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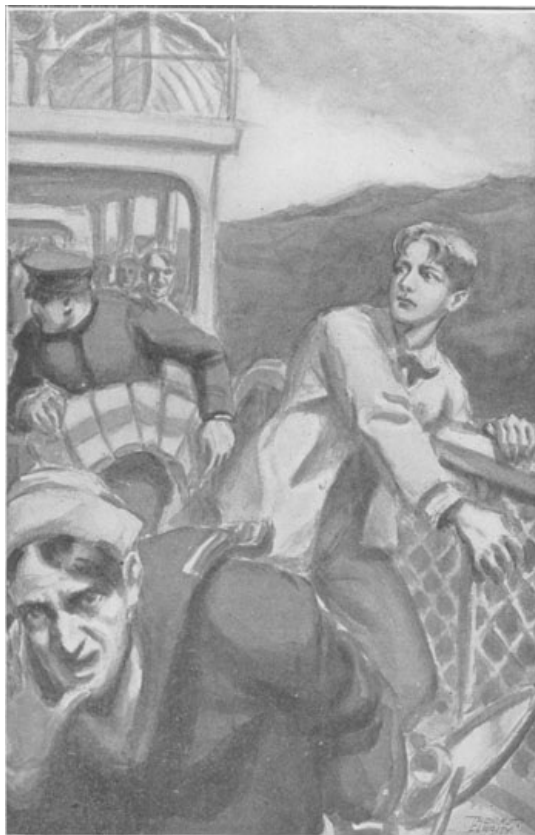
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TOM SLADE ON A TRANSPORT ***



TOM HOBBLLED ALONG, HOLDING THE RAIL.

Frontispiece—(Page 131)

TOM SLADE ON A TRANSPORT

BY PERCY K. FITZHUGH

AUTHOR OF
TOM SLADE, BOY SCOUT, TOM SLADE
AT TEMPLE CAMP, TOM SLADE
ON THE RIVER, TOM SLADE
WITH THE COLORS

ILLUSTRATED BY
THOMAS CLARITY

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TOM SLADE ON A TRANSPORT

CHAPTER I

As Tom Slade went through Terrace Avenue on his way to the Temple Camp office, where he was employed, he paused beside a truck backed up against the curb in front of a certain vacant store. Upon it was a big table and wrestling with the table was Pete Connigan, the truckman—the very same Pete Connigan at whom Tom used to throw rocks and whom he had called a “mick.” It reminded him of old times to see Pete.

The vacant store, too, aroused dubious memories, for there he had stolen many an apple in the days when Adolf Schmitt had his “cash grocery” on the premises, and used to stand in the doorway with his white apron on, shaking his fist as Tom scurried down the street and calling, “I’ll *strafe* you, you young loafer!”

Tom had wondered what *strafing* was, until long afterward he heard that poor Belgium was being *strafed*; and then he knew.

“Wal, ef ‘tain’t Tommy Slade!” said Pete, with a cordial grin of surprise. “I ain’t seen ye in two year! Ye’ve growed ter be a big, strappin’ lad, ain’t ye?”

“Hello, Pete,” said Tom, shaking the Irishman’s brawny hand. “Glad to see you. I’ve been away working on a ship for quite a while. That’s one reason you haven’t seen me.”

“Be gorry, the town’s gittin’ big, an’ that’s another reason. The last time I seen ye, ye wuz wid that Sweet Cap’ral lad, an’ I knocked yer two sassy heads tergither for yez. Remember that?”

“Yes,” laughed Tom, “and then I started running down the street and hollered, “Throw a brick, you Irish mick!’?”

“Ye did,” vociferated Pete, “an’ wid me afther ye.”

“You didn’t catch me, though,” laughed Tom.

“Wal, I got ye now,” said Pete, grabbing him good-naturedly by the collar. And they sat down on the back of the truck to talk for a few moments.

“I’m glad I came this way,” said Tom. “I usually go down Main Street, but I’ve been away from Bridgeboro so long, I thought I’d kinder stroll through this way to see how the town looked. I’m not in any particular hurry,” he added. “I don’t have to get to work till nine. I was going to walk around through Terrace Court.”

“Ben away on a ship, hev ye?” questioned Pete, and Tom told him the whole story of how he had given up the career of a hoodlum to join the Scouts, of the founding of Temple Camp by Mr. John Temple, of the summers spent there, of how he had later gotten a job on a steamer carrying supplies to the allies; how he had helped to apprehend a spy, how the ship had been torpedoed, how he had been rescued after two days spent in an open boat, of his roundabout journey back to Bridgeboro, and the taking up again of his prosaic duties in the local office of Temple Camp.

The truckman, his case-spike hanging from his neck, listened with generous interest to Tom’s simple, unboastful account of all that had happened to him.

“There were two people on that ship I got to be special friends with,” he concluded. “One was a Secret Service man named Conne; he promised to help me get a job in some kind of war service till I’m old enough to enlist next spring. The other was a feller about my own age named Archer. He was a steward’s boy. I guess they both got drowned, likely. Most all the boats got upset while they were launching them. I hope that German spy got drowned.”

“Wuz he a German citizen?” Pete asked.

“Sure, he was! You don’t suppose an American citizen would be a spy for Germany, do you?”

“Be gorry, thar’s a lot uv German Amiricans, ‘n’ I wouldn’ trust ‘em,” said Pete.

“Well, there’s some Irish people here that hate England, so they’re against the United States too,” said Tom.

“Ye call me a thraiter, do ye!” roared Pete.

