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THE SUBMARINE BOYS ON-DUTY

Life on a Diving Torpedo Boat

by

VICTOR G. DURHAM

1909

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CHAPTER I

TWO BOYS WHO PLANNED TO BECOME GREAT

"So this is Dunhaven?" inquired Jack Benson.

"Ye-es," slowly responded Jabez Holt, not rising from the chair in which he sat tilted back against the outer wall on the hotel porch.

"It looks like it," muttered Hal Hastings, under his breath.

"Doesn't look like a very bustling place, does it?" asked Jack, with a smile, as he set down a black, cloth-covered box on the porch and leisurely helped himself to a chair.

The box looked as though it might contain a camera. "Tin-type fellers," thought Holt to himself, and did not form a very high estimate of the two boys, neither of whom was more than sixteen years of age.

Just now, both boys were dusty from long travel on foot, which condition, at a merely first glance, concealed the fact that both were neatly enough, even if plainly, dressed.

"Huh!" was all the response Jabez Holt made to Jack's pleasant comment. Hal, however, not in the least discouraged by a reception that was not wholly flattering, set down a box not unlike Jack's, and also something hidden in a green cloth cover that suggested a camera tripod. Hal helped himself to one of the two remaining chairs on the porch of the little hotel.

"Takin' pictures?" asked Jabez Holt, after a pause spent in chewing at a tooth-pick.

"Yes, some of the time," Jack assented. "It helps out a bit when two fellows without rich fathers take a notion to travel."

"I s'pose so," grunted Jabez. He was not usually considered, by his fellow-townsmen, a disagreeable fellow, but a hotel keeper must always preserve a proper balance of suspicion when dealing with strangers, and especially strangers who follow callings that do not commonly lead to prosperity. Probably "Old Man" Holt, as he was known, remembered a few experiences with the tribe of itinerant photographers. At any rate he did not mean to make the mistake of being too cordial with these young representatives of the snap-shot art.

"Is there any business around here?" asked Jack, after awhile.

"Oh, there's a Main Street, back uptown, that has some real pretty homes," admitted the hotel keeper, "an' some likely-lookin' cross streets. Dunhaven ain't an awful homely town, as ye'll see after you've walked about a bit."

"But is there any business here?" insisted Hal Hastings, patiently.

"I guess maybe you're business photografters, then?" suggested the hotel keeper.

"What kinds of business are there here?" asked Jack.

Jabez Holt cast away a much-mangled toothpick and placed another in his mouth before he replied, with a chuckle:

"Well, I reckon about the only business here that the town is doing any talkin' about at present is one that don't want no photografterers around."

"And what may that business be?" persisted Jack.

"Well, down to Farnum's boatyard they're putting up a craft that's known as 'Pollard's Folly.'"

"And why wouldn't they want that photographed?" demanded young Benson.

"Because it's one of them sure-death boats they hope to sell the Government, and the United States Government don't care 'bout havin' its war craft secrets snap-shotted," replied Jabez Holt.

"Didn't you speak of Pollard's boat?" demanded Jack, his eyes agleam with sudden interest.

"Ye-es," admitted Mr. Holt, slowly. "A boat that'll drown its score of men, I reckon, an' then lay somewhere an' eat itself out with rust."

"A submarine boat, isn't it?" continued Jack, quickly.

"Yep; submarine torpedo boat: One of them crazy craft that men *will* build against all sense of what's decent on salt water."

"Why, I've read about *that* boat;" Jack ran on, eagerly. "And, from what the newspapers said, I've gathered the idea that David Pollard's boat is going to put the United States completely ahead of all other nations at sea."

"That's the way Dave Pollard talks," returned Mr. Holt, grimly. "But folks 'round Dunhaven, I must say, don't think over an' above of him or his boat. They—"

"Oh, bother the folks around Dunhaven!" broke in Jack Benson, impatiently. "If the place is the best they know how to do in the way of a town, I don't care a heap about their ideas of boats. And—but I beg your pardon, Mr. Holt. My tongue's running a bit ahead of my manners, I guess. So this is where that famous submarine torpedo boat is being built? And she's a diving boat, at that?"

"Well, I guess mebbe she'll dive, all right," chuckled Jabez Holt. "But as to her comin' up again, I reckon the 'Pollard' ain't goin' to be so certain."

"Where are they building her? Farnum's shipyard, you said?"

"Right over yonder," explained Mr. Holt, pointing to a high board fence that enclosed a space down by the water front. Farnum's "boatyard," as thus seen, was about an eighth of a mile from the little hotel, and looked as though it might be considerable of a plant.

"Who's in charge of the boat?" was Jack's next question.

"Well, now, that's a conundrum," replied Jabez Holt, pondering. "Jake Farnum owns the yard. Jake is a young man, only a few years out of college. He inherited the business from his father, who's dead. Jake is considered a pretty good business man, though he don't know much 'bout boats, an' can't seem to learn a heap, nuther. So Jake leans on Asa Partridge, the superintendent, who was also superintendent under old man Farnum. However, old man Farnum's line was building sailing yachts, small schooners, and, once in a while, a tug-boat. That's in Asa Partridge's line, but he won't have nothin' much to do with new schemes like diving torpedo boats."

"Then—" hinted Jack.

"I'm a-comin' on with the yarn," replied Jabez Kolt, patiently. "Now, Dave Pollard, the inventor of the boat, is a powerful bright young man, on theory, some folks says, but he ain't much use with tools in his hands. But he an' young Jake Farnum hang 'round, watching and bossing, and they have a foreman of the gang, Joshua Owen, who knows he knows most everything 'bout buildin' any kind of boat. So, barrin' the fussing of Farnum and Pollard, I guess Josh Owen is the real boss of the job, since the riveters' gang came an' put the hull together, an' went away."

"Then I suppose Mr. Owen—" began Jack.

"Ja-a-abez! Jabez Holt! Come here!" rang a shrill, feminine voice from the interior of the hotel.

"Must be goin', for a few minutes, anyway," grunted Jabez, rising and leaving the two boys. But no sooner was he out of sight than Jack Benson turned upon his chum, his eyes ablaze.

"Hal Hastings," he effused, in a low voice, "I had forgotten that Dunhaven was the home of the Pollard boat. But, since it is, and since we're here—why, here we'd better stay."

"Do you think we can get in on that job?" asked Hal, dubiously.

"Not if we just sit around and wonder, or if we go meekly and ask for a job, and turn sadly away when we're refused," retorted Jack Benson, with a vim that was characteristic of him. "Hal, my boy, we're simply going to shove ourselves into jobs in that boatyard, and we're going to have a whack at the whole game of building and fitting out a submarine torpedo boat. Do you catch the idea? We're just going to hustle ourselves into the one job that would suit us better than anything else on earth!"

"Bully!" agreed Hal, wistfully. "I hope you can work it."

"*We* can," returned his chum, spiritedly. "Team work, you know. We've worked around machine shops, and at other trades, and we know something about the way boats are handled. Why shouldn't we be able to make Farnum and Pollard believe we know something that will be of use to them?"

"I guess the foreman is the one we want to see, first of all," suggested Hal.

"Well, we'll camp right down here and go at the thing," almost whispered Benson. "And, as this hotel is right at the water front, and within two jumps of the boatyard, I guess we'd better stay here until we get settled."

While the two chums were discussing the whole matter in eager, low tones, a few things may be told about them that will make their present situation clearer. Jack Benson, an only son, had been orphaned, three years before, at the age of thirteen. With the vigor that he always displayed, he had found a home and paid for his keep and schooling, either by doing chores, or by working at various occupations in his native seaport town of Oakport. He had kept at school up to a few months before the opening of this narrative. With marked genius for machinery, he had learned many things about the machinist's trade in odd hours in one of the local shops. He was remarkably quick at picking up new ideas, and had shown splendid, though untrained, talent for making mechanical drawings.

Hal Hastings, of the same age, had a stepmother who did not regard him kindly. Hal, too, had worked at odd jobs, almost fighting for his schooling. His father, under the stepmother's influence, paid little heed to his doings.

For two summers both boys had done fairly well working on yachts and other boats around Oakport. Both had learned how to handle sail craft, to run motors and small marine steam engines.

During the spring just passed Hal Hastings had worked much of his time for an Oakport photographer who, at the beginning of summer, had failed. Hal, with a considerable bill for unpaid services, had taken some photographing material in settlement of his dues.

At the beginning of summer both boys decided that Oakport did not offer sufficient opportunity for their ambitious hopes in life. So they had determined to take Hal's newly acquired camera outfit and "tramp it" from town to town, earning their living by photographing and all the while keeping their eyes open for real chances in life. Both had some money, carefully saved and hidden, from the previous summer's work, so that in point of attire they presented a creditable appearance.

During these few weeks of tramping from place to place they had made somewhat more money than their expenses had amounted to. Jack Benson, who was the treasurer, carried their entire hoard in a roll of one and two-dollar bills.

"I tell you, Hal Hastings," Jack now wound up, "this submarine torpedo boat business is already a great field. It's going to be bigger and bigger, for a lot of inventors are at work. If we can hustle our way into this Dunhaven boatyard, we may be able to—"

"Earn a very good living, I guess," nodded Hal, thoughtfully.

"Earn a living?" sniffed Jack, rather scornfully. "Hal, I've got faith enough in both of us to believe that we could make our fortunes in a few years. Look at some of the poor young men who had sense enough to get into the automobile business early. The prizes go to the fellows who get into a field early and have ability enough to build up reputations."

Jabez Holt came out upon the porch at this moment.

"Still here?" he asked, looking at the boys.

"We're going to be here a little while, I guess, if it's agreeable to you, Mr. Holt," Jack answered; with a smile.

"What d'ye mean? I don't want no tin-types taken."

"We haven't asked you to have any photos made, Mr. Holt," Benson ran on. "We're just talking about becoming guests here."

"For twenty-four hours," supplied Hal Hastings.

"For at least two days," Jack amended.

"But, see here," explained Landlord Holt. "Rates here are two dollars a day. If ye hain't got no other baggage I'll have ter look into them camera boxes before I take 'em as security for board."

"You can't have them as security, Mr. Holt," Jack laughed. "I'm going to pay our charges two days in advance. For two persons it's eight dollars, isn't it?"

Then young Benson carelessly produced the young partners' roll of banknotes. He quickly counted off eight dollars, handing the money to Mr. Holt.

"Come right in an' register," said Landlord Holt, springing up and leading the way. The hotel sometimes prospered when yacht owners or boat designers came this way, but at any season eight dollars were eight dollars. The boys were now in high standing with their host. When matters had been settled in the office Holt led them to the wash room. Here the young men dusted themselves off, washed, polished their own shoes, donned clean collars and cuffs, and, altogether, speedily made themselves so tidy that they looked quite different from the dusty travelers who had trudged into Dunhaven.

Jabez Holt then conducted them back to chairs on the porch, remarking:

"It's after four o'clock now, and supper'll be ready sharp at six."

"What time do they knock off work in the boatyard?" queried Jack.

"Five, sharp," the landlord informed him.

"Does that foreman on the submarine boat job ever come along this way?"

"Goes right by here on his way home," Mr. Holt informed the boys.

"I'd be glad if you'd introduce us to him," Jack suggested.

"I sartain will," nodded Jabez Holt. "An', ye know, Dave Pollard is stoppin' at this hotel."

"Oh, he is, eh?" Jack snapped up, eagerly. "Then we'll certainly try to make his acquaintance to-night."

Hal, too, looked pleased at this prospect. Mrs. Holt again calling, from the depths of the kitchen, the landlord was forced to hurry off. He left behind two boys who suddenly fell to planning their futures with all the rosy enthusiasm of youth. The longer they talked about the submarine boat, the more both Jack and Hal felt convinced that they were going to succeed in getting into the work. In fact, both planned to become great in that special field.

It was a bright July day, one of the kind when the world looks at its best to young, hopeful minds. Absorbed in their vague but rosy plans, both boys forgot the flight of time.

They were roused out of their talk, at last, by hearing heavy footsteps on the gravel close at hand. Looking up, they saw a heavy, broad shouldered, dark-complexioned youth of about eighteen years. He had a swaggering way of carrying himself, and undoubtedly considered himself of much importance. His clothing proclaimed him to be a workman. As he caught sight of the two happy looking boys this older and larger youth looked them over with a sneering expression which soon turned to a scowl.

"Strangers here, ain't ye?" demanded the scowling one, as he halted on the edge of the porch.

"Yes," nodded Jack Benson, pleasantly.

"Thought so," vouchsafed the other. "Any body but a stranger hereabouts would know ye were in my chair—the one I sit in when I come along this way."

There was something decidedly insolent both the tone and manner of the stranger. But Benson, not quick at taking offense, inquired:

"Are you a guest of this hotel."

"None of your business," came the rough retort.

"Oh!" said Jack.

"Did ye hear me say ye were sitting in my chair?"

"Yes."

"Going to get up out of it?"

"Not until I know your rights in the matter," replied Jack. "You see, my board is paid in advance at this place."

"Huh!" growled the other, sneeringly. "Reckon ye don't know much 'bout Dan Jagers's way of doin' things."

"Who on earth is Dan Jagers?" demanded Benson, curiously.

"That's me! It's my name," rejoined the swagger. "An', sense ye're so fresh—"

Jagers didn't finish in words, but, taking a firm hold on the back of the chair, he suddenly pulled it out from under Benson. So swiftly was the thing done that Jack went down on all fours on the porch. But, thoroughly aroused, and his eyes flashing indignantly now, that boy was quickly on his feet. Dan, however, with a satisfied grin, had dropped into the chair.

"Going to get up out of that, Jagers?" challenged Jack Benson.

"Not as I know of," rejoined Dan, with a broader grin. "Why?"

"Because I'd hate to hit you while you're sitting down," replied Jack so quietly that his voice sounded almost mild.

"What's that?" demanded Jagers, with a guffaw of laughter.

"You heard what I said," Jack insisted. "You'd better get up."

"Spoiling for a fight, are ye?" questioned the bully.

"Not at all," Jack replied, still keeping his temper in check. "I never go about looking for trouble. I suppose you didn't know any better than to do what you did."

"What's that?" scowled Dan Jagers.

"If you want to apologize, and get out of the chair, I'll let it go at that," pursued Jack, coolly.

"Hey?" demanded Dan Jagers, aghast. "*Me*—apologize?"

He sprang up suddenly, resting a broad paw heavily on Jack's shoulder. But Benson, without flinching, or drawing back, returned the ugly look steadfastly.

"You're behaving like a pretty poor grade of tough," spoke Jack, in deep disgust.

"I am, hey?" roared Dan. He drew back, aiming a heavy fist for Benson's chest. It was a mistake, as he quickly realized, for Jack Benson, from much practice in boxing, was as agile and slippery as a monkey and an eel combined. Jack dodged, then came up under with a cleanly aimed though not hard blow on Jagers's chin.

"I'll learn ye!" roared Dan, returning two ponderous blows in quick succession. To his intense astonishment Jack wasn't in the way of either blow, but came in with a neck blow on Jagers's left side that sent the bully reeling to the gravel beyond the porch.

"Come right down here!" challenged the bully, hoarsely. "We'll find out about this."

Jack Benson hesitated. He did not care about fighting. Yet, seeing that Jagers meant to have a final encounter, Jack dropped nimbly down to the gravel.

Dan Jagers rushed at him, both fists up on guard, his whole attitude more cautious since he had had

a taste of the smaller youth's quality. Jack was about two inches shorter and fully thirty pounds lighter, but he made one think of a dancing master as he skipped away before the big fellow's rushes.

"Stand still, won't ye, drat ye?" roared Dan, driving in another heavy blow.

But Benson dodged, then came in under the bully's guard, landing a stinging blow on the tip of his nose. Under punishment Dan let out a noise resembling the bellow of an angry bull. Glowering, he stood uncertain, for a moment, but Jack was tantalizingly just out of his reach, smiling confidently. Then Jagers leaped forward, hopeful of winding his arms around this foe and crushing him into submission. A second later, however, Dan fell backward, yelling with pain, for Jack Benson had landed a left handed blow just under his opponent's right eye, partly closing it. Dan bent over double, still groaning.

"Well, I swan!" said the astonished Jabez Holt, in the doorway of his hotel.

Jack stood his ground a few moments, watching until he felt sure that his enemy did not intend to carry the affair further. Then the younger boy stepped lightly back to the porch, standing just before the chair from which he had lately been evicted.

"Just bear in mind, I'll git square with ye for this!" uttered Jagers, wrathfully, glaring at young Benson with his undamaged eye. Then he turned and stalked away, muttering under his breath.

"Well, I swan!" remarked Jabez Holt again, now stepping out onto the porch. "I guess that sartain done Dan Jagers some good. He needs some of that medicine, friends. An' say, here's Josh Owen coming up from Farnum's boatyard."

Jack and Hal both turned quickly to gaze down the road at a man just coming out through the gate of Farnum's yard.

"He's the man we want to meet," cried Jack Benson, breathlessly.

"I dunno," replied Mr. Holt, shaking his head, ominously. "I dunno as it'll do ye much good, now. Dan Jagers is Josh Owen's nephew and favorite!"

CHAPTER II

THE FIGHTING CHANCE

"My type of torpedo boat is going to rule the seas in naval warfare," declared David Pollard, his eyes a-kindle with the enthusiasm of the sincere inventor.

"I'm sure of it," replied Jack Benson, quietly. "That's why, Mr. Pollard, Hal and I are so anxious to get into this work. Mr. Pollard, when your type of submarine diving torpedo boat is understood by the United States Government you'll need some reliable and intelligent experts. Take us in now. Let us learn the work with you. Let us go ahead, keeping pace with the progress in Pollard torpedo boats, and you will never be sorry you have two young fellows you can depend upon."

"That's so, if you can come near to making as good as you promise," admitted the inventor, thoughtfully. "But you're pretty young."

"And that's the only fault with the Pollard submarine boat," rejoined Jack Benson, artfully. "You've got to buck your boat against all the older types that the Government already takes an interest in. Yet you feel sure that you can do it. You don't believe the Pollard diving boat is too young. Give us the same show you ask for your boat."

"Well, I've never seen any of your work—except these drawings," replied Mr. Pollard, indicating some sheets that lay on the table before them.

The chums had succeeded in making the inventor's acquaintance through the aid of the landlord. It was now eleven o'clock at night. Jack and Hal had been in the inventor's room for the last three hours. Benson had done most of the talking, though Hal had now and then put in some effective words.

David Pollard was now thirty years of age, tall, lean and of pallid countenance. He was a graduate of

a technical school. Though not a practical mechanic, he had a rather good lot of theory stored away in his mind. He had inherited some money, soon after leaving school, but this money had vanished in inventions that he had not succeeded in marketing. Now, all his hopes in life were centered in the submarine torpedo boat that was nearly completed. Pollard had had no money of his own to put into the craft. Jacob Farnum was his friend and financial backer.

No one could grasp how much success with his submarine boat meant to this wearied yet hopeful inventor. For years all his schemes had been laughed at by "practical" men. It was success, more than mere fortune, for which David Pollard hungered. The officials of the Navy Department, at Washington, had promised to inspect and try the boat, when finished, but that was all the encouragement that had come from the national capital.

If the "Pollard," as the new craft was at present named, should prove a failure, then the inventor felt that he would be "down" indeed in the world. Also, he must feel that he had buried one hundred and fifty thousand dollars of the money of his loyal friend, Farnum.

In his present anxious, worried frame of mind, with few real believers in the possible success of his boat, it was little wonder that David Pollard was grateful for any intelligent interest or faith in his plans. These two friends were but boys, nor had they had any experience in submarine boat construction. Yet they had shown the inventor that they knew much about machinery and marine engines in general, and Jack, with his handy knack of sketching machinery, had made a decided hit with poor Pollard.

"Just put us in as apprentices," begged Benson. "We'll be just the plainest sort of helpers, fetching and lifting, and that sort of thing, until we learn how to do more."

"Well, you see, for one thing, boys," replied Pollard, "this building of a submarine boat is very important and confidential work. Now, while I like the looks and talk of you both, I really don't know a thing about either of you."

"Of course you don't," Jack Benson admitted, frankly. "And it's highly important that you should. I know that. But you can telegraph the principal of the school we attended in Oakport, and you can telegraph the minister of our church, too. We'll abide by just what they say about us. And"— here Benson brought his little roll of bills once more into sight—"we'll pay for the telegrams and the answers."

"That looks right," nodded Mr. Pollard, with a slight smile. "There is just one more point. The superintendent of the yard, Mr. Partridge, isn't having anything to do with the building of the 'Pollard.' After the steel workers and the riveters had finished on the hull, then the inside work, including the fitting of the machinery, was turned over to Mr. Owen, our present foreman. Sometimes he's a crotchety fellow, and he might take a dislike to you youngsters."

"I've got to tell you about something that I think *will* make him take a dislike to us," spoke up Jack Benson, candidly. Then he recounted the afternoon's affair with Dan Jagers.

"Yes, that certainly will stir up some feeling," replied Mr. Pollard.
"In fact, it will make it very difficult for you to get along with Owen, for he thinks a lot of that disagreeable, bullying nephew of his. Yet, Benson, I like you a whole lot better for your honesty."

The inventor was silent for some moments, puffing slowly at a pipe, and then he removed the stem from between his teeth and continued:

"You've made a good impression upon me, both of you, and particularly with what you say about giving young fellows and young boats a chance to prove themselves. You talk like youngsters with some experience and some ideas in the matter of machinery. I admire your honesty. I also like what you say about the need Farnum and I will have, in the future, of young men who will understand our boats thoroughly. I don't know what you can do until we try you out."

He took a few more thoughtful pulls at his pipe and resumed: "See here, you come to the yard at eight o'clock in the morning, ready to do anything that's wanted of you. I won't wire, but I'll write, to-night, to the references you've given. If we find you're not of much use we'll drop you. If your references don't turn out to be unusually good, out you go! But, if you make good, you'll have your chance. It's just your fighting chance, you understand. I'll fix the matter with Mr. Farnum."

"And the foreman?" smiled Jack, wistfully.

Mr. Pollard looked grave as he answered:

"Look out not to invite any trouble with Joshua Owen, and avoid trouble with Jagers, who works in the boat-fitting crew. I think we can get over the effects of your little trouble this afternoon. And now, boys, give me the addresses of your references, and I'll write at once."

A few moments later the chums bade the inventor good night, then hurried to their own room, though not to retire at once.

"Well!" demanded Jack Benson, his face radiant, as he thought of their "fighting chance."

"It was the way you put the whole matter to Pollard," replied Hal Hastings. "Jack, you're a wonder with your tongue. I believe you could talk a hole through a thick board fence."

"We've got our chance, anyway. And, oh, Hal! I believe it's going to be our real chance in life!"

"You'll soon be as wild about the 'Pollard' as the inventor himself," laughed Hastings, good-naturedly.

"It isn't going to be just the one boat, Hal," urged his chum, seriously. "It's the whole big problem of submarine warfare. It's going to be *the* warfare of the future, old chum! And, starting this early, we may become Pollard's real experts—his leading men when he's famous, successful and rich! We may even become his partners, through getting up improvements on his ideas. Hal, boy, we may even put through our own design of submarine boat one of these days."

"It'll be huge fun, anyway, if we can get a chance to cruise on a submarine boat-under water and all!" glowed young Hastings. "Say, there must be a wonderful thrill to going down deep in the ocean."

Thus they talked for another hour. It was very late when the two turned in, nor did they go to sleep at once. Yet, when the half-past six call came in the morning, both boys turned out in a jiffy. Excitement took the place of rest with them. They breakfasted with appetite. Shortly after half-past seven, though the yard was so near, Jack and Hal set out for their first day's work at boat building.

The gate was open, though the yard, as they stepped inside, had a deserted look. The partly finished hulls of two schooners lay on the ways down by the water front. There were half a dozen sloops in various stages of completion. There were two houses, close to the water's edge in which, as the boys afterwards learned, motor boats were built. But it was a rough shed, more than twenty feet high, and at least one hundred and twenty feet long, running down to the shore, that instantly caught Jack Benson's glance.

"There's where they must be putting the 'Pollard' in shape," he cried, eagerly, as he pointed. Both youngsters hurried toward that shed. As they reached it the inventor came into sight around the end. He was hollow-eyed, though alert; he looked even more worried than he had looked the night before.

"Ah, good morning, boys," was his greeting. "Early on hand, I see."

"When a fellow's whole heart is set on a thing, he isn't likely to lie abed until the last moment, is he, Mr. Pollard?" inquired Benson.

That speech impressed the inventor most favorably. *He* could appreciate enthusiasm.

"Come inside, and I'll show you something," he said, producing a key and leading the way to a door in the side of the shed.

Through the long, high windows of the shed an abundance of light fell. But Jack, once inside the door, halted, looking with lips parted and eyes wide open.

"O-o-o-oh!" he murmured.

"What is it?" inquired the inventor, curiously.

"The very, wonder of the thing," replied Benson, frankly, looking over the whole length of the "Pollard" as she lay propped up on the sturdy ways.

Nor did that simple speech make the inventor think any less of the boy. Though Hal Hastings remained silent for some time, his fascinated gaze rested steadily on the strange-looking outlines of the cigar-shaped hull of the boat.

The outer hull was of steel plates, carefully riveted into place. The entire length of the boat was about one hundred and ten feet, which in point of size placed her just about in the class of boats of this type which are being constructed to-day.

Near the center of the boat, on the upper side, was the conning tower, about nine feet in outside

diameter, and extending some four feet above the sloping deck of the craft. Around the conning tower extended a flat, circular "platform" deck.

At the bow of the boat the torpedo tube projected a short distance. At the stern the rudder was in place, and all was in readiness for placing the propeller shaft and the propeller itself. On the floor of the shed, near the middle of this strange, dangerous boat, lay miscellaneous small pieces of machinery and fittings.

At the starboard side of the boat stood a ladder that ascended to the platform deck. In the top of the conning tower a man-hole cover stood propped up. It was through this opening that the workmen entered or left the boat.

From outside the shed several wires ran in. In dark weather these wires carried the current for electric lights in shed and boat.

"I won't ask you aboard until the foreman and other workmen arrive," explained Mr. Pollard. "It'll be only a few minutes to wait."

While they were still examining the outer hull, and discussing the submarine, Dan Jagers, in his workman's clothes, reached the open doorway of the shed. One look inside, and he halted short. He gathered from the talk he heard that Jack Benson and Hal Hastings were to be added to the "Pollard's" working gang.

"Not if I know myself—and the foreman—and I think I do!" growled the Jagers youth, backing away unseen.

The next of the workmen to arrive was Michael O'brien, red-haired and about twenty-eight years of age. He was good-humored and talkative, and the two boys took an immediate liking to him.

Through the gate of the yard came Joshua Owen, a man of forty-five, of medium height, broad-shouldered, black-haired and with a frame that spoke of great physical power and endurance. Yet he had restless, rather evil-looking eyes. He did not look like the sort of man whom a timid fellow would want for an enemy.

"Hold on there, Unc," greeted Dan Jagers, motioning his foreman-uncle aside. "Say, you know that cheeky young fellow I told ye about—the tricky one that played the sneak on me, and gave me this black eye?"

"Haven't you met him and paid him back yet?" demanded Mr. Owen.

"Hadn't seen him again, until just now," complained Dan. "What do you think? Pollard has engaged that feller and his friend to work on the submarine."

"Has, eh? Without speaking to me about it?" demanded Joshua Owen, looking anything but pleased.

"Of course you'll let Pollard know that you're foreman and take on and lay off your own gang," hinted Jagers.

"Now, you leave me alone, Dan, boy, to know what to do," retorted Mr. Owen. Then he stepped on toward the long shed, a very grim look on his face. Going inside the shed, the foreman looked the two boys over briefly.

"If you young men haven't any business in here," he ordered, "get out and on your way. Work is about to begin here. I'm the foreman."

"Oh, Mr. Owen," hailed the inventor, "these are two very bright young chaps, with some experience, that I've engaged to help us out with installing the machinery in the boat."

"Couldn't you have consulted me, sir?" asked the foreman, again looking keenly at the youngsters.

"When you've found out what they can do, Mr. Owen," replied Pollard. "I believe you'll be rather pleased with them. They're hired only on trial, you understand."

"I can tell whether we want 'em before we start work," grunted the foreman. With that he began to fire all manner of machine-shop questions at both boys. Yet Jack and Hal, paying respectful heed, answered in a way that showed them to be quite well informed about this class of work.

"They won't do Mr. Pollard—won't do at all," announced Foreman Owen, turning to the inventor. "I know their kind. They're glib talkers, and all that, but they belong to the know-it-all class of boys. I've had a lot of experience with that kind of 'prentices, and I don't want 'em bothering our work here. So I

say, sir, the only thing for you to do is to send them about their business."

