gotten trimmed in everything he's gone after. First there was football, the eighteenth won that."

"But the fourth got second."

"Yes," assented Bob without noticing the other's look. "And then he lost the basketball series by a bad beating towards the end."

"But he won third place."

Bob looked up suddenly. "Why, come to think about it, he's pulled down second or third in just about every series that's come off to date!"

"Correct!" said the officer. "And what is more, he is now twelve points ahead of the nearest company."

"It can't be so!" exclaimed Bob. He seized the list of records. "Well, by George! If that wouldn't gol-swizzle you!"

"Van Brunt's second still," the other reminded him. "If he wins the company drill and the baseball series he will beat Poor. Otherwise Poor will win. And just between you and me, the man who has got the brains to develop a high average in a crowd, whether it's a ship or a college or a company of midshipmen, is the one who deserves to win."

Bob hurried back to Reggie and told him the extraordinary news.

"Just waked up to the facts myself," was the unexpectedly calm reply. Bob himself was not surprised to hear his roommate say he'd discovered the truth without help. That was Reggie's way: he was always using the "inside of his bean" as Bob called it.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

Reggie grinned confidently. "I've got him yet. Don't know but what it's more fun to let him come so close to

winning after all. I have a hunch that this company competition is his idea of beating me at my own game as he calls it. It is too," he went on a little vainly, "in that it is a matter of brains to carry off as complicated a campaign as this."

"Swabo on the highbrow stuff!" commented Bob, "and let's have some proof that you've got a chance."

"The baseball is cinched," was the prompt reply. "I've got the regular varsity coach to handle our company team by tipping him off to a prep school job for his brother."

"That still leaves the company drill to be won."

"Right. And it's going to be won by yours truly. But, though it grieves me to say it, my handsome friend, I must conceal from you the great device by which I intend to rub Tom Poor's nose in the dirt at the company drill."

Bob was delighted. "Gosh!" he cried; "I don't care what it is you're going to do it with so long as you do it. Fact, it's more exciting just to have it a secret."

The word got about just as Reggie expected. His company, the tenth, was going to have the big coach train it in baseball. This quickly made most of the other companies drop out. The fourth, Tom's, hung on till the end and managed to scramble out with a third, the tenth winning first in the series by a large margin.

Final victory now lay between the fourth and the tenth, with only one competition to decide which was to be the best company in the brigade, which was to be the color company for the ensuing year, which was to be marched up in front in June Week and receive the plaudits of the multitude, which—the privileges seemed innumerable.

The whole brigade took sides.

"Poor can handle his men best," claimed some.

"But Van Brunt is the quickest thinker—can get an order off in half the time Poor can. And he understands the theory of the game better."

Others thought Tom's popularity with the officers would tend to make them favor him. "Got a stand-in for his work in the Army-Navy game," most people admitted.

"But Van Brunt is the best appearing cadet officer on parade—the Supe once said so in public."

So it went. No one was willing to bet very much of their monthly money on either company. And yet, despite the sensational crew races, baseball games, hops, and all the other thrilling features of the Annapolis spring the contest grew in public interest as the time went on.

It was something nearer home than outside games; something that all hands had participated in through the year. "Like a couple of your own brothers having a scrap!" one man described it.

"Or a civil war," added a more serious-minded lad. "Going out and mow down your own kind, and all that."

When the great day came for the competitive drill each company was like an armed camp. Its own territory was guarded from outsiders or anyone who might be a spy for the other side.

Three especially selected officers were detailed by the Superintendent as judges. Said one:

"It's going to be the same as every other year. The company that looks the best and keeps the best time is going to win."

He was half right at any rate. When the brigade came on the big parade ground and the first cheering had ceased, the competing companies had dwindled to four within fifteen minutes. These four were Tom's

and Reggie's and two others. The two others were in chiefly because their company commanders had not yet made any mistake in handling them and their appearance was good.

Then they fell out on some flaw or other leaving only the two rivals.

"Splendid!" declared the Commandant to his aide. "Both those lads have certainly got their men in apple-pie order!"

He was right. Reggie and Tom well realized that their year's work in the company fight would depend on today's contest. Each midshipman in each company wore a new cap, freshly pressed uniform, shoes polished till they shone. Each midshipman in the two companies looked as if he had just stepped out of the show window of a uniform tailor.

The band played. Two airplanes swooped overhead. The grandstands were crowded—cheering—waving. It was one of those days—those events—that live forever in the memory of a Navy man, or the girl he's brought to thrill at the gorgeous life he leads—or seems to.

Even the experts could detect no difference in the two companies. Like automatons the blue lines advanced and retreated, swung into fours and sections, and did all the other amazing evolutions possible to an infantry troop.

"It's a tie!" muttered one of the judges.

"Right!" agreed the second.

The third was silent. "No—look!" he exclaimed.

Tom's company was just ahead of Reggie's near the end of the field. The band was at the other. A stirring march was being played. It was the best tune known for keeping time to.

"Can't you see?" cried the judge. "The fourth company is losing step!"

He was right. As Tom approached the quarters he began to get an echo from the granite cliff formed by the terrace wall. Two music times were then apparent: one from the wall and one from the band. His men began to get out of step—half one time, half the other.

"Van Brunt wins!" exclaimed the first judge. "He's still in step!"

"The tenth wins!" someone took up the cry.

Signal was hoisted to this effect. Instantly the crowd broke into a roar of applause. Even the band was drowned out.

The winning company swung gaily down past the grandstand. "By George!" ejaculated the third judge, "They're still in step. And they can't possibly hear the music in all this uproar."

Suddenly the speaker sprang from his seat and rushed down the aisle. He leaped the fence and, to the amazement of the brigade, pushed himself squarely into the marching column. For a moment the company wavered. Then it lost step to a ragged humpety-hump that brought laughter in place of the cheers of the moment before.

The intruding officer tucked something like a small tin can under his arm and rushed back to the judges' stand.