“I didn’t call you anything,” Tom said, laughing and dodging the Irishman’s uplifted hand; “but I say a person is American or else he isn’t. It don’t make any difference where he was born. If he’s an American citizen and he helps Germany, then he’s worse than a spy—he’s a traitor and he ought to get shot.”

“Be gorry, you said sumthin’!”

“He’s worse than anything else in the world,” said Tom. “He’s worse than—than a murderer!”

Pete slapped him on the shoulder. “Bully fer you!” said he. “Fwhatever became uv yer fayther, lad?” he questioned after a moment.

“He died,” said Tom simply. “It was after we got put out of Barrel Alley and after I got to be a scout. Mr. Ellsworth said maybe it was better—sort of—”

Pete nodded.

“An’ yer bruther?”

“Oh, he went away long before that—even before my mother died. He went to work on a ranch

out West somewhere—Arizona, I think.”

“N’ ye niver heard anny more uv him?”

“No—I wrote him a letter when my mother died, but I never got any answer. Maybe I sent it to the wrong place. Did you ever hear of a place called O’Brien’s Junction out there?”

“It’s a good name, I’ll say that,” said Pete.

“Everybody used to say he’d make money some day. Maybe he’s rich now, hey?”

“I remimber all uv yez when yez used fer ter worrk fer Schmitt, here,” said Pete.

“It reminded me of that when I came along.”

“Yer fayther, he used fer ter drive th’ wagon fer ‘im. Big Bill ‘n’ Little Bill, we used fer ter call him ‘n’ yer bruther. Yer fayther wuzn’ fond uv worrk, I guess.”

“He used to get cramps,” said Tom simply.

“He used fer ter lick yez, I’m thinkin’.”

“Maybe we deserved to get licked,” said Tom. “Anyway *I* did.”

“Yer right, ye did,” agreed Pete.

“My brother was better than I was. It made me mad when I saw him get licked. I could feel it way down in my fingers, kind of—the madness. That’s why he went to live at Schmitt’s after my father got so he couldn’t work much. They always had lots to eat at Schmitt’s. I didn’t ever work there myself,” he added with his customary blunt honesty, “because I was a hoodlum.”

“Wal, I see ye’ve growed up ter be a foine lad, jist the same,” said Pete consolingly, “‘n’ mebbe the lad as kin feel the tingles ter see’s bruther git licked unfair is as good as that same bruther, whativer!”

Tom said nothing, but gazed up at the windows of the apartment above the store where the Schmitts had lived. How he had once envied Bill his place in that home of good cheer and abundance! He remembered the sauerkraut and the sausages which Bill had told him of, and he had not believed Bill’s extravagant declaration that “at Schmitt’s you could have all you want to eat.” To poor Tom, living with his wretched father in the two-room tenement in Barrel Alley, with nothing to eat at all, these accounts of the Schmitt household had seemed like a tale from the Arabian Nights. Once his father had sent him there to get fifty cents from thrifty and industrious Bill, and Tom remembered the shiny oilcloth on the kitchen floor, the snowy white fluted paper on the shelves, the stiff, spotless apron on the buxom form of Mrs. Schmitt, whom Mr. Schmitt had called “Mooder.”

Tom Slade, of Barrel Alley, had revenged himself on Bill and all the rest of this by stealing apples from the front of the store and calling, “Dirty Dutchman”—a singularly inappropriate epithet—at Mr. Schmitt. But he realized now that Mr. Schmitt had been a kind and hospitable man, a much better husband and father than poor Bill Slade, senior, had ever been, and an extremely good friend to lucky Bill, junior, who had lived so near to Heaven, in that immaculate home, as to have all the sauerkraut and sausage and potato salad and rye bread and Swiss cheese and coffee cake that he could possibly manage—and more besides.

CHAPTER II

HE DOES A GOOD TURN AND MAKES A DISCOVERY

“What became of the Schmitts?” Tom asked.

“It’s aisy ter see ye’ve ben away from here,” said Pete.

“I’ve only been back five days,” Tom explained.

“Wal, if ye’d been here two weeks ago, ye’d know more’n ye know now about it. Ye’re a jack ashore, that’s what ye are. Ye’ve got ter be spruced up on the news. Did ye know the school house burned down?”

“Yes, I knew that.”

“Wal—about this Schmitt, here; thar wuz two detectives come out from Noo Yorrk—from the Fideral phad’ye call it. They wuz making inquiries about Schmitt. Fer th’ wan thing he wuz an aly-*an*, ‘n’ they hed some raysons to think he wuz mixed up in plots. They wuz mighty close-mouthed about it, so I heerd, ‘n’ they asked more’n they told. Nivir within half a mile uv Schmitt did they go, but by gorry, he gits wind uv it ‘n’ th’ nixt mornin’ not so much as a sign uv him wuz thar left.

"Cleared out, loike that," said Pete, clapping his hands and spreading his arms by way of illustrating how Adolf Schmitt had vanished in air.

"Thar wuz th' grocery full uv stuff and all, 'n' the furnitoor upstairs, but Adolf 'n' the old wooman 'n' th' kids 'n' sich duds ez they cud cram inter their bags wuz gone—bury drawers lift wide open, ez if they'd went in a ghreat hurry."

Tom had listened in great surprise. "What—do—you—know—about—that?" he gasped when Pete at last paused.

"It's iviry blessed worrd that I know. I'm thinkin' he wint ter Germany, mebbe."

"How could he get there?" Tom asked.

"Wouldn't thim Dutch skippers in Noo Yorrk Harrbor help him out?" Pete shouted. "Gerrmany, Holland—'tis all th' same. Thar's ways uv gittin' thar, you kin thrust the Germans. They're comin' and goin' back all the toime."