Foreman Owen spoke as though that settled the matter. Jack Benson and Hal Hastings felt their hopes oozing.

"I've told the boys they shall have a chance Mr. Owen," replied Pollard quietly, yet in a tone of authority. "So of course my word must be kept with them."

"But I'm the foreman," exclaimed Joshua Owen, irritably, "and I'm supposed to—"

"Exactly," interposed David Pollard. "You're supposed to obey all instructions from your superiors here, and to give your advice when it's wanted. I have much at stake in the success of this boat, and when I find what looks like good material for our working crew I'm going to try out that material."

"But I don't want to be bothered with boys, like these young fellows," retorted the foreman, angrily. "This is no job for amateurs!"

"The boys remain until they've been well tried out," retorted Pollard, firmly. "If they can't do our kind of work, then of course we'll let them go."

"I'll speak to Mr. Farnum about this business," muttered Foreman Owen, turning on his heel. Three other workmen had arrived during this talk. Now, at the order from Owen all climbed the ladder to the platform deck, thence disappearing through the manhole. Electric light was turned on inside the hull by the time that Jack and Hal appeared at the manhole opening.

Owen looked upward, from the floor of the boat, to scowl at them, but, as Mr. Pollard was right behind them, the foreman said nothing at that moment.

Last of all came Dan Jagers. As he caught sight of the two newcomers he shot at them a look full of hate.

"I thought ye said those fellers couldn't work here," he muttered to his uncle.

"Keep quiet and watch out," whispered Joshua Owen. "They're not going to work here. I'll fix that!"

CHAPTER III

JOSH OWEN STARTS TROUBLE

"Knock off!"

As the deafening din of hammers lessened David Pollard shouted that order through a megaphone.

Confined in a limited space, inside that bull of steel, the clatter, which outdoors would have been barely noticed, was something infernal in volume and sharpness. Human ear-drums could not stand it for any very great length of time.

By this time Jack Benson and Hal Hastings had had a good chance to see exactly what the interior of a submarine torpedo boat was like.

A level floor extended throughout the entire length of the "Pollard." Below this floor, reached by hatchways, were various small compartments for storage. Under the level of this floor, too, were the "water tanks." These were tanks that, when the craft lay or moved on the surface of the ocean, were to contain only air. Whenever it was desired to sink the torpedo boat, valves operated from the central room of the boat could be opened so that the water tanks would fill, and the weight of the water would sink the boat. In diving, the forward tanks could be filled first, and then, when the desired depth was reached, the other tanks could be filled entirely, or partly, in such a way as to control depth and position.

With the boat below the surface, and the commander wishing to return to the surface, compressed air could be forced into the water tanks, expelling all the water in them, or a part of the water, if preferred. The valves would then operate to keep more water from entering.

On the surface the "Pollard" was intended to be run by a powerful six-cylinder gasoline engine. When

below the surface the boat was to be propelled by electric power supplied from storage batteries. Below the waves the gasoline engine could not be used, as such an engine consumes air and also creates bad vapors.

On the morning when our two young friends went to work the electrical engine was fully installed, and had been tested. The gasoline engine was in place, but the fittings had yet to be finished. In the course of this latter work the necessary connections were to be made between gasoline engine and dynamo.

The many strong-walled receivers for compressed air had been placed, and were now being more securely fitted and connected by the workmen. The final work on the compressed air apparatus was yet to be done by a special crew of workmen who were soon to come down from New York. A powerful, compact plant for compressing air was a part of this outfit.

Right up in the bow of the "Pollard" was the tube through which a Whitehead torpedo, fourteen feet in length, could be started on its destructive journey by means of compressed air force. One torpedo was to be carried in the tube, six others in special lockers on either side.

Back of the torpedo room was the rather cramped engine room in which were the gasoline and electric motors, other machinery and work-benches. Then came the central cabin, some twenty feet long and about ten feet wide. Here was a table, while the seats at the side could be arranged also as berths. Out of the cabin, aft, led a narrow passageway. Off this, on either side, were a narrow galley, cupboards, ice-box and toilet room. Nearer the stern were two compact state-rooms, one intended for two "line" or "deck" officers, the other for two engineer officers. There were other features about the "Pollard" that will be described as need arises.

For more than an hour the entire gang had been at work, though Joshua Owen had seen to it that Jack and Hal had nothing more to do than lift or hold heavy articles, fetch tools, etc. Still both boys stood this good-humoredly, paying strict attention to orders. David Pollard, watching them at times, and guessing how they might feel under such treatment, found his good opinion of the two newcomers still rising.

Stopping their work, when the order came, the workmen lighted their pipes. Jack and Hal, not liking the clouds of tobacco smoke, ran up the spiral staircase to the manhole, stepping, out upon the platform. As they did so they encountered a man of about thirty years of age who had just reached the platform deck from the shed flooring.

"Hullo, what are you two doing here?" questioned the new arrival, looking the boys over keenly.

"Are you Mr. Farnum?" asked Benson.

"Yes. Well?"

"Mr. Pollard put us to work here, Mr. Farnum."

"Oh! That's all right, then," replied the owner of the yard, amiably, and entered the conning tower.

"Tumble down here, you two lazy young roustabouts!" sounded Owen's voice a few minutes later.

"We seem to have made a hit with our foreman, don't we?" chuckled Jack to his chum.

"Mr. Owen," Pollard was saying to the foreman, as the boys rejoined the crew below, "we can't stand the ringing of hammers all the time, so, for the next job, I think you'd better fit some of the feed pipes connecting the gasoline tanks with the motor."

"All right, sir," replied Josh Owen, briefly. He turned to order Jaggars and O'brien to bring forward one of the longer pieces of feed pipe. This the foreman helped to fit in place.

"Mr. Pollard," reported Owen, soon, "this pipe is a small botch on the part of the contractor."

"What's wrong" asked the inventor, quickly, springing forward and bending over to examine.

"The pipe is about a half inch too long," replied Owen.

"But one of the superintendent's men over at the machine shop can cut it to fit?" asked the inventor, looking uneasy.

"Oh, he can cut it all right, but there's the new thread to be cut, too," explained the foreman, pointing. "I'm sorry, sir, but if you want a good job, without any danger of botch, you'll have to wire the

contractors to rush a new pipe, cut exactly to the specifications."

"But that will delay us at least forty-eight hours, and the launching date is so near at hand," protested the inventor.

"You'd better put your launching off two days, Mr. Pollard, than take any chances of having a bad connection in your fuel feed pipes," argued the foreman.

"Confound such luck!" growled Pollard, turning away. "Well, come over to the office with me, and we'll wire a kick and a prayer to the contractors."

Just as he turned, the inventor barely failed to overhear something that Jack muttered in an aside to Hal.

"What's that you're saying, Benson?" demanded David Pollard.

"Oh, nothing much, sir," replied Jack, quickly. "I'm not foreman here, nor much of anything, for that matter."

"Were you expressing an opinion about this pipe business?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"You agree with me that the pipe can be cut properly at the machine shop of this yard?" insisted the inventor. It was strange to ask such a question of a boy helper, but David Pollard, facing a delay in the launching of his craft, was ready to jump at any hope.

Jack Benson hesitated.

"I want a reply," persisted Mr. Pollard.

"Why, yes," Jack admitted. "I don't want to be forward, but I feel pretty sure the pipe can be measured both for its own length and the length it ought to be. If there's a good metal saw over at the machine shop, and a thread cutter, this pipe ought to be ready for safe fitting in half an hour."

"That's the way it looks to me, too," broke in Mr. Farnum. "Send the pipe over, anyway, with the proper measurements, and Partridge can tell you what's what."

"I won't make the measurements. I won't have anything to do with it, or be responsible for a botched job," snarled the foreman.

"You don't have to, then," replied Farnum, taking a spring steel tape from his pocket. "Benson, you seem to have a clear-headed idea of what you're talking about. Take the measurements. This tape has been standardized."

It was not a matter of great difficulty. Jack, with his chum's aid, soon had the measurements taken.

"Since you youngsters know so much about it," growled Joshua Owen, "you two can carry the pipe over to the machine shop."

Other workmen sprang to help in passing the pipe up through the manhole and down over the side of the hull. When Jack and Hal got the pipe up on their shoulders they staggered a bit under its weight. But they were game, and started away with it.

"That's a shame," growled Mike O'brien. "Boss, leave me go 'an be helpin' the b'yes with that load."

"Go ahead," nodded Mr. Farnum. O'brien went nimbly down the ladder, placing one of his own sturdy shoulders under the forward end of the pipe, while Benson got back with Hal Hastings at the other end. In about three-quarters of an hour the trio were back, with the pipe cut to the right length, and with a new screw-thread cut at the shortened end.

"Now, you can demonstrate your own work, Benson," laughed Mr. Farnum. "Fit the pipe yourself, and call on the men for what help you want."

At that, Joshua Owen folded his arms as he stepped back scowling. Yet when the crew, under Jack's direction, had finished fitting the pipe in place, not even this angered foreman dared say that it was not fitted properly.

The next work called for fitting some pipe-joints, and in this a red lead cement was used. One of these joint-makings fell to Benson and Hal.

"Here's yer cement," muttered the scowling Dan Jagers, passing a rough ball of the stuff to young Benson.

"Is this the best you have?" asked Jack, eyeing the cement with disfavor.

"Yes," growled Dan, "and it's plenty good enough."

"I'd call it too dry," replied Jack, quietly.

"Are you bossing this job all the way through?" demanded Joshua Owen, angrily, stepping forward. "Mr. Farnum, Mr. Pollard, if these boys are to have charge of this work, I may as well stop."

"What's the matter?" asked Mr. Farnum, coining forward.

"This younker is grumbling about the red lead cement," snapped the irate foreman.

"What's the complaint, Benson?" asked the boatyard owner.

"No complaint, Mr. Farnum," Jack answered, quickly. "Only, I've got to make the joint fast with red lead cement, and it seemed to me that this stuff is too dry. If I use it, it won't fill out smoothly enough. It's dry and crumbly, and I'm afraid the joint would be very defective."

"Nothing of the sort!" snapped Joshua Owen. "Boy, you've no business trying to do a man's work, anyway. Give me that cement, and I'll make the joint fast myself."

"All right," nodded Benson, stepping back. He started to pass the chunk of cement to the foreman, but Mr. Farnum quickly took it from him, then cast a look upward. Asa Partridge, the yard superintendent, a man past fifty, stood on the platform deck, looking down through the open manhole.

"Come down here, Mr. Partridge," hailed the yard's owner, while Joshua Owen's scowl became deeper than ever. "Mr. Partridge, Benson says this cement is too dry to make a joint tight with. Owen says it isn't. Who wins the bet?" the owner finished, laughingly.

Asa Partridge, a man of long experience in steam-fitting, took the chunk of cement, examining it carefully, then picked it to pieces before he rejoined dryly:

"Why, the boy wins, of course. Any apprentice ought to know that cement as dry as this stuff can't make a tight joint."

"Isn't there some better cement than this around?" called out Mr. Farnum.

"If there isn't," volunteered the superintendent, "I can send you over plenty. But the use of such stuff as that would leave some joints loose, and make a breakdown of the boat's machinery certain."

"You see, Owen," spoke the yard's owner, quietly, turning to the foreman, "you're letting your dislike for these boys spoil your value here as foreman."

"I've stood all I'm going to stand here," shouted Joshua Owen, in a tempest of rage, as he snatched off his apron. "You're letting these boys run the job—"

"Nothing of the sort," broke in Farnum, icily. "They haven't tried to run anything. But any workman is entitled to complain when he's expected to perform impossibilities with poor material."

"There ye go, upholding 'em again," roared the foreman. "I'm through. I've quit!"

"I don't know as that's a bad idea, either, Owen," replied Mr. Farnum, in the same cool voice. "When you don't care how you botch a job it's time for you to walk out. You can call at the office this afternoon, and Mr. Partridge will give you your pay."

Joshua Owen glared, amazedly, at his employer. Then, seeing that his threat had been taken at par, and that he was really through here, the infuriated man wheeled like a flash, leaping at Jack Benson from behind and striking the boy to the floor. But Grant Andrews, O'brien and others leaped at him and pulled him away.

Jacob Farnum pointed up the spiral staircase, as Jack Benson leaped to his feet, hardly hurt at all.

"You can't get out of here too quickly, Owen!" warned the owner. "If you linger, I'll have you helped out of this boat! Grant Andrews, you're foreman here from now on."

"First of all, see that that fellow gets out of here in double-quick time."

"Come along, Dan!" called Owen, hoarsely to his nephew, as he started up the stairway.

"Yes, run along, Danny," added Farnum, mockingly. "You're no better than your uncle!"

After the pair had departed it took all hands at least five minutes to cool down from their indignation. Then they resumed work, and all went smoothly under the quiet, just, alert new foreman, Grant Andrews.

That afternoon, as Jack crossed the yard, going on an errand from Mr. Pollard to the office, he encountered Josh Owen and his nephew. The pair had just collected their pay from the superintendent. They were talking together, in low, ugly tones, when they caught sight of the boy.

Though Benson saw them in season to avoid coming close to them, he neither dodged the pair nor courted a meeting. He would have passed without speaking, but Joshua Owen seized the boy by one arm.

"I s'pose ye feel me and you had trouble, and you got the best of it?" leered the former foreman, then scowled. "But listen to me, younker. Ye're going to run into trouble, and quicker than ye think, at that. That old cigar shaped death-trap won't float—not for long, anyway. All I'm hoping is that ye'll go in for bein' one of the crew of that submarine boat. Then I'll be even with a lot of ye all at the same time!"

With which enigmatic prophecy Joshua Owen let go of the boy's arm, and tramped heavily away, followed by his precious nephew.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRICK OF THE FLASHLIGHT

"Have you seen anything of Owen, since he was discharged?"

It was David Pollard who put the question, while the crew, under the new foreman, Andrews, was busy the next day with more work on the motor fittings.

Then, for the first time, except to his chum, Jack Benson told of his meeting in the yard.

"Making threats against you, and against the boat, is he?" smiled Mr. Pollard. "Well, he can't get near the boat. Partridge took the precaution of getting the keys back from Owen yesterday afternoon, when the fellow went to get paid off. But as for his threats against you—"

"It will be just as well to look out for the fellow, Benson, and you, too, Hastings," put in young Mr. Farnum, who happened to be aboard. "Owen is an ugly fellow, and a powerful one, and I imagine he possesses a certain amount of rough brute courage."

"I'm not afraid of him, sir," replied Jack, coolly. "At the same time, of course, I'll keep my eyes open."

"Owen probably can't hang around Dunhaven very long, anyway," continued the owner of the yard. "I don't believe he has very much saved. Of course, he can't get any work in his line in Dunhaven, now that this yard is closed to him. So look out for a day or two, and, after that, I guess he'll be gone."

"I'll keep my eye open, but I shan't lose any rest," smiled young Benson, confidently—too confidently, as the sequel proved.

Work was now proceeding at a rapid rate. Andrews was an ideal foreman, quiet, alert, watchful and understanding his trade thoroughly. He was something of a driver, as to speed, but workmen do not resent that if the one in authority be just and capable.

"I wish we had had you as foreman from the start, Andrews," remarked the inventor.

"Well, I was here, and ready to be called at any time," replied the new foreman, with a smile.

"By the way, you don't seem to have any trouble with Benson or Hastings," pursued Mr. Pollard.

"Not a bit. They're good helpers. In fact, young as they are, they are a long way on the road to being real mechanics."

"You don't find them forward, or—well, fresh?"

"They're not the least bit troubled that way," replied the new foreman emphatically. "Owen didn't get along with them, and couldn't have done so, because he's a nagger, and no self-respecting workman will stand for a nagger. There were times when O'Brien and I wondered if we hadn't better pitch him out and then leave our jobs."

Thus matters went along most smoothly. Jack Benson and Hal Hastings, with a good general knowledge of mechanics, and willing to work hard and tackle new problems, were learning much. Even before the "Pollard" was launched and sent on her trial trip these two boys showed remarkable proficiency in equipping and handling this wonderful class of craft.

In the meantime the boys had left the hotel, taking up their quarters at a comfortable boarding-house where Foreman Andrews lived. Though Farnum was paying them fair wages, they were thrifty enough to be on the lookout for any outside work with their camera outfit. So it happened that, one evening after supper, Jack and Hal, carrying their outfit, set out on a walk of more than two miles. They had secured an order to go to a wealthy man's summer "cottage," as the great, handsome pile was called, there to make some flashlight photographs of some of the large, expensively furnished rooms.

Time flew, and the owner of the cottage caused many delays by wishing furniture shifted about before the photographs were made. It was after eleven o'clock at night when the two submarine boys left the cottage to tramp back to Dunhaven. As they neared the village they heard the town clock striking midnight. That was the only sound they could hear besides the movement of their own feet. Dunhaven was wrapped in sound slumber.

Their way led the boys close to Farnum's boatyard. As they came around a corner of the fence, Hal, who was slightly in the lead, stepped back quickly, treading on his friend's toes.

"Sh!" whispered Hastings. "Keep quiet and take a sly peep around the corner. Look up along the fence and see what you make out."

Slipping off his hat, Jack took a hasty look, exposing very little of his head, while Hal now crowded close to him from behind.

"Someone trying to scale the fence," whispered Jack. "By Jove, there he goes. He has a good hold, and is going—now he's over in the yard."

Such stealthy prowling could mean little else than mischief brewing. To both the boys came instantly the same thought:

"The submarine boat!"

"Did you recognize him?" whispered Hal, quivering.

"No; too dark for that, and, besides, he was too quick. But we must hustle to alarm someone."

"There's a watchman in the yard," Hal replied. "He ought to be getting busy."

"I don't hear any hail, or any shot," Jack replied. "Hal, old fellow, we've got to do something ourselves."

"Well, we can climb the fence as well as that stranger did."

"We'd better. Here, take the flashlight gun. Pass that and the camera up as soon as I get to the top of the fence. We can't leave our outfit outside—it's worth too much money."

With that Jack Benson swiftly found a knothole in which he could get a slight foot-hold. With that start he was quickly up on top of the ten-foot fence. Bending down he took camera and flashlight "gun." Hal hurriedly followed. Down in the yard, they started speedily though softly forward, going by impulse straight toward the submarine's shed, though keeping in the shadow of other buildings.

Arrived at one corner of the office building, young Benson, who was in the lead, signaled a stop. Hal halted just behind him.

"It's the submarine, all right, that the fellow's after," whispered Jack excitedly, as he peeped. "Make him out over there, at the door? Gracious! He's unlocking and throwing the padlock off. And, blazes!

Can't you make out who it is, Hal?"

"Josh Owen! But he gave up his keys."

"He had at least one duplicate, then," declared Jack, in a tremulous whisper. "There, he's gone inside. Come on, Hal—soft-foot! We'll take a near look at what he's doing."

There was some distance to be traveled, and it had to be done with the utmost stealth. Whatever Josh Owen—if it was truly he—was doing in the submarine shed, the young shadows did not wish to put him on his guard until they had caught him red-handed.

"Where's the night watchman while all this is going on?" wondered Jack as he tip-toed forward. It was afterwards discovered that the watchman, who sometimes drank liquor, was at this moment sound asleep in one of the sheds. There was no time to be squandered in looking for him if Josh Owen was to be followed and foiled.

Creeping to the now open door of the submarine's shed, Jack, who was in the lead, took a peep inside.

There was a dim light in there, though it came from the further side of the hull. Benson signaled, and his friend followed him, stealthily, a step or two at a time, around to the stern of the "Pollard" as she lay on the stocks.

By this time a noise that plainly proceeded from the use of tools came to the ears of the boys. Their nerves were on the keenest tension as they reached the stern of the propped-up hull.

Then they came in sight of the quarry. Almost in the same flash they realized what the night's mischief was.

Depending wholly on the light of a dark lantern that lay on the floor of the shed, Owen, with two or three tools, was swiftly, wickedly tampering with one of the sea-valves belonging to one of the forward water compartments of the submarine.

This valve, if leaking badly when the craft lay submerged, would let in enough water to cause the "Pollard" to lurch and then go, nose-first, to the bottom. It was wholly possible, too, that a capable workman could tamper with the valve so that, on casual inspection, the damage would not be detected.

Hal Hastings's heart beat fast as he viewed this dimly illumined piece of cowardly treachery. His fingers itched to lay hold of Josh Owen, uneven though the fight might be with both boys for assailants.

But Jack Benson, though his first impulse was to let out a Comanche yell, and then dart forward into the fray, instantly conceived a plan that he thought would work better.

Gripping his chum's arm for silence, Jack whispered in his ear:

"Can you set the camera for universal focus, here in the shadow?"

"I—I think so," came Hal's low, quivering reply.

"Do it—like lightning, then!"

In his hand Jack held the flashlight "gun." It was one of those patent affairs, arranged to fire a charge of magnesium powder by the explosion of a cap when the trigger was pressed.

Dropping to one knee, Hal set the camera, half by instinct, half by guess. While he did so, Jack fixed a charge of the powder in the firing pan of the "gun."

These preparations made hardly any noise; such as might have been heard in a silent room was drowned by the tap-tap of a small hammer that Josh Owen was at the moment using.

And now, without glancing back at the stern, the ex-foreman half-turned his head, so as to give a profile view of his face.

Hal, kneeling, turned up quickly to nod the signal that the camera was ready.

Pop! Flare!

As the cap exploded, a blinding flash filled that side of the shed for a brief instant. It was as through a lightning bolt had plunged into the place.

Wholly unprepared for any such happening, Josh Owen let out a yell of fear, rose up and leaped back so that he upset and extinguished his dark lantern.

"Wha-wha-what was that?" he faltered.

In the intense darkness that followed the flash Jack and Hal stole away.

Suffering all the terrors of a guilty conscience, increased by the terror of the inky darkness under such circumstances, Josh Owen tremblingly felt for his momentarily useless lantern. It took him some moments to find it. Even then his fingers shook so convulsively that it needed several trials before he got the light going.

By this time Jack and Hal were safely outside. More than that, Jack held in his hand the padlock of the door, with the false key in it.

"Why not slam the padlock shut over the door and lock him in there until we can get someone here?" whispered Hal Hastings.

By this time the two boys were hiding behind the corner of a nearby building.

"I thought of that," whispered Jack, "and I'd like to do it. But Owen has a fearful temper. If we locked him in there, and he knew he had to be caught, he'd do thousands of dollars' worth of damage. As it is, if you watch out, you'll soon see him quitting that shed and getting away as fast as he can."

Not more than a few seconds later Josh Owen appeared at the door of the shed. He shut off the light from his dark lantern, then stole swiftly towards the fence. Going up and over, he vanished from sight.

"Now, we'll lock the shed, take this false key to Mr. Andrews, and let him decide whether to rouse Mr. Pollard or Mr. Farnum," announced Jack Benson.

Grant Andrews, as soon as he was aroused at the boarding house, and had been made to understand, took the false key, saying:

"I'll go over to the hotel and call Dave Pollard. Then I'll do whatever he says."

The inventor was greatly excited over the news borne to him by the new foreman. Together they hurried to the Farnum yard, unlocked the door to the submarine's shed, entered and made a hasty examination.

Thanks to the promptness of Jack Benson and Hal Hastings, Josh Owen had not had time to inflict more damage to the forward sea-valve than could be readily repaired.

"I guess that was what the infernal rascal meant when he told Jack Benson that the 'Pollard' would dive to the bottom and stay there," exclaimed the inventor, in a shaking voice. He smiled a ghastly smile.

"We'll put a stop to such pranks after this," replied the new foreman. "Until your craft is launched, sir, I'll sleep here nights, beginning with what's left of to-night."

Before the inventor left the yard, he hunted for and found the drunken night watchman, who was still asleep. That worthless guard was discharged the following day.

CHAPTER V

ONE MAN'S DUMFOUNDED FACE

When the new foreman's gang started on the "Pollard," at eight in the morning, there was no outward ripple to show that anything unusual had happened. True, Jacob Farnum arrived at the shed earlier than he was accustomed to do, but those of the workmen who were not in the secret thought nothing of that.

Half an hour later Josh Owen, a peculiar, gleaming look in his eyes, showed his head at the manhole opening over their heads.

"Good morning, Mr. Farnum," he called.

"Good morning, Owen," answered the yard's owner. "Come right down."

Owen came down the spiral staircase, looking curiously about him.

"I got your note, Mr. Farnum," began the ex-foreman. "What's the matter? Find you need me here, after all?"

"Not for long," replied Mr. Farnum, coldly. "Owen, before you gave your keys in to Mr. Partridge you must have taken an impression of one of them and must have fitted a key to the pattern. Why were you here last night?"

"Me? I wasn't here last night—nor any other night," Josh Owen made haste to answer, though a look of guilty alarm crept into his face. All of the workmen had ceased their toil, and stood looking on at this unusual scene.

"You say you weren't here last night?" demanded Mr. Farnum, sternly. "And you didn't use any false key to get into this shed?"

"Of course I didn't," retorted the ex-foreman, defiantly. "You wrote a note to me that, if I'd come around here this morning, I'd hear of a job. I didn't come here to be insulted."

"The job I mentioned in my note," rejoined Mr. Farnum, with a meaning smile, "is over at the penitentiary. Owen, you did come here last night. You scaled the fence at the west side, crossed the yard, opened the door of this building with this key—"

Here the yard's owner held out the false key, that all might see it.

"—and," finished Mr. Farnum, "you came in here and went to work to damage a sea-valve forward on this craft. The valve shows, this morning, very plain traces of having been tampered with."

Josh Owen was summoning all his courage, all his craft. Instead of looking frightened, he glared boldly at his accuser.

"Who says I did such a thing?" he demanded, hotly.

"Benson and Hastings saw you at your rascally work, my man."

"Humph!" snorted the ex-foreman. "Who? Those boys?"

"Yes."

"Humph! I wouldn't believe those boys under oath, and you'll make a huge mistake if you do, Mr. Farnum," continued Josh Owen, hotly.

"Then you deny that you were here, and that you tampered with a sea-valve last night?" insisted the yard's owner, looking his man keenly in the eyes.

"I'll deny it with my dying breath," asserted the former foreman, boldly. "As for those lying boys—"

"Do you believe *this* can lie?" inquired Mr. Farnum, passing the accused man a photograph print.

Josh Owen took the print, staring at it hard. In an instant his eyes began to open as wide as it was possible for them to do. A sickly, greenish pallor crept into the man's face. Beads of cold perspiration appeared on his forehead and temples.

"You see, your face shows up very clearly," went on the yard's owner, in the same cold, crushing voice. "Moreover, it shows you right at one of the sea-valves, and in the very act of tapping with a hammer. You didn't know that Benson and Hastings are very fair photographers, did you?"

"I don't care what they are," cried Owen, in a passionate voice, as before the print to small bits. "That isn't a photograph of me, even if it does look like me, and I wasn't here last night. I—"

"Any judge and jury will believe the evidence against you, my man," cried Farnum, sternly. "As for the boys, maybe you don't like them, nor they you. They've reason enough for not liking you. Besides, they couldn't photograph anything that wasn't here to be photographed."

"Then it was that flash—" began Josh Owen.

He stopped instantly, biting his lips savagely.

"Yes, they took the picture by flashlight, and you've just admitted remembering the flash that interrupted your rascally labor," exclaimed Mr. Farnum, triumphantly. "As for the print you've just torn

up, Owen, it doesn't make any difference. There are other copies of it. Now, my fine fellow, you've been trapped just as nicely as the law requires, and, in addition, you know you're guilty of the whole thing. Now—"

But Owen leaped up the spiral staircase, shouting:

"I won't be taken alive! I—"

Andrews, O'Brien and another workman sprang forward to seize the fellow, but Mr. Farnum called them back. Josh Owen got down from the platform deck, and out of the shed in a twinkling.

"Let him go," ordered, the yard's owner. "He won't be seen around Dunhaven after this. If he is, I can quickly enough put the law's officers on his track. But he'll vanish and stay vanished."

"I shan't soon forget the absolutely dumfounded look on his face when he saw that photograph," laughed Mr. Pollard. "It was a look of complete, incredulous amazement."

"I'm sorry for the wretch's family," sighed Mr. Farnum. "However, if Owen clears out promptly, and stays away from this part of the country, I'll give him an opportunity for a new chance."

Then the work went on again. Even with the thorough examination of the sea-valve that had been, tampered with, there was not so much to be done, for this was the last day of the work. On the morrow Dunhaven was to be more or less alive, for the "Pollard" was to be launched then. Many visitors, including a swarm of newspaper men, were expected. An officer of the United States Navy was also booked to be present, to witness the launching, and to note how the "Pollard" might sit on the water afterwards.