"Here's the secret!" he panted. And held out a sort of small drum, a tom-tom that could be carried unseen in ranks.

"Well, I'll be hanged! It's a Filipino thumper or I'm a liar!" exclaimed the second judge.

Whereupon the third judge came to life and cried: "So he kept his own time—drummed it right in ranks! That's against the rules of the competition, isn't it?"

"No, but it's to be next year. And it's enough to make him lose this by such skulduggery. What do you say?"

The other two nodded, and a moment later a fresh burst of cheering brought Tom out of the trance of discouragement into which he had fallen.

"It's us!" yelled Ole. "They've reserved their decision! We win!"

The crestfallen Reggie shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"Who wants to be a soldier anyway!" he was reported to have remarked.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BATTLE

LIEUTENANT RUGGLES sprang the idea in the officers' mess. His first thought was how good a joke it would make. But a little discussion brought out the possibilities of a great and even thrilling event.

"Let's make them fight it out!" he announced.

"But they did. Poor's fourth company won the colors," was replied.

"Sure. But they tell me Van Brunt sneered at Poor for being a tin soldier. Said he could only drill. Wouldn't be able to make use of his ability when it came to the real thing."

"And now what?"

"Why the Admiral is having Hill and me arrange this sham battle for the last day in June week. Wants a lot of action—real guns firing and men dying, and all that. Finest chance in the world to let Tom Poor show his adversary that he can bring home the bacon on the firing line as well as at drill."

"You're a genius, Ruggles!"

So it came about that when the Five Striper called in all his company commanders and explained that the brigade was to be divided into two armies, he startled Tom and Reggie by saying:

"The fourth and tenth companies are to have the most spectacular job. They were picked because they stood

highest in company competition for the year. They are to battle for the capture of Hill Number Five, otherwise known to Anne Arundel County as Spinelli Farm."

"A little more detail," demanded Reggie with alacrity. Possibly this was going to be his chance to get even. Tom had beaten him at his game. It was now his turn to beat Tom at the game of force.

Reggie never knew till years later that Ruggles had planned the show entirely for Tom's benefit.

"It's like this—" the Five Striper held out a map. "The main armies are to fight on the ridge back of the old marine barracks. Whoever gets to the top of the ridge first will of course win. The rules forbid either force from starting up till the other force is out of cover. This information can be got only by holding a spot that commands both sides of the Ridge."

The speaker pointed to a black circle on his map marked "Hill No. 5."

"The fourth and tenth companies under Cadet Lieutenants Poor and Van Brunt will command the troops which will fight for this vantage point."

Next day Ole and Tom took a look over the ground. Though Tom was of course not in the joke, he had sense enough to realize that he was to have his chance to get back at Reggie for the taunt which had gone through quarters: "Tom Poor, the Tin Soldier!" It was a bitter reward for having won the competitive drill.

"Sure is a simple outlay!" exclaimed Ole.

"Got to be," replied Tom. "These visitors down to see the exhibition are not militarists. They want to hear the noise and see the smoke. That's about all."

"I get you. And the way I understand the plan is that the long ridge is the main battle field. Us two companies

are simply going to have a little private scrap of our own to see who gets the honor of sending the signal for his own forces to go over the top."

"Correct. And *we're* going to be the ones to signal because this is the very sort of business Van Brunt can never get through his head. He doesn't think physical strength counts for much of anything."

"But what chance have you to use hand to hand fighting?" Ole himself had always been a little doubtful of Tom's point of view. "If you start a free-for-all brawl up here, no one will be able to signal and the sham battle won't come off. Furthermore, one of your company commanders is likely to hit the pap for gumming the game."

Then briefly Tom sketched his plan to capture Reggie's scouts. "Of course he'll send out his best men, that varsity team gang one at a time to reconnoitre. I'll have a strong arm gang to capture them one at a time and tie them up. When the final rush comes his pillars of strength will have all been tied up and hove in the bushes."

Within an hour Reggie and Bob were also wandering about on the same mission.

"Got to snoop about a bit," explained Reggie. "Time has come when I've got to beat Tom Poor or leave Annapolis feeling he has put it over me on every public occasion."

Bob yawned. "What's the sense of that fighting stuff anyway. You lammed the nail on its bean when you said you didn't intend to be a soldier. Here we've been studying to be naval officers for four years and still we have to trot around on land and pull a lot of Army foolishness till we're so full of dust and chiggers there's no fun living!"

Reggie turned with a serious look. "Man, have you never heard of the battles the Navy's fought on land? Never has it come to your donkey ears how our gallant gobs took Vera Cruz? Why, it would have been six months before the Army could have packed their trunk and got there. That's half the fun of being in the Navy: variety every minute of the time! First a fleet action at sea, then an expeditionary party ashore!"

But for all his great ideas, Reggie took little interest in the details of the battle. His one engrossing desire was to "hang it on to Tom for having skinned him earlier in the week."

At ten A. M. of the day set, the brigade was divided and established half on each side of the main ridge on which the action was to be fought. Infantrymen were armed with Springfield rifles. The artillery had three-inch field pieces. Sufficient blank ammunition had been served out to destroy a goodsized army had there been lead in the shells instead of pasteboard wads.

The immense crowds of spectators were kept back of the danger line by an extra force of watchmen. Hundreds swarmed over the hospital grounds and even the bridge over the College Creek. The Marine band occupied the bandstand and kept up a gay martial serenade through the whole morning.

The fourth Company approached Hill No. 5 direct from the armory. The Tenth under Reggie had their instructions to make their way through the town of Annapolis.

On West Street Reggie encountered a parade. Unlike his own, its members were not in military uniform. Yet they wore their best clothes and colored ribbons, and some had hats with plumes in them.

"What's that?" Bob inquired of a bystander as he passed.

The civilian shook his head. "Don't know exactly, except it's some kind of wedding over at Spinelli Farm. Armenians I believe."

Bob passed the news along to Reggie as a matter of interest.