"What do you suppose they suspected him of?" Tom asked, his astonishment still possessing him.

"Nivir a worrd wud they say, but ye kin bet yer Uncle Sammy's not spyin' around afther people fer nuthin'. They searched the store aftherworrd, but nary a thing cud they find."

So that was the explanation of the now vacant store which had been so much a part of the life of Tom Slade and his poor, shiftless family. That was the end, so far as Bridgeboro was concerned, of the jovial, good-hearted grocer, and Fritzie and little Emmy and "Mooder" in her stiff, spotless white apron. It seemed almost unbelievable.

"A Hun is a Hun," said Pete, "'n' that's all thar is to't."

"What did they do with all the stuff?" Tom asked.

Pete shrugged his shoulders. "Mister Temple, he owns th' buildin' an' he hed it cleared out, 'n' now he leaves them Red Cross ladies use it fer ter make bandages 'n' phwat all, 'n' collect money fer their campaign. He's a ghrand man, Mister Temple. Would ye gimme a lift wid this here table, now, while ye're here, Tommy?"

As they carried the table across the sidewalk, a group of ladies came down the block and whom should Tom see among them but Mrs. Temple and her daughter Mary. As he looked at Mary (whom he used to tease and call "stuck up") he realized that he was not the only person in Bridgeboro who had been growing up, for she was quite a young lady, and very pretty besides.

"Why, Thomas, how *do* you do!" said Mrs. Temple. "I heard you were back—"

"And you never came to see us," interrupted Mary.

"I only got back Tuesday," said Tom, a little flustered.

He told them briefly of his trip and when the little chat was over Pete Connigan had disappeared.

"I wonder if you wouldn't be willing to move one or two things for us?" Mrs. Temple asked. "Have you time? I meant to ask the truckman, but—"

"He may be too old to be a scout any more, but he's not too old to do a good turn," teased Mary.

They entered the store where the marks of the departed store fixtures were visible along the walls and Schmitt's old counter stood against one side. Piles of Red Cross literature now lay upon it. Upon a rough makeshift table were boxes full of yarn (destined to keep many a long needle busy) and the place was full of the signs of its temporary occupancy.

"If I hadn't joined the Red Cross already, I'd join now," said Tom, apologetically, displaying his button. "A girl in our office got me to join."

"Wasn't she mean," said Mary. "I'm going to make you work anyhow, just out of spite."

Other women now arrived, armed with no end of what Tom called "first aid stuff," and with bundles of long knitting needles, silent weapons for the great drive.

Tom was glad enough to retreat before this advancing host and carry several large boxes into the cellar. Then he hauled the old grocery counter around so that the women working at it could be seen from the street. The table, too, he pulled this way and that, to suit the changing fancy of the ladies in authority.

"There, I guess that's about right," said Mrs. Temple, eying it critically; "now, there's just one thing more—if you've time. There's a thing down in the cellar with little compartments, sort of —"

"I know," said Tom; "the old spice cabinet."

"I wonder if we could bring it up together," said Mrs. Temple.

"I'll get it," Tom said.

"You couldn't do it alone," said Mary. "I'll help."

"I can do it better without anybody getting in the way," said Tom with characteristic bluntness, and Mary and her mother were completely squelched.

"Gracious, now he has grown," said Mrs. Temple, as Tom disappeared downstairs.

"His eyes used to be gray; they've changed," said Mary.

As if that had anything to do with moving tables and spice cabinets!

The spice cabinet stood against the brick chimney and was covered with thick dust. Behind it was a disused stove-pipe hole stuffed with rags, which Tom pulled out to brush the dust off the cabinet before lifting it.

He had pushed it hardly two feet in the direction of the stairs when his coat caught on a nail and he struck a match to see if it had torn. The damage was slight, and, with his customary attention to details, he saw that the nail was one of several which had fastened a narrow strip of molding around the cabinet. About two feet of this molding had been torn away, leaving the nails protruding from the cabinet and Tom noticed not only that the unvarnished strip which the molding had covered was clean and white, but that the exposed parts of the nails were still shiny.

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“Huh,” he thought, “whoever pulled that off must have been in a great hurry not to hammer the nails in or even pull them out.”

As he twisted the nails out, one by one, it occurred to him to wonder why the heavy, clinging coat of damp dust which covered the rest of the cabinet was absent from this white unsoiled strip and shiny nails. The cabinet, he thought, must have been in the cellar for some time, whereas the molding must have been wrenched from it very recently, for it does not take long for a nail to become rusty in a damp cellar.

He struck another match and looked about near the chimney, intending, if the strip of molding were there, to take it upstairs and nail it on where it belonged, for one of the good things which the scout life had taught Tom was that broken furniture and crooked nails sticking out spell carelessness and slovenliness.

But the strip was not to be found. A less observant boy would not have given two thoughts to the matter, but in his hasty thinking Tom reached this conclusion, that some one had very lately pulled this strip of molding off of the cabinet and had used it for a purpose, since it was nowhere to be seen.

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With Pete’s tale fresh in his mind, he struck match after match and peered about the cellar. Against the opposite wall he noticed a stick with curved tongs on one end of it, manipulated by a thin metal bar running to the other end. It was one of those handy implements used to lift cans down from high shelves. It stood among other articles, a rake, an old broom, but the deft little mechanical hand on the end of it was bright and shiny, so this, too, had not been long in the damp cellar.