Before four o'clock the last stroke of work had been done. Mr. Farnum, the anxious, inventor, the foreman and the others went all over the submarine marine craft, inside and out, looking for any detail of the work that might have been slighted.

"It's all done—finished," cried David Pollard, nervously.

"And, Mr. Andrews, you'll have a real guard here to-night to help you keep watch," announced Jacob Farnum. "We've heard the last of Owen, without a doubt, but we won't take a single chance to-night. Now, men, all be here at seven in the morning, ready for work. The launching is to be at ten o'clock, but at the last moment we may find that something needs overhauling. Now, you've all worked hard and faithfully." "Here's a little present for each of you, with much more to come if the boat proves the success we hope."

As the men passed him, Jacob Farnum handed each a crisp ten-dollar banknote. Even Jack and Hal were thus remembered.

"But we haven't been here, sir, long enough to earn this present," protested Jack Benson.

"You haven't been here long, perhaps," smiled Mr. Farnum. "But think of what you did last night. By the way, Benson, and Hastings, I want to see you at my office at once."

Wondering somewhat, the youngsters followed their employer, and David Pollard accompanied them.

"Now, then, boys," began their employer, seating himself at his desk, "I want to say to you that my friend Pollard hired you on the strength of your general appearance and the impression you both made. At the same time Pollard was careful to write to the references you gave in your home town. This noon he received letters from your former school teacher and your minister. Both speak in the nicest terms of you both, as honorable, upright, hard-working young men."

"It's fine to know that one is remembered in that way," Jack replied, his face, and Hal's, showing their pleasure.

"Now, to go on," continued Mr. Farnum, "as soon as the boat is in the water there comes up the question of a crew for the 'Pollard.' Some of our good hands, especially those with families, say very frankly that their taste doesn't run to going down in diving boats, on account of the possible chance that the Pollard might not be able to get up to the surface again. But Pollard tells me that you've applied for a chance to belong to the crew of the boat."

"That's our biggest wish, gentlemen!" cried Jack Benson, his eyes glowing.

"Nothing else could give us half the delight," confirmed Hal Hastings.

"Then we're going to give you the chance," announced Mr. Farnum, while David Pollard nodded. "But, of course, you're not blind to the fact that, even on the most perfect submarine torpedo boat, there's some risk to your lives."

"One isn't wholly safe, either," retorted Jack, coolly, "in crossing a crowded city street."

"Then you're both alive to the danger, but not afraid to chance it?"

"We're ready for anything in the submarine boat line," declared Jack and Hal, in the same breath.

"Then that's settled. You're both engaged to serve aboard the 'Pollard' when she floats—and dives," wound up Mr. Farnum, dropping back into his matter-of-fact tone, and mopping his face, for the July afternoon was exceedingly hot. "By the way, boys, how do you feel about taking a little pleasure trip to-night? How'd you like to take one of my horses and a buggy, after supper?"

"Fine and splendid," replied Jack, with enthusiasm.

"And, by the way, since your references are so good, I can give you a chance to try to make a little extra money, if you like."

"Extra money is highly prized in the town where we come from, sir," laughed young Benson.

"Well, see here, over at Waverly Center, eight miles from here, is a man named George Forrester. Now, Forrester owes me, and has owed me, for some time, eight hundred dollars for a little boat we built him here. Forrester was always considered a safe man, but for some reason he has let this bill run. If you care to, you may take the bill and drive over to see him to-night. I'll pay you a commission of five per cent. on the whole bill, or any part that you can collect. But I warn you that you may find Forrester a bit shy about settling."

No matter! A chance to get in forty dollars in an evening looked extremely attractive to these young submarine boys.

CHAPTER VI

ALONG THE TRAIL OF TROUBLE

"I wonder if we shall find our man at home?" remarked Jack Benson, as he and his chum drove over the road to Waverly Center in the early evening.

"I wonder if he'll settle the bill!" rejoined Hal.

"If he has the money, and doesn't settle, it'll show what poor collectors we are," laughed Jack.

"Very few men keep eight hundred dollars around the house," objected young Hastings.

"And our man won't have that amount in cash, either. I'd be almost afraid to take that amount of real money, at night. If Mr. Forrester is willing to do something pleasant for us, it will be in the form of a check, of course."

"I'd like to come out all right with Mr. Forrester, of course," Hal admitted. "But, to tell the truth, I haven't been thinking much about Jack, old fellow, all my real thoughts are on our wonderful chance to be part of the trial crew of the 'Pollard.'"

"Same here," admitted Benson. "Say, money does look rather small, compared with a chance like ours. Now, doesn't it?"

So they hardly mentioned Mr. Forrester on the rest of that cool, delightful drive. Arrived at Waverly Center, however, they had to inquire the way to the Forrester house. They found it, a comfortable though not pretentious house. The owner was at home, and saw them at once.

"May we see you alone, Mr. Forester?" asked Jack Benson, respectfully.

"Is it as bad as all that?" laughed their host, a pleasant-faced, rather bald man past forty. "Come into

my little den, then."

He conducted them to a small room that looked as though it served partly the purposes of library and partly of office.

"Now, what can I do for you?" inquired Mr. Forrester.

"We represent Mr. Farnum, of Dunhaven," began Jack, slowly.

"Farnum? Oh, yes, the boat-builder. He must know that I don't want anything new in his line, and on any other business I imagine he would have sent someone—er—older."

"Mr. Farnum believed you would find it wholly convenient, now, to settle the account for the last bill," Benson went on, slipping the statement from an inner pocket and laying it on the desk before Mr. Forrester. That gentleman frowned slightly.

"I trust we haven't called at the wrong time, and that it will be wholly convenient for you this evening," Jack continued.

"But, see here, young man, I know nothing about you. You have the bill, true, but it is not receipted."

"I will receipt it, in Mr. Farnum's name."

"All well and good," replied Mr. Forrester. "But—pardon me—how do I know that you have any authority to receipt for this account?"

"Then I think you will appreciate my painstaking care to make everything regular and satisfactory," laughed Jack, very quietly. "Here is a paper, signed by Mr. Farnum, authorizing me to receipt this account in his name. You may keep this authorization along with the receipt. Mr. Forrester, it is growing late, and we are obliged to be at business early in the morning. You will oblige us by letting us have your check, won't you?"

Benson spoke as though he had not a doubt of immediate settlement. Yet his tone and his manner were such as not to give the least offense to the man who was being "dunned."

"Why, this—er—is rather a late time in the day to collect bills," hinted Mr. Forrester, in an uncertain voice.

"Had the matter not been just a little pressing we wouldn't have ventured over as late," Benson replied, softly. "However, you understand what I would say, don't you, Mr. Forrester?"

There was something about the young speaker's manner, his tone, the look in his eyes, that proclaimed him to be anything but a "quitter." Mr. Forrester began to feel that, if he succeeded in evading payment this evening, he would only have to see these young men frequently.

"Well, you see, Benson," he said, at last, "I don't want to draw for such a sum against my check account before to-morrow."

"I think we could come again to-morrow, if we *have* to," responded young Benson, as though thinking it over.

"I am going to make a deposit in my bank in the morning," continued the man.

"Then we are to come again to-morrow evening?" insisted Jack.

"Why, hang it, no. If you'll take cash, instead of check, I can let you have the money to-night."

But that gentleman added, under his breath:

"I may as well settle to-night as have them coming again to-morrow."

"Why, certainly we'll take the cash, to-night," replied young Benson, his face beaming at thought of how easily a fine commission was to be earned as part of an evening's pleasure.

Mr. Forrester, having made the offer, began secretly to regret it. He was a man who meant to pay his debts, but just now he felt that he would really like to have the money to use in other directions.

Jack, however; began to suspect that some such thought was in the other's mind.

"With your permission, Mr. Forrester," said the boy, reaching over the desk, "I'll borrow one of your pens."

In a firm, clear hand Jack Benson promptly receipted the bill, dating the receipt as well, and affixing his own name as the collector.

"Now, that's all done," smiled Jack, pleasantly, putting back the pen, blotting the fresh ink and passing the paper half forward.

Stifling a sigh, Mr. Forrester rose, going to his safe. A few turns of the combination lock and he pulled the steel door open.

"Nine hundred and fifty dollars that came in this afternoon. I intended to bank it in the morning," he said, then began to count "If a burglar broke in to-night and cracked the safe," he added, with a laugh, "I'd be glad, in the morning, that I had settled this bill with cash."

Jack received the bills with a rapidly beating heart. He counted them, found the amount correct, and passed half the money to Hal Hastings.

"For safety, Hal," he suggested, "I think we'd better divide the money, and then each of us put half of his own pile in each shoe."

Mr. Forrester watched with something like an amused smile as the two youngsters crossed the room, removing their shoes, and putting small packets of bills down inside.

"I suppose that's in order that a hold-up artist would pass the money by," he chuckled. "Well, boys, I wish you a safe journey back with your money. We don't often have any hold-ups on these quiet roads, anyway."

Before leaving, Jack took pains to thank his host again, very courteously, for the settlement of the account. Then the boys went outside, untied the horse, got into the buggy and drove away.

"Well, that's a pretty smooth profit for one evening," laughed Jack, as he turned the horse's head into the highway.

"Forty dollars you make, in one evening," commented Hal.

"Twenty apiece, you mean, old fellow. You were with me in this."

"But I didn't have to do any of the talking, or anything else."

"Just the same, Hal, you know we're still partners."

"Whew!" said Hastings, uneasily. "I shall be nervous until we reach Mr. Farnum's house and hand him the money. Hold up a minute, Jack, while we're near houses."

"What's the game?" inquired Benson, as his chum leaped down into the road and began to rummage about.

"These may be of some use to us in the buggy; just possibly," replied Hal, returning with a half dozen stones, the size of hens' eggs, which he placed on the seat between them. "It's the only form of arms we have, Jack," he whispered, "and we're carrying a heap more money than we could make good in a long time."

"We've got only a few miles to go," laughed Jack, easily. "Besides who'd ever think of holding up boys? And no one but Mr. Forrester knows that we have the cash."

In the first five miles that they drove from Waverly Center the boys passed only two other horse-drawn vehicles and one automobile. Then, suddenly, the keen ears of both boys heard a sound as of some human being wailing in acute distress.

A moment later they came in sight of the cause of the sounds. A hatless, dirty, illy-dressed youngster of perhaps ten years stood by the roadside, howling and digging his soiled fists into his eyes as he blubbered. At sight of the horse and buggy this small sample of human misery looked up to call, appealingly:

"Hey! Oh, mister!"

"Well," demanded Jack, reining in the horse, "what's the matter?"

"Oh, mister, mister! It's me mother!"

"What's the matter with her? Where is she?"

"She's in there," pointing under the trees just off the road. "We was walkin' along, an' one o' them otterbubbles must ha' hit her. She give a yell, then crawled inter them bushes. She hain't said nuthin' lately—an' oh! I'm dreadful scared!"

"Poor little chap!" muttered Jack, handing the reins to his friend.
"I'll go in and see what's wrong."

But Hal also jumped out, hastily hitching the horse. Then they followed their youthful guide in under the trees, to a clump of bushes. There in the dark Jack and Hal saw a huddled mass of something lying on the ground. Benson was the first to bend over, but Hal, also peering intently, was close at his side.

"Why, this isn't anything human," called Jack. "It's just a—"

Thump! A jarring blow fell upon him from behind, knocking the boy nearly unconscious. Hal, struck at the same moment, felt his head reel, and then did lose consciousness for a few moments.

"Ha, ha! Ho! ho!" roared the elfin youngster, his tears suddenly giving place to laughter as he fled.

It was Joshua Owen, aided by his bullying nephew, Dan Jagers, who had made this sudden, treacherous assault. That both were well prepared for the miserable trick was shown by the speed with which they tied the hands of the helpless boys behind them.

"Now, bring *your* prize along," directed Owen, jubilantly, as he picked up Hal Hastings, bearing that youth on his shoulder.

Jagers, though not a giant, was strong enough to do the same with Jack Benson. Further and further into the thicket they bore their captives, pausing only once, to gag their charges as soon as the latter showed a disposition to yell.

At last the rascally pair halted in the depths of the woods, dumping their human burdens on the ground.

"You're not the lightest thing I ever carried," growled Josh Owen, panting somewhat, as he reached for his pipe and filled it.

"Now!" clicked Dan Jagers, shaking a dirty, heavy fist over Jack's face. "I can pay you back for that black eye, and all the other mean things you done to me, you sneak!"

"Oh, we'll pay ye both back," gritted Owen, lighting his pipe and puffing. "An' say! I hear ye're both slated for the launchin' of the 'Pollard' to-morrow, and that ye're to have a try as members of the crew. Well, ye won't be at the launching! Take it from me that, if ye ever git back to Dunhaven, 'twon't be for many a day yet. We've got a fine place to hide ye, near here. Nobody'll ever find ye, even if they take the trouble t'look. And, as the days go by, Dan and me will take plenty of chance t'show ye just how we feel about ye. We'll pay ye back, with loads of interest, younkers, for the mean things ye've done to us!"

As if to emphasize his spite, Owen gave each of them a kick as he stood over the boys, glaring down at them.

In the minds of Jack and Hal, torment was raging. Ordinarily, it would have been bad enough to be certain of missing the launching of the submarine boat, and of possibly losing their places in the crew. But now, a far greater terror assailed them. They had collected the eight hundred dollars. If they failed to appear and to turn it over, Jacob Farnum would have the best reason in the world for believing them defaulters.

"Wondering what I'm going to do t'ye, to square matters, ain't ye?" demanded Dan Jagers, bending over and glaring into Jack's eyes. "Well, go on guessin'. My hate's that great that I'm goin' ter take plenty o' time to think it over 'fore I do a thing t'ye."

"I guess, first-off, Dan," observed his uncle, "ye'd better go back t' the road an' leave that horse somewheres further off. Probably, if ye do, it'll trot back into Dunhaven, and that'll be good enough."

"Got any money for licker?" demanded Dan. "I can git some an' bring it back."

"Go through the boys' pockets. Ye ought to find some cash there," hinted Owen.

Dan looted a few dollars from the pockets of each captive. Jack and Hal, however, were satisfied that their captors knew nothing of the great sum of money they had collected.

"And, while I think of it, Dan," continued Owen, "ye know where to leave them boys' shoes. Ye know who they'll fit."

Josh Owens started by unlacing Jack's shoes roughly and hauling them off. As he did so, oven in the darkness, he saw something fall the ground.

"Money!" gasped Josh Owen, in evil delight. "Look at the piles of it! Hurry with *your* younker, Dan. Maybe ye'll have the same luck."

Almost in a twinkling, it seemed to the groaning captives, the rascally pair had the whole sum of eight hundred dollars in their greedy hands.

Now, what would going back to Dunhaven be like for these two hapless submarine boys?

Even though they returned, manfully, at the first chance, how would their story of having been robbed sound? What a thin, hollow mockery it would seem, backed only by their own word!

To the two chums it almost seemed as though death would be sweeter!

CHAPTER VII

WHEN THIEVES FALL OUT

"By the great sledge-hammer! Here's a whole bale of money!" gasped Dan Jagers, after having emptied Hal's shoes.

Wholly unmindful of the one he had just robbed, Jagers sat down on the ground, passing the banknotes between his fingers.

"I found a small hay-mow of money where I looked, too," observed Josh Owen, with intense satisfaction, though his manner was calmer.

"How much did *you* get?" demanded Dan, instantly prepared to be suspicious that his rascally uncle had happened upon the lion's share.

Josh Owen thrust his findings deep down in a trousers pocket before he replied:

"No one will see our light 'way in here. Wait till I light the dark lantern. Then we can count up. But—don't you try to hide any on me, Dan!"

So keenly did the older man watch the younger one that the former burned his fingers twice in attempting to light the lantern. Yet at last the lantern was lighted, the wick turned up not too high, and then the older man invited:

"Sit down in front of me, Dan, sociable like, so I can keep track of yer hands."

"D'ye think I'm the only one'll bear watching?" demanded Jagers, hoarsely. "I ain't taken my eyes off that pocket o' your 'n. Now, pull out that money, an' be sure ye git it all out. Turn the pocket inside out. That's right. Now, you count your money, an' I'll watch. Then I'll count mine, an' you can watch, if ye wanter."

Mutual confidence being thus established between the rogues, the counting proceeded. Josh found that he had just four hundred dollars in his "findings." Dan Jagers's count proved that that young bully possessed an exactly equal sum.

"Then there ain't no need o' dividing," declared Dan, thrusting his money into a trousers pocket and fumbling for a pin with which to close the top of the pocket. "Now, I'll go back to the road, find the hoss, an' drive him most of the way into town. Then I'll turn the hoss loose, to do his home-findin' an' I'll keep on until I can buy something in bottles."

"But ye ain't goin' t' take all that money with ye inter town?" protested Josh Owen.

"Why not? It's mine," declared Jagers, with singular ideas of ownership.

"But I know ye, Dan Jagers. If ye git inter Dunhaven with all that money ye won't be able to keep from showin' it. Then, if these boys ever git loose, an' do their talkin', folks will remember that ye showed such a lot o' cash on this night, an' the law'll have you caught in yer own steel trap. It'd help to

put me in trouble, too. No, no, Danny. Ye can take five dollars, but ye'll have t' leave the rest of the money with me."

"An' then I'd find ye here when I came back, wouldn't I?" sneered Jagers.

"Yes!" replied Josh Owen, stoutly, and doubtless meant it, for he was really fond of this rough, shaggy young bully of a nephew of his. "Don't ye see, Danny, it'd be foolish of me to light out with all the money? Then ye'd turn against me, an' help the constables to catch me. Looky here, Danny, you trust me, an' ye won't come far out. Now, take five dollars, an' leave the rest with me."

"No, I won't," retorted that youth, defiantly.

"Yes, ye will!" suddenly shot from between the lips of Josh Owen. He accompanied the words with a spring, bearing his nephew down to the ground, and holding him there.

"I'm stronger than you, Danny, an' ye know it," growled the ex-foreman, hoarsely. "Now, will ye hand up that money, or will ye make me take it from ye?"

With a reluctant grace, while still pinned down to the ground, Dan Jagers surrendered his half of the stolen money.

"Now, ye can git up, and go do what's laid out to be done," announced Josh Owen, peeling a five-dollar bill from the roll and handing it to his nephew. "First, get the horse headed right, then go on into town and get the liquor. But don't ye stop to drink in Dunhaven, Danny. If ye do, ye'll be sure to git inter a fight, and ye might do some talkin' too. Hustle in, and hustle back, and ye'll find ye can trust me to hold outer to-night's pickings safe for ye. Don't ye worry a mite on the way to town or back, Danny boy."

If a scowl could have killed, Dan would have triumphed, even now, at the expense of his uncle's life. But Josh paid no heed to black looks. He thought he knew this nephew of his.

"Hurry along, Danny," he coaxed. "My throat is gittin' mighty dry for a bit o' liquor."

"Give me another five-spot," begged Jagers.

"Not another dollar till ye come back, Danny," rejoined his uncle, firmly. "The quicker ye start, an' return, the quicker ye'll have yer share of the night's business. Now, git!"

Using ugly language under his breath, Dan Jagers turned and shuffled off through the woods, well knowing that he would suffer from his uncle's heavy hands if he did not.

Josh now extinguished the light by shutting off the slide of his dark lantern. Then, after taking a look at the boys, he seated himself near them, filling his pipe once more while he muttered:

"Subsequent happenin's clean drove them shoes outer Danny's mind. An' I don't wonder!"

Having gotten his pipe comfortably lighted, Josh could not resist the temptation to open the slide of his lantern ever so little; in order that he might have another look at the money.

"Wonder how ye came to have it?" he muttered, looking at the boys, who, being gagged as well as bound, could not have answered anyway. "I guess likely Farnum must ha' been fool enough to let ye do some collectin' for him," grinned Josh. "In that case, younkers, Danny an' me are makin' it pretty hard for ye all 'round, ain't we?"

That thought appeared to bring Owen around into a state of good humor. He looked at the chuckling, and two or three times broke out into a hearty guffaw.

Jack Benson's mental torment grew as the time passed. Hal Hastings was in no more enviable frame of mind.

"And we brought this upon us by being sympathetic. We wanted to help that infernal little boy out, and carry relief to his injured mother!" thought Jack, squirming. "Confound it, I feel, just now, as though I would never caught trying to do another kind act! All this fearful luck just because we had to have more sympathy than brains! What fools we are!"

Later came this terrifying thought:

"Mr. Farnum won't believe us, of course. The story will sound altogether too absurd." "What will he

do—have us sent to jail as common thieves?"

"Ain't very comfortable in yer mind, are ye, younker?" leered Josh Owen, hearing the muffled groan that escaped the boy.

Though Josh Owen smoked many pipefuls, time soon began to drag on that worthy's hands. Hours slipped by.

"I'd no business to let Danny go," growled Owen, uneasily, time after time, often rising and pacing about, though never straying away from the two boys. "That young feller thinks a heap too much o' liquor for one so young. He's spendin' time, as well as money, over in Dunhaven. It won't be so bad if he don't take too much, and get talkative."

Two or three times Josh thought he heard someone moving in the woods. Each time he called softly, or signaled, but there came no response.

Despite his inward suffering, Jack Benson dozed at last. So, as he afterwards learned, did Hal. Yet these drowsings must have been short. They were filled with horrible dreams of disgrace, imprisonment, and all the misfortunes that healthy young minds in torment could bring up.

At last Jack awoke, with a start, to realize that it was daylight.

Josh Owen was on his feet, his taste for tobacco gone. He was listening, peering between the trees, and making many impatient remarks under his breath.

"Hullo, uncle! Gettin' weary, carryin' 'round my share of the money?" chuckled the voice of Dan Jagers. Then that shaggy young bully stepped out from behind a tree.

"Ye've been long enough," growled his relieved uncle. "But I'm glad t' see ye're in good enough shape."

"Oh, I'm all right," admitted Jagers, serenely, as he came forward. "I've been back here for hours."

"What are ye telling me?" demanded Josh Owen.

"The facts. Ye see, Uncle Josh, I wanted to know whether ye'd forgit ye had my money, an' stray off. So I've been watchin' round, 'thout making no noise, for hours." Josh Owen had no means of knowing whether this statement was the truth or not, but he growled:

"Then ye must know for sure, now, lad, that I'm square with my own nephew. What'd ye bring back with ye?"

"Something to eat."

"And something to drink, hey? I guess we'll eat first."

Dan retraced his way through the woods a few paces, returning with packages.

"You younkers can see us eat, if you want to," said Josh Owen, with a malicious leer, as he spread a piece of paper on the ground and began to lay out the meal. "When are you two going to eat? I don't know. Maybe not for a few days yet. Ye see, it ain't so easy to make an enemy of a man by sneaky tricks, and then get on his right side again."

This picnic breakfast lasted a long time, it seemed to watchful Jack Benson. But at last it was over. Josh brought out his ill-smelling pipe once more, settling himself, with his back against a tree-trunk, to enjoy himself.

"Bring anything to drink, Danny boy?" inquired Owen, after a few minutes.

"Here's some beer," proposed Jagers, passing over the bottle.

Josh opened it, took a long drink, then sat with the bottle poised on one of his knees.

"I don't believe ye'd better have any of this, Danny, lad," declared Owen, with a grin.

"Don't want any," responded Jagers, in a rather sulky voice.

Dan got up and strolled about, his hands in his pockets, whistling softly but cheerily. Josh Owen finished his unwise beverage, and tossed the bottle a few feet away. Presently the man's eyes closed,

but he opened them as though with an effort.

"S'here, Danny," he demanded, thickly, drowsily, "watcher put in that stuff?"

Dan Juggers did not reply, but he turned to watch his uncle, a look of the lowest cunning in the young bully's eyes. For a brief space of time Owen fought against his drowsiness. Then he lurched, falling over on one side, unconscious—drugged.

In a twinkling, then, Dan Juggers knelt beside his uncle, rifling the other man's pockets until he had brought to light both their shares in the evil-doing of the night.

CHAPTER VIII

A SWIFT STROKE FOR HONOR

For the space of a few moments Dan Juggers stared at the money clutched in his hands in a way that betrayed the extent of its fascinating hold upon his mind.

Then he glanced down at his unconscious uncle.

"Ugh!" he grunted, giving that prostrate form a slight but contemptuous kick. "If I hadn't done something like this you would. Oh, ye-eh, there's honor among thieves, but it's no good trusting to that honor. Every man for himself, in the woods!"

One more gloating look the shaggy young bully took at all that money, before thrusting it deep down in a pocket and pinning the opening securely.

"Don't ye wish ye was me, with all this money to have a good time on?" he demanded, jeeringly, of Jack Benson. "But maybe ye've framed up some kind of a yarn that yer boss, Farnum, will be willin' to believe. If ye hain't, then mebbe ye'd better never git close to him again."

Dan Juggers again turned his attention to his overcome uncle, kneeling beside the ex-foreman and watching his face closely.

And then a strange thing happened, or so it would have seemed, had Dan Juggers possessed eyes in the back of his head. For Jack Benson likewise his chum had striven many times through the night to free their wrists of the cords that bound them. Jack was the first to succeed, at a cost of hours of effort and thinking. He wriggled one hand out from under the knots just as Dan turned for that last look at the prostrate man.

How fearfully numbed Jack Benson's wrists were, after that long spell of being tied up. Yet the boy knew that he must quickly restore circulation there and get his hands ready for use before it was all too late.

It must be one swift, decisive, conquering stroke for honor's sake.

Jack's trembling right hand went into one of his trousers pockets. He found his clasp-knife, yanked it out, opened one of the blades, and Hal Hastings, who had been watching every move with breathless interest, now rolled noiselessly so that his chum could reach the rope that held him captive.

In another twinkling Hal was free. Just then, Juggers, fancying he heard some noise in their direction, turned slowly. By the time Juggers had them within his range of vision each boy was lying as before, his hands behind his back.

With a heartless chuckle, Dan turned back for one last look at his uncle. Jack rose, almost fearing to breathe. Hal started to follow suit. There was some swift stealthy toe-work. Just as Dan Juggers turned more sharply Jack Benson hurled himself through the air, catching and clutching at his enemy's neck. Both rolled over together, Dan, with his greater strength, fighting like a panther and bear in one.

It was Hal Hastings's chance. As he darted forward he espied a serviceable-looking stick on the ground. He snatched it up with a single breathless swoop, then poised himself over the struggling fighters, stick uplifted.

Down came that slender cudgel, striking Dan a light blow squarely top of his head.

"O-o-ow! Help! Quit that!" screamed Dan Jagers.

"Lie still, then," commanded Hal, sternly. "And let go of Jack, or I'll use this stick for I'm worth."

Brave enough while he thought he had a good fighting chance, Dan cowered under the menace of that club. He submitted to being rolled on his back, pleading:

"Don't club me! I'll be quiet."

"See that you are, then," ordered young Benson, kneeling on his opponent's chest. "Remember, Dan, that there are two of us. We mean to win, no matter how ugly a fight we have to put up."

"Want the gag that you threw away when you jumped up, Jack?" asked Hal, with a delighted grin.

"No; we don't need to gag him. Jagers, roll over on your face, and don't you dare make any attempt to get up," ordered the submarine, boy, rising from his prostrate foe, while Hastings stood ready to use the stick.

Dan obeyed. Jack took the slim cudgel from, his chum, who, at a silent signal, slipped back and picked up some of the slashed cord. There was enough of it to accomplish the tying of Jagers.

"See here," whined Dan, "you're not going to take me to Dunhaven?"

"We're going to get that money away from you, and take it to its rightful owner," retorted Jack, tersely, as he commenced to tie the knots, while Hal held the cudgel conveniently close to the bully's head.

Dan, however, had hardly a thought of making any fight. Jack, alone, was nearly a match for him. The two churns, acting together, could overcome him easily enough at any time.

"Oh, I'll give up the money," promised Dan Jagers, willingly.

"Thank you," returned Jack, dryly. "However, we'll take it ourselves—and right now," he added, as he finished tying the knots about Dan's wrists.

The rifling of Jagers's pockets brought to light all of Mr. Farnum's money except the five dollars Dan had spent in Dunhaven the night before. However, the boys' own money, that had been taken from their pockets, and which was now found in one of Owen's vest pockets, made up the full sum of eight hundred dollars.

"You fellers win, and I lose a good time," muttered Dan, mournfully.

"But say, now you've got the cash again, set me free before ye start for Dunhaven. Don't leave me tied up like this."

"We won't," Jack promised him, grimly. "We'll take you with us."

"Not to Dunhaven!" screamed the bully.

"Even to Dunhaven," mocked Hal.

"But they'll send me to jail," protested the scared wretch.

"Well," insinuated Benson, "can you imagine any other place that would be as suitable for a fellow of your kind?"

"You fellers promised me ye wouldn't take me to Dunhaven, if I stopped fighting," whined Jagers.