"Armenian wedding?" echoed Reggie. "Seems to me I saw one once. I wonder—" He slapped Bob on the back, a most unmilitary procedure. "By heck! I've got an idea!"

"You usually do sooner or later," admitted Bob. "Though I can't say it always works. Not another Filipino Tom-Tom I hope."

"No a bride and groom!"

Bob spent the rest of the march trying to worm Reggie's brainthrob from him, but without success.

Having reached the little valley on the far side of Hill No. 5. Reggie gathered his men about him and pointed to the cluster of farm buildings above him.

"Fellows," he said, "there's an Armenian, or some kind of 'enian, wedding going on up there. We're supposed to capture the hill itself and the Supe has got permission for us to use the pasture at one side of the house for our war game."

"Don't forget the time," warned Bob.

Reggie glanced at his watch. "Twenty minutes yet—keep your shirt on," he retorted. "Now my idea is to send some of you big bugs up as scouts. Soon as the wedding starts butt in on it. Throw mud, or do anything not too rough to attract their attention. When they get good and sore at you, beat it. Naturally Poor's fourth company will come along about the same

time. The Armenians will see their uniform and think they're us. Then there will be a big row. We won't even have to show up. While the Armenians are demolishing Poor and his gang, one of our signalmen can sneak up and send the signal."

This clear happy plan met the company's approval at once. Considerable applause broke out.

"Time now for a scout!" announced Reggie. "You first, Calkins."

The husky varsity football tackle unslung his rifle and started up the hill. With the caution of a trained Indian he took advantage of every bit of cover. Near the top he paused. No one was in sight. From the barn came sounds of music and revelry. The wedding had started. Now was the time for him to excite the foreigners against any midshipmen that might appear, particularly those of the unsuspecting fourth company.

Through an open door of the barn he could see the dancers and merry makers. A mud ball or two through this space and the sight of his uniform would be sufficient. He leaned over for a missile.

At the same instant a step sounded behind him. A heavy body threw itself upon his back. He was borne to the ground. There was a short sharp struggle. Despite his great strength, Calkins had no chance from the first. Five men were against him. And the fifth was Tom Poor himself.

"Tie him," ordered Tom. "And gag him," he added when the captive opened his mouth to yell.

When Calkins failed to return with any news Reggie sent his next best man, Bullock, half-back on the team. Surely he could handle any sort of foul play that his predecessor might have met.

Three minutes later he also lay trussed and gagged, Tom's strong-arm gang were certainly getting in their work!

In quick succession Reggie expended the remaining men whom he felt could cope with any defense Tom's crowd might be putting up. The last two he sent together and armed with clubs cut from the young oaks growing about.

Still none returned. And there were no joyous signs of rage from the wedding party that were supposed to be incited to murderous actions against any and all midshipmen.

Time was flying. If no signal were sent in ten minutes both sides of the main forces in the battle could start off together. Those depending upon Reggie would have lost all the advantage he had promised them.

"Guess I'll take a look myself," said Reggie. "There's something wrong going on up there. I don't know but what the fourth company may have taken possession already. Though I'm hanged if I can see where they'd get cover enough to hide themselves!"

"Better not," cautioned Bob. "If you get nabbed, we'll never hear the end of it."

But Reggie had better sense than to risk himself single-handed. "Here, Gerard and Hope," he called. "I want you two to go up there as if you were scouting. I'm going to take a side course and watch what happens."

The same thing happened as before. Only this time from a nearby tree Reggie watched the performance, saw his scouts overpowered and disposed of with the other helpless ones.

He looked at his watch. "Four minutes," he mut-

tered. "Guess Poor'll take his company up in force and capture the place."

At this instant a door near the end of the barn opened. One of the foreigners came out and went towards the house. He carried a milk pail. Through the open entrance Reggie saw a line of stalls.

Then he realized that this end of the barn was separate from the remainder of the building in which the wedding was being held.

"That's the stunt!" he exclaimed aloud, leaped to the ground and dashed back to his company.

"Fall in!" he shouted. "We've got just three minutes to win this battle, fellows! Follow me and do exactly what I say or we won't have the ghost of a show!"

He turned and started off around the hill at a trot. "Come on, and make as little noise as possible!" he shouted. Also he told off three more scouts to go up the same place as the first ones. "Bait!" he explained to Bob as he ran.

Just below the house he dodged off into the woods and up the hill. At the summit the company came out into the open yard.

"Speed now!" yelled Reggie.

The midshipmen dashed pell mell and without thought of military formation across the treeless space.

By the time the breathless company had reached the back end of the barn a shout was heard from the bottom of the hill at the other side.

The fourth company had seen them. Tom was absent; he was busy with his strong-arm gang. A minute and a half more he personally could leave the tying-up gang and send the wig wag to his "army."

Ole, second in command, took charge at once. He

realized that Reggie had thrown caution to the winds and was willing to risk an open battle in the farmyard.

"Don't like it though," thought Ole. "We had particular instruction not to go on the farm except in the pasture."

He raised his sword. "Forward, double time!" he shouted. And the fourth company leaped into stride with him. They all saw now the enemy tenth waiting near the barn.

Reggie gauged the oncoming mob. "Quick, Bob!" he commanded. "Slip the crowd round the corner and into that open door. I'm going to leave a squad of plebes here to be captured."

So as the charging company swept up the slope Reggie's men swiftly made their way around the corner of the barn and into the space of the cow stalls. Reggie entered last, pulled the door to, and bolted it after him.

"Here, Booth," he called to the company signalman, "beat it up through the loft and signal our forces to attack."

The midshipman scrambled up the loft ladder, floundered through the dusty hay, and in another moment was flashing the call to victory to the waiting army half a mile away. A distant cheering swept faintly back and brought a cool thrill up and down his spinal column.

By this time Ole and his winded troopers had reached the building. Roughly they surrounded the waiting dismal plebes and made captives of them.

"Where're the rest of the company?" roared Ole. "Tell us at once or we'll string you up to the nearest trees!"