For a moment Tom paused and thought. It never occurred to him that momentous consequences might hang upon his thinking. He was simply curious and rather puzzled.

He picked up the can lifter and stood looking at it. Then with a sudden thought he went back to the chimney, struck a match and, thrusting his head into the sooty hole, looked up. Four or five feet above, well out of arm’s reach, something thin ran across from one side to the other of the spacious chimney. The can lifter was too long to be gotten wholly into the chimney, but Tom poked the end of it through the hole and upward until its angle brought it against the chimney wall.

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It was right there that the crosspiece was wedged. In other words, it had been pushed as high, a little on this side, a little on that, as this handy implement would reach, and perhaps kept from falling in the process by the gripping tongs.

Not another inch could Tom reach with this stick. By hammering upward against the end of it, however, he was able to jam it up a trifle, thanks to its capacity for bending. Thus he dislodged the crosspiece and as it tumbled down he saw that it was the strip of molding from the cabinet.

But along with it there fell something else which interested him far more. This was a packet which had evidently been held against the side of the chimney by the stick. There were six bulging envelopes held together by a rubber band. The dampness of the chimney had not affected the live rubber and it still bore its powdery white freshness.

“I wonder if they looked there,” Tom thought. “Maybe they just reached around—kind of. I should think they’d have noticed those shiny nails, though.”

He put the packet safely in his pocket and, hauling the cabinet up on his back staggered up the stairs with it.

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“What in the world took you so long?” said Mary Temple. “Oh, look at your face!”

“I can’t look at it,” said matter-of-fact Tom.

“It’s too funny! You’ve got soot all over it. Come over here and I’ll wash it off.”

It was a curious thing about Tom Slade and a matter of much amusement to his friends, that however brave or noble or heroic his acts might be, he was pretty sure to get his necktie halfway around his neck and a dirty face into the bargain.

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CHAPTER III

HE SCENTS DANGER AND RECEIVES A LETTER

Tom was greatly excited by his discovery. As he hurried to the office he opened the envelopes and what he found was not of a nature to modify his excitement. Here was German propaganda work with a vengeance. He felt that he had plunged into the very heart of the Teuton spy system. Evidently the recipient of these documents had considered them too precious to destroy and too dangerous to carry.

"He might still think of a way to get them, maybe," thought Tom.

There was a paper containing a list of all the American cantonments and opposite each camp several names of individuals. Tom thought these might be spies in Uncle Sam's uniform. There was some correspondence about smuggling dental rubber out of the United States to make gas masks in Germany. There were requests for money. There was one letter giving information, in considerable detail, about aeroplane manufacture.

Another letter in the same handwriting interested Tom particularly, because of his interest in gas engines—the result of his many tussles with the obstreperous motor of the troop's cabin launch, *Good Turn*. Skimming hastily over some matter about the receipt of money through some intermediary, his interest was riveted by the following:

"... I told you about having plans of high pressure motor. That's for battle planes at high altitudes. I've got the drawings of the other now—the low pressure one I told you about at S—'s. That's for seaplanes, submarine spotting, and all that. Develops 400 H.P. They're not putting those in the planes that are going over now, but all planes going over next year will have them. B— told me what you said about me going across, but that's the only reason I suggested it—because the information won't be of any particular use to them after they bring down a plane. They'll see the whole thing before their eyes then. But suit yourself. There's a lot of new wrinkles on this motor. I'll tell you that, but there's no use telling you about it when you don't know a gas engine from a meat-chopper.

"Sure, I could tend to the other matter too—it's the same idea as a periscope. That's a cinch. I knew a chap worked on the *Christopher Colon*. She used to run to Central America. Maybe I could swing it that way. Anyway, I'll see you.

"If you have to leave in a hurry, leave money and any directions at S—'s.

"I'm going to be laid off here, anyway, on account of my eardrums.

"Hope B— will give you this all right. Guess that's all now."

Tom read this twice and out of its scrappiness and incompleteness he gathered this much! that somebody who was about to be dismissed from an aeroplane factory for the very usual reason that he could not stand the terrific noise, had succeeded in either making or procuring plans of Uncle Sam's new aeroplane engine, the Liberty Motor.

He understood the letter to mean that it was very important that these drawings reach Germany before the motors were in service, since then it would be too late for the Germans to avail themselves of "Yankee ingenuity," and also since they would in all probability succeed in capturing one of the planes.

He gathered further that the sender of the letter was prepared to go himself with these plans, working his way on an American ship, and to do something else (doubtless of a diabolical character) on the way. The phrase "same idea as a periscope" puzzled him. It appeared, also, that the sender of the letter, whoever he was and wherever he was (for no place or date or signature was indicated and the envelopes were not the original ones) had not sent his communications direct to this alien grocer, but to someone else who had delivered them to Schmitt.

"It isn't anything for me to be mixed up in, anyway," Tom thought. He was almost afraid to carry papers of such sinister purport with him and he quickened his steps in order that he might turn them over to Mr. Burton, the manager of Temple Camp office.

But when he reached the office he did not carry out this intention, for there was waiting for him a letter which upset all his plans and made him forget for the time being these sinister papers. It took him back with a rush to his experiences on shipboard and he read it with a smile on his lips.

"DEAR TOMMY—I don't know whether this letter will ever reach you, for, for all I know, you're in Davy Jones's locker. Even my memo of your address got pretty well soaked in the ocean and all I'm dead sure of is that you live in North America somewhere near a bridge."

Tom turned the sheet to look at the signature but he knew already that the letter was from his erstwhile friend, Mr. Carleton Conne.