"We promised you nothing of the sort," retorted Jack. "Now, come. Up on your feet with you!"

The two submarine boys raised the now whitefaced bully, who was still pleading and protesting. Dan refused to start at the word, but a few sharp cuts across his legs by Hal made the fellow change his mind.

"I reckon your uncle will stay until he's called for," laughed Jack, as they started. "Anyway, the matter of greatest importance is to deliver the money to Mr. Farnum before it goes through any more mishaps."

"I tell ye, tain't right to make me go along an' be sent to jail," declared Jagers, earnestly. "Ye've already done me harm enough, and got me outer my job."

"If you haven't head enough to know the difference between getting yourself into all your troubles,

and our doing it, there's no use arguing the matter," retorted Jack, quietly. "Get along, now, for we don't mean to have any nonsense. We've got to get through in time to send someone back for your uncle.", Despite the vigilance of both boys, Dan lagged all he could. As he came nearer to the seaport village his despair and rage increased so that he several times halted and flatly refused to stir. At such times Hal had to use the stick with increasing severity.

At last, with a violent wrench, Jagers, with his strong wrists, managed to snap the cords upon which he had already made many efforts.

"Now, see here," he defied them, waving his fists in the air, "mebbe ye think ye're goin' to take me with ye, but ye won't take me inter town alive!"

Retreating, he crouched against a tree, waving his fists before him. Jack and Hal lost no time closing in with the bully, but he drove them back. The boys were not prepared to do their enemy serious bodily harm; Dan, on the other hand, didn't care what he did, so the odds seemed almost in his favor.

"Clear out, an' leave me to take to my heels, an' I'll call it square," he shouted, hoarsely. "But, if ye try to fight, then don't blame me for anything that happens to ye. I won't go to jail, I tell ye! I'll die, sooner!"

Jack, with his fists up, worked in as close as he could, trying to get in under the big bully's guard for a clinch, so that Hal Hastings could finish the work of successful attack. Dan, fighting with the fury and strategy of desperation, kept them both off fairly well.

While the opposing forces were so occupied there came down a path out of the woods, behind the tree against which Jagers was backed, a third boy. About sixteen years old he appeared to be. He wore patched overalls, a frayed flannel shirt and a much-used straw hat of the field variety. His hair, once brown, had many streaks of reddish tint in it, from long exposure to the sun. His face was brick-red from the same cause. His rather large hands looked rough enough from hard labor. But he had frank, laughing eyes and a homely, honest look. Moreover, he had the air of one who could be swiftly alert.

All this Jack Benson noted as soon as he caught sight of the newcomer.

"Hullo, there!" called Jack, pausing. "This fellow is a thief, and we're trying to get him to town. Help us to get him, will you?"

"Want me to look behind me, an' then ye'll jump me, hey?" leered Dan Jagers. "That won't work."

The newcomer grinned broadly, then shot forward. Ere Jagers could change his mind he felt himself clasped from behind, a pair of strong hands joined over his windpipe, his body thus bound securely to the tree.

"He—help!" sputtered the victim of this attack.

"We're bringing it to you," laughed Jack, leaping forward. In a twinkling, now, the three boys had Dan Jagers down, and held so closely that he could not stir. Benson produced another length of cord, and Dan had to submit to having his wrists lashed, this time in most workmanlike manner.

"Thank you, ever so much," acknowledged Jack, looking up at the new boy.

"Oh, you're welcome," laughed the young stranger. "I know Dan Jagers, and I'm willing to believe anything against him."

"I'll live to get square with ye for this, one o' these days, Eph Somers!" growled the captive.

"Oh, take your time about it, Dan," laughed Eph, unconcernedly. "I'm patient, you know, about such things. In fact, I come of a patient family."

CHAPTER IX

"Which way were you headed when you happened along?" inquired Jack Benson.

"Dunhaven way," responded Eph Somers.

"Good enough. That's where we're going, too."

"It's me for the submarine launching today," Eph remarked, rather ungrammatically. "I wouldn't miss that for the world."

"Nor would we, either," added Hal. "Especially, as we've helped in the work on her. And, gracious, what time is it?"

"Just about eight o'clock," replied Somers, consulting his watch.

"And the launching is at ten o'clock. Come; we must hustle along. What will Mr. Farnum be thinking of us?"

"He probably believes *we* stole the money, and he must have officers out looking for us by this time," hinted Jack; with a wry face.

Jack thought, to be sure, of Josh Owen, back there in the woods, but clearly it would be out of place to ask Eph Somers to go back and attend to the ex-foreman. Besides, they could all soon be in Dunhaven, and then a constable or two could be sent out to search.

At first, Dan tried his old tactics of balking, but a few energetic, rough-and-ready punches from Eph caused the bully to change his mind. After that he went along in sullen silence. It was not long before the quartette turned down into the shore road that led up to the boatyard.

As they came near the big gate, still closed to the public, the boys beheld a crowd of several Hundred people. There were many vehicles and automobiles there, also.

"Here come those boys! Hey, young fellows, the officers are looking for you!" shouted someone.

"I guess so," admitted Jack, dryly. "However, they won't want us. Let us through this crowd, please. We want to find Mr. Farnum without delay."

The new watchman, at the gate, admitted them without question. Eph Somers, being of the party, got into the yard also, without any difficulty.

It being, now, less than two hours before the time set for the launching of the "Pollard," both the yard's owner and the inventor were with the gang of workmen that was busy removing the water end of the submarine craft's construction shed.

"Here come Benson and Hastings," called Grant Andrews, catching sight of the boys.

Jacob Farnum turned to look at them, then came on the run.

"I hear you have put officers out, after us, and I don't blame you," smiled Jack, rather grimly. "However, we didn't run away with your money, and we would have been back last night had that been possible."

"I could hardly bring myself to believe that you had absconded," cried Mr. Farnum, ruefully. "I sent officers out on the trail as much to learn what had happened to you as for any other reason. The horse came in with the buggy last night, and I knew something was wrong. But this fellow, Jagers—"

"He and Owen tricked us and got us last night," explained Benson. "I don't, believe they knew anything about the money. They just wanted to beat us to their heart's content. But they found the money, and—but I'd better begin at the beginning."

This Jack did, soon putting Mr. Farnum in possession of the whole story.

"I'll send two men with Jagers, to turn him over to the constable," remarked Mr. Farnum. "I'll also send the alarm out so that Josh Owen may be caught. Both these fellows must have their full deserts."

"Perhaps, first of all, you'll take this money," urged Jack, producing the roll of banknotes. "Count it over, will you please, sir?"

Mr. Farnum rapidly counted. "Just eight hundred," he nodded. "But, according to your story, it ought to be five dollars short, on account of what this rascal, Jagers, took out to spend."

"We've made that good out of some of our own money that the pair took away from us, and which we got back with yours."

"You won't do anything of the sort," retorted Mr. Farnum, thrusting the money down in one of his pockets. "I owe you that five, besides your commission of forty dollars. And I'll settle with you just as soon as we get our rush off. But now—you haven't had any breakfast. Rush up to the hotel and get it at my expense. Then be sure to be back here before ten o'clock. And say, boys, you're the right kind of material—both of you. I hope to keep you with us."

Two men being dispatched to convey Dan Jagers to the lock-up, Jack and Hal hurried away for some sort of a meal. Eph Somers, being inside the yard, and no one paying him any heed, that young man concluded that he might as well remain where he could see the most.

While the two submarine boys were at breakfast a constable and a deputy appeared at the hotel, to get precise directions as to where to find the drugged Joshua Owen. Then they departed in haste.

"There's the band playing over at the yard!" cried Hal, seated at the hotel dining table. "Great Scott! We'll be late."

"I hardly see how that can happen," replied Jack. "It isn't quite nine o'clock yet."

Nevertheless, the martial strains caused both boys to hurry through their breakfast. Then, full of eagerness, they all but ran down the short stretch of road to the yard.

"I wish we had a little better clothes," muttered Hal, regretfully, as they neared the gate.

"What's the odds?" replied young Benson. "We're workmen, anyway."

"But most folks will be dressed up mighty well to-day," objected Hal. "Even Grant Andrews has his best suit on."

"Well, we haven't any other clothes," murmured Jack, like a young philosopher. "Folks won't be looking at us, anyway. They'll all have their eyes on the boat."

The watchman at the gate had been reinforced by another man, to hold the crowd back. When the would-be spectators found that only work men and invited guests would be admitted to the yard the disappointed ones made a scurry for the nearest portions of the shore outside the big fence.

Inside, the noise of hammers had stopped. The entire front of the submarine's shed had been removed, and much of the underpinning structure that held the "Pollard" in place. All that remained, to send the steel craft into the water, were the command and a few lusty sledgehammer strokes.

The band was playing again, a lively strain. Jacob Farnum was bustling about, although, as far as could be seen, his only impulse was sheer excitement.

David Pollard, silent and more anxious than anyone could know, stood apart with Grant Andrews, while Eph Somers stood solitary at a little distance.

Even the coming of the boys caused Pollard a bit of relief. They were to be of the crew at the launching, and their early arrival showed the inventor that there ought not, now, to be the faintest hitch.

"I thought there was going to be a naval officer here, Mr. Pollard," whispered Jack.

"Looking for a uniform, eh?" laughed the inventor. "There is a naval officer here—Lieutenant Jackson. There he is, over there, in the gray suit and straw hat."

"Does he go on the boat with us?"

"Oh, no. He's simply to watch the launching, and see how the craft sits on the water after she goes in. Some time in the near future there'll be a board of naval officers here, when we're ready to show them what the boat can do."

With everything in readiness, the nerves of all the interested persons present began to suffer from the suspense. Only the tireless band saved the day.

"Come along," said Jacob Farnum, at last. "It's a quarter of ten. We'll get up in our places."

Those who were going made a rush for the shed. The band leader, catching the enthusiasm, led his musicians, with a crash, into a triumphal march. Eph Somers slid, unobtrusively, into the shed. David

Pollard turned to look at him keenly.

"I want to be on hand to help just a bit, if I can," murmured Eph, pleadingly, "and to wish the boat good luck as she strikes the water. My father used to work in this yard, and I worked here last summer."

"He's all right," nodded Mr. Farnum, so Eph got inside the shed.

The ladder rested against the hull; this was to be the last time that it would be used. David Pollard ascended, first, to the submarine's platform deck Farnum followed. Then Grant Andrews went up. Last of all came Jack Benson and Hal Hastings. These were all who were scheduled to slide down the slippery ways with the "Pollard." But Eph was there, close at hand, consumed by an unquenchable desire to go, too. Nor was he wholly convinced that he wouldn't.

Outside, at one side of the shed, stood Lieutenant Jackson and the invited guests. On the other side were the members of the band.

On the platform deck, near the conning tower, were an outside steering wheel and the engine controls. Back of all were the funnels of the ventilators.

"Are you going to take the wheel, sir?" whispered Grant Andrews, to the inventor.

"I—I'm afraid I'm too nervous to," replied David Pollard, in an undertone. "You'd better take the wheel, Andrews."

So the foreman stationed himself there, for the craft might need guidance during the headway that the launching would give her.

Pollard turned to the yard's owner, to whisper imploringly:

"Better give the word and start things, Farnum. The suspense will floor me if it lasts much longer."

So Farnum gave the first signal, and the workmen below began their last duties. In a twinkling it was known that something was wrong with one of the ways. Grant Andrews moved quickly away from the wheel to look below and give an order.

Jack Benson moved up to the wheel, that there might be someone there in case the "Pollard" made an unexpected leap into the water. In the confusion, just as one of the workmen below was about to remove the ladder, Eph Somers swiftly pushed it back against the hull, ascending almost on the run to the platform deck, where he stood pointing out to Andrews the cause of the trouble below. As he did so, Eph slyly but authoritatively signaled to the men to remove the ladder, which was done. Eph Somers had won his wish. He was aboard—safe unless someone discovered him at the last second and threw him over.

Now, with a fearful clattering, the last supports of the substructure were knocked away by lustily wielded sledge-hammers.

The leader of the band, accustomed to launchings, held his baton aloft. At the downward stroke of that implement the band would crash out into "See, the Conquering Hero Comes!"

In the midst of the clatter another gang of workmen, at a silent signal, began to push against the hull on either side.

Hats off, the men among the guests began to cheer, the women to wave handkerchiefs.

Farnum was the coolest of all, now. As the "Pollard" *might* sink to the bottom of the harbor, no woman was aboard to do the christening. Instead, the yard owner clutched the bottle, ready to smash it over the forward rail of the platform deck.

A creak, a yell, and the "Pollard" started. How the cheering redoubled and made the shed's rafters shake. Lieutenant Jackson, of the Navy, tried to look unconcerned, but he couldn't, wholly. A launching of any kind of important craft is a mighty exciting thing.

Jack's hands took firm clutch on the steering wheel. He was throbbing from head to foot.

Another creak! The "Pollard" began to move in good earnest. All on the platform deck felt the exhilarating thrill of motion.

Down came the baton, the band crashed out, its music almost drowned by the frantic cheers of the

beholders. Down off the ways shot the submarine torpedo boat. Oh, the glory of it!

There was a gigantic splash. Everyone on the platform deck was, drenched, yet holding on and happy. For many rods out over the waters, Jack steering straight and true, the boat dashed, then slowly stopped. The "Pollard" was launched—for what adventures, what fate?

CHAPTER X

UNDER WATER, WHERE MEN'S NERVES ARE TRIED

After that first stop, after that first feeling of exhilaration was over, the anxious thought of all on the platform deck was:

"Is there any fault in her construction? Is she going to sink?"

Not that any of these six human beings would have been in much danger, for all were where they could free themselves and swim.

It was the defeat of months of hopes that would have been terrible.

A few moments of tension, then David Pollard's gaze lighted on Eph Somers, unconcernedly smiling.

"Hullo!" muttered the inventor. "How do you happen on board?"

"Me?" grinned Eph. "Why, you see, I'm the mascot."

But Jack Benson, fearful that, under the strain, something unpleasant might be said to his newly-found friend, asked, quietly:

"Going to drop the anchor?"

Grant Andrews, Hal and Eph quickly attended to this.

The flag at the short pole had become wrapped around its short staff. Jacob Farnum noted this just in time and hastily shook it out, for the band had suddenly begun to play "*The Star Spangled Banner*," and on shore the crowd was hushed, hats off and at attention. On board the submarine hats were quickly doffed, all turning with reverent gaze toward the Flag!

For a long time the crowd on shore remained, staring with fascinated gaze at the craft from which wonders were expected. Presently a small boat put off from shore. Mr. Farnum and Mr. Pollard were taken off and went ashore to talk over matters with Lieutenant Jackson.

The "Pollard" now sat jauntily on the water. Only the upper two feet of her oddly-shaped hull were out of water, neither the bow nor stern showing. In rough weather the platform deck would be a wet place, indeed; but now, with little wind, and the water only slightly rippling, the deck was drying rapidly under the glare of the hot summer sun.

"I guess we might as well go below and get on dry clothing," hinted Grant Andrews.

"Is there any such thing aboard?" queried Jack, in surprise.

"Yes, thanks to Mr. Farnum's thoughtfulness. Come on; I'll show you."

So the four piled below, and, in one of the state-rooms aft, Andrews pointed to a goodly store of clothing, much more than would be needed for the present, and of different sizes, even to shoes. There were also rough bath towels with which to rub down dry.

"I wonder do I come in on these?" murmured Eph, doubtfully.

"Well, since nothing has been said to the contrary," laughed Andrews, quietly, "I think I'd be brave enough to try it. You're surely as wet as any of us."

The four were quickly in undershirts and linen. But the outer suits made the boys wonder a bit. These suits were dark blue uniforms, the coats braided, and the front buttons hidden by another band of braid. The caps were of visored naval pattern.

"Say," asked Eph, looking about him, "I'm only a common sailor, at most. Ain't there any common sailor togs lying about?"

"I don't know where," smiled Andrews. "I judge, from the togs, that we're all to be captains."

So Eph, with a comical sigh, fitted himself to a uniform and donned it.

"Maybe I'll have a chance to strut about in this for an hour, until the owner comes aboard and throws me into the water, after stripping me," murmured Eph, wistfully.

Then, as young Somers caught a glimpse of himself in one of the state-room mirrors, he stood up unaccountably straight, inflating his chest and bulging it out.

They had to go up on deck again. It all seemed so much like a dream that all hands wanted to get up where they could stare at the hull, the water and at anything else that could make them realize that the "Pollard" was launched and they were aboard.

A boat-load of men soon put out.

"They're special workmen, coming to finish up on the air-compressors," explained Grant Andrews. "We have nothing to do with their work. All we've got to do is to take things easily for the present."

"I'm going to get busy, if they'll let me help at anything," declared Eph. "When the two bosses come aboard I'm mighty anxious to have them think I look natural here."

"Are you going to try to join the crew, Eph?" asked Jack, in an undertone.

"Well, I'm not going to be put ashore, except by force," declared young Somers, wistfully. "I've been dreaming about this old boat for three months back. Say, I'd give anything I had, even if it was a lot, to stay aboard this craft for good and all."

"I know how you feel," nodded Jack Benson. "And I don't blame you. It's going to be a grand old life, and, Eph, I hope you're to be in it."

As soon as the special workmen were aboard Eph followed them below. He hung about until he saw a chance to help, then joined in the work. He was as industrious as the proverbial beaver when Messrs. Farnum and Pollard at last came aboard and went below.

"Hm! Does that new boy figure that he belongs aboard with us?" asked David Pollard, of Jack, when the pair came on deck again.

"He's frightfully anxious to be of the crew, sir," Benson answered. "And he seems like a splendid fellow."

"We might as well let him stay aboard, Dave," proposed Mr. Farnum. "He's a good, straightforward young chap, and comes of good water stock. I know what it is to be a youngster and to have ambitions."

"All right, then," nodded the inventor. "Let him stay. I dare say we can use his time."

"May I, as a great favor, go below and tell him he may stay?" asked Jack, eagerly.

"Why, you seem to take a personal interest in young Somers," laughed the yard's owner.

"I do. And he was useful in your interests this morning, Mr. Farnum."

"Run along and tell him, then," nodded the yard's owner.

When Eph heard the news he stopped work long enough to dance an exultant jig on the cabin floor.

"Oh, Jack Benson, if ever you want a favor—a great, big one, with trimmings—come to me!" begged young Somers, imploringly as soon as he caught his breath again.

Then, to keep his rising spirits down, Eph returned, to work as soberly as he could.

Later Grant Andrews, with Eph's help, cooked a meal at the galley fire, and this all hands ate while the special workmen kept at their task.

When they were on deck again Mr. Pollard said, in a low voice:

"Boys, I may as well tell you what Mr. Andrews already knows. Work on the interior of this boat is much further along than we've allowed to leak out. In fact, when the men below finish with the air-compressors, in a few hours, we're all ready to put out to sea on a stealthy trial trip of our own."

"Wow!" sputtered Eph, enthusiastically.

"Now," continued Mr. Pollard, earnestly, "of course we believe most thoroughly in this boat, but, until the actual trial is made, we don't know how she'll behave. If any of you feel like backing out, why, go ashore before we start, but keep your tongues behind your teeth."

"Reminds me of what my Dad once did in the hen-yard," remarked Eph, in a low voice. "He went out with a couple of quarts of corn, looked at the hens, and said: 'Now, biddies, I'm going to toss your supper down. But any of you critters that want can go in and roost for the night before I do it.'"

"Well?" asked David Pollard, a bit puzzled.

"Would you believe it?" asked Eph, with a comical twist of his mouth, "Every blessed hen stayed. Fact, sir!"

Just before dark the special workmen went ashore. Again Andrews and Eph prepared a meal, which was eaten.

Then followed a restless two hours, waiting until the town was asleep, for the gasoline tanks were filled, and all was ready for the first turn of the drive-wheel below.

It was after half-past ten when Pollard at last said:

"Go below and get the gasoline engines started, Andrews."

The boys followed him below to watch the work. Messrs. Farnum and Pollard, too, were soon below, for they wanted to observe the work of the air compressors and the dynamos. The work had to be started by lantern light, but, within ten minutes, it was possible to turn on electric lights below.

"Everything is working as perfectly as though the boat had been in commission a year," remarked the inventor, hoarsely. His suspense was almost painful to watch.

"Everything is all ready for a start, isn't it, Andrews?" inquired Mr. Farnum.

"Everything appears to be, sir, so far as the power's concerned," replied Andrews. "But I'm going to stay by the engine. I want to be on hand to watch whatever might happen."

Power was applied to raise the anchor.

"You take the wheel, Benson, since you had it during the launching," said the yard's owner. "Somers, stand by on deck. Hastings, you go below and stand with Mr. Andrews."

"Give the go-ahead at slow speed," directed David Pollard, nervously.

So Jack gave the speed wheel a small turn, then rested both hands on the steering wheel. Without an unnecessary sound, and with no outer lights showing, as yet, the "Pollard" was headed for the mouth of the little harbor, Mr. Farnum standing by as pilot.

Just as they passed out on to the edge of the ocean Farnum himself turned on the electric sailing lights.

"She rides the water easily," remarked Pollard, almost in a whisper. "I wonder how she can go at speed?"

"We'll find out, now we've got clear seaway ahead," replied Mr. Farnum. "Benson, turn on a few miles more."

Quickly obeying the impulse of her twin-propellers, the "Pollard" began to dance over the waves.

"Say, but she's the fine, light-riding boat!" cried the builder, joyously. "Just as I thought she would be. Give her more speed, Benson."

So the speed was turned on, more and more. The "Pollard," as far as those aboard, could see, had the whole of that part of the ocean to herself. She was still headed due east, and was moving at last at the

rate of seventeen of the twenty-one miles an hour of which she was believed to be capable.

Even at this rapid gait the semi-immersed "Pollard" rode splendidly, with hardly any vibration noticeable.

As he watched, instead of feeling the thrill of triumph that influenced the crew, David Pollard's face was whitening with anxiety. His face, almost ghastly in its look, was deeply furrowed.

"We're doing well enough on top of the water," he muttered, hoarsely, at last, to the builder. "But will the boat dive? How will she run under water? I must—know!"

"Good enough! We'll soon know, then," replied Jacob Farnum. He passed the word for Andrews, who came on deck. The ventilators were quickly shipped. Jack Benson shifted to the steersman's seat inside the conning tower. Sailing lights were turned off; the manhole cover was battened down securely. They were dependent, now, on the air-compressing equipment whenever the air aboard became unfit to breathe.

Wedged on either side of Jack Benson in that little conning tower stood the builder and the inventor.

"You attend to the first submerging, Farnum," begged the inventor. "I—I'm afraid I'm too nervous."

The gasoline motor had just been shut off, the submarine now running at less speed under power from the electric motor.

Handling the controls in the conning tower, Mr. Farnum, not without a swift, shooting thrill of dread, opened the sea-valves to the water tanks. As the tanks filled the "Pollard" settled lower and lower in the water. They were beginning to go down. All who were aboard felt the keen, apprehensive quiver of the thing, shut in, as they were, as though soldered inside a huge metal can.

The platform deck was quickly level with the water's surface, though Jacob Farnum was not rushing things. Then the deck outside, as shown by the steady glow of the lights in the conning tower, went out of sight, the water rising around the tower.

They continued slowly to sink until the top of the conning tower was less than three feet above the waves.

"Now, just a little dive!" pleaded David Pollard. "Oh, merciful heaven!"

"Pass the word to brace yourselves for the dive!" bawled Mr. Farnum below, and Eph, stationed at the bottom of the spiral stairway, yelled the word to the engine room.

Now, the sea-valves of the forward diving tanks were opened. As the water rushed into them, changing the balance of the boat, the bow shot downward, making it difficult for all to keep their footing. It was as though they were sliding down an inclined plane.

Another lurch, and down they shot under the water, where men's nerves may well be tried!

CHAPTER XI

THE TRY-OUT IN THE DEPTHS

Pollard clutched at the stairway railing with both hands, his face hard-set, his eyes staring.

He was not afraid. In that supreme moment he could not know physical fear. It was the inventor's dread of failure that possessed him.

Jacob Farnum stood as one fascinated as he felt the boat plunging into the depths.

"Aren't you going to put us on an even keel, sir?" Jack called.

The warning was needful. In the exhilaration of that plunge Farnum was in danger of forgetting.

In a twinkling, now, however, he threw open the sea-valves of other tanks, amidships and aft, until

the gauge showed that they were running on an even keel and forty feet below the surface. Their speed was now about five miles an hour, but could be increased.

Gradually, the ghastly lines on David Pollard's cheeks began to soften. His eyes gleamed.

"There's nothing wrong! We can run anywhere!" he shouted.

Yet there was something of hysteria in his voice. Nor was it long before the others began to feel themselves similarly affected.

It was an eerie feeling that all hands had, running along like this, blind and guessing, in the depths. Pollard was the only one aboard who had ever been below before in a submarine boat. Though the rest had faced the chances coolly enough, they now began to feel the strain.

Even when it is broad daylight on the surface, with the sun shining brightly, the submarine boat, when a few fathoms below, is simply a blinded, groping monster. There is no way of illumining the depths of the ocean. Naval officers have suggested the placing of a powerful electric light at the bow of the submarine craft, but, when tried, it has been found quite useless. The light will not project far enough ahead, through the dense water, to do any more than make the surrounding darkness all the more trying to brave men's nerves.

"Take the wheel, Dave; it will steady you to have something to do," spoke the builder to the inventor. "As soon as you get the wheel, turn the course to due south. Follow it to the line."

Jack Benson slid out of the helmsman's seat, giving way to the inventor, and stepped down the stairway.

At the foot he came upon Eph and Hal, standing there, their faces presenting a strange look.

"How do you find it?" asked Benson.

"Startling," replied Hal Hastings.

"Yet nothing is happening to us," contended Eph Somers, somewhat shaky in his tones. "It's just thinking what might happen—if we were to strike a water-logged old hull of some vessel, say."

"Or collide with a blue-fish," suggested Hal, with a short, nervous laugh.

"I suppose we'll be used to this, after a few more trips," laughed Jack, with an effort.

"Are *you* scared, too?" asked Eph, keenly.

"Well, I can't say I feel wholly comfortable," admitted Jack Benson, candidly.

"Then you're sitting down on your fears pretty well," declared young Hastings, with an admiring look at his chum.

"We've got to," returned Jack, stoutly. "If we're to go into the submarine boat line we've got to learn to look as though we liked *anything* under water."

"Let's take a look-in and see how Andrews likes it," proposed Eph.

Peeping through the door of the engine room they beheld the man there sitting bolt-upright on one of the leather-cushioned seats, staring hard at the wall opposite. He turned his head, however, as soon as he became aware of the presence of the submarine boys.

"Rather creepy, ain't it?" hailed Grant, his voice not as steady as usual.

"Think you're going to learn to like it?" demanded Benson.

"Well, I may get so I'll think this sort of thing the greatest going," drawled Andrews, "but I'm afraid a good, soft bed on land will always be a close second for me."

"Wonder how far the bosses are going to run under water?" pondered Eph, sliding into the engine room and seating himself on the cushion opposite Andrews.

"Till they've tried the boat out all they want to under water, I guess," ventured Jack.

"I'll slip back, so I can pass any order that may come," proposed Hal, who, truth to tell, felt an undefinable something that made him too restless to like the idea of sitting down.

As the "Pollard" continued to glide along, almost without perceptible motion at that depth, these members of the crew became somewhat accustomed to the feeling. They began to have a new notion, though, that they would take it all much more easily after they had once seen proof of the new craft's ability to rise.

"Say, I wonder if it would be too fresh of me to ask Mr. Farnum when he means to try the rising stunt?" wondered Eph, aloud.

Grant Andrews looked up with interest, then shook his head.

"Better not," he advised. "We knew what we were coming to, and took all the chances. Now, we'd better keep quiet. Any nervousness might bother Mr. Pollard or Mr. Farnum."

"Well, she's a dandy boat, anyway," declared Eph, a bit jerkily. "So far, she's done everything she's been told to. So I reckon she can rise when the time comes."

"Who's below?" cried Mr. Farnum.

"Hastings, sir," Hal answered.

"Tell the crew we're going to run below the surface until the air becomes noticeably bad. We want to test out the compressed-air devices for purifying the atmosphere."

So Hal stepped forward with the message.

"Don't you think the air begins to smell queer already?" demanded Eph, looking up. "I'm willing to have some compressed air turned on right now."

The others laughed, which was all they could do. Jack Benson, of them all, probably, was getting most rapidly over the first bad touch of "submarine fright." He was now almost as well satisfied as he would have been on the porch of the little hotel at Dunhaven. Only he was anxious to know just how the boat would behave when it became time to rise. That was all.