"In the barn, sir," replied the plebe promptly as he had been told.

"Get 'em, fellows—send the signal—here you, go tell Mister Poor to come back at once!" The orders tumbled hurriedly from his lips.

Almost before he had ceased speaking, the company had dashed around the corner of the barn. Not even noticing the closed door behind which Reggie and his silent men stood grinning, the armed rioters galloped toward the main entrance. In a single rush they entered.

"Listen!" commanded Reggie sharply.

Came through the board partition a sudden ending to the music. Women screamed. Heavy thumps, loud cries, angry imprecations, sounds of a more real battle than even that planned on the Academy grounds resounded across the rafters of the great building.

Reggie held up his hand. "Men," said he, "there is a moment in every great campaign when to retreat is the only safe and sane procedure. That moment has arrived for the noble Tenth!"

"And, for the love of Mike, don't make any noise!" added Bob.

Reggie pointed over his shoulder. "Like to know how we'd ever disturb that din in there," he said.

With broad smiles of satisfaction the victorious company slipped quietly out and down the hill in the direction of the Naval Academy. Not a lad but would have hugged himself for thought of the mess to which he had abandoned his own schoolmates.

Dress parade had just begun when the Tenth marched triumphantly on to the field. In a few minutes the news had got about that this was the company responsible for

the master stroke which won the battle for—for no one knew nor cared which army.

A gay rattle of handclapping ran down the line of visitors.

After the parade the company commanders were called over to be congratulated by the Admiral for their work. The Fourth was still absent.

Reggie stood nearest the Admiral. Just then the Aide stepped up and saluted.

“Beg your pardon, sir, but a report has just come from police headquarters in Annapolis.”

“Good heavens! What’s up?” exclaimed the Admiral.

“Can’t quite make out, sir. Sounded like there was an Armenian massacre or something like that taking place at the Spinelli Farm!”

Reggie bit his lip till the blood came. If he could only go down under the bleachers and have the kind of terrific laugh that was threatening to burst his ribs.

CHAPTER XXV

THE TURRET

Two days before graduation the second squadron of the North Atlantic Fleet arrived in the Roads off Annapolis. Ships and men were scheduled to take part in the June Week exercises.

Ole received a note from his old friend Billings, three classes ahead of him. Billings was now an ensign on the *Pennsylvania*.

"Dear Mr. President," it ran "I've got a turret aboard this battleboat and I want to recruit some of your bunch in the Gunnery Department. We won the trophy last year and we hope to this—provided we can rake in a few of the right kind of men. I'll send a boat in for you and five more. Suggest Poor, Van Brunt, and Calkins. You can pick the others. Yours—for the Fleet—Bill."

Tom who had been listening, burst out laughing.

"The nerve of him—wanting to mix Van Brunt in with us!" Tom was still smarting under the jeers his men had received on their return from the so-called "Armenian massacre."

"Oh, piffle!" said Ole. "You had more fun out of that 'massacre' than Reggie did. You had all the excitement of the actual scrap!"

Tom shook his head. No real trouble had come from the escapade. But it was a doubtful glory to have been outwitted by an acknowledged inferior.

At nine the midshipmen stepped from the sea-wall into the battleship's fast picket boat. Out to the gray line of mammoth vessels of war they travelled silently. In the minds of each was thought of how soon he should become an integral part of one of these great fighting machines.

"Hello, you kids!" Billings greeted them.

"Good morning, sir." The dignity of the first-classman was not lost on the young officer who had already passed into the new mill, having entered at the bottom for a long climb to rank and command.

"Just wished you to have a look around the old craft," continued Billings.

"Not very old," muttered Tom, running a practised eye along the white decks and glistening guns.

"Old enough to be the best," was the quick retort. "Which is why I wanted you here. You know you can get orders to the *Pennsylvania* if the Skipper asks for you. The gunnery officer and I thought you'd be the very crowd we want."

As they walked about for a glimpse through the quarters, engine-rooms, and bridge, Billings and Ole fell back a bit.

"How's the old Navy School?" asked the former.

"Same as ever," was the absent reply. Then, realizing that now was the chance to unburden himself, Ole spoke his mind: "Bill, don't you know it won't do to have Van Brunt and Poor on the same ship?"

"Oh, chuck that scuttlebutt stuff and talk sense!"

"True, Bill. They're almost as bad as the day they entered."

"I don't believe it. Tell me now—and be fair—haven't they both been through the mill for four years mentally

and physically? Haven't they had one scrap after another—fists—wits—studies? And now haven't they got a certain respect for the wits of each other?"

Ole thought for a moment. "Yes, I guess they have. But that doesn't prevent each from thinking the other is a pretty weak fish, and behaving accordingly on every occasion."

Billings stepped up to Ole and banged him heavily on his back. "Just the opportunity!" he cried.

A bugle sounded. Men came running from hatches, up ladders, from galleys and gangways and decks. The morning turret drill was on.

Billings directed the five visiting first-classmen to follow him into the forward turret. They squeezed up through the little hole in the overhanging armor plate and found themselves in a closed box-like space. This was the protected room in which the crews worked. Gaping breeches of three fourteen-inch guns stood ready for their meal of nearly a ton of powder and projectile. Through each breech down the sixty-foot barrel could be seen the distant target at which the mammoth guns were trained.

Lieutenant Strake, the turret officer and boss of Billings, bustled in a few minutes later. He glanced over the waiting men, stripped to their waists, and asked sharply:

"Ready, Billings?"

"Ready, sir."

"Dummy charge, you know; bean bags in place of powder, of course. How is that elevating motor this morning?"

"Pretty good, sir. Not sparking so much." Billings didn't add that he and the turret captain had been up

half the night working over the wiring and armatures, and computing the losses that weakened the powerful mechanism just enough to disable the turret. He had long since come to realize that on a battleship of the line once a difficulty arises it must be fought and conquered with no thought of food or sleep.