"You'll remember that I promised to get you a job working for Uncle Sam. That job is

yours if you're alive to take it. It'll bring you so near the war, if that's what you want, that you couldn't stick a piece of tissue paper between.

"If you get this all right and are still keen to work in transport service, there won't be any difficulty on account of the experience you've had.

"Drop in to see me Saturday afternoon, room 509, Federal Building, New York, if you're interested.

"Best wishes to you.

"CARLETON CONNE."

So Mr. Conne was alive and had not forgotten him. Tom wished that the letter had told something about the detective's rescue and the fate of the spy, but he realized that Secret Service agents could hardly be expected to dwell on their adventures to "ship's boy" acquaintances, and was it not enough that Mr. Conne remembered him at all, and his wish to serve on an army transport? 24

He took the letter into the private office to show it to Mr. Burton, resolved now that he would say nothing about his discovery in Schmitt's cellar, for surely Mr. Conne would be the proper one to give the papers to.

"You remember," he began, "that I said if I ever heard from Mr. Conne and he offered me a job, I'd like to go. And you said it would be all right."

Mr. Burton nodded. "And the expected—or the unexpected—has happened," he added, smiling, as he handed Mr. Conne's letter back to Tom.

"It'll be all right, won't it?" Tom asked.

"I suppose it will have to be, Tom," Mr. Burton said pleasantly. "That was our understanding, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir—but I'm sorry—kind of."

"I'm sorry, kind of, too; but I suppose there's no help for it. Some boys," he added, as he toyed with a paperweight, "seem to be born to work in offices, and some to wander over the face of the earth. I would be the last to discourage you from entering war service in whatever form it might be. But I'm afraid you'd go anyway, Tom, war or no war. The world isn't big enough for some people. They're born that way. I'm afraid you're one of them. It's surprising how unimportant money is in traveling if one has the wanderlust. It'll be all right," he concluded with a pleasant but kind of rueful smile. He understood Tom Slade thoroughly. 25

"That's another thing I was thinking about, too," said Tom. "Pretty soon I'll be eighteen and then I want to enlist. If I enlist in this country I'll have to spend a whole lot of time in camp, and maybe in the end I wouldn't get sent to the firing line at all. There's lots of 'em won't even get across. If they find you've got good handwriting or maybe some little thing like that, they'll keep you here driving an army wagon or something. If I go on a transport I can give it up at either port. It's mostly going over that the fellers are kept busy anyway; coming back they don't need them. I found that out before. They'll give you a release there if you want to join the army. So if I keep going back and forth till my birthday, then maybe I could hike it through France and join Pershing's army. I'd rather be trained over there, 'cause then I'm nearer the front. You don't think that's sort of cheating the government, do you?" he added. 26

Mr. Burton laughed. "I don't think the government will object to that sort of cheating," he said.

"I read about a feller that joined in France, so I know you can do it. You see, it cuts out a lot of red tape, and I'd kind of like hiking it alone—ever since I was a scout I've felt that way."

"Once a scout, always a scout," smiled Mr. Burton, using a phrase of which he was very fond and which Tom had learned from him; "and it wouldn't be Tom Slade if he didn't go about things in a way of his own, eh, Tom? Well, good luck to you."

Tom went out and in his exuberance he showed Mr. Conne's letter to Margaret Ellison, who also worked in Temple Camp office.

"It's splendid," she said, "and as soon as you *know* you're going I'm going to hang a service flag in the window."

"You can't hang out a service flag for a feller that's working on a transport," Tom said. "He isn't in regular military service. When I'm enlisted I'll let you know." 27

"You must be sure to write."

Tom promised and was delighted. So great was his elation, indeed, that on his way home to his room that evening he went through Terrace Avenue again, to see how the Red Cross women were getting on in their new quarters.

Mary Temple received him in a regular nurse's costume, which made Tom almost wish that he were lying wounded on some battle-field. She was delighted at his good news, and, "Oh, we had such a funny man here just after you left," she said. "Mother thinks he must have been insane. He said he came to read the gas-meter, so I took him down into the cellar and the gas-meter had been taken away. Wouldn't you think the gas company would have known that? Then he said he would stay in the cellar and inspect the pipes."

"Did you let him?" Tom asked.

"I certainly did *not!* With all our stuff down there? When he saw I intended to stay down as long as he did, he went right up. Do you think he wanted to steal some of our membership buttons?"

28

Tom shrugged his shoulders thoughtfully. He was glad the next day was Saturday.

29

CHAPTER IV

HE GETS A JOB AND MEETS "FRENCHY"

Tom found Mr. Conne poring over a scrapbook filled with cards containing finger-prints. His unlighted cigar was cocked up in the corner of his mouth like a flag-pole from a window, just the same as when Tom had seen him last. It almost seemed as if it must be the very same cigar. He greeted Tom cordially.

"So they didn't manage to sink my old chum, Sherlock Nobody Holmes, eh? Tommy, my boy, how are you?"

"Did the spy get rescued?" Tom asked, as the long hand-shake ended.

"Nope. Went down. But we nabbed a couple of his accomplices through his papers."

"I got a new mystery," said Tom in his customary blunt manner. "I was going to give these papers to my boss, but when I got your letter I decided I'd give 'em to you."

He told the detective all about Adolf Schmitt and of how he had discovered the papers in the chimney.

"You say the place had already been searched?" Mr. Conne asked.

30

"Yes, but I s'pose maybe they were in a hurry and had other things to think about, maybe. A man came there again just the other day, too, and said he wanted to read the gas-meter. But he looked all 'round the cellar."