"How would you feel if we were running along like this, bent on driving a torpedo against the hull of a big battleship?" questioned Eph.

"Curious," Jack answered.

"What about?"

"Wondering if we were going to succeed in the job."

"Put it another way," laughed Grant Andrews, shortly. "How would you feel about being aboard a battleship in wartime, and suspecting that a boat like this was nosing down in the water after you?"

Jack Benson made a little grimace.

"Serious business, this fighting on the ocean, isn't it?" he replied.

"It's stranger to think about than it is to be doing it," replied Andrews, musingly. "I know. I was in the war with Spain."

"How did you feel?" asked Eph, quickly.

"Tired, most of the time," replied Andrews. "Sick some of the time, and hungry the rest."

"But about being scared?" insisted Eph.

"I was kept too busy, generally, to have any time to give to being scared. I was a soldier, and a soldier is a good deal like any other workman. He does his work by habit, and soon gets over thinking much about it."

There was a long pause, broken by Eph, saying:

"I wonder when they're going to let the boat rise?"

"When they're going to try to make it rise, you mean," corrected Jack Benson.

"Same thing, I hope," muttered Eph Somers.

After some minutes more Jacob Farnum stepped down below.

"Why, it looks cozy here at night, doesn't it?" he called.

At sound of his voice the boys stepped out of the engine room into the cabin.

"Mighty comfortable sort of place," continued the yard's owner, looking around him. "We'll have to put in some books, won't we, so you young men can read when you're doing nothing under water?"

"Maybe the time will come when we *can* read," laughed Hal. "Just now, sir, I'm afraid we're too busy with thinking and wondering."

"I'll confess to being a bit nervous myself," responded Mr. Farnum. "Somehow, there's something uncanny about rushing through the depths of the ocean in this fashion, not having any idea what danger you may be close by."

"Such as running into the hull of some big liner that draws more than forty feet of water," hinted Jack.

"We're fifty-eight feet below, now," remarked Mr. Farnum. "You didn't guess that, did you? We sank eighteen feet more, on an even keel."

"Gracious! You meant those eighteen feet, didn't you? It wasn't accident?" gasped Eph.

"We meant it," smiled the builder. "But say, the air is getting a bit foul here, isn't it? We'll have to try the compressed air equipment, now."

By an ingenious mechanical contrivance the present air was forced, by compressed air draught, into compartments from which the bad air was expelled through sea-valves. An instant change for the better in the atmosphere was noted.

"That's another thing about this good old new craft of ours that works all right, so far," remarked the builder. "Boys, I'm beginning to have confidence that we're going to see the surface again all right. Hullo, there's Pollard hailing us."

"The air purified all right, didn't it?" called down the inventor.

"Yes; couldn't have been better," declared the builder heartily.

"Then I'm going to make the supreme test," came down from the man at the wheel. "We'll proceed to find out whether we can rise to the surface and stay there."

CHAPTER XII

THE DISCOVERY FROM THE CONNING TOWER

"Go up slanting, or on an even keel?" called up Mr. Farnum.

"On the even keel," came the answer.

"All right, then; we'll know soon."

For this purpose the largest compressed air container of all was to be employed. It distributed great volumes of compressed air to all the water tanks, forcing open the valves and driving out the water.

"Any of you youngsters know where the proper wrench is?" inquired the builder, looking keenly at the boys.

There was an instant start, followed by widespread pallor.

"Oh, it's not right to keep you in torment," laughed the builder. "I have kept the wrench in my pocket, all along."

He drew it out, holding it up before their gaze. Though technically a wrench, it looked more like a very large key. It was of curious construction, intended to supply the greatest amount of force with the least amount of exertion.

"Watch me," commanded Jacob Farnum. "Any one of you may have to use this wrench at any time."

Little did any of them guess the tragedy that was destined to center around that life-saving wrench later on. Now, with the boys gathered about him, Mr. Farnum fitted the wrench with great care and deliberation.

"See how easily it's intended to turn?" asked the builder, giving it a slight turn.

All three of the boys nodded.

"Now, we'll give it more," continued Mr. Farnum. He swung the wrench well around in order to release compressed air with a rush and great force into the water tanks.

Then he stood there, waiting. There was no perceptible motion or other change that the boys could note about the boat.

"Wha—what makes it act so slowly?" asked Eph Somers, in a queer voice. "Or isn't it going to act?"

For some seconds more the four stood there looking at one another. Andrews came to the doorway of the engine room, looking anxious.

"We've released a lot of compressed air," uttered Mr. Farnum. "More than half of the force in the receiver is gone."

A few seconds more passed. Then restless Eph sprang to the stairway.

"Mr. Pollard," he cried, nervously, "when on earth—under the sea, I mean—are we going up? What's wrong?"

"Going up?" called down the inventor. "This isn't an airship."

"When are we going to strike the surface?" Eph insisted.

"Why, we're awash already. Don't you notice I've just shut off the electric motor?"

That was true, although none of the quartette had yet realized that the propeller shafts were stilled.

"Awash, are we?" cried Eph, in an incredulous voice.

"If you can't believe it," replied David Pollard, calmly, "come up and see for yourself." Eph accepted that invitation with such alacrity that he tripped and barked his shins against one of the iron steps, but recovered and darted up in no time.

"Glory!" he shouted, jubilantly. "It's true. I can see the stars."

At that moment the bell rang for turning on the gasoline motor. Within a few seconds the big engines were throbbing. Again the propeller shafts began to turn. Now, all hands could feel the motion as the "Pollard" skimmed lazily along over the ocean's surfaces.

As Eph came down, Jack Benson stepped up, with a light heart, now that the submarine had responded to the last and most important of its tasks. He stood beside the wheel, ready to take it whenever Mr. Pollard should give it up.

Yes, indeed; there was the sky overhead. And, with this glimpse of heaven's arch Jack Benson found himself forever done with submarine fever in the matter of the ordinary risk and dreads.

As yet only the conning tower was out of water. The platform deck would not emerge until Mr. Farnum, below, employed much of the remaining compressed air for expelling the last gallons of sail water from the tanks.

"What's that off the starboard bow?" wondered Jack. "Stop, Mr. Pollard. Reverse! I'm sure there's something over yonder worth stopping to look into."

David Pollard stopped the speed, then reversed sufficiently to correct the headway, although he replied:

"I don't see anything, Benson. You've been below so long that up here, in less light, you're a victim of shadows."

But Jack, who had snatched the marine glasses from the rack, and was using them, retorted:

"The shadows I see, Mr. Pollard, are human shadows, clinging to something in the water, and that something must be an overturned craft of some sort."

"Let me have the glasses," requested Mr. Pollard.

After taking a long look the inventor replied, excitedly:

"Benson, you're right. There are some human beings in distress over yonder. Thank heaven, we didn't go by them."

For the first time that night David Pollard turned on the powerful searchlight, projecting abroad, brilliant ray off the starboard bow. The bottom of a hull about forty feet long, presumably that of a sloop, was what David Pollard now saw. Clinging to it were two men. One of them appeared to be middle-aged, the other much younger. The overturned boat was some three hundred yards distant.

"What have you stopped for? What's up?" called up Mr. Farnum.

"Wreck, sir. Two men in distress," Jack answered.

"We'll go close and contrive to take them off," announced the inventor. Turning on slow speed, he swung the "Pollard's" prow about, making for the wreck.

"You youngsters had better get out on deck, with lines to heave," suggested Mr. Pollard. So Jack called up Hal and Eph. After Benson had stepped out on the platform deck Hal passed out three long, light lines.

Up to within a hundred feet of the wreck ran the submarine boat, then stopped, lying parallel with the capsized craft.

"Can you catch a line, if we throw it?" hailed Jack.

"Yes," came the answer. The voice was dull. There was no enthusiasm about it.

"They don't seem very glad to see us," muttered the submarine boy to the inventor, who had stepped out to the deck wheel. "I wonder if they're dazed and weak?"

Then to the wrecked ones Jack called:

"How long since you capsized?"

"Since just after sundown," replied the younger of the pair clinging to the hull. Again his voice was sulky.

"There's something queer about this," whispered Benson to Mr. Pollard. "They don't seem a bit glad to be pulled off that hull. Besides, they must have been the worst sort of lubbers to capsize a boat in any breeze that has been blowing this day. I don't see how they managed it."

"Throw them a line," directed Mr. Farnum, who had just come out on deck.

Jack made the cast, doing it cleverly. The long, light rope lay across the overturned hull. But the younger man of the wet pair, in reaching for the line, pushed it off into the water.

"Clumsy!" muttered Jack, under his breath. "And look there! They have life preservers on. It must have been a leisurely capsizing to give them time for that."

"It *does* look queer," agreed Jacob Farnum.

Having rapidly hauled in the line, Jack made another cast.

"Try to get that," he shouted. Yet once more, in some unaccountable way, the younger man on the capsized boat managed to bungle so with the line that it went overboard into the water.

"I can put a stop to that," muttered Jack Benson, pulling off cap and coat and dropping them down through the manhole. "I'm going to swim over there. When I get there, Hal, throw me a line."

With that the young submarine boy stepped over the rail, poised his hands at the side and dived. An excellent swimmer, it was not long before he touched the overturned hull. Neither of those whom he sought to rescue offered him a hand. But Jack climbed up out of the water, seated himself on the keel between the strange pair, and stared hard at them, each in turn.

The older man appeared to be about fifty years of age. He wore a closely-cropped beard that had in it

a sprinkling of gray. The younger man, who appeared to be about twenty-five years of age, was smooth-faced and sulky-looking. Both were dressed well, and looked like people of means. Jack guessed that they must be father and son.

"Well, have you got through looking at us?" demanded the younger man.

"I guess so," nodded Benson. "I was thinking that your boat must have taken several minutes in doing the capsizing trick. You both had time to adjust life-preservers nicely, and you, sir," turning to the older man, "must have found time to pack the satchel that you're holding so carefully."

The older man's jaw dropped. He looked haggard. But the younger one demanded, fiercely:

"Is all this any of your business?"

"Not a bit," admitted Jack Benson. "All I'm here to do is to rescue you, or help in it."

"Humph!" grunted the younger man.

"Heave a line, Hal!" shouted the submarine boy, signaling with one hand. "Drive it straight. I'll get it."

Swish! Whirr—rr! It was a splendid cast. As Jack leaped to his feet the slender rope fell over one shoulder. Benson caught it with both hands.

"I'll help you," called the younger stranger with startling suddenness, reaching forward. He grabbed at the submarine boy. The next instant Jack Benson lost his footing on that wet, slippery sloop bottom. He pitched, threw up his hands in an effort to regain his balance, then toppled, disappearing beneath the waves.

"They're trying to drown Jack!" rang Hal Hastings's excited voice.

"That was a deliberate trick!"

CHAPTER XIII

A HIGH-SEA MYSTERY

Splash! Without a word as to his intentions Hal Hastings went overboard. His head showed above the waves almost immediately, as he swam toward that other craft of mystery.

Jack Benson did not immediately reappear. When he did come up, it was under the over turned hull. He was obliged to make a half-dive in order to come out and up in the open.

By the time he did appear, his chum was close to him.

"Hurt?" hailed Hal.

"Not a bit," responded Jack, after blowing out a mouthful of water.

"Then climb aboard with me, and see what these prize lunatics mean by their behavior," requested Hal, not caring who heard him.

The sulky young man made no effort to oppose their boarding the hull. Probably he feared to make too plain an opposition, with that dark-hulled, sombre, ugly-looking submarine torpedo boat lying so close at hand.

"Now, heave us a line, Eph!" hailed Hal. The line came, and was caught. Hal slipped over the further side with it, vanishing under water long enough to make it fast to one of the submerged cleats of the sloop's rail.

"That will hold," he reported, clambering back on to the bottom of the sloop. "Now, sir," turning to the older man, "since you have a life preserver on, you can easily get over to the submarine boat by holding to the line and pulling yourself along."

"I'm afraid I can't get across and keep my satchel," whined the older man, nervously.

"I'll take that and swim over with it," proposed Hal, briskly, reaching out his hand for the bag.

"Oh, no, no!" protested the man. "I'd sooner stay here. The satchel doesn't go out of my hands."

"Better take to the water, father, and do the best you can," advised the younger man in a growl. "These fellows belong to the United States Navy, and they're determined to rescue us. Trust yourself to the water, and I'll keep along with you. These people will take us by force if we refuse any further."

If mistaking the crew of the "Pollard" for members of the United States Navy would make matters move any more quickly, there was no need to disabuse the mind of either of these queer men. But Jack and Hal gave each other a queer, amused look.

The old man took to the water, without difficulty. Buoyed up by his life preserver, he was able to hold to his satchel with one hand, pulling himself along the slightly sagging rope with the other. His son swam along lazily beside him, Eph, outside the rail, but holding to it with one hand, employed his other in helping the father and son up to the deck. When this had been accomplished, Hal threw off the line, after which he and Jack swam back. Eph drew them up to the platform deck.

"Go down below, and hear their account of themselves, if you want to," said David Pollard, leaning against the wheel. "For myself, I'm sick of that pair already."

Jack and Hal had quite enough boyish curiosity to go below. Eph soon followed. The father, dripping wet and still clutching his satchel with one hand, sat on one of the long seats of the cabin, while the son, scowling, paced back and forth.

"It seems to me that I know you," Farnum was saying, to the elder man.

"I—I am very sure you don't," replied the one addressed, uneasily.

"Don't you know who I am?" pursued the boat-builder.

"N-no; I'm very certain I don't."

"Let's see. Did you ever hear of a man named Arthur Miller, of Sebogue?"

The elder man started, paling a trifle. The younger man stopped his walk, his face settling into a black scowl.

"No-o; I don't know Arthur Miller," replied the older man; with an effort.

"Queer," mused Mr. Farnum. "It just came to me that you were Mr. Miller. However, of course you know best about that."

"Thank you," nodded the older man, with an attempt at a smile. "I started to tell you that my son started out late this afternoon, in the sloop that lies overturned yonder, intending to put me aboard the yacht of friends who are passing down the coast. I have most pressing business with those friends. The business is to be finished on the coming trip. It seems that our friends are late; still, I know they must be on their way down the coast."

"As they haven't shown up, at least, not close enough," proposed Jacob Farnum, "we'll put you ashore at Dunhaven, and doubtless you can catch up with your friends in some way."

"Dunhaven? Then you must be Mr. Farnum," cried the older man, eagerly. "This must be the torpedo boat you were building. And these young men belong to the Navy? Midshipmen, no doubt?"

"There are no Navy men on board," replied the builder. "These young men are my employes. But we are losing time drifting about on the high seas. We will put back to Dunhaven, and you can tell us your story, if you choose, on the way."

"But my father does not care to go ashore," interposed the son. "It is vitally important to him that he find the schooner and join his friends aboard. In fact, I may add that a very considerable sum in the way of a profitable business deal depends upon his going aboard the schooner."

"But as that craft isn't here, how can we put your father aboard?" Mr. Farnum asked.

"We are right in the path that is to be taken by our friends' yacht," replied the son. "Since this is not a naval vessel, and you are not under Government orders, I take it you can as well wait here for two or three hours, if need be. My father will pay suitably for your time, and the service, if you will consent to wait until the yacht appears."

"I do not need any pay for extending the ordinary courtesies of the sea to those who have suffered

wreck," replied Mr. Farnum, a bit stiffly.

"Whether you take pay or not, sir, will you wait and put my father aboard the yacht?" demanded the son eagerly. "A vast interest, believe me, sir, is at stake."

"Oh, there is a very great stake in this," cried the older man, tremulously. "I appeal to you, Mr. Farnum, since that is your name, to help me out in this. And, if you will accept handsome compensation, I shall be very glad to offer it."

David Pollard, who had heard some of this talk through the open manhole as he lounged by the wheel, now called down to report: "There's some kind of a craft on the northern horizon throwing up searchlight signals."

"That's our friends' yacht—it must be!" proclaimed the young man, darting forward and resting one hand on the rail of the spiral stairway. "Now, you see, if you will be good to us, we shall not very long trespass on your patience."

"A schooner—a sailing craft—equipped with a searchlight?" asked Jack, wonderingly.

The son flashed upon the submarine boy a look in which there was something of a scowl, but he explained quickly:

"The boat has auxiliary power, and a complete electric light plant. Mr. Farnum, you'll steam toward that searchlight, won't you? I tell you, I am positive it is the boat of our friends."

"Well, I'll put you where you want to be, of course," agreed the boatbuilder, though he spoke with some reluctance, for he realized that some great mystery underlay this whole affair.

"Come up, Benson, and take the wheel," called Mr. Pollard. So Jack went up and out on the deck, Eph following him, while Hal went to the engine room to watch more of Grant Andrews' work there. Jack threw on the speed wheel, then steered north, while Eph threw the searchlight skyward in the path of the approaching vessel.

Within fifteen minutes the two craft were in sight of each other. Five minutes later they were within hailing distance. The other craft was a schooner of some eighty or ninety tons, and was using an auxiliary gasoline engine.

It was Jack who sounded a signal on the auto whistle for the other craft to lay to. Then Benson steered in closer, the two who had been rescued standing not far from him on the platform deck. The older man still clutched his satchel.

"Submarine, ahoy!" came a hail from the schooner's deck. "Is that you, Mr. Miller?"

"Ye-es," hesitatingly admitted the older man, at which Jacob Farnum smiled grimly, though he said nothing. "Put off a boat and send it alongside, will you?"

In a trice a boat was lowered from the schooner. Manned by two sailors and steered by a deck officer, the boat came alongside the sloping hull of the torpedo boat.

"You weren't expected in such a craft as this, Mr. Miller," called the deck officer in the stern of the small boat, touching his cap.

"Never mind any conversation, my man," broke in young Miller, testily. "Lay right alongside, and help get my father into your boat."

Hal and Eph helped in piloting Mr. Miller over the side and getting him into the boat alongside. Immediately afterwards the younger man jumped into the small boat.

"Oh, you're going with your father, are you?" hailed Mr. Farnum.

"Yes," replied the son, coolly, though with another scowl. "A thousand thanks for your kindness to us. Good-bye!"

The small boat put off, making rapidly for the schooner.

"Well, full speed ahead for Dunhaven," muttered Jacob Farnum. "But that's the queerest crowd I ever ran into. It's uncanny, all the way through. Somehow, I can't shake off the impression that I've been engaged in some stealthy or nasty work."

The run back to port was without incident, the submarine behaving perfectly on the surface. Indeed, all aboard were highly delighted with the new boat. Jack was still at the wheel as they glided into the little harbor. Anchor was dropped and power shut off for the night.

"You three boys may as well stay aboard for the night," suggested Mr. Farnum, as the night watchman of the yard appeared, coming out in a row-boat. "In fact, you may as well live aboard, and use the pantry and galley for all your meals."

"Shall we keep watch through the night, sir?" asked Jack.

"No need. Let the yard watchman do that. It isn't far from daylight. Get yourselves some coffee in the galley, have a good rub-down, spread your clothing to dry, and turn in in the state-rooms."

Grant Andrews went ashore with the builder and the inventor. The first thing the submarine boys did was to start coffee in the galley. Next they rubbed down, got into dry underclothing, then sat down over their coffee.

For some minutes they discussed the mystery of the night, making all manner of guesses. At last, however, they lay down in the berths of the state-rooms, and were soon sound asleep.

Nor did any of them wake until Jack opened his eyes in the forenoon, when he heard someone coming down the spiral stairway.

"You boys awake?" bellowed the wrathful voice of Mr. Farnum. Instantly, almost, two state-room doors were yanked open, while the builder went on:

"Oh, that was a fine trick that was played on us last night. As soon as I opened my eyes this morning I telephoned to Sebogue. I got the whole story. Arthur Miller is a defaulter to the tune of a very large fortune. He must have had the cash in that satchel. And he made us tools of his! Made us aid him in his flight, and put him beyond the reach of the law! Oh, if I should ever get my hands on that rascal again!"

It was plain that the boatbuilder was angry all the way through. He stamped in a temper. As quickly as the boys could get on their clothing they came out to hear the rest of the story.

"Arthur Miller," resumed Mr. Farnum, angrily, "was supposed to be a rich man, and at one time no doubt he was. But he got into speculation. He was guardian of the fortune of his orphaned niece, Grace Desmond, a very sweet girl whom I've seen. Miller must have lost some of her fortune in his mad speculations. At any rate, he tried fearfully hard to marry his son, Fred, to her. I suppose he felt that if Miss Desmond became his daughter-in-law she couldn't very well prosecute her faithless guardian. But Miss Desmond, who will be of age in a few days, would have none of her Cousin Fred for a husband. She must have suspected much, too, for she had engaged lawyers and accountants to go over the state of her affairs. The whole party were at the house yesterday, when Miller and his son slipped out and got away in the son's sloop. It is believed that Arthur Miller converted all the rest of his niece's fortune into cash, and arranged with the schooner to pick him up in the night."

"Then I think I understand, sir," broke in Jack, quietly, "how that sloop came to capsize. I couldn't understand that before. But the Millers, father and son, must have figured that the overturned sloop would be found, and that they would be believed to have drowned. That would shut off pursuit. So whichever of the pair is a good sailor—"

"That's the son, Fred," interposed Mr. Farnum.

"Then Fred Miller, after fixing life preservers on both of them, must have watched for his chance at a good puff of wind, close-hauled on the sheet and sent the boat over. That explains why they weren't very cordial with us last night. Our overhauling them prevented their being reported drowned accidentally."

"Oh, confound them! Drat them!" roared Mr. Farnum. "Making me, and the rest of us, accomplices of a dastardly defaulter. If I ever run afoul of that crowd again—if I ever get my hands on them—won't I make them smart for their trick!"

Nor were the submarine boys much less angry over the part they had all been made to play.

CHAPTER XIV

In the days that followed, the need of work drove away thoughts of the trick played by the Millers.

Trip after trip was made out to sea, and under the sea, in the "Pollard." That fine little craft was tested under every condition that could be imagined, except that, of course, no torpedoes were fired through her business-like bow tube. The firing of torpedoes at sea belonged to the Navy exclusively. Such a test could not be made by a civilian trial crew.

By degrees the submarine boys outgrew every trace of dread at finding themselves well under the surface of the sea. Their confidence in the abilities of the "Pollard" made them daring to the point of recklessness.

Just once the boys did have strong occasion to remember the Millers. That was when they were ashore one night. Grace Desmond, the despoiled heiress, who, as events proved, was left without a dollar of her own, came to Dunhaven to live with friends until she could plan what she was to do to earn her living.

The three boys were walking, in uniform, with Mr. Farnum when that gentleman suddenly asked them, in low tones:

"Do you see that young lady in white, walking with the two old people, coming toward us?"

"Yes," Jack answered.

"That's Miss Desmond. I feel like going into a rage every time I see that poor girl. She was heiress to eight hundred thousand dollars. The lawyers believe that Arthur Miller carried off than half a million in cash belonging to Miss Desmond. And we helped start him on his journey. Confound the rascal!"

Grace Desmond was a beautiful girl, above medium height, slender and dark. The simple white gown that she wore displayed her beauty at its best. Despite her fearful loss, when the boys first caught sight of her, she was smiling cheerily as she chatted with her elderly friends.

Mr. Farnum and his young friends came to a street corner just before they encountered Miss Desmond and her companions. The builder would have turned down the side street, but Miss Desmond called to him. So he was obliged to lift his hat and stand waiting until the girl reached him.

"I want just a word with you, Mr. Farnum," began Miss Desmond. "It has come to me that you are very much upset over having helped my uncle to escape. I want to tell you how foolish it is for you to be unhappy about it. You weren't in the least to blame. You did what any other good-natured man would have done under the circumstances. The only ones who can be blamed for any part in the affair are the two men from whom I had a right to expect the most considerate treatment. But as for you, Mr. Farnum, I beg that you will give my misfortune no further thought."

"That would be impossible," protested the builder.

"At least, never allow a thought of self-blame to creep in again. Please don't," she added, appealingly. Then, as though to change the subject abruptly, she inquired:

"Are these the young men who handle the 'Pollard?' Present them to me, please."

The boys were introduced, also, to Mr. and Mrs. Scott, the elderly couple.

"Some time, Mr. Farnum, if it could be arranged, I wish very much that you would invite us to take a short trip aboard the submarine boat. It will be the only chance of the kind we'll ever have."

"I certainly shall invite you," replied the builder. "But," he added, bitterly, "going aboard the boat that played the strong part in your undoing will be the nearest you will ever come, I fear, to a trail of your missing money. Pardon me"—Mr. Farnum choked suddenly—"I can't think of that night with patience."

"And that is just what I want you to forget, please," begged the girl, softly. Then she added, with a laugh: "I'll call a trip on the 'Pollard' settlement in full for any claim you may think I have against you."

"I'll pay," groaned Farnum, "but it won't be settlement even in part."

When Miss Desmond and her friends had gone on again Farnum clenched his hands, muttering:

"The girl's kindness only makes my savage disgust with myself all the greater."

"Why, she's right in saying that you're not responsible in any way," urged Jack.

"Boys, if you ever happen up with that rascal, or his scowling son, and if you choke either one, and give him a sound beating, draw on me for a thousand dollars. If you can ever do anything that leads to the recovery of Miss Desmond's money, draw on me for anything you please!"

Two days later the promise to give Miss Desmond a trip on the "Pollard" was kept. Mrs. Scott would not go, but her husband did. The girl even begged for a brief run under water, and stood it bravely, though with some pallor until she saw the sun once more shining in through the conning tower.

By the time that trip was over the submarine boys would have gone cheerily in the "Pollard?" through a sea of ink, blood or fire to serve the unfortunate young woman.

Very soon after that Miss Desmond plucked up sufficient courage to ask for the vacant position of typewriter in Mr. Farnum's office, and obtained it. She rapidly mastered the machine, and, in the meantime, gave all her spare time to the study of shorthand. She also learned to do much work on the books. Jacob Farnum would've made her post an easy one, but Grace Desmond insisted that she had her way to make in the world, and that she wanted to obtain a business training in the shortest time possible.

Although the "Pollard" went out every day, ever night she lay in the little harbor that formed the sea-board part of the yard. At her anchorage was a depth of seventy-five feet of water.

The three boys now lived wholly aboard, but it was dull there evenings, so after dark they spent much of the earlier hours of the night ashore.

"Going ashore with us to-night!" asked Hal, one evening, after the meal had been disposed of and the dishes washed and put away.

"Not to-night," replied Jack Benson, with a shake of his head. "I'm too much in earnest about wanting to know all about the handling of a submarine to waste all my leisure in fooling. See this book on mechanics? I'm going to stay aboard and study it to-night, and see how much of it I can get into my head."

"Good luck to you," laughed Eph. "If you succeed, maybe we'll stay on board to-morrow night and let you be schoolmaster. But this was pay-day, and the ice-cream soda up in the village fizzes good to me."

As soon as they had gone, Jack placed his book on the cabin table and drew up to it. Until dark he plodded through the pages, then turned on the electric light. Finding the book more difficult of comprehension than he had expected, he crouched over the volume, devoting his whole attention to the first few pages. Nine o'clock came and went. Half-past nine went by. Had Benson heeded the time he would have concluded that his comrades had found village life unusually alluring to-night.

Through the dark, quiet boat yard prowled a man, pausing and listening every few steps, as though bent on trying to keep out of the sight of the night watchman.

It was Jack's old enemy, Josh Owen, who, so far, had cleverly kept out of the way of the officers seeking him.

In some way Josh had learned that the other two submarine boys were up in the village. The lights shining from the interior of the submarine proved that someone was aboard. Hence it must be Jack Benson.

Down at the water's edge lay the "Pollard's" rowboat tender. A final survey satisfied Josh Owen that the watchman was nowhere about. An instant later the former foreman was in the rowboat, handling the oars so quietly as to make hardly any sound. Two or three minutes later he was alongside the "Pollard," stealthily making the painter fast to the deck rail. Then, in his bare feet, Josh went softly up over the side. At the manhole he crouched to peer below. He could not see the boy, but the shadow told him that Benson was sitting with his back to the stairway.

A gleam of insane wickedness in his eyes—for brooding had somewhat unbalanced the former foreman's mind—Josh Owen started softly down the stairway.

Fancying he heard some slight, unusual sound, Jack Benson turned. Too late! The powerful ex-foreman leaped, upon him, bearing the boy to the floor and holding him there helpless.

"You little sneak, I've waited for this time!" snarled Owen, hoarsely.
"But now—"

Josh rolled the boy over, yanked a pair of steel handcuffs from a rear pocket, and quickly, despite Benson's struggles snapped them onto the Submarine boy's wrists.

"Now, I've got ye!" he finished, his flaming eyes close to Jack's.

"For a little while," jeered Benson, as calmly as he could force himself to speak.

It was an unfortunate speech.