A bell rang. "Stand by!" shouted the Lieutenant.

Men leaped to their stations. Motors and hoists were switched into rumbling buzzing action. The whole structure began a slow sure movement upon the exact line of the target nearly four miles away.

A second bell rang. "Load!" roared Strake.

Instantly fifty brawny sailormen sprang into action. The half-ton shell appeared from a yawning hole underfoot. With a crash it fell automatically upon a brass table. A mechanical rammer shot it with tremendous speed into the hungry gun. Four ponderous bags of smokeless powder followed without a moment's delay. Smash! Bang! The huge steel breech-plug swung shut.

"Thirteen seconds!" announced Strake from his stop watch. "You can do better than that."

Again the gun team braced. And again the gigantic charge issued from the lower regions of the battleship. The projectile rumbled upon the table. The rammerman shot forward his operating lever.

But this time the steel missile failed to hit its mark. To the amazement of the tensely watching midshipmen it trembled for an instant, wobbled sidewise, then shot with a terrific concussion against the solid wall of the gun's body and fell into the pit beneath. The rammerman had pressed his lever the fifth of a second too soon.

A man screamed in pain. He had been struck a glancing blow and, unbalanced, was flung to what seemed certain death.

"Silence!" roared Strake.

To a man the crew stood stock still.

"Motors off!"

Whirring gears and wheels came to a dead stop. Then, from the blackness could be heard the cries and groans of the two victims. One was stunned and helpless. The other lay pinned by the mass of metal that had fallen upon both legs, crushing them to a pulp.

"Overhead tackle," snapped the officer. "Stand by your chain hoist and lift. Here, Tomkins, call the sick-bay. Say send two stretchers."

Except for snapped "aye, aye, sirs!" the men jumped without a word to obey.

The turret captain brought a portable electric lamp. By its light it could be seen that the man pinned down could be freed only when the projectile was lifted. To do this a clamp must be put around the projectile's body. And to put the clamp on required that the 1400-pound mass be raised an inch.

Strake swiftly saw the danger. "Men," he said in quiet but incisive tones, "that clamp's got to go on. The shell is caught so that the slightest movement may dislodge it. The man who holds the clamp may be caught with poor McGregor. Will any of you volunteer to try it while I run the motor?"

At once there was a chorus of "I wills!"

"You understand that no one but myself and McGregor can run this motor—that I am not asking any of you to do what I myself wouldn't do?"

The instant response was a joy to hear.

By this time Billings had reached the upper level. He had sprung down immediately to the wounded man and administered first aid with a hypodermic injection to stop the pain.

"I believe I had better take the job, sir," he interrupted.

"Why?"

"Because I have been in this turret longer than any of these other men. I know the sound of that hoist motor to the finest note. Not one of this bunch can tell as well as I just exactly when to slip that clamp on."

There were several muffled protests about this not being an officer's job. But Strake shut them up with a curt:

"You realize the danger, Billings?"

"I do, sir."

"Very well then, stand by."

Billings lowered himself again beside the stricken man, now quiet from the opiate. The heavy shell clamp was passed down. He balanced it opposite the middle of the the projectile. To do this it was necessary for him to place his own hip directly beneath. If the mass slipped, as it threatened, he too would be caught, crushed, maimed.

"Ready, sir!"

Not a tremor or hesitation in the voice of the young officer. Not the slightest indication of the awful risk he was taking. Not a flicker of an eye to show what he knew as well as the dread-stiffened audience, that he had even chances of coming out a whole man.

"Here she goes!" Strake might have been tossing a pebble into the sea, so calm his words sounded.

The lever went forward half an inch. Nothing stirred.

"Touch her again, sir," came cheerily from the death-pit below.

Again the lever crept toward the spot at which it must move the motor a hair—and decide the fate of two men.

One of the midshipmen leaned faintly against the steel bulkhead. He could stand the strain no longer. The others were pale. Beads of perspiration stood out on Tom's forehead. Reggie's face looked exactly as if he were holding his breath.

Suddenly there was a slight metallic clink. The chain leading to the clamp tautened. "Now!" sang Strake, and shoved his lever to the furthest notch.

Something slammed. The thud of a body striking a metal surface sounded. Then:

"Got her, sir!" cried Billings. And half a minute later the pinned man was freed. Helping hands lifted him gently and passed him to the stretcher bearers who had arrived.

When the injured man had been cleared, Strake pulled out his stop watch. "Stand by to load!" he ordered.

"Not again!" groaned Tom. "And after what's just happened! How can they have the stomach for any more of it this morning?"

But to the visiting midshipmen's great astonishment, not only did the drill go on, but it continued for so long that they became tired just watching.

"Strake did it on purpose," Billings told his visitors when it was all over. He had taken them down to the junior officers' mess room and ordered up some ginger ale from the Filipino boy in charge of the canteen stores.

"But why?" asked Ole. "Seems to me after that nasty mess of an accident he would have called things off for the day."

"Yes," continued Billings, "but that is just where Strake gets his hold on his men. If he had let them go at the

time when they were shaken and nervous, he would have encouraged them to stop whenever any accident happened."

"But you don't have those often, do you?"

"Practically never. We haven't so much as cut a man's finger for the past year in the turret. But suppose we were on the target range, even in battle, and there was real powder being bounced about. Suppose a man got laid out and the others fell into a panic. Then where'd we be?"

The truth suddenly dawned on the midshipmen. Though the drill had been but that of the usual routine, they had seen the truest test of an officer: Strake had held his men under his thumb in a crisis; and he had carried them through to further work as if nothing had happened.

"The thing we're meant for—I see it now!" exclaimed Reggie suddenly.

Billings glanced toward the speaker. His face lighted as if suddenly remembering something. Then he turned to the others. He did not wish to seem to address Reggie.

"By the way, fellows, let's get down to business. If you are willing to come to the *Pennsylvania*, let me know at once and I can speak to the Skipper."

"I am," said Ole promptly.