"Hmm," Mr. Conne said dryly. "Tom, if you don't look out you'll make a detective one of these days. I see you've got the same old wide-awake pair of eyes as ever."

"I learned about deducing when I was in the scouts," said Tom. "They always made fun of me for it—the fellers did. Once I deduced an aeroplane landed in a big field because the grass was kind of dragged, but afterwards I found the fellers had made tracks there with an old baby carriage just to fool me. Sometimes one thing kind of tells you another, sort of."

"Well, whenever you see something that you think tells you anything, Tommy, you just follow it up and never mind about folks laughing. I shouldn't wonder if you've made a haul here."

"There was one of 'em that interested me specially," ventured Tom; "the one about motors."

Mr. Conne glanced over the papers again. "Hmm," said he, "I dare say that's the least important of the lot—sort of crack-brained."

31

Tom felt squelched.

"Well, anyway, they'll all be taken care of," Mr. Conne said conclusively, as he stuffed the papers in his pocket.

Tom could have wished that he might share in the further developments connected with those interesting papers. But, however important Mr. Conne considered them, he put the matter temporarily aside in the interest of Tom's proposed job.

"I just happened to think of you," he said, as he took his hat and coat, "when I was talking with the steward of the *Montauk*. He was saying they were short-handed. Come along, now, and we'll go and see about it."

Mr. Conne's mind seemed full of other things as he hurried along the street with Tom after him. On the ferryboat, as they crossed to Hoboken, he was more sociable.

"Don't think any more about those letters now," he said. "The proper authorities will look after them."

"Yes, sir."

"And whatever they set you to doing, put your mind on your work first of all. Keep your eyes and ears open—there's no law against that—but do your work. It's only in dime novels that youngsters like you are generals and captains and famous detectives."

32

"Yes, sir," said Tom.

"What I mean is, don't get any crazy notions in your head. You may land in the Secret Service

yet. But meanwhile keep your feet on the earth—or the ship. Get me?”

Tom was sensible enough to know that this was good advice.

“Your finding these letters was clever. If there are any spies in the camps they’ll be rounded up double quick. As for spy work at sea, I’ll tell you this, though you mustn’t mention it, there are government sleuths on all the ships—most of them working as hands.”

“Yes, sir,” said Tom.

“I’m going across on a fast ship to-morrow myself,” continued Mr. Conne, greatly to Tom’s surprise. “I’ll be in Liverpool and London and probably in France before you get there. There’s a bare possibility of you seeing me over there.”

“I hope I do,” said Tom.

The transport *Montauk* was one of the many privately owned steamers taken over into government service, and Tom soon learned that outside the steward’s department nearly all the positions on board were filled by naval men. Mr. Conne presented him to the steward, saying that Tom had made a trip on a munition carrier, and disappeared in a great hurry. 33

Tom could not help feeling that he was one of the least important things among Mr. Conne’s multitudinous interests, and it must be confessed that he felt just a little chagrined at finding himself disposed of with so little ceremony.

But, if he had only known it, this good friend who stood so high in that most fascinating department of all Uncle Sam’s departmental family, had borne him in mind more than he had encouraged Tom to think, and he had previously spoken words of praise to the steward, which now had their effect in Tom’s allotment to his humble duties.

He was, in a word, given the best position to be had among the unskilled, non-naval force and became presently the envy of every youngster on board. This was the exalted post of captain’s mess boy, a place of honor and preferment which gave him free entrance to that holy of holies, “the bridge,” where young naval officers marched back and forth, and where the captain dined in solitary state, save for Tom’s own presence. 34

Now and then, in the course of that eventful trip, Tom looked enviously at the young wireless operators, and more particularly at the marine signalers, who moved their arms with such jerky and mechanical precision and sometimes, perhaps, he thought wistfully of certain fortunate young heroes of fiction who made bounding leaps to the top of the ladder of fame.

But he did his work cheerfully and well and became a favorite on board, for his duties gave him the freedom of all the decks. He was the captain’s mess boy and could go anywhere.

Indeed, with one person he became a favorite even before the vessel started.

It was well on toward dusk of the third day and he was beginning to think they would never sail, when suddenly he heard a tramp, tramp, on the pier and up the gangplank, and before he realized it the soldiers swarmed over the deck, their tin plates and cups jangling at their sides. They must have come through the adjoining ferry house and across a low roof without touching the street at all, for they appeared as if by magic and no one seemed to know how they had got there. 35

Their arrival was accompanied by much banter and horseplay among themselves, interspersed with questions to the ship’s people, few of which could be answered.

“Hey, pal, where are we going?”

“Where do we go from here, kiddo?”

“Say, what’s the next stop for this jitney?”

*“We don’t know where we’re going,
but we’re on our way,”*

someone piped up.

“We’re going to Berlin,” one shouted.

The fact that no one gave them any information did not appear to discourage them.

“When do we eat?” one wanted to know.

Tom saw no reason why he should not answer that, so he said to those crowded nearest to him, “In about half an hour.”

“G-o-o-d-ni-ight!”

“When are we going to start? Who’s running this camp anyway?”

“Go and tell the engineer we’re here and he can start off.”

“Fares, please. Ding ding!”

“Gimme me a transfer to Berlin.” 36

And so it went. They sprawled about on the hatches, perched upon the rail, leaned in groups against the vent pipes; they covered the ship like a great brown blanket. They wrestled with each other, knocked each other about, shouted gibberish intended for French, talked about *Kaiser Bill*, and mixed things up generally.