"Thank ye for warnin' me that the time's short," chuckled the brute. With that he lifted the boy, bore him back to a stanchion, and swiftly tied him to it in a standing position.

"That's all but the last thing I've got to do," pursued Josh Owen, drawing back. "Boy, ye did yer worst for me, when ye had the chance. And ye was the means of havin' Danny locked up. Mebbe Dan Jagers did give me some sleepin' stuff, an' maybe he did worry my own share of the money from me; but, boy, ye never knew how much store I set by Danny in spite o' some things. And now, he's locked up tight, thanks to you, an' the constables are chasin' me from cover to cover, lookin' for me everywhere. Howsomever, this settles the account!"

Jack Benson's heart seemed to stop beating as he realized what the rage-crazed fellow was up to.

Josh Owen deftly handled the mechanism that opened the sea-valves to let water into the diving tanks.

"I'm turnin' the water in slow," he announced. "That'll give me time to git away. This is a divin' boat. *Well, Dive in her!*"

CHAPTER XV

THE COURAGE THAT RANG TRUE

In that first awful moment after he was left alone, Jack Benson's first feeling was that it must all be an unbelievable dream.

Yet he knew that it was not. In his frenzy he tugged at the handcuffs, fought with the cords that bound him to the stanchion, but all in vain.

The sea-valves had been opened only enough to let the water in slowly. Almost at the outset, however, the keel slanted downward, for most of the water was coming into the tanks the bow of the boat.

"Help! Help, quick!" roared Benson at the top of his voice. The side ports were not open, but the manhole was, and the ventilators were in place. The submarine boy shouted in the hope that the night watchman might hear and reach the scene in time to effect a rescue.

The keel was still more slanting. At the instant when the diving tanks held water enough to overbalance the buoyancy of the craft the "Pollard" was bound to take a sudden lurch and go below.

Still fighting uselessly though frantically at the bonds that held him helpless in this terrible crisis, Jack also kept up his yells.

The watchman did not hear. He was not near enough. Josh Owen, having gained the shore and hauled the rowboat up, fled a short distance, then crouched in hiding, waiting to see the effects of his terrible deed.

Only one other person was in the yard. Grace Desmond, unknown to her employer, had come to the office in the evening, bent on posting up a set of books that were in her care.

She had finished her work, and was stepping out into the yard, adjusting her hat, when she heard one of those muffled appeals for help.

At the first sound she was not even sure of the word, but something in the faintly-heard accent claimed her attention. She stopped short, listening intently.

"Help! Aboard the submarine!"

This time, though the appeal seemed to come from a great distance, she distinguished the words.

"Something wrong with the diving boat, and someone aboard!" she thought, with a tugging throb at the heart. Turning, she sped down to the water's edge.

"Help! help! The boat is sinking, and I'm helpless aboard."

She could see the bow slanting forward in the water, and realized that all was wrong with the torpedo boat, and with some hapless human being aboard. In that instant Grace Desmond's courage rang true.

Espying the rowboat, she bounded into it, snatching up an oar and pushing off. At home on the water and skilled with oars, she pulled a strong, rapid stroke until she lay alongside the "Pollard."

"Keep cool. Help is coming!" called the girl, as she ran alongside. She caught at the lower portion of the deck rail and drew herself up. It was but an instant later when she went gliding down the spiral stairway.

Then, all in a flash, she caught sight of Jack Benson, lashed to the stanchion. She comprehended, also, that whoever had tied the boy in this fashion must have thrown the sea-valves partly open. That floor was fast becoming an unsteady platform.

"You turn on the compressed air with a wrench, don't you?" she demanded, swiftly.

"Yes," nodded the submarine boy. Then added, instantly:

"But you're a woman. These risks are not for you. Rush up through the manhole and escape. There may be time."

"Where's the wrench? Tell me quickly," commanded Grace Desmond. "I can turn on the air more quickly than I can set you free to do it."

"Yes," breathed the boy, rapidly, "because I'm manacled, anyway. But save yourself, Miss Desmond."

"We must both go down if you don't tell me quickly where to find the wrench," cried the girl, stamping her foot with impatience.

Then Jack told her, only when he realized that she would not save herself at his expense. Fortunately, Josh Owen had overlooked securing that wrench and throwing it overboard. In another moment Miss Desmond had the implement.

"The forward compressor, first," Jack directed.

With a quick comprehension that asked only bare details, Miss Desmond fitted the wrench just where it should go.

"A hard turn forward," called Benson.

The girl gave the twist, as directed, as hard a turn as she could make. To her horror she fancied the muscles of her wrist not quite equal to the need of that dread movement. The floor was slanting so that she was obliged to throw out her left hand to clutch at a support in order to hold herself up.

"Don't try it any longer. Get overboard, Miss Desmond, if there's yet time. In heaven's name do!" begged Jack, in a horrified tone. "I can stand going to the bottom if I don't have to drag you down with me. Escape!"

"Not and leave a fellow human being here in your plight," retorted the girl quietly, though with sublime heroism.

"But you can't save me, anyway."

"Then I'll go down at my post, just as a man would," she retorted, throwing all her frantic strength into her task. How she blamed herself that her muscles were so weak!

"Please go! There may be time."

"I'm not thinking of that. Oh, for a man's strength!"

Jack's breath was bated. His dread for himself was forgotten now, as he watched the efforts of this splendid girl.

"We'll take the last plunge at any instant, now!" screamed Jack Benson.
"There may be time for *you*—"

"Then there'll be time for us both," came the undaunted answer. Grace Desmond did not turn her head as she spoke, but Jack, his intense gaze upon her, knew the light that was flashing in her eyes at this moment.

A sound above told the submarine boy the worst. The water was gently rippling against the edges of the platform deck. That told him, all too plainly, how near the diving boat was to doing the work for which it had been built.

Could Jack have been close enough to see just why Grace was failing in her effort he might have told her better just what to try to do. Now, he tried to explain, rapidly. The fault was not with her strength; there was an exact knack needed in the use of the wrench.

On shore, in the yard, Josh Owen crouched low in his place of concealment. He had failed to prevent Grace from starting in the rowboat because, until it was too late, he did not believe the plucky young woman had any such intention.

"It's too bad for the gal to go to the bottom, too," half sighed the raging one. "But she shouldn't meddle."

Hal came swinging along down the street, having left Eph Somers behind in the village. Through the yard came young Hastings, whistling. By instinct he turned to look at the boat, and what he saw made him gasp, then leap forward in the start of a sprint.

Straight down to the harbor's edge he raced. Then, seeing the rowboat adrift, Hal, after one more look at the sinking submarine, leaped into the water without stopping even to shed jacket or cap.

Splash! In the same instant that he sprang, Josh Owen jumped up.

"Come back here, or ye'll wish ye had!" raged the ex-foreman.

Hal Hastings heard, though he did not even take the trouble to answer, but struck out frenziedly, for his chum's calls for help now rang in his ears.

There was the sound of a discharge, a sharp split of fire from a weapon that Owen held in his hand. A bullet struck the water just before Hal's nose, dashing the spray back in his face.

"Come back here, I tell ye!" raged the ex-foreman.

"Josh Owen's voice!" throbbed Hastings, but he swam on with the strongest strokes of which he was master. Then a succession of shots rang out. Hal Hastings was in the gravest danger he had ever been in.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LAST SECOND OF THE NICK OF TIME

Despite the whistle of lead, minding only the spray that dashed into his eyes, Hal Hastings swam on.

His one idea, at present, was to reach that submarine boat if it were within human power to do so ere the boat, now nearly all submerged, took the final plunge below the waves.

Grace Desmond did not quit her post, nor cease her heroic efforts to turn on the compressed air. Yet she added her shrill shrieks to Jack Benson's lusty yells for help.

The sounds of the shots from the shore gave them a momentary hope that help of some sort was really on its way.

"It's the last second or two, if you mean to save us!" yelled Jack, at the top of his voice.

Bang! bang! Josh Owen fired two more shots from his dangerous automatic revolver as Hal caught at the rail of the boat.

"The last chance to save us!" repeated Jack.

"I know it," came, breathlessly, as the dripping Hal dropped down the manhole. He did not even wait to make use of the stairs.

By a fortunate impulse Grace Desmond fell back as young Hastings appeared. Hal's right hand shot out, gripping the wrench. The "Pollard" gave a surge that all aboard believed to be her final one.

Yet Hal hung to his post, resolved to go down trying.

There was a hiss of compressed air. The "Pollard" didn't quite make the death plunge. Then she seemed to go, ever so little, toward a more level keel.

"I—believe—I've got her!" cried Hal Hastings.

A moment or two later he felt sure of it. He gave a cheer to ease his pent-up feelings, then suddenly gasped:

"Jack, do you know how much compressed air there is?"

"No," replied Benson, blankly.

"Heaven grant there's enough for what we must do," prayed Hal, aloud.

There were two shots over in the yard just now. The three young people heard the discharges, though they paid no heed to them at this critical instant.

Slowly the "Pollard" continued to regain evenness of keel.

Then Hastings, shifting the wrench to another part of the compressed air apparatus, opened the sea-valves of the amidships water tanks to expel water.

Briefly, now, they knew that the "Pollard" had risen. Also, she was resting on an even keel. Hal, bedewed with cold perspiration, darted up the stairs to the conning tower. He looked out, and the first glance told him the "Pollard" was riding the water as she should.

"It's all right—now," he called down, with a strong effort at calmness.

"Jack, what on earth happened that you had to call for help!"

Then he caught sight of his chum, lashed to the stanchion. Hastings's mouth went wide agape with astonishment.

"Jack—how on earth—did Josh Owen—"

"Yes," nodded Benson, quickly. "This was his work. Get me free from this stanchion, won't you?"

Despite his elaborate effort at calmness Hal Hastings shook so that it was some seconds before he could get his knife from a pocket.

"Wait till I steady down," Hal muttered, grimly. "I'm afraid of stabbing you."

At last, however, Hastings controlled his right hand enough to feel safe in slashing the cords. Jack, weak-kneed, stepped away from the stanchion, though he was still handcuffed.

"Thanks, old fellow. That's enough for the moment," said Jack, whose face was still ashen gray. "Miss Desmond—"

Both boys wheeled together to speak to that splendid young woman. They paused with their lips open. Grace Desmond could not have heard them; she had fainted, lying inert across one of the seats.

"She's a brick—a wonder—clean grit," broke from Jack, softly, admiringly.

When Josh Owen saw Hal drop through the manhole, and then saw the submarine's dive arrested, he realized that it was time for instant flight. Yet, as he turned to dash away, he found himself confronting the muzzle of a revolver held by the night watchman, who had been outside the yard at a little distance, but whom Josh's firing had brought back on the run.

"Throw up your hands, Owen. You're my prisoner," said the watchman, crisply.

But the ex-foreman much preferred being shot to taken. Flourishing his weapon, he turned, making a dash for the street gate.

Then it was that the foreman fired the two shots heard by the young people on the "Pollard."

Both shots missed. Thereupon, the watchman lowered his weapon and dashed after the fugitive.

Eph Somers, coming down the street to go aboard, heard, the shots.

"Me for a high roost, if there's trouble," uttered Somers, dryly. He climbed the fence, close to the gate. An instant later Josh Owen darted out. As he passed, Eph, with a fine eye, measured the time, and dropped fairly a-straddle of the fleeing one's shoulders.

"Whoa, you big draft-horse!" chuckled Eph, holding on to Owen's head for grim life. Under the weight and the unexpected shock the ex-foreman sank to the sidewalk.

Had the night watchman continued the chase they would have had Josh Owen then and there. But the watchman, knowing that he was a poor sprinter, and that Josh was a fast one, turned, just inside the gate, to rush to the telephone and notify the constable.

So Josh, on his hands and knees, after he recovered from his first astonishment, found he had only Eph to fight. Young Somers was all grit when aroused, nor was he lacking in muscle. But he was no match for Josh. There was a brief, heated contest. Then Eph, dizzy from a blow in the chest that winded him, staggered back. Owen swiftly vanished in the darkness, but Eph, when he got to his feet again, clutched the empty revolver that he had twisted from Owen's hand.

So much racket of firearms on a still night had aroused many people. It was not long before there was a crowd at the yard. Mr. Farnum was quickly on the scene. Soon after him came David Pollard.

The rowboat was recovered and those on the submarine brought ashore. Grace Desmond's faint had been a short one; at the first dash of water in her face she had come out of her swoon. The handcuffs were quickly filed off Jack's wrists.

In the yard office as many persons as were admitted heard a tale that made them feel creepy.

"You splendid, brave girl!" cried Jacob Farnum, patting Miss Desmond's shoulder. Then he sent a man after a carriage to take the young woman to the home of her friends.

That night the yard's owner made announcement of a reward of one thousand dollars for Josh Owen's capture—dead or alive.

"That fellow has proved himself more dangerous than an ordinary lunatic, and he knows too much about submarine boats for my comfort. He's even capable, some dark night, of putting a mine under the 'Pollard' big enough to destroy her at anchorage."

"We'll have to keep deck watch through the night, then," proposed Jack Benson.

"Very well, Captain. I put you in command," smiled Mr. Farnum.

"I can keep a sharp lookout without the title of captain," responded the submarine boy.

"But you are going to be in charge of the boat—at least until she's sold to the Government or consigned to the junk-heap. So why not be captain from now on?"

Thus it was settled, off-hand. Jack flushed with delight. Had it been possible for him to be more loyal, or devoted to the interests of the builder, he would have been from that moment.

Jack took his own first deck-watch that night, dividing the remaining time up to six o'clock between Hal and Eph.

In the morning captain and crew had hardly more than finished breakfast when Jacob Farnum and Mr. Pollard came off from shore in the tender. Both looked highly pleased about something.

"I haven't mentioned anything about this before," announced the builder, "but I've been pulling some strong wires at Washington for some time. As a result I've just received orders from the Navy Department to attend the summer manoeuvres of the fleet at Cape Adamson. We're to have our trial by the Government there."

"How soon do we start?" cried Jack, eagerly.

"We'll start this afternoon, so as to be in plenty of time. It's only about a seven hours' run for us, though, and we're not expected at Cape Adamson before to-morrow evening. Can you be ready,

Captain?"

"Why, there's nothing to do, sir, but to take aboard more gasoline and water. We can do that in an hour."

"We'll drop out to sea, then, about five o'clock this afternoon," decided Mr. Farnum, as he and the inventor rose. "Don't get flurried about anything, Captain Benson."

"Be very sure I won't, sir," replied Jack, earnestly. "And we'll be ready to start at the stroke of five. But I've been thinking, sir, and there's one question I want to ask. Does Grant Andrews go with us?"

"No," replied Mr. Farnum, dropping his voice. "I need Grant for other work. The first hint I get at Cape Adamson that we have a winner in the way of a submarine, I'm going wire Andrews to start laying the keel for another. He has his orders, and knows what may be coming."

"We really ought to have a fourth member of the crew, sir," explained Captain Jack, "if we're to keep watch and perhaps run on long trips."

"I'll see if I can get someone who'll be any good to us," nodded Mr. Farnum, seriously. Then he and the inventor went ashore, leaving the young captain to the leisurely task of fitting for sea service.

The news that the "Pollard" was going to attend the naval manoeuvres at Cape Adamson soon became noised about Dunhaven, for Mr. Farnum saw no reason for holding back the nature of his orders from Washington. It was not long before groups of people gathered on the shore, on either side of the boat yard, to gaze with increased interest at the grim, mysterious looking submarine.

Before one o'clock Mr. Farnum put off in the tender with a stranger, a swarthy, stalwart, almost gigantic looking man of about forty.

"I've got you just the man you want, Captain," called the builder, joyously, as he came aboard. "Captain, this is Bill Henderson, late boatswain's mate, of the United States Navy. He knows all about our line of work, for his papers show that he has served aboard various submarine torpedo craft belonging to the Government. He's a crack helmsman, a navigator, and knows all about our kind of machinery."

During this introduction Henderson had saluted and scraped. He now stood at attention.

"The youngest captain I've ever sailed under, sir," he said to Jack. "But I'm satisfied you know the business, or Mr. Farnum wouldn't have given you the berth. At your orders, sir."

After Mr. Farnum had returned to shore Benson put his new hand through a searching quiz. If there was anything Boatswain's Mate Henderson did not know about submarine boat work, then the young captain was not able to find out what it was.

"Bill Henderson ought to be captain, not I," whispered Jack to his chum.

"If Mr. Farnum didn't find that out for himself," replied Hal, dryly, "don't tell him."

"This man Henderson is certainly a jewel for us," murmured Captain Jack.

At the moment the three boys were standing on the platform deck, while Henderson was stowing his limited baggage away below.

"Now, Cap, take this from me," muttered Eph, with the air of a wiseacre. "When a man seems a crackerjack at anything, and doesn't have as good a position as you think he ought to have, keep your eye on him."

"For what?" asked Captain Jack, smilingly.

"Oh, just to see what turns out to be wrong with the fellow."

"What can be, wrong with Henderson?"

"I didn't say anything was, did I?" queried Eph Somers.

"And I don't believe anything can be," responded Jack Benson, hopefully. "Mr. Farnum has looked over the man's Navy discharge papers, and Mr. Farnum isn't an easy one to take in."

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE GRIP OF HORROR

Before five o'clock that afternoon Dunhaven lined the water front. That is to say, fully five hundred people of the little seaport town were on hand. The "Pollard" was a local enterprise. If the great United States Government expected to buy the boat, the people of the village wanted to be on hand and give a rousing send-off to a homemade craft that might yet be destined to become famous.

Cheer after cheer went up. Hats, parasols and handkerchiefs were waved.

"I don't know," growled one old salt in the shore throng. "If it was a human sort of craft, meant to ride the waves as a good ship should, I'd have more faith in her. I'm afraid that boat'll go to the bottom one o' these days, an' forgit to come up again."

The old salt was promptly voted a croaker. Hadn't the "Pollard" been given abundant tests by her crew? Had she failed to come up yet? So the cheering redoubled when Captain Jack came up on the platform deck, followed by the builder and the inventor.

"Thank you, my friends!" shouted Jacob Farnum, making a trumpet of his hands. "We all thank you! Now, Captain Benson, make as handsome a flying start as you can." Jack already stood by the wheel, where he could reach all the controls. Down below the gasoline motor throbbed, making the hull vibrate. Power had been ready for the last ten minutes.

Captain Jack moved the speed wheel around to the six-mile notch. The twin propellers aft began to churn the water lazily, causing the "Pollard" to slip away from her moorings. Ere they had gone a hundred yards Jack swung on much more speed. By the time that the submarine reached the mouth of the little harbor she was traveling at eighteen miles an hour, her bow nosing into the waves and throwing up a fine spray, some of which reached the platform, deck. Astern, her propellers were tossing the water into a milky foam. Truly, she made a gallant sight!

For half a mile Captain Jack kept out to sea. Then he turned the craft's nose northward. For another hour the "Pollard" was kept at the same speed, behaving handsomely. Then Captain Jack turned the wheel over to big Bill Henderson, going below to have his supper with builder and inventor.

"As soon as the other watch have had supper," proposed Mr. Farnum, "I think, Captain, we'll drop fifty feet below the surface and run for an hour or more. The Navy men will want an even sterner test than that. We want to make sure that everything about the craft is running at the top notch of perfection. A fortune for Pollard, and another for myself, are at stake on what we show the Navy in the next three days."

"Oh, we can easily show them anything that any submarine craft can do," smiled Jack Benson, confidently. "And I'm certain we can show the Navy officers an ease of handling that isn't reached by any other submarine in the world."

"It's a good thing to have a confident captain," smiled David Pollard.
"A confident captain, aboard a reliable boat, spells victory."

When the meal was over Captain Jack went back above to the wheel. There was no moon this night, but the stars shone brightly over the water. It was a warm night, with a gentle breeze, and only the gentlest swell to the water. The "Pollard" had been slowed down to twelve miles an hour, but there was still speed enough for the motion to be exhilarating.

"Oh, it's great to be captain of probably the most powerful and dangerous sea-terror in the world!" throbbed the boy, looking up at the stars. "How little I dreamed of this, a few months ago!"

"Going to be ready, now, for the dive and the hour's run under water, captain?" inquired Mr. Farnum, coming up on deck.

"In about ten minutes, sir," replied Jack, pointing forward over the port bow, "we'll be abreast of Point Villars light. Why not dive just abreast of that light? It will give us a starting point to reckon our run from."

"A good idea," nodded Mr. Farnum, and just then David Pollard came up from below. Both stood watching the young commander for some moments.

"Captain," remarked the inventor, "you handle the boat as easily as though you had been doing this

sort of thing for years. You must have had some practice aboard rather goodsized craft?"

"Never anything much bigger than a thirty-foot gasoline boat," Jack replied. "In the old days, sir, a young sailor had to begin with a rowboat, go on to a cat-boat, and so work on up until he could handle a full-rigged ship. That's where the change has come with to-day's gasoline boats. A fellow who learns to run a twenty-foot gasoline launch can just as easily handle a big gasoline yacht of any size. The new style of power saves a heap of time in the learning, sir."

Captain Jack was now nearing a line abreast of the Point Villars light. He watched keenly. At last, when just abreast, he shouted down through the manhole:

"Shut off the gasoline power. Stand ready to turn on the electric power. Get ready to dive. Henderson, take the steering wheel in the conning tower."

Less than sixty seconds later the ventilators had been taken in, the manhole cover was made fast, and all were below, save Bill Henderson, who sat at the tower wheel, before him an electric lighted compass.

"Henderson," called Captain Jack, "steer north by northeast, one point off north."

"Aye, aye, sir," came from the seaman in the conning tower.

"Hold fast! Make ready to dive!" called the young captain.

Then, at the signal, Hal Hastings turned open the sea-valves into the diving tanks. Down shot the "Pollard," the young captain standing by the gauge to watch until they were fifty feet below.

"On even keel!" he shouted. Quickly the submarine regained her even keel, and ran along at eight miles an hour. Captain Jack Benson read the gauge once more, to make sure that they were fifty feet below the surface.

"And now, we've nothing to watch but the clock, until our hour is up," he laughed, dropping onto one of the seats and stretching. "Somehow, I notice none of us are as nervous as we were the first time this diving machine went down with us."

With the electric fans running it was cool and comfortable there, and the air, as pure as that above the ocean until the point of diving, would last for some time without renewing.

With no wind or, wave to buffet, and the steady electric power running the propeller shafts, the sensation was almost that of being aboard a boat at rest.

After they had run along thus, for a few minutes, Eph went up to take the wheel. As Bill Henderson came down below the young skipper noticed a bright gleam in the seaman's eyes, though he thought little of it.

Henderson went forward into the engine room, stretching himself out on the leather cushion of one of the seats.

"Ever run on a smoother boat than this below the surface, Henderson?" inquired Captain Jack, looking in through the engine room door.

"All submarines are alike to me, sir," replied Henderson, rather shortly.

"I guess he's been too long at the business to have any enthusiasm left, if he ever had any," muttered Benson to himself, and returned to the group in the cabin.

When one is accustomed to the life, and there is confidence in the boat, the main sensation when running along below the water's surface is one of great monotony. All one can possibly see is the interior of the boat and the persons of his comrades. The longer the run below water is continued the more pronounced does the feeling of monotony become. A well equipped submarine torpedo craft should be easily capable of running twenty-four hours continuously below the water, but the long continued monotony of such a length of time below would be almost certain to drive the officers and crew to a high pitch of nervous tension. Indeed, it is doubtful whether men of ordinary nervous powers could stand such a strain.

Before fifteen minutes had passed Jacob Farnum began to tell funny stories to make the time seem to pass more quickly. After ten minutes he gave this up, for he realized his hearers were becoming bored.

"Whew!" sighed Pollard. "An hour below the surface is certainly as long as twenty-four hours can be anywhere else!"

"I shall be glad when the hour is up," admitted Captain Jack, candidly. Yet no one proposed cutting the time short by returning to the surface sooner.

Hal Hastings climbed up into the conning tower to take the trick at the wheel for the last twenty minutes. Indeed, occupation of any sort helped to kill some of the time.

"I believe," laughed Jacob Farnum glancing about him, "we all feel just about as though we had lost confidence in the 'Pollard's' ability to rise when the time comes."

From the engine room came a burst of seaman's song. Bill Henderson was loudly crooning some ditty. Although the listeners could not make out the words, the song had a gruesome sound that made one's flesh want to creep.

"Shall I tell him to stow that noise?" asked Captain Jack.

"No," replied Mr. Farnum, though he made a grimace. "If it cheers the fellow any let him have his melody."

Presently Henderson was singing another song. Those in the cabin paid little heed until the sailor's voice roared out the couplet:

_Down below went the good brig Mary!

She was heard from again—nary!_

"Say, that's fine!" muttered Eph Somers, in an undertone loaded with sarcasm.

The seaman's voice reached them now in a hushed undertone of murmured song. Later it swelled out into this gruesome fore-castle refrain:

_Where the sharks go to pray,

And the dead men lay—

Where the crabs crawl to bite,

And the eels—_

"Henderson!" rang the young captain's voice sharply.

"Aye, aye, sir!" came a growl from the engine room.

"Save that song for the deck watch. We want to hear the clock tick."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The seaman was as good as his word. No more of the awesome ditty floated back from him.

The time yet to remain below surface narrowed down to ten minutes, then to five. At last, tick by tick, the time wound by until the full hour of submergence had been finished.

"Henderson!" shouted Captain Jack, leaping to his feet, "stand by to empty the water tanks!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" responded the big sailor, coming out of the engine room. He went to the proper rack, then turned to ask:

"Where's the wrench, sir?"

"Why, there in its rack, of course," cried Captain Benson, leaping forward. "You're looking at it."

"I'm looking at the rack, sir, but I don't see no wrench, sir," replied Henderson, calmly.

"What's that? The wrench mislaid?" demanded Jacob Farnum, also leaping forward and staring with dismayed eyes into the rack. "Oh, it has dropped—somewhere—or—been mislaid."

In another instant there was a frenzied search for that invaluable wrench, without which the "Pollard" could not be brought to the surface. So frantically did they search that they frequently got in each other's way. Hal Hastings shut off the speed and came tumbling down below to aid.

"Don't get excited, friends," begged Jacob Farnum, in a voice that shook. "Of course we're going to find the wrench. It's aboard—somewhere—of course it is. Now, let's begin a systematic search."

In a short time every conceivable nook and corner had been explored. Though it seemed absurd that the wrench should be lost, yet a fearful conviction began to settle down over the startled ones that it would not be found in time.

Even the breathing air of the "Pollard's" interior could not be renewed without the wrench. Though each strove to conceal his feelings from the others, grim horror soon had them all in its grip.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LAST GASP OF DESPAIR

"I can't realize it yet, or believe it. It can't be true," shuddered David Pollard.

"We surely did," asserted Captain Jack.

"Could you swear that you have seen the wrench since we sailed?" asked Jacob Farnum, white-faced but cool.

"I—I can't quite say as to that," replied Benson, slowly. "But I will swear that I remember having seen it just a few minutes before we started."

"A *few minutes*—only?" insisted the builder.

"Yes, sir. I'm positive."

"For that matter," continued the builder, "there has been no one on board to-day save those who belong aboard."

"No; no one but ourselves has been on the boat to-day."

"None of us would throw it overboard, knowing how precious a tool it is," declared Mr. Farnum, glancing about him bewildered. "It was hardly possible to mislay such a thing by accident. Where on earth *can* it be, then?"

Again all hands started to hunt. Henderson was the first to sink to a seat as a sign that he gave up the search. The others barely glanced at him, so intent were all on the hunt that meant their only chance for life.

Yet at last they all sat down, panting, perspiring.

"Good heavens!" quivered the inventor. "We must soon begin to think of our very breath here. We can't exert ourselves as we have been doing. Whoever moves now, let him remember that he is using up the very life of others in the act of breathing!"

All but devoid of hope, they all remained sitting. At first they studied the floor, gloomily. At last they looked up, to read each other's faces. No hope was to be seen in any countenance.

"Thank heaven the electric light doesn't eat up air," shuddered Hal Hastings, at last. "It would be fearful to be alive—conscious—after it had become dark!"

"Don't!" shivered David Pollard, convulsively.

"Come, come, old chap," urged Farnum, laying a hand on his friend's arm, "*you* are not going to lose your courage?"

"I feel as if I ought to bear the whole punishment," groaned the inventor, covering his eyes with his hands. "It was I who invented this wretched boat!"

"But you didn't lose the wrench, or mislay it," broke in Eph Somers, with the intention of consoling.

"Who *did* mislay it?" pondered Captain Jack aloud. "If we could only settle that point, it might start us on the right track to finding the thing yet. For, of course, it's on board."

The certainty that the wrench must be *somewhere* on the boat brought all to their feet, though this

time they rose slowly, almost painfully.