"You bet!" chimed in two of the others.

Reggie and Tom remained silent. All present half-expected they would. Despite the remarkable change four Annapolis years had brought to each, there still remained that old resentment and dislike which dated from the day Reggie spoke of Tom as the "common sailor" and Tom called him a "sick cat" back.

"And you, Tom?" inquired Billings.

Tom shook his head. "Don't much care where I go," he said gruffly.

Billings smiled. Tom had played right into his hands.

"That's pretty near right, old man," he said. "I came to the *Pennsylvania* not knowing who was here. The night I arrived Lieutenant Strake had the deck. I nearly fainted when I saw him. He was the last man in the Navy I wanted to go to sea with. My plebe year he was a second-classman. He tried to haze me in a way I didn't like and we had a fight. I got the better of the scrap. So the rest of the time at Annapolis he hated me for licking him. And I hated him for what he had tried to put across under the guise of hazing."

At this moment the mess-room door opened and Strake himself walked in. "Hello," he called, "have they made up their minds yet, Bill?"

"Not yet, sir. Maybe they will though after I tell 'em about how you and I got along that first few weeks. In fact that's why I took them into the turret this morning."

"Great stuff!" returned the Lieutenant. "I'll just stick around and help you out."

"Well," continued Billings, "we looked each other up and down. I guess if it hadn't been for the quartermaster and the boatswain's mate we'd have busted loose right then and there and fought it out."

"Agreed!" said Strake heartily.

"But we didn't. And then the Skipper somehow got wind of the feeling between us and put us in the same division. Believe me, we were like a pair of roosters. Of course Strake was the boss because he was the senior. But I never took my eye off him for suspicion of the dirty tricks I was sure he'd play on me sooner or later."

"Never told you I had one, did I?" interrupted Strake.

"No, sir, but I guessed it all right. Well, as time went on the whole ship got to watching us. The wardroom wanted us to fight it out and the loser get detached. Said such a plan would be better for the ship than all this hate business."

Tom and Reggie both began to get a little uneasy. There was a bit too much similarity between this tale and their own feelings.

"The end came down there at Vera Cruz. We'd put a landing party ashore and our division had to capture a bunch of armed rioters outside the town. I didn't like Strake's plan and I told him so."

Strake leaned across the table. "And I asked you to make a suggestion of your own, didn't I?" His eyes narrowed.

"You did," agreed Billings. "And I told you I was going to clean you up then and there. And you said: 'Mister Billings, you're on. We will settle this knuckle-wise when we get back to the ship. But till then we're going to fight elbow to elbow with our gang here. Why? because we're one of them—and the Navy!'"

Billings stopped. He looked a little ashamed at the memory of his trouble. And he recalled vividly how his senior officer should have reported him and had him court-martialed for such behavior.

"Tell the rest," said Strake. "It's worth these youngsters' time."

Billings lowered his voice. "I got back to the ship. I went to my room to make ready for the fight. I even taped my wrists and hands. Then suddenly the truth came bang into my head; Strake had played the man; he had kept his head. Didn't we both love the Navy? Didn't we both have the same interests, go in for pretty

much the same games?" The speaker stopped and looked across at his former enemy.

Strake concluded the tale: "And he came to me and said he guessed he wouldn't fight," he chuckled. "Said he thought we might try out a plan of being friends for a week or two just for the old ship's sake."

"And we've been getting better friends every day since!" exclaimed Billings. "By gosh, fellows, you don't know what it means to go through the strain and worry of a target practice!"

"And win!" added Strake.

A pause followed. Billings looked at Reggie, then at Tom. Both lads studied the deck.

"I haven't heard from you two," he remarked.

Suddenly Tom stood up. He turned on Reggie with set jaws. "Van Brunt," he said. "It looks as if there is a meaning to all this. Bill wants the two of us to come here. He—"

Reggie looked up with a smile that was almost a sneer.

"Poor," he broke in, "I'm willing to chance a cruise with even you—provided a certain difficulty can be cleared up. And you know what that is—you—"

Ole sprang to his feet. "Oh, cut it, you bantams! Is this another fool misunderstanding?"

The two rivals glared at each other. Tom spoke first:

"Van Brunt, that matter will be decided tomorrow morning. If it is a misunderstanding I'm willing to try being friends. If it isn't I'm—" he stopped and doubled up his fists—"I'm going to give you the beating of your life!"

Strake and Billings gazed for a moment admiringly at the pair before them. Tom had always been a splendid physical specimen. Now Reggie, with his four hard years

behind him, had grown to a man's size too. And his extra height, his clear-cut features, gave him a look of strength that even matched Tom's thicker back and shoulders.

"They're off!" cried Billings.

"Like us!" shouted Strake.

"And I bet a ten spot they help us win the pennant next October!"

Strake and Billings shook hands heartily and with confidence.

Ole and the other two midshipmen, however, stood a little apart. The mystery and fierceness of this new row between their classmates just at graduation was almost too much to bear.

CHAPTER XXVI

THEIR LAST FIGHT

To understand the final barrier that threatened once and forever to ruin the possibility of Tom and Reggie being friends, it is necessary to go back a few weeks.

As first-classmen, and each in command of a company, one of their many duties was the instruction and drill of the lower classes. Their own work still continued. But a final touch of practical application of all their book learning was necessary before they could go aboard a battleship and take command of men.

One evening just before taps, a plebe friend of Reggie's named Harbin came to his room and complained about Tom.

"Gave me the devil at drill today."

"Why?"

"Said I read all the signals wrong."

"Did you?"

"Don't see how I could. The flagboat was close by and her hoists were slow enough."

"Did he say anything special?"

"Called me down before the whole section. Asked me if I thought I ought to be in the Navy when my eyes wouldn't tell me any more than they did this afternoon."

"Ever had any trouble with them?"

"Not a bit. Now Poor has not only given me a low mark for the afternoon, but claims he is going to report me to the doctor."