At last they were ordered into line and marched slowly through the galley where their plates

and cups were filled and a butcher was kept busy demolishing large portions of a cow. They sprawled about anywhere they pleased, eating.

To Tom it was like a scout picnic on a mammoth scale. Here and there was noticeable a glum, bewildered face, but for the most part the soldiers (drafted or otherwise) seemed bent on having the time of their lives. It could not be said that they were without patriotism, but their one thought now seemed to be to make merry. Tom's customary stolidness disappeared in the face of this great mirthful drive and he sat on the edge of the hatch, his white jacket conspicuous by contrast, and smiled broadly.

He wondered whether any other country in the world could produce such a slangy, jollying, devil-may-care host as these vociferous American soldiers. How he longed to be one of them!

A slim young soldier elbowed his way through the throng and, supper in hand, seated himself on the hatch beside Tom. He had the smallest possible mustache, with pointed ends, and his demeanor was gentlemanly and friendly. Even his way of stirring his coffee seemed different from the rough and tumble fashion of the others.

"These are *stirring* times, hey, Frenchy?" a soldier said.

"Yess—zat is verry good—*stirring times*," the young fellow answered, in appreciation of the joke. Then, turning to Tom, he said, "Zis is ze Bartholdi statue, yess? I am from ze West."

"That's the Statue of Liberty," said Tom. "You'll see it better when we pass it."

"Ah, yess! zis is ze first; I haf' nevaire seen. I zank you."

"Do you know why the Statue of Liberty looks so sad, Frenchy?" a soldier asked. "Because she's facing Brooklyn."

"Do you know why she's got her arm up?" another called.

Frenchy was puzzled.

"She represents the American woman hanging onto a strap in the subway."

"Don't let them jolly you, Frenchy," another said.

Frenchy, a little bewildered, laughed good-humoredly as the bantering throng plied him with absurdities.

"Are you French?" Tom asked, as some new victim diverted the attention of the boys.

"Ah, no! I am Americ'."

"But you were born in France?"

"Yess—zey call it Zhermany, but it is France! I take ze coat from you. Still it is yours. Am I right? I am born in Alsace. Zat is France!"

"Doncher believe him, kiddo!" said a soldier. "He was born in Germany. Look on the map."

"He's a German spy, Whitey; look out for him."

"Alsace—ziss is France!" said Frenchy fervently.

"Ziss is the United States," shouted a soldier derisively.

"Ziss is Hoboken!" chimed in another.

"Vive la Hoboken!" shrieked a third.

Tom thought he had never laughed so much in all his life.

CHAPTER V

HE MAKES A DISCOVERY AND RECEIVES A SHOCK

Soon after dusk the soldiers were ordered to throw away their "smokes" and either go below or lie flat upon the decks. Officers patrolled the rail while others strolled among the boys and reminded the unruly and forgetful not to raise themselves, and soon the big ship, with its crowding khaki-clad cargo, was moving down the stream—on its way to "can the Kaiser." Then even the patrol was discontinued.

A crowded ferryboat paused in its passage to give the great gray transport the right of way, and the throng of commuters upon its deck saw nothing as they looked up but one or two white-jacketed figures moving about.

Tom thought the ship was off, but after fifteen or twenty minutes the throb of the engines

ceased and he heard the clank, clank of the anchor winches. A little distant from the ship tiny green, red and white lights appeared and disappeared and were answered by other colored lights from high up in the rigging of the *Montauk*. Other lights appeared in other directions and were answered by still others, changing rapidly. Tom thought that he could distinguish a dark outline below certain of these lights. The whole business seemed weird and mysterious.

40

In the morning he looked from the rail at a sight which astonished and thrilled him. No sign of land was there to be seen. Steaming abreast of the *Montauk* and perhaps a couple of hundred yards from her, was a great ship with soldiers crowding at her rail waving caps and shouting, their voices singularly crisp and clear across the waters. Beyond her and still abreast was another great ship, the surging army upon her decks reduced to a brown mass in the distance. And far off on either side of this flotilla of three, and before it and behind it, was a sprightly little destroyer, moving this way and that, like a dog jumping about his master.

Upon the nearest vessel a naval signaler was semaphoring to the *Montauk*—his movements jerky, clean-cut, perfect. Enviously Tom watched him, thinking of his own semaphore work at Temple Camp. He read the message easily; it was something about how many knots the ship could make in a steady run of six hundred miles. The *Montauk* answered that she could make twenty-eight knots and keep it up for nineteen hours. The other signaler seemed to be relaying this to the transport beyond, which in turn signaled the destroyer on that side. Then there was signaling between the *Montauk* and her own neighbor destroyer about sailing formation in the danger zone.

41

It was almost like A B C to Tom, but he remembered Mr. Conne's good advice and resolved not to concern himself with matters outside his own little sphere of duty. But a few days later he made a discovery which turned his thoughts again to Adolf Schmitt's cellar and to spies.

He had piled the captain's breakfast dishes, made his weather memoranda from the barometer for posting in the main saloon, and was dusting the captain's table, when he chanced to notice the framed picture of a ship on the cabin wall. He had seen it before, but now he noticed the tiny name, scarcely decipherable, upon its bow, *Christopher Colon*.