After a few minutes the search became listless. At Hal's suggestion, made with a wan smile, each even searched through his own baggage. Pantry and galley were patiently ransacked.

"I've heard of such things being lost before, in the simplest way, and defying all search for a long time," mused Hal, aloud. "It may be the same with that precious wrench. But the difference, this time, is that we shan't be here long to wait for it to turn up unexpectedly."

Farnum dropped into a seat again, and that started the rest, until all had taken seats. From one to another, dumb, moody looks were passed. Each was wonderingly asking himself the same question that none would have thought of framing in words. How much longer could the air last in a pure enough condition to sustain six lives?

Eph Somers chuckled, absently, then looked up, startled and ashamed. The others gazed at him, comprehendingly. Each knew that Eph was thinking how idiotic it was for six human beings to sit, in perfect health, waiting until the soiling of the air about them killed them all. It was a terrible thought; Eph's mirth was of the hysterical kind.

Finally, after some minutes had passed, Jack Benson dragged himself to his feet.

He was amazed, at first thought, to find out how every joint and muscle in his body ached. He felt as weary as though he had been without sleep for a month.

Then he understood. The dreadful lassitude was caused by the withdrawing of the life-giving oxygen from the air. The oxygen was still there, but combined with the carbon from lungs and blood to form carbonic acid gas, which, in large quantities, is fatal to life.

When Jack moved about now, feeling, dully, as though a cane on which to lean would be a great boon, the others got to their feet with evident effort and joined in one more despairing search.

This hunt ended as the others had done, only more quickly. The only places into which they had been able to look for the missing wrench were the same places that had been vainly examined twice before.

This time it seemed to cause pain even to sit down. How much longer could the torment last, ere death came mercifully to their relief?

"It seems as though I ought to reach out my hand and lay it on the wrench," muttered Captain Jack Benson, to Henderson, next to whom he found himself sitting.

The former boatswain's mate smiled a ghastly smile, his eyes glowing bright like coals. Jack turned, with a shiver, away from the strange glint in the big fellow's eyes.

"Friends," said Mr. Farnum, presently, "we may as well realize the whole situation, and agree to face it like men. We can't find the wrench. Wherever it is, we are not going to find it. The little breathable air that is left us here is not going to last more than a few minutes. We will not waste any more of that air in getting up to make useless searches. Let us be as calm as possible. Perhaps each man had better look down at the floor, and so continue to look. At the end—the end!—let no one, I beg of you, raise his eyes to witness the final sufferings of any comrade."

There was an awed pause.

"Is that agreed to?" asked Farnum, huskily.

"Yes," came in hoarse whispers. There was another long silence—long as time must now be measured, for a breath, now, was as long as an hour on the surface.

It was big Bill Henderson who spoke next.

"Gentlemen," he announced, "the lord of battles and of spring flowers and breezes is displeased with us. He is taking this method to punish us as we deserve. Yet in that punishment we shall find pardon, too. Though we suffer now, we shall know joy when this life is ended."

Somehow, the speech stirred up resentment in the minds of the hearers.

"Could any death be more glorious?" demanded the seaman. "We are blessed with the privilege of serving as our own sacrifices!"

"The poor chap's mind is going first," whispered Mr. Farnum, pityingly, to Captain Jack.

"I don't understand what he's talking about," whispered Benson.

"Don't be surprised at that. Neither does he know," muttered Jacob Farnum.

"Are you jesting or mocking," broke in Henderson, half-angrily, "at the very moment when you should be getting ready for the glory of giving the last gasp of despair?"

"Give the last gasp, if you want to," retorted Eph, with savage irony, "and let us sit here in peace."

"Can anyone think," suggested Jack, "of any possible place in which we have not yet looked for that wrench?"

"I'm—too—tired to—think," drowsed Hal.

His voice startled the others. Now, that they came to examine their own conditions a bit more keenly, they began to understand that they, too, were fast sinking into a drowsy state.

Was the coming end, too, to be painless?

"There's no use looking," replied Jacob Farnum, in answer to Jack's question. "There isn't a single place left to explore. We—"

Whether Mr. Farnum thus broke off because he had lost his thought, or whether he dreaded to say the omitted words, none of the others even troubled to guess.

Bill Henderson started in to sing. There were a few angry gasps of protest until the others slowly realized that the air sounded like that of some hymn. The words, however, were in a foreign tongue, picked up in the course of the seaman's wanderings over the world.

Then their resentment softened. If Bill preferred to meet the end with a hymn on his lips, perhaps that was the best thing for all of them.

It crept over them, now, that they felt choking sensations, with pain and buzzing in their ears. Then the end must be near. Unconsciousness, at any rate. That loss of the senses would be the end, so far as any of them could know.

"Now, give thanks with your last real thoughts," cried Bill, hoarsely. "Gentlemen—this is—glorious! We're going fast! The last—croak—is upon us! Good—bye!"

CHAPTER XIX

JACK STRIKES THE KEY TO THE MYSTERY

"Down below! Down, down, down!" croaked Bill Henderson.

He pointed below, with one forefinger, laughing wildly. The others, sure that the seaman had lost his mind under the crushing force of the catastrophe, felt pity for him, though the man's actions and words also helped to increase their own terror.

To cap the climax Henderson got painfully to his feet and tried to dance a jig. That was carrying things too far in the then state of mind of the rest of the company.

"Henderson, confound you," cried Captain Jack, half savagely, as he rose, "keep quiet and sit down! Act like a man. You—"

To emphasize his order the young captain pushed against the seaman's breast, intent on shoving him into a seat. Just as he did so, Captain Jack paused aghast, for an instant. Then he shouted hoarsely:

"Friends, *I've found the wrench!*"

That brought them all to their feet, while Bill Henderson snarled in sudden rage.

"This man has it hidden away in the inside pocket of his coat!" cried the young captain of the "Pollard." "Help me to take it away from him while we've enough life left to act!"

With another snarl Bill Henderson crouched, in the attitude of a football player, to meet the impending assault.

Five of them swarmed upon him, from all sides. Had not all of them been near to dying from air starvation the conflict would have been a savage one. As it was, the fight, although a relatively weak one, was as strenuous as any of the combatants could make it.

Henderson, ordinarily a powerful brute capable of fighting three or four ordinary men, still endeavored to do his very best.

Back and forth they fought, rolling over each other, and every moment burning up more and more of the air that was left to them.

Yet at last Captain Jack, aided by the others, succeeded in snatching the wrench from the seaman's inner pocket.

"Hold him," cried Benson, getting weakly up, tottering over to one of the compressors. "Give me a minute—and some—strength—and I'll give us a taste—of real air."

Desperately he fitted the wrench, tried to give it a sufficient turn, and could not.

"I'll help you," hoarsely croaked dying Hal, reaching out and getting the weight of his hands also on the wrench. Never before had either boy struggled so desperately hard for anything. At last it yielded, ever so little. There was a hiss of escaping compressed air.

Then they got a taste of it. Oh, how nectarlike that air was! Renewed strength began to course through their arteries and to creep into their muscles. Two deep breaths apiece, and then Jack and Hal succeeded in making a good turn. A moment later they were able to make another twist, that set the pneumatic apparatus in operation to expel the bad air through sea valves.

But Bill Henderson, too, was reviving. Uttering hoarse cries of rage that sounded wonderfully more powerful, now, he fought his three captors to get upon his feet.

There was no help for it. Captain Jack had to dart over and tap the fellow on the head with the wrench. Then Bill was quiet long enough to make it possible, for Mr. Farnum to hurry after a pair of the handcuffs that were a part of ship's stores. These were snapped over the seaman's wrists just before he came to.

"Now, we won't have to hurt him," muttered Jack, compassionately. "He's a maniac, poor chap, or he'd never have done such a thing as try to condemn us all, himself included, to death in the depths by asphyxiation."

"He's a maniac, sure enough," commented Mr. Farnum. "But how on earth did I ever get trapped into hiring such a fellow as one of the crew? Confound him, he seemed sane enough until after we came below the surface."

"And now, sir," nudged Captain Jack, "I think we'd all of us be thankful enough for a glimpse of the surface—for a look at the stars—a breath of real ocean breeze."

"Good enough," nodded the boat-builder. "Travel right to it!"

Though all were weak and trembly from the shock of their late experience, there was strength enough in their combined force to handle the "Pollard" promptly.

While Messrs. Farnum and Pollard sat over the prostrate Henderson, handcuffed on the floor, Hal hurried to the engine room, while Captain Jack climbed up into the conning tower. Eph Somers stood near the two men and their captive, ready to respond to any call.

But Henderson, now that his maniacal rage had passed, was sobbing quietly. He seemed spent, exhausted.

It was with a thrill that the young captain of the submarine touched the control for speed ahead from the electric equipment. Then he looked at his compass, finding that the boat, from a northerly heading, had veered around almost east. As the boat went ahead, softly, Benson put the course around to north. Then he called to Hal and Eph to empty the diving tanks by degrees.

"Going up on even keel!" asked young Hastings.

"Surest thing I know," replied the young captain.

Though there was not much motion, all felt the boat gradually rising. Then Captain Jack suddenly caught the greater comparative light of the night above the water. Next, he caught sight of the blessed stars. But he did not stop the work of Hal and Eph until the boat rode well up out of the water.

"Now, come up and get the manhole open," called the young skipper.
"Let's all have a notion again of how it feels to stand in the open air."

Messrs. Farnum and Pollard had, by this time, completed the captivity of Bill Henderson by wrapping around him and securing many and many a turn of half-inch rope.

As the manhole was opened Captain Jack stepped out, taking the deck wheel. The others, all except the prisoner, crowed out after him. Thus they ran along for a mile or two, under the slower electric power.

"That crazy fellow," uttered Jacob Farnum, "had some mania on his mind that we were all great sinners, and that he'd save the whole lot of us by killing us under water."

"It seems strange," muttered Hal, "for even a crazy man to have the nerve to destroy himself slowly in such a way."

"Humph, no; nothing new in that line," returned Mr. Farnum.

"What are we going to do with him, sir?" inquired Captain Jack.

"Well, we're not going to turn in at any of the coast towns to give him up," replied the builder. "We'll keep right along until we join the fleet, and then we'll ask the advice of some naval officer."

When, at last, all had become accustomed to the world to which they had returned, Hal and Eph went below, to turn on the gasoline power a short time the "Pollard" was kicking the water at the exhilarating gait of eighteen miles an hour.

"How did it come, sir, that you made it eighteen miles, instead of knots?" asked Captain Jack, after a while.

"Why, that's the basis on which gasoline engines are built," replied Mr. Farnum. "For that matter, captain, when we've had more practice with this boat we'll tune the engine up to eighteen full knots an hour. In the second boat we are going to try for an assured speed of twenty-two to twenty-four knots."

"It seems to me," said Jack, musingly, "that the ideal submarine torpedo boat ought to have a speed of from twenty-eight, to thirty-five knots."

"Why?"

"So that the speed of the submarine boat shall always be ahead of the speed of any battleship afloat."

"Again, why?"

"Why, so that the submarine can give effective chase to a battleship."

"But submarines are intended only to go with fleets of their own country, or else to remain on station at or near the mouths of harbors to be defended."

"All well and good," argued Captain Jack, nodding. "In future wars a battleship fleet is likely to keep away from any harbor known to be defended by the enemy's submarine boats. But, if a submarine torpedo boat could have speed enough to give chase to a fleeing battleship, and sink when within range of the battleship's guns, yet still be able to pursue, under water, and destroy the battleship, that would mean the day when battleships wouldn't be of any further use, wouldn't it?"

"Undoubtedly," admitted Mr. Farnum. "But you see, captain, so far as present human ingenuity goes, a boat can't be built to sail as fast under water as another can be made to go on the surface."

"But that's the problem I'm going to tackle, as soon as I get our plans a little further along," murmured David Pollard, eagerly. "Benson is right. When we get a submarine boat that can pursue the fastest battleship, on the surface or below it, then the United States, with a hundred such submarines, could defy the combined naval powers of the world. If the United States can own a large fleet of such boats, then we can control the seas of the world."

No more attempts at diving were made on the trip. The horror of that last dive remained with all, safe as they now were.

All the way the "Pollard," though well out from shore, ran within sight of the light-houses.

Shortly before two o'clock in the morning Captain Jack Benson, again at the deck wheel, steered in for the light at Cape Adamson. He was going at slow speed as he rounded the point and headed in for the bay.

"Be careful how you go, captain, and be on the alert to obey signals," cautioned Mr. Farnum. "We've got to thread our way into a perfect hornet's nest of war craft. A dozen battle ships, several cruisers and a flotilla of torpedo boats are at anchor over yonder."

It wasn't long before the searchlight of one of the battleships picked up the "Pollard" with its broad ray. Then, from the flagship the colored lights that blazed out and faded spelled the signal:

"Who are you?"

"Pollard, submarine," replied the little craft's signal lights.

"Expected. Come in close for orders," came the signaled answer.

There was something sombre, grim, awesome about this great fleet of mighty fighting craft as the young captain stole his boat in among them. These craft represented much of Uncle Sam's fighting strength, a bulwark of safety, to our coasts and commerce.

Close up within megaphone-hailing distance Captain Jack ran his boat. The watch officer of the "Columbia," the battleship that served as flagship to the fleet, stood with megaphone ready.

"Ahoy, 'Pollard'!" he called.

"Ahoy, flagship!" Captain Jack answered through a megaphone.

"Fleet patrol boat will show you to your anchorage. Are your owners aboard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, in the morning, they will hear from the admiral."

"One moment, sir," Captain Jack shouted back. "We have aboard a maniac, a man who tried to destroy us on the trip down. He has naval discharge papers."

"His name?"

"William Henderson."

"Henderson? Wait a moment!" came back from the flagship's rail.

Those on the "Pollard's" deck saw a younger officer leave the watch officer and hurry away. This younger officer soon returned with a paper which he handed to the watch officer.

"'Pollard' ahoy!" came from the latter.

"Flagship ahoy!"

"William Henderson was an inmate of a naval hospital, where he had been sent to be watched on a suspicion of lunacy. A few days ago he escaped. We'll take him off your hands and see he is sent back where he belongs."

"Thank you, flagship."

The fleet patrol boat, which had been hovering near, a small cabin launch, now steamed in alongside the submarine. An ensign and four men came aboard. Captain Jack led them below, pointing out Henderson. The four sailors lifted him, carrying him up and over the side to their own boat.

"Now, follow us, captain," directed the ensign, "and we'll lead you to your anchorage."

Five minutes later the "Pollard" rode snugly at anchor, with all made trim and secure. But Captain Jack and his two boy friends, despite the lateness of the hour, were in no hurry to turn in below.

It was the first glimpse any of the trio had ever had of such an imposing war fleet, and all wanted to stay on deck drinking in the glory of the sight.

CHAPTER XX

"ONE ON" THE WATCH OFFICER

At nine o'clock the next morning Messrs. Farnum and Pollard were sent for to report aboard the flagship, where they had a long talk with Admiral Bentley.

The result was somewhat disappointing. During the manoeuvres a board of naval officers would be sent aboard the "Pollard" to observe what she could do in surface running, diving, etc. The "Pollard," however, was not to be included in any of the deep-sea manoeuvres of attack and defense, as there were already two Government submarines with the fleet, and the work of these had been mapped out.

"However, that's the best we can do, and we must be satisfied," sighed Jacob Farnum to Captain Jack. "We'll find plenty of chance to show what we can do, and I know the Navy officers will see that we get a fair show at Washington."

"Of course," nodded Captain Benson, loyally. "When they see just what a handy craft the 'Pollard' is at all times, they'll be wild to have a few 'Pollards' in the Navy."

"That's the way to talk," beamed the anxious inventor, all of whose hopes of the future were based on the developments of these few days.

"It's the way to talk, sir," replied Captain Jack, "because it's the truth. We'll show these Navy folks so much about the 'Pollard' that, being men of good sense, they'll see the point."

In the afternoon several delegations of naval officers visited the little submarine from the different craft in the fleet. The tiny cabin was crowded with visitors, the air being thick with cigar smoke much of the time. What astounded many of the visitors was the extreme youthfulness of captain and crew, but Jacob Farnum assured the naval callers that these young men had accomplished all that had been done with the 'Pollard' up to date.

"And I'm going to be wholly satisfied, gentlemen," added the builder, "with the impression that will be made upon you by what my crew of boys can show you."

"Why, your boy crew is your strong point," laughed Captain Carew. "You're building a type of submarine so simple that any child can handle it above or below water."

All present joined in the laugh at this sally, but Mr. Farnum took it in good part declaring:

"That is just the idea, Captain Carew. We have the simplest, most effective submarine boat that it is possible to build."

All of the visitors were inclined to take this view, from an inspection of the simple running methods of the boat. Of course, none of the visitors had seen the "Pollard" dive or run beneath the surface, but they were willing to accept the statements of builder and inventor.

One naval officer, however, was sceptical on the whole subject of submarine torpedo boats. That gentleman was Lieutenant McCrea, of the huge battleship "Luzon."

"Of course," remarked Lieutenant McCrea, "there's a whole lot of good theory about what submarine torpedo boats can do. In different naval evolutions, I admit, the submarines have made an excellent theoretical showing. As far as can be determined in peaceful evolutions it looks as though the submarine might really be a source of great danger to a hostile battleship.

"But, in actual war, conditions are different from anything that can be planned during mere evolutions. In war time the nerves of both officers and men are more keenly attuned. So, in actual war, I think it very doubtful whether a submarine could succeed in getting up close to a big battleship, unseen, and delivering the mortal blow."

That started a good deal of lively discussion. A few of the Navy officers present favored Lieutenant McCrea's view. More, however, were inclined to the belief that, as time went on, the more and more perfected submarine torpedo boat would become a greater and greater danger to the battleship, very likely in the end driving the battleship from the navies of the world.

"Humph!" muttered Lieutenant McCrea. "Lying here in the bay I am willing to admit that a submarine can sail under the hull of the vessel I'm stationed on. But I'd like to see the submarine that could creep up alongside, showing ever so little of itself, even on the darkest night, without being detected."

"You think, sir," interposed Captain Jack, quietly, "that, if you were in command of the deck at the time, you'd detect any submarine boat that showed any portion of itself above the water?"

"Think?" retorted Lieutenant McCrea, with warmth. "No; I don't think anything of the sort. I'd detect any such trick in time to turn a rapid fire gun loose on the venturesome submarine!"

"Every time, sir?" asked Jack, calmly.

"Every time!" retorted the lieutenant, with emphasis.

Young Benson was wise enough not to attempt to take too much of a part in the conversation with so many experienced naval officers present. Yet he remained, listening, for the talk was highly instructive.

"I'll have to go up and signal for my boat," declared Lieutenant McCrea, rising, at last. "I want a bit of sleep, for I'm watch officer on the 'Luzon' to-night, from dog watch to midnight."

After the lieutenant had gone, Captain Jack suddenly rose, hastening to the platform deck, where Hal Hastings stood on watch.

"What's the matter?" demanded Hal, looking keenly at his chum.

"Why?"

"Why, your face is nearly all one broad grin."

"Oh, I'm thinking a bit," Jack answered, evasively.

"Happy thoughts, then," mocked Hastings, amiably. "I can tell by the grinfal look of your face."

"Yes, it's something lively that I'm thinking about," laughed young Benson.

Over the supper table, that evening, Captain Jack announced the scheme that had entered his mind while listening to Lieutenant McCrea.

Jacob Farnum listened, at first, somewhat thunderstruck. Then, of a sudden, he laid down his knife and fork, bursting into a roar of laughter.

"It sounds like a fearfully cheeky thing to do, I know," confessed the young captain.

"It surely is," confirmed David Pollard, nervously.

"Yet," pursued young Benson, "if the trick should succeed, how it would take the conceit out of some people who don't believe in submarines."

"Wouldn't it?" rejoined Mr. Farnum, his eyes twinkling with merriment.

"Yet you don't intend to try it, do you?" asked the inventor.

"I don't know," confessed Mr. Farnum. "But I'll admit this much—I'm certainly thinking hard over the scheme that Captain Benson has proposed."

"It would be unfortunate if we did the thing, and only succeeded in offending the officers of the Navy," pursued the inventor, an extremely thoughtful look on his pallid, thin face.

"Oh, of course, as far as the mere expense goes, I'd pay the bill for the trick," Farnum went on. "To tell the truth, Dave, the point I'm considering most now is, whether we can really successfully play the trick that Captain Benson has sprung on us."

"I believe we can; don't believe there'll be any difficulty whatever," declared the young captain, his eyes glowing.

"Well, I'm going to think it over a while," announced the builder, as he finished his meal.

He went directly up to the platform deck, seating himself on a folding chair. From the loud chuckles that came, from time to time, from the platform deck, it was plain that the boatbuilder had had his sense of humor mightily tickled.

Presently, the hail came:

"Benson, come up here, won't you?"

As Jack reported to the builder Farnum stood looking across the bay.

"Captain, how are we going to get at the exact distance between our boat and the 'Luzon'?"

"It's a question of mathematics, isn't it?" asked Jack, slowly. "Mr. Pollard is the expert in that line, isn't he?"

"Oh, I say, Dave," bawled the builder down the stairway. "Come up here, won't you? Now, how far is it from our moorings to those of the 'Luzon'?"

There being still enough daylight for the purpose, Mr. Pollard brought up a small transit. Measuring a base-line on the deck of the submarine, he took two observations, then went below to do some rapid figuring.

"Exactly 1,142 feet, from mooring to mooring," he called up through the manhole, presently.

"If you've got the distance down as fine as that," laughed back Mr. Farnum, "good enough!"

"Are you going to try to play Benson's trick, then?" asked the inventor, reappearing on deck.

"I'm inclined to think," replied the boatbuilder, "that I am. It seems like too good a thing to miss."

On board the "Pollard" the cabin lights burned late that evening. Once the plan invented by Captain Jack was explained to the others all hands turned to, in great glee, to make preparations.

Ships of any size always carry, as a part of the cruising supplies, a stock of paints and brushes. The submarine craft was so provided.

Jack caused to be brought from one of the lockers a can of prepared white paint. This was thinned with oil and tested for the business in hand. Then the best brush for the purpose was picked out. To this was fitted a long handle. Two short sticks had to be spliced to make a handle of sufficient length.

"How are you on lettering, Captain?" guffawed Mr. Farnum, while preparations were thus being made.

"Nothing extra," Jack admitted. "But I guess I can at least make legible letters."

All was in readiness long before need came. At about quarter past eleven o'clock that night the "Pollard" noiselessly slipped from her moorings. At that time none of the searchlights of the fleet at anchor happened to be turned toward the submarine boat.

Ventilators were taken in, the manhole cover was closed, lights were extinguished, and, the next instant, the "Pollard" began to sink. Only one light burned aboard, and that came from a small lantern in the engine room, where Hal Hastings crouched over the electric motor, keeping strict track of the revolutions. While Jack Benson steered strictly to compass, Hal counted the revolutions until the number had been reeled off to carry the submarine the estimated distance under water. Then Hal shut off speed, while Eph Somers passed word to the young captain.

"Let her come up slowly, until I give the word," called down Captain Jack. "Don't rush with the raising."

So compressed air was turned into the diving tanks, slowly expelling the water therefrom. Very slowly the "Pollard" rose. Jack, watching intently, knew the instant that the conning tower's top was above waves.

"Stop," he called down. Just ahead, about sixty feet, lay the seaward side of the battleship "Luzon's" great gray hull. With his hand on the electric speed control Captain Jack moved the submarine in until she lay alongside the big battleship.

With the greatest stealth the manhole cover was raised by Hal and Eph. Captain Jack, in the meantime, was rapidly shedding his clothing, until he stood forth in a bathing suit only. Clad in this garment he slipped out over the top of the conning tower. The platform deck was under water, but Benson touched it with his feet.

"No hail from the deck above," he whispered to Hal. "Now, pass me the paint and brush like lightning."

The brush was passed out, the paint can being rested on the edge of the manhole, where Hal steadied it. Taking up a good sopping of paint on the brush, Captain Benson rapidly sketched, on the gray side of

the battleship a letter "P" some six feet long.

Then, with rapid strokes, he swiftly finished the entire word:

"Pollard."

As the "Luzon" lay on the outer edge of the anchored fleet, and the submarine lay alongside on the seaward side, there was no danger of any betraying searchlight being turned on the perpetrators of this huge joke.

"It's all done," whispered Jack, chuckling softly, "and that wonderful watch officer above hasn't hailed us or passed the word for the marine guard!"

"That man McCrea will claim it wasn't done during his watch," whispered Eph. "Paint on the exact present time. It's just 11.33."

So Captain Jack, again chuckling, and with a fresh brushful of paint, wrote the present time on the battleship's gray side.

All in a twinkling, afterward, the submarine, her manhole closed, dropped down beneath the waves. She was soon back at her anchorage, lying on the surface of the water as though this handy little craft had not just been engaged in perpetrating the biggest naval joke of the year!

CHAPTER XXI

THE MAN WHO DROPPED THE GLASS

Early the next morning there was, as might be imagined, a big stir of excitement in the fleet.

First of all, one of the fleet patrol launches discovered the legend lettered in white, on a gray background, on the Lizon's side.

As soon as the matter was reported aboard, the executive officer, after ordering a side gangway lowered, and going down close to the water's edge for a look, sent for the different watch officers of the night.

Each was emphatic in the belief that the thing did not happen during his watch. Lieutenant McCrea was one of the most positive.

"But, Mr. McCrea," urged the "Luzon's" executive officer, "the time, '11.33 P.M.,' has been lettered on the ship's side with great distinctness."

Still, that lieutenant was positive that the outrage hadn't been perpetrated during his deck watch. He had kept much too vigilant a watch for that.

While the questioning of the watch officers was going on the "Luzon's" captain appeared. He quizzed Mr. McCrea unmercifully, and that officer of the early night watch began to look and feel most uncomfortable.

"There's but one thing to be done, first of all," stated the "Luzon's" commander, Captain Bigelow. "Send a boat over to the 'Pollard' to ask the people there if *they* have any explanation to offer."

When the "Luzon's" launch came alongside, Mr. Farnum, expecting the visit, assured the ensign in charge that he would go to the battle ship at once to explain matters. Mr. Farnum did go. Captain Bigelow listened with an intensely grave face. Lieutenant McCrea seemed to be in the depths of mortification, and his face was very red.

"There is but one thing to be done, now, Mr. Farnum," declared Captain Bigelow, severely. "We shall have to appear before Admiral Bentley, on his flagship, as soon as he will receive us. You must repeat your explanation to him."

This Mr. Farnum was quite willing to do. Before the boatbuilder finished with his explanation to the fleet's commander there was a very decided twinkle in Admiral Bentley's sharp old eyes.

"I accept your explanation, Mr. Farnum, that it was all a joke," smiled the admiral.

"Of course," Jacob Farnum made haste to add, "having perpetrated such a hoax, I shall charge myself with all the expense of painting out the objectionable lettering."

"But I am not sure that that will be necessary," Admiral Bentley laughed. "The truth is, Mr. Farnum, your hoax on Mr. McCrea has taught us a most excellent and valuable lesson about the sort of other work that a submarine might do against a battleship at anchor. The lesson is worth far more than the cost of the paint. Indeed, I shall not have the lettering on the 'Luzon's' side painted out until other officers of the fleet have been able to examine such a striking proof of the value of submarines. Yet I am extremely sorry for the feelings of Mr. McCrea this morning."

In truth, Lieutenant McCrea was in for a most unmerciful tormenting by his brother officers. If there was one thing on which the lieutenant prided himself, it was upon the strictness of his deck watch. So the jest, jibes and quips of his brother officers stung him deeply.

"Was the hoax your idea, Mr. Farnum?" asked Admiral Bentley.

"No, sir; I am sorry to say that I am not often as brilliant as that."

"Then whose joke was it?"

"It was the scheme of Captain Jack Benson, the 'Pollard's' present commander."

"I have heard of your boyish captain," smiled Admiral Bentley. "He must be a very resourceful young man."

"You're right in saying that," replied Farnum, with warmth. "Benson is altogether about the brightest boy I've ever met. For that matter, all three of the boys are unusually keen."

Admiral Bentley consulted a memorandum book that lay on his desk, before he went on:

"Mr. Farnum, if you've nothing in the way, I shall be extremely glad to have Mr. Pollard and yourself at luncheon at one o'clock this afternoon. But I shall feel much disappointed if you do not also bring with you your youthful captain, Benson."

Farnum promptly accepted, with great delight. This all looked as though the "Pollard" would figure handsomely in the admiral's forthcoming reports to Washington.

Ere the morning was over all the officers and men of the great war fleet were laughing at Lieutenant McCrea. The newspaper correspondents with the fleet got hold of the yarn, of course, and sent stories to their journals that helped to make the fame of the "Pollard" and of those who handled her.