Reggie studied the problem for a moment. He had learned the disadvantage of jumping to conclusions too quickly with Tom Poor or any one else. If there was anything the matter with this midshipman's eyes he would have to leave Annapolis anyway. Eyes meant too much on a man-of-war's bridge for any weak ones ever to slip through the Naval Academy.

"Don't we have spotting tomorrow?" asked Reggie finally.

"Yes. In the armory, I think."

"I'll settle the trouble then. That's about as good a test of a man's vision as I know."

The plebe glanced up with a shrewd look. "Did you realize Poor knows you spoon on me?"

Reggie gripped the table. "You mean he's rotten enough to take his dislike of me out on you?"

"Don't see why not," craftily suggested the plebe.

Reggie frowned. Tom Poor was a rough sort still in that he was outspoken in all that he said or did. Yet, in the past four years, Reggie had never once had permanent cause to believe that he was not perfectly honest.

"Anyway, we can settle it tomorrow," he said finally.

Next afternoon, Reggie marshalled a section of underclassmen at one end of the mammoth hall where the brigade was formed. Overhead the great steel arches supported a roof of dizzy height. Rifle racks lined the walls holding thousands of small arms in glistening rows.

"Here is the spotting gun," explained Reggie, laying his hand on a small mortar-like cannon. "At the other end of the building you can see the target. The object of this drill is to train you men for spotting, that is, the control of fire from the fighting tops of a warship."

For illustration he lay flat on the floor. The gun was pointed at the target and discharged. A dummy projectile shot across the intervening space and landed with a thud near the distant screen. An attendant placed a white tuft of cotton where it fell in imitation of the splash.

"There," said Reggie, "to my eye near the floor that splash looks just about the way a splash at sea would look if I were firing at a range of ten miles."

The sights on the spotting gun were adjustable. Reggie directed one of the midshipmen to change them—"up five-hundred yards" was the way he put it. Then he fired again.

"There! I shot over that time, showing I aimed too high. Another correction on my sights and I would probably hit."

When it came Harbin's turn to spot, Reggie watched him closely. If the man couldn't see the signals, he certainly would be unable to estimate or even see the pigmy target way at the other end of the building.

"Fire!" sung out Harbin. The projectile whistled through the air and fell what corresponded to a thousand yards short.

"Up nine-hundred," he directed. "Fire!"

"Good work!" came from a dozen of the bystanders. The cotton splash showed the plebe's guess had been nearly exactly right.

Five times Reggie tried his man before he was convinced. And on each trial the plebe proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that, if anything, he could see considerably farther and more distinctly than any of the others.

Tom had an artillery drill the same afternoon. When

he had done an hour of dragging the heavy field piece all over the parade ground he felt his men had had enough. He handed the company over to Ole the second in command and turned back to Bancroft Hall.

He had a hunch. The hunch had to do with the plebe Harbin. For nearly a week he had been struggling to teach the lad signals. Instruction of this sort had proved so easy with the others that he was surprised to find this single midshipman stupid beyond belief.

Then, to Tom's astonishment, Harbin proved he knew the signals well enough by memory. He could recite the meaning of the flags as rapidly as any other boy.

But he couldn't read them when hoisted on another vessel!

It was evident at once that the fellow's eyes were bad. He simply couldn't see far enough to distinguish which flag was which.

"Ought to have your eyes examined," Tom told him.

"Don't need to, sir. I can see as far as any of the others."

But he couldn't, and Tom told him so. And also Tom openly pointed out that dismissal for defective vision was Harbin's fate unless he improved.

Harbin's roommate seemed more impressed by the possibility of disaster than Harbin himself. This Tom noticed. Also the very next day the roommate went on the sick list. He got permission to stay in his room during drill.

The room opened out on the side of the sick bay, as the hospital part of quarters is called. From the drill ground Tom could see the roommate sitting in one of the windows. This gave him an idea.

Could it be possible that the roommate was going to save Harbin by dishonest means?

Midshipmen's eyes are tested by having them read letters of various sizes printed on large cardboards. If a man could secure a list of the letters and memorize them, he would be able to pass the eye test by simply identifying the card and repeating the letters as he had learned them.

He would *pretend* to see them!

Tom gently opened the door to Harbin's room. There, as he had suspected, sat the roommate with a pair of binoculars. On the floor above, not a hundred feet across the open court some man was getting an eye test. As each card was held up the roommate would read the letters through his binoculars and copy them. Thus would he save his friend Harbin.

Tom closed the door gently. Time for action had not yet come.

He found Reggie waiting for him in his room.

"Hello," said Tom a little distantly.

Reggie eyed his man with cool estimation of what his problem was. No longer did the broad shoulders and thick arms awe him as they had in earlier years. Now he realized he ran no more danger of being struck by one of Tom Poor's famous sledge-hammer blows than he did of being run down by an automobile at a street-crossing. It was simply a case of watching his step.

"Poor, I came to see you about a friend of mine. Harbin is his name."

"Yes?"

"He tells me you are reporting him for inefficiency in signals as well as defective sight."

"Yes?" Tom himself had learned the waiting game. He long since knew that until the other man showed his hand there was nothing to be gained by flying up and starting a row.

"I would like you to know that I gave him an eye test of my own this afternoon. Harbin proved to be the best spotter in the company. Only the strongest eyes could do what his did."

"Yes?" It still wasn't time to fight back.

"And furthermore, I tried him out on signals and discovered that he knew them almost better than I did myself—a plebe, mind you!"

"Yes?"

Reggie's face slowly reddened. The other's calm and inquiring tone angered him. This was a new development of Tom Poor's. In the past, Reggie had usually held the upper hand by the very composure with which he faced Poor's uncontrollable bursts of temper.

"Well," he snapped, "what are you going to do about it?"

"Report him for inefficiency and weak eyes," returned Tom quietly.

Reggie stiffened. "Do you realize that if you do, Poor, I shall go down the same day and report that your statement is false and that I can prove the opposite?"