As for McCrea, he kept out of sight all he could. It was months before his brother officers in the Navy would let him hear the last of the joke that had been played upon him.

"Has it hurt us any?" repeated Jacob Farnum, when he returned to the submarine. "It has helped us wonderfully. And, Jack, my boy, you're to lunch with the admiral to-day!"

In fact, that joke of Jack's was heard of in the halls of Congress later on. The significant fact of it all was that, while the "Pollard" had been manoeuvred for the successful perpetration of the joke, neither of the other two submarines with the fleet was "handy" enough to be used in quite such a neat trick.

When a United States rear-admiral entertains guests at luncheon aboard his flagship, the affair is a stately one. When our three friends appeared at table there were several naval officers in attendance.

"I have been laughing a good deal to-day, Captain Benson, over the joke sprung on us last night," was Admiral Bentley's greeting. "It was cleverly carried out, and with a great deal of skill in seamanship as well."

"It wasn't intended, sir, to be so much a joke as a demonstration of what our boat can accomplish," Jack replied, modestly.

"I haven't lost sight of the practical side of the affair, I assure you," rejoined the admiral. "But I am afraid I have wounded one heart—McCrea's."

"Then I am very sorry," replied Jack, quickly. "I had hoped he would feel as much like laughing as anyone."

"Mr. McCrea might feel more like laughing, if it weren't for the fact that his brother officers insist on

doing his laughing for him," chuckled the admiral.

The talk now turned upon the "Pollard's" construction, which the inventor explained, while Jacob Farnum threw in a few words now and then. Captain Jack had the good taste to remain silent during this discussion. Admiral Bentley asked many questions, appeared deeply interested, and promised to make a thorough trip of inspection aboard the submarine.

"The time may come, of course," said the admiral, musingly, "when a flag officer will have to make his headquarters aboard such a little craft, for the day may not be far distant when battleships will be too cumbersome and too costly to be risked any more at sea when a nation is engaged in war."

"That's our captain's view of the possibilities," nodded Mr. Farnum.

"It will be a sad blow to some of us old salts," laughed the admiral. "It isn't likely to strike me, of course. I shall be retired, and done with the service, before the big battleship becomes as useless in war as a ferryboat. But you, Captain Benson, will very likely live to see the day when the battleships will be sold for freight steamers. By the way, my young friend, what is your age? Sixteen. Why, you are young enough to enter Annapolis. With your bent for things naval, why don't you try to interest your home Congressman in appointing you as a cadet?"

"If the battleship is to go, sir," replied the youngster, "or even if the submarine is to become a vastly more important craft, it seems to me that I shall be seizing the biggest chance by staying right with Mr. Farnum and Mr. Pollard. The greatest naval man of the future may be the all-around submarine expert."

"There, again, I am inclined to think you are right, Captain Benson," nodded the old admiral, thoughtfully. "My, but I often wish I could look forward, as you may, to being alive fifty years from now—living to see what sea warfare will be like *then!*"

While Jack Benson was listening or talking, he became conscious that one of the noiseless stewards waiting at table was eyeing him keenly, even if covertly, at such times as he approached.

The steward in question was brownhaired and smoothly shaven, a man of about fifty years of age who carried himself with much dignity. When Jack got his first good look at this man, the submarine boy felt certain that the steward's hair was dyed to its present color. There was something altogether familiar about the man's look, too, that puzzled young Benson.

Now, during a lull in the conversation, and between courses, this steward approached the table to replace young Benson's water-glass, which he had just filled.

As the steward reached out to set the glass down Jack wheeled, looking straight into the man's eyes.

The steward returned the look and paled, then—

Crash! The glass dropped from the man's fingers, breaking to fragments on the cabin floor.

With a softly-muttered word, the luckless steward bent, picked up the pieces of glass and beat a hasty retreat, followed by a heavy frown from the chief steward.

Then, all of a sudden, it flashed through the boy's mind where he had seen this man before.

Leaning toward Jacob Farnum, the submarine boy whispered:

"You've been trying hard to find Grace Desmond's fugitive guardian."

"I don't know what I wouldn't give to come up with that rascal!" muttered the boatbuilder fervently, his eyes blazing.

"Then I guess you're going to have your wish," continued Jack Benson.
"The man who dropped the glass is—Arthur Miller."

Uttering an eager cry, his fists clenched, Jacob Farnum started up from his chair.

CHAPTER XXII

"What's wrong?" demanded Admiral Bentley, looking up quickly.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir," cried Mr. Farnum, though lowering his voice, "but I want a good look at the steward who has been attending to this end of the table."

"Nothing will be more simple," replied the admiral.

Just at that moment another steward entered the room.

"Ask that new steward to come here," directed the admiral.

The man hastened away in search of his mate.

"Pardon me, but is there any unusual reason why you wish to see that particular steward?" asked the admiral, in a low voice.

"The only reason, sir," replied Mr. Farnum dryly, "is that my friend, Benson, is certain the fellow is identical with the defaulting guardian of a young woman at present employed in my office. He is believed to have taken the last half-million dollars remaining of her fortune away with him into hiding."

"A half million dollars!" gasped the admiral.

"If this steward is the man we think he is, then his right name is Arthur Miller," finished the boatbuilder.

"Why, I remember that case. I read of it in the newspapers," replied Admiral Bentley. "Jove, gentlemen, but I hope your guess is a correct one. There must always be a satisfaction in catching so great a rogue so easily."

Only those at the admiral's end of the table had heard this dialogue. Other guests present continued eating, or chatting with their neighbors. Other stewards were entering and leaving in the discharge of their duties.

Some time passed. Farnum was fidgeting, though he strove to conceal the fact. Jack looked quiet, but his heart was thumping.

"Steward Dugan!" called the admiral, rather sharply, and the man stepped over quickly.

"I sent Hecht after that new steward," declared the admiral. "Hecht hasn't come back. Find him on the jump and learn his reason for the delay."

In something like a minute more both Dugan and Hecht returned.

"I couldn't find Dudley, sir," reported Hecht. "I've looked for him everywhere that he ought to be."

"Then find the first officer on duty that you can, and, with my compliments, ask him to report instantly," ordered Admiral Bentley.

In barely more than a jiffy a young lieutenant of marine stepped into the room, saluting the admiral.

"Lieutenant, a new steward known as Dudley is being sought for. Order the guard at the side gangway to let no one overboard, unless he is certain that the one seeking to pass is not Steward Dudley. Then have the ship searched thoroughly for Dudley. When found, bring him just outside that door, under guard, and send in word to me."

Again the lieutenant saluted, then hurried from the room. The whole thing had been, ordered so quickly that few of the lunchers guessed that anything out of the ordinary was taking place. Admiral Bentley took up knife and fork, turning his attention to a dish that had just been laid before him.

The marine lieutenant was soon back.

"I regret to report, admiral," he murmured, in a low voice, "that the sentry at the side gangway states that Steward Dudley went over the side and started off in a shore boat at least five minutes ago. He displayed a paper which he said was a telegram you had ordered sent in a rush."

"Great Scott!" uttered Jacob Farnum, laying down knife and fork in a tremble. "Then, by flight, the fellow confesses his identity. Admiral, we feel that we simply must get ashore without the loss of an

instant. That rascal must be found."

"Certainly," agreed Admiral Bentley, rising. "Do not lose an instant."

Turning to the marine lieutenant, he added:

"My compliments to the officer of the deck, and ask him to see that these gentlemen have a shore boat placed at their disposal without any loss of time. Or, that they have any facilities they may wish for going to any part of the fleet. No thanks, gentlemen. I appreciate your need of haste and wish you every success."

The half-curious eyes of many persons followed these three guests, as the boatbuilder, the inventor and the young submarine captain hastily left the room, followed by the marine lieutenant.

As soon as the admiral's order had been transmitted to him, the lieutenant in charge of the deck ran to the side gangway, looking for a shore boat.

"Just our confounded luck when we're in a hurry," he muttered. "The only boat I can get is the one that just took Steward Dudley ashore. See, there it is over yonder, leaving the pier. It will be here within five minutes."

"Then I thank our lucky stars," cried Captain Jack, pointing, "for here comes our own good boat, and we can take it, instanter, if you'll permit it to come alongside, Lieutenant."

"Certainly," replied that officer.

Hal Hastings was at the deck wheel, in charge of the boat. He had just taken a party of sightseeing naval officers back to their ship, and was on his way to the "Pollard's" moorings. He caught sight of Benson's signals, and, slowing down the speed, ran neatly in alongside of the battleship's gangway platform.

In another twinkling the trio in haste were aboard their own boat.

"Better hurry below," advised Captain Jack. "Ship the ventilators and I'll get inside, close the manhole cover and handle the boat from the conning tower. Then, if Arthur Miller is watching us from the shore, he'll think we have officers aboard and are manoeuvring to show off the boat."

"Arthur Miller?" gasped Hal, in astonishment.

"Down below with you, Hastings," replied Jacob Farnum, pushing him gently. "When we've time to talk we'll tell you."

When, therefore, within sixty seconds, the "Pollard" left the flagship's side, she was equipped for diving. A casual observer would have believed she was about to do so with some inspecting party of naval officers.

As he sat in the conning tower Captain Jack steered the most direct course for the pier to which the supposed Miller had gone in the flagship's shore boat.

In order to do this, the young captain had to cut across the bow of a battleship that had just gotten under way. There was plenty of searoom for this manoeuvre, so Captain Jack did not hesitate.

Once past the bows of that battleship, however, the young submarine captain's heart gave a mighty bound.

For, just beyond, was another battleship, also under good headway. The "Pollard" was between the two. To go ahead meant a collision with the second battleship, while to reverse speed meant to back into the battleship just passed.

To turn and run between them in either direction might have been feasible, but the battleships, seeing the trouble of the little submarine, were sounding conflicting signals.

It was a situation that had to be met and solved in a second.

Jack Benson's heart seemed to stop beating; he felt ill, and a cold perspiration beaded his face all at once.

"Hold fast!" he roared down the stairway.

Then he did the only thing that could be done in a second.

Without waiting to shut off the gasoline power, he reached out for the conning tower controls. Like a flash, and with high nervous energy, he operated the mechanism that would fill the diving tanks in an instant.

In rushed the water, faster than it had ever done before. Down dived the "Pollard" like a lump of lead. To the startled onlookers on other ships she seemed almost to stand on her nose. Those on the decks of the two nearest battleships saw the "Pollard's" propellers uppermost of all, and revolving fast.

Then out of sight went the little submarine. Those below in her cabin and engine room had been pitched forward on their faces. Captain Jack fairly sprawled over the wheel.

Down went the little boat to a depth of some seventy feet. Then Captain Jack had the presence of mind to bring her to an even keel. A couple of hundred yards he ran under water. Then, shutting off the motive power, he called below to turn the compressed air slowly into the water compartments.

"For I want to rise mighty gently," he called down, in explanation. "Then, if we come up under some craft's keel, we won't hurt them or ourselves."

By this time the deck rails and rigging of many a naval vessel were crowded with officers and men, all anxious to know the fate of the plucky, or foolhardy, crew of the submarine.

A few moments passed. Then the conning tower emerged from the water. Next, the boat appeared, and rode at her proper amount of freeboard over the water.

What a deafening din of cheers filled the air. Men, everywhere, were waving uniform caps. Four of the big ships blew their whistles in harsh salute to this latest dash of Yankee bravery.

"Let us up on deck," cried David Pollard, excitedly. "We want to acknowledge some of that applause as modestly as possible."

The submarine's entire crew were speedily on the platform deck, while Captain Jack was busily explaining to his friends the necessity that had arisen for such a prompt, deep dive.

"Oh, but that was magnificently done, Jack!" cried the inventor, in a transport of enthusiasm. "Hear them yell! See them wave! The din of the whistles! It was the best thing we've done or could do in the way of compelling advertising!"

"Advertising be—will keep!" rasped Jacob Farnum. "But, for now, Captain Benson, hustle over to that pier as fast as the speed of the boat will allow. Advertising—with Grace Desmond's fortune and happiness at stake!"

So the young captain turned on speed, and steered on through the lanes of Naval vessels. Even on those craft from which his dashing, daring performance had not been witnessed the news was known, now, passed from ship to ship by the wig-wagging of signal flags.

All the way into the pier the "Pollard" was greeted with tempestuous volleys of applause, for there is nothing the American naval tar loves as he does sheer, wild grit.

"Advertising, is it?" demanded Mr. Farnum, in raging disgust. "We're getting plenty and to spare. No one within five miles of here can possibly be ignorant of the fact that the 'Pollard' is making a hustle to the dock!"

CHAPTER XXIII

WANTED, BADLY—ONE STEWARD!

As the "Pollard" slipped in at a vacant berth on one side of the pier, there was a rush of civilians, and of sailors and marines on brief shore leave.

Many of those who crowded down to look over the boat and her crew had witnessed Captain Jack Benson's difficult manoeuvre from the distance.

"Take the wheel, Hal," Jack murmured to his chum. "You and Eph had better stay aboard, and slip out into the stream before a swarm of folks rushes aboard."

Jacob Farnum leaped to the pier, the inventor following. Jack leaped to the string-piece last of all. Then Hal veered easily off, turning the boat's nose about and making out again.

"Aw!" went up a murmur from the crowd. "We wanted to see that craft."

"There she is," smiled Benson. "She won't go far away. She'll be on view, all right."

Jacob Farnum made straight for two marines who had been standing a little distance away. Neither had joined in the rush for the submarine.

"My men, to what ship do you belong?" he asked, quickly.

"Flagship 'Columbia,' sir," replied one of the men.

"Do you know the new steward, Dudley, of the 'Columbia'?"

"I think he came ashore lately, sir, in one of the shore boats."

"Then you saw him land?"

"Yes, sir."

"Which way did he go?"

"I think he headed straight for the railway station, sir. Had something in his hand that looked like a telegram."

"That's enough. Thank you," cried Farnum, as he hurried away.

"One moment," interrupted Jack. "How was Dudley dressed?"

"He had on the white duck uniform of a steward, and cap to match," replied the marine.

"Thank you," nodded Jack, then turned and ran after Farnum and Pollard.

The railway station was not far away. Over there the trio hastened. No train had left for half an hour, as they quickly learned, but one was due to leave in about fifteen minutes.

The operator assured the questioners that no one in a naval steward's dress had attempted to send a telegram.

"That was only a ruse, then," said Farnum. "The fellow went through here, and by here."

Jack hastily devoted himself to questioning other employes about the station.

"Why, yes, I saw a man who looked like that," replied the baggage-master.

"What did he do! What became of him?" asked Jack, swiftly.

"He went through here, and down that street," replied the baggage-master promptly.

"Is that all you saw, or know about him?"

"Yes."

Jack hastily reported to his two friends. Just then a policeman approached. Farnum learned that he was stationed here during the naval week. So the boatbuilder gave the officer a hasty description of the fugitive and asked that the steward, in case he returned to the station, and attempted to board a train, be arrested.

"I'll certainly nab him," promised the officer.

"Now, come along up that street, yonder," called Farnum to his companions. "Confound it, it's like hunting a needle in a hay-stack!"

"And we forgot to ask that officer to report to the police of the town," Jack reminded his employer, after they had gone a little way.

"Run back to the station, get the police station on the 'phone, and send word to the chief, will you?" begged Mr. Farnum.

Captain Jack returned on the run. He secured 'phone connection with the chief of police, and was able to give a graphic description of the steward who was wanted so badly.

"Of course," Jack hinted to the police chief, "the fellow we want so badly may have friends on shore, or some other way of changing his white uniform for other clothes."

"I won't overlook that," promised the chief of police. "And I'll send out a general alarm at once."

By the time that the submarine boy left the railway station again Farnum and Pollard were out of sight. Nevertheless, Benson hurried off up the same street they had taken.

He walked quickly for two blocks, then, coming to a larger street that crossed at right angles, he started to turn and go east. Just as he rounded the corner he thought he heard something strike the sidewalk, as though it had dropped from his pockets.

Wheeling quickly, the submarine boy returned to the corner. He was just in time to see something that took his thoughts like a flash from everything else.

Near the doorway of a small clothing store, two doors from the corner, a man had been looking stealthily out. Just as Jack turned the corner, out of sight, this man darted out, then slowed down to a deliberate walk in the direction of the railway station.

It was this man at whom Jack Benson found himself staring with all his eyesight. The man was dressed in a rather fastidious-looking summer weight frock coat suit. On his head rested an expensive straw hat of the latest sort. Over his eyes were light blue goggles. His hair was jet black.

"But that's a wig!" flashed Jack Benson, inwardly, almost at once. "That's Arthur Miller, just the same. He has the same walk as the steward!"

Though the other had had a brief chance for a glimpse at Benson just as he turned, the well dressed one did not increase his pace—that is, not until he heard Captain Jack's swift steps behind him.

"Oh, just a minute, if you please!" called Benson, in a voice that was ironically pleasant.

One look over his shoulder the other took, then broke into a run.

But Jack was younger, more agile, with better wind. Realizing this, the fugitive wheeled around the corner into an alley.

It was a short one, leading to some sort of a stable yard. Yet, though Jack Benson reached that yard in about record time, he gave a gasp of dismay. For the well-dressed fugitive was already out of sight, nor did noise from any quarter show the line of his further flight.

"Confound him, I'm not going to lose him as quickly and easily as that!" raged young Benson.

"Looking for your pop?" demanded a laughing, broad-faced woman, appearing at a back door that opened into the yard.

"Yes," declared Jack, pulsing. "Which way—"

"He went in there," nodded the woman, pointing to the nearly closed door of a small barn.

It might have been that the woman was purposely deceiving him, to aid the fugitive, but to that suspicion Jack had no time to give thought. He sprang into the barn to find it empty. He stood there, panting, for a moment, growing sick at heart with disappointment.

Then he heard a slight rustling on a haymow overhead, that was reached only by a ladder. Up that ladder rushed the submarine boy, springing into the hay.

As he did so, the well-dressed fugitive darted out from cover at another point in the mow, leaping straight down to the floor. After him sprang Jack Benson, and landed full upon him.

But the fugitive, by a supreme effort fear, rose, shaking off the boy, and started to dart out into the open.

"No, you don't—Mr. Arthur Miller!" roared the submarine boy, making a bound after him.

So much force did Jack put into that leap that, missing, he fell to the floor on his hands and knees. The moment thus gained for the fugitive was enough to give the latter time to dart out, slamming the door shut after him.

"This chase doesn't stop until it turns out my way!" muttered young Benson, doggedly. He had expected to find the door secured, but it was not. He yanked it open.

The fugitive was crossing the yard, just reaching the alley, when the same woman who had first spoken to Jack again opened her door. In one hand she held a mop. This she threw with such aim or luck that it passed between the running man's legs, tripping him.

And then Jack Benson piled upon him in earnest, first snatching up the mop and brandishing it over the fugitive's head.

"I don't want to hurt your cranium any," flared up Captain Jack. "But I'm going to do it if I have to."

"Confound you, woman!" roared the discomfited rascal.

"Arthur Miller's voice!" cried Jack, joyously. "Now, I know what we had only guessed so far! Now, see here, my fine fellow, you might as well give in, for I'm not going to quit until I land you—"

Miller had been lying quietly enough for a few moments. Now, however, he suddenly squirmed about, catching Jack by the ankles with both hands. Down went the submarine boy, flopped by a trick that he had little expected.

"We'll see whether you've got me!" clicked the scoundrel, leaping to his feet and making for the street.

"Thank you for your mop, ma'am," Jack called back, pantingly, as he gave chase. It annoyed him to have Miller prove so slippery, and he was filled with dread lest the defaulter should wind up by getting clean away.

Singing snatches of song, two sailors passed on the sidewalk, just at the head of the alleyway.

"Look what's coming," roared one, goodnaturedly, catching at his mate's hand. Thus, halted, they formed an effective barrier of brawn in the way of the first runner.

"Let me through! That wretch wants to kill me!" gasped Miller.

"We won't let him," replied one of the sailors, reassuringly.

"Hold him! The police want him!" implored Jack.

"Hold on, both of you," admonished one of the sailors, grabbing at Miller, while the other sailor placed himself so as to prevent the submarine boy from a possible attack. "One of you is lying. Which one is it?"

"Well," grinned Jack, reassured, "I'm not afraid to have you take us both before the nearest officer of the law. But I guess that man is afraid of such a test."

"Sounds like a straightforward answer," observed the other Jack Tar.

"This man," declared young Benson, "is Arthur Miller, wanted by the law for looting part of his ward's fortune and running away with the rest."

"It's a lie!" challenged Miller, hoarsely.

"Then ask him," proposed Jack, crisply, "why he's wearing a black wig, and under that has iron-gray hair that has been dyed brown? Why he shaved his beard off?"

"Do you know the answer?" demanded the sailor who held Miller. The other sailor lifted Miller's new straw hat, snatching off the wig.

"Guilty, as charged," he grinned.

"Now, hold on to him, and march him along until you meet the first policeman," urged Jack Benson. "If you do that, I'm very certain that my employer, Jacob Farnum, builder of the 'Pollard' submarine boat, will remember you both handsomely."

"That sounds good," laughed one of the seamen.

"And here comes an officer now," cried Captain Jack, looking down the street as far as the next corner. "See how your prisoner trembles. Would an innocent man act so?"

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

Within three minutes Arthur Miller stood before the desk at a station house. In less than twenty minutes Messrs. Farnum and Pollard had been found. They hurried to the police station, confirming the identification of Arthur Miller. He was locked up.

"It's a big thing you've helped to do, lads," Jacob Farnum assured the two strong young sailors. "You're entitled to some of the fruits of your work. How will this do?"

Whereupon he pressed upon each Jack Tar a couple of twenty-dollar bills.

"We've a couple of hours of shore leave left to us," grinned one of the sailors. "Is there anyone else you want caught, friend?"

By the time that Farnum, Pollard and Captain Jack had returned to the pier they found a midshipman awaiting them.

"Admiral Bentley's compliments, gentlemen," said the midshipman. "He begs you to go to him aboard the flagship. He has information of importance to communicate to you concerning the missing steward."

"By the way," laughed Mr. Farnum, contentedly, "that steward is no longer missing. We've just had the pleasure of seeing him placed under lock and key, where he'll keep until he's wanted."

"Will you come aboard the flagship in our launch?" asked the midshipman.

"Yes, thank you," replied Farnum. Thereupon Jack signaled to Hal Hastings, aboard the "Pollard," which lay to, not far off, to return to moorings.

"Catch your man?" yelled Hal, through a megaphone. His chum nodded in the affirmative.

"Toot! toot! toot!" sounded the "Pollard's" auto-whistle, in three long, triumphant blasts.

Arrived at the flagship, the midshipman conducted the visitors at once to the admiral's office.

"Did you catch the rascal?" asked that fine old officer.

"Yes, sir," nodded Farnum, and gave a quick, brief account of the capture.

"Captain Benson appear's to be your lucky star to-day," laughed the admiral. "By the way, captain, I must congratulate you most warmly on that daring, magic dive. Your boat is surely in a new class. But now to other interesting business. After you had gone it occurred to me to make a most thorough investigation into the whole matter of that steward.

"Your man Miller certainly displayed considerable originality in his attempt to hide from the law. He had been aboard for some time. He plainly realized that about the last place detectives would ever think to look for criminals would be among the crew of a battleship. We always require references for any man we enlist, and always look up the references. I have yet to satisfy myself as to how the fellow Miller managed to get around the matter of references. However, he got aboard, and was all but safe from pursuit. Moreover, this flagship is scheduled to sail for the European station as soon as the manoeuvres are over. Miller, I imagine, intended to desert when in European waters. By that time, as police pursuit would have cooled, he must have figured that he would be rather safe from the law.

"I have investigated his doings aboard this boat. Among other things I have learned that he deposited with our paymaster, taking a receipt for the same, an iron box—a small affair—which, the fellow said, contained papers regarding the history of his family. He had been years in getting the papers together, he explained to the paymaster, and wanted them put in a place of safe-keeping."

Jacob Farnum sprang to his feet, a great light of suspicion shining in his eyes.

"I have had that box taken from the paymaster's safe and forced open," continued Admiral Bentley with a smile. "It is a right that we exercise over any package at need. It was opened in the presence of three officers of this fleet, and it was found to contain, probably, close to a half million dollars in bills of large denominations. The paymaster will be able to give you more exact figures. He has the money in his safe again. It will be transferred to the custody of civil authorities ashore until the courts have issued an order for its further disposition."

"It's Miss Desmond's money," cried Farnum. "Only a little while to wait, and then that splendid young woman will come into her own."

Tears glistened in the boatbuilder's eyes.

"If you think I am unusually affected over this matter," explained Mr. Farnum, presently, "let me, with your permission, sir, tell you of the fine, brave conduct of the girl in saving Captain Benson and the submarine boat."

Admiral Bentley was greatly interested in the recital that followed.

In due time the flagship's shore boat carried the three to land again. With fingers that shook Jacob Farnum penned a most exultant telegram to Grace Desmond.

That sent, they engaged a boatman to put them aboard the "Pollard." It was now the turn of Hal Hastings and Eph Somers to share in the excitement and the joy.

In the days that followed the "Pollard" did not take any official part in the naval manoeuvres, though whenever there was time for officers to get leave from their ships Captain Jack and his friends were busy enough showing all the workings of the fine boat to their visitors.

Admiral Bentley and his naval staff spent one entire forenoon aboard the natty little submarine. They were delighted with all that they were shown.

"Mr. Pollard," exclaimed the admiral, just before leaving, "it is my unofficial opinion, from what I have seen to-day, and from what you have already shown at this rendezvous, that your boat is miles and miles ahead of any other type of submarine torpedo boat yet constructed. I shall undoubtedly also make that the text of the official opinion that I shall furnish to the Navy Department. I must also tell you, what you already know, that, in your captain and crew of youngsters, you have the best possible material for showing your boat off to the best possible advantage."

It was with light hearts indeed that the crew and passengers of the "Pollard" turned her nose toward the home port. Grant Andrews had already been instructed, by wire, to begin the preliminary work for laying the keel of a sister submarine torpedo boat.

If Dunhaven had turned out well for the launching, she did herself more than proud in the wildly cheering crowd that lined the shores on the return of that adventurous little boat, which was no longer known as "Pollard's Folly," but as "Pollard's Marvel."

It was a happy day for both inventor and builder. The press of the country had been talking for some days of the new era that had dawned in submarine boat building.

Grace Desmond was among the first to welcome the returning voyagers. She had promptly answered Farnum's telegram, and that boatbuilder had subsequently received from her two letters that he did not take the trouble to read fully to his companions.

As if to celebrate the return of the splendid boat, Dunhaven, in the persons of two of her constables, captured Josh Owen that same night when he tried to return by stealth to his home.

Yet the constables did not get their man handcuffed before that same elfin ten-year-old son of Owen's had tried desperately to fight the officers into letting his father go.

Arthur Miller was placed on trial, and pleaded guilty, and Grace Desmond's claim was established to the money found in the iron box aboard the flagship. She tried hard to make Jack and Hal and Eph accept a handsome reward, but all three boys steadfastly refused her offer. Jacob Farnum, in his own quiet way, was a bit more successful, however, and started for each of them a very substantial little bank account.

One day, shortly after the return of the submarine boys to Dunhaven, while the hammers of the riveters were ringing out merrily on the hull of the second Pollard boat, Jacob Farnum sent for Captain Jack Benson and his friends.

"I want to talk business with you," said the builder, motioning to chairs. "You've been working for me for a sort of pay, but now I want to make a definite and regular arrangement with you. I'm willing to provide your keep aboard the boat, and furnish your uniforms. In addition, I am willing to pay Captain Benson a hundred and fifty dollars a month, and Hastings and Somers each a hundred."

That offer brought the three boys to their feet. "It's—it's too much!" Jack managed to gasp.

"First time I ever had an employe tell me he was being paid too much," laughed the builder. "Now, see here, young men, Pollard and I are going to make fortunes out of building these boats—huge fortunes, we believe—and we want to attract loyal young men to us by paying them at least fair wages. Think it over, and you'll soon agree you're not being paid too much."

What could the young men do but accept the wonderful good fortune that was offered them? Then Farnum, laughing, rose and opened a nearby door. There stood Grace Desmond smiling.

"Captain," announced the builder, as he took one of the girl's hands in his own, "I shall want you to decorate the 'Pollard' handsomely next Thursday. On that day Miss Desmond will become Mrs. Farnum. Captain and crew of the 'Pollard,' we shall look for you to be at the wedding, and wearing new uniforms that have already been especially ordered for the occasion."

What could the young men do but congratulate the happy couple? And they did it most heartily.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SUBMARINE BOYS ON DUTY ***

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