Tom smiled. "Van Brunt, I wonder if you think I waste my perfectly good time trying to hunt up ways of getting even with you?"

"It looks very suspicious when I realize you know this man is my friend; and when I know that you are—"

Reggie hesitated. He had no intention of calling Tom a liar. But he wished to make sure that Tom understood he *thought* Tom was a liar.

Tom smiled again. Two could play at this game of wits. In the old days he would have leaped on Reggie and pummeled him for the insinuation of dishonor. Now he was playing a far more subtle game.

"You know, Van Brunt," he observed pleasantly, "if I wished to have a fight I'd go down into the gym, put on the gloves, and pick a man my own size. If, on the other hand, I was hankering to prove my honesty or the truth of what I had said I would take the matter before a referee and argue it out. That's what a court is for. And, if it were a good close dispute, there is no reason why it shouldn't be as much fun as a fist fight."

Reggie controlled his feelings with difficulty. He saw that at last Tom Poor had ceased to be the bully he had been once. If Tom was to be beaten he must have convincing evidence against him.

"And, incidentally," went on Tom, "it may interest you to know that Harbin's roommate is planning to play the old and crooked game of memorizing the eye cards to get him through."

Reggie started. "He is?"

"Just came by and saw him getting them."

"What do you make of it then?" Reggie's bewilderment at the case was getting the better of his emotion.

Tom then and there laid the difficulty squarely out: "I think, Van Brunt, that you and I are near the crisis of our acquaintanceship. I am positive that Harbin has no right to remain at Annapolis. And I have the most excellent proof. You are apparently convinced of just the opposite; and you tell me you have proof equally strong. There is a motive for each of us to be dishonorable: you and Harbin are friends; you and I are enemies. I give you my word that if I prove my case against you,

I shall leave no stone unturned to have you put out of the naval service. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," agreed Reggie. "And let me add that I am prepared to boost you to exactly the same fate if, as I have good grounds for thinking, you are misrepresenting Harbin just to get even with me."

Reggie glared for a moment then stalked out.

Thus while they had not actually come to blows, Reggie and Tom, school and classmates, had on the eve of their graduation sworn to see that one or the other of them was forced out of the profession they had struggled four hard years to master! It was deplorable.

Both made their reports to the authorities, then each resigned himself to his fate. Each felt confident.

On the day of their visit to the *Pennsylvania* no word had been received of any action taken on the matter. Neither midshipman had been called to testify. It began to look as if the authorities had got wind of the struggle between the two and had determined to arrange matters so that both might be saved to the Service.

Graduation morning came and still no word.

The great event of graduation exercises was held as usual in the armory. The graduating class sat in front. Behind, standing at parade rest was the entire brigade. The galleries were crowded with parents and friends.

The Secretary of the Navy made the presentation speech. Once he paused and glanced keenly over the upturned faces before him.

"One thing above all I pray you shall remember," he pronounced with impressive solemnity. "And that is this: no matter what you have been in the past, have thought or done or said in the past, from now on you are

brothers in a common cause: the defense of our great Republic!"

But down in Tom Poor's heart a small voice whispered: "True for you, Tom Poor—except for one man, Van Brunt. Isn't there some way out?"

And Tom, with set teeth, inwardly replied: "Yes, there is. Prove he's a liar and dismiss him!"

So, though Graduation Ball that night was gay, Tom Poor was not. Neither, if truth were known, was Reggie. Despite the magnificent beauty of the spectacle each man wandered listlessly about, longfaced and unhappy. Each had won honors. Each had triumphed over every obstacle that professor and drillmaster could set. Each was an officer every inch.

Yet each had one black shadow on the day's success: the fact that one man hated him, had cause to believe him crooked, and would prefer to see him flung from the Navy's lists!

Tom was standing near some decorative palms when he saw Dr. Morris, the senior surgeon, approaching.

"Good evening, Poor," said the older officer. "I have been looking around for you this evening.

"Yes, sir," said Tom feebly. He had no desire to add to the evening's melancholy by being forced to fight the battle even though it must come sooner or later.

"It's about a report that you put in against a fourth-classman."

"Just a minute, sir," Tom interrupted. "I would much prefer that Van Brunt be present if you have any real news about the case."

As the surgeon assented, Tom set out after Reggie. He found him equally disconsolate at the far end of the hall.

"Van Brunt, Surgeon Morris has some news about our reports and I asked him to let me get you before he disclosed the result."

Reggie nodded and followed Tom back.

"It looks personal," laughed the Surgeon, "the serious way you two lads take the matter. I suppose you have quarrelled over the business. Well you might, too, because you were both right."

"But we couldn't be, sir!" exclaimed Tom. "A man can't fail to read signal flags at a hundred yards, as I found, and then be the best spotter in his class as Van Brunt reported!"

"Ho! Ho!" roared the Surgeon. "He certainly can!"

Tom and Reggie stared with flabbergasted faces at the speaker.

"But *how?*" stammered Reggie.

"By being *color blind*," explained the Surgeon. "Harbin has perfectly good eyes. He can see as far and clearly as any other midshipman. But he can't read signals any more simply because he can't distinguish the different colors in the flags. Naturally he will have to be dropped."

Just then a lady signalled the Surgeon and he dashed away leaving the two bewildered young naval officers standing looking vacantly after him.

Suddenly Tom turned to Reggie.

"Say, old man, do you suppose that you and I could be a little color-blind about each other?"

Reggie returned the other's keen look for a long minute. Then he held out his hand.

"Tom Poor," he said, "when the Secretary told us this morning we were brothers in a common cause, I made a mental reservation that I'd never be a brother to you. I take it back. Will you shake on it?"

Tom gripped the other's hand. "I'll shake, you bet! And I'll put in for the *Pennsylvania* tomorrow. I've been wondering which of us would win the chance of going to her."

"We've both won!" exclaimed Reggie.

"No," amended Tom. "We've been won—*won for the Fleet!*"

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