So that was the ship on which somebody or other known to the fugitive, Adolf Schmitt, had thought of sailing in order to carry certain information to Germany. As Tom gazed curiously at this picture he thought of a certain phrase in that strange letter, "*Sure, I could tend to the other matter too—it's the same idea as a periscope.*"

42

Yet Mr. Conne's sensible advice would probably have prevailed and Tom would have put these sinister things out of his thoughts, but meeting one of the steward's boys upon the deck shortly afterward he said, "There's a picture of a ship, the *Christopher Colon*—"

"That's this ship," interrupted the steward's boy. "They don't say much about those things. It's hard to find out anything. Nobody except these navy guys know about how many ships are taken over for transports. But I saw a couple of spoons in the dining saloon with that name on them. And sometimes you can make it out under the fresh paint on the life preservers and things. Uncle Sam's some foxy old guy."

Tom was so surprised that he stood stark still and stared as the boy hurried along about his duties. Upon the *Montauk's* nearest neighbor the naval signalman was semaphoring, and he watched abstractedly. It was something about camouflage maneuvering in the zone. Tom took a certain pride in being able to read it. Far off, beyond the other great ships, a sprightly little destroyer cut a zigzag course, as if practicing. The sky was clear and blue. As Tom watched, a young fellow in a sailor's suit hurried by, working his way among the throng of soldiers. Presently, Frenchy strolled past talking volubly to another soldier, and waving his cigarette gracefully in accompaniment. A naval quartermaster leaned against the rail, chatting with a red-faced man with spectacles—the chief engineer, Tom thought.

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Who were Secret Service men and who were not? thought Tom. Who was a spy and who was not? Perhaps some one who brushed past him carried in his pockets (or more likely in the soles of his shoes) the designs of the Liberty Motor. Perhaps some one had the same thought about *him*. What a dreadful thing to be suspected of! A spy!

That puzzling phrase came into his mind again: *Sure, I could tend to the other matter too—it's the same idea as a periscope*. What did that mean? So the *Montauk* was the *Christopher Colon*....

He was roused out of his abstraction by the fervid, jerky voice of Frenchy, talking about Alsace. Alsace was a part of Germany, whatever Frenchy might say.... Again Tom bethought him of Mr. Conne's very wise advice, and he went to the main saloon and posted the weather prediction.

44

That same day something happened which shocked him and gave him an unpleasant feeling of loneliness. Mr. Wessel, the steward, died suddenly of heart failure. He was Tom's immediate superior and in a way his friend. He, and he alone, had received Tom's recommendation from Mr. Conne, and knew something of him. He had given Tom that enviable place as captain's boy, and throughout these few days had treated him with a kind of pleasant familiarity.

He stood by as the army chaplain read the simple burial service, while four soldiers held the rough, weighted casket upon the rail; and he saw it go down with a splash and disappear in the mysterious, fathomless ocean. It affected him more than the loss of a life by torpedoing or drowning could have done and left him solemn and thoughtful and with a deep sense of loss.

Just before dark they semaphored over from the *Dorriton* that they could spare the second steward for duty on the *Montauk*. Tom mentioned this to one of the deck stewards, and to his

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surprise and consternation, an officer came to him a little later and asked him how he knew it.

"I can read semaphoring," said Tom. "I used to be in the Boy Scouts."

The officer looked at him sharply and said, "Well, you'd better learn to keep your mouth shut. This is no place for amateurs and Boy Scouts to practice their games."

"Y-yes, sir," said Tom, greatly frightened.

The next morning, when the sea was quieter, they rowed his new boss over in a small boat.

CHAPTER VI

HE HEARS ABOUT ALSACE AND RECEIVES A PRESENT

That was a good lesson for Tom and a practical demonstration of the wisdom of Mr. Conne's advice. Not that he had exactly gone outside his duties to indulge his appetite for adventure, but he had had a good scare which reminded him what a suspicious and particular old gentleman Uncle Sam is in wartime.

The officer, who had thus frightened him and, in Tom's opinion, cast a slur upon the Scouts, made matters worse by scrutinizing him (or so he fancied) whenever they met upon the deck. But that was all there was to it, and the captain's mess boy did his allotted tasks each day, and stood for no end of jolly from the soldiers, who called him "Whitey" and "Eats," because he carried the captain's tray back and forth.

This banter he shared with Frenchy, who took it as good-humoredly as Tom himself, when he understood it, and when he didn't Tom explained it to him.

"Ziss—how you call—*can* ze Kaiser?" he would inquire politely.

"That means putting him in a tin can," said Tom.

"Ze tin can? Ze—how you call—wipe ze floor wiz him?"

"They both mean the same thing," said Tom. "They mean beating him—good and thorough—kind of."

Frenchy did not seem to understand but he would wave his hands and say with great vehemence, "Ah, ze Kaiser, he must be defeat! Ze wretch!"

Frenchy's name was Armande Lateur. He was an American by adoption and though he had spent much time among the people of his own nationality in Canada, he was strong for Uncle Sam with a pleasant, lingering fondness for the region of the "blue Alsatian mountains," whence he had come.

It was from Frenchy that Tom learned much which (if he had only known it) was to serve him well in the perilous days to come.

The day before they entered the danger zone the two, secure for a little while from the mirthful artillery fire of the soldiers, had a little chat which Tom was destined long to remember.

They were sitting at dusk in the doorway of the unoccupied guardhouse which ordinarily was the second cabin smoking-room.

"Alsace-Lorraine is part of Germany," said Tom, his heavy manner of talking contrasting strangely with Frenchy's excitability. "So you were a German citizen before you got to be an American; and your people over there must be German citizens."

"Zey are Zherman *slaves*—yess! Citizens—no! See! When still I am a leetle boy, I must learn ze Zherman. I must go to ze Zherman school. My pappas have to pay fine when hees cheeldren speak ze French. My little seester when she sing ze Marsellaise—she must go t'ree days to ze Zherman zhail!"

"You mean to prison?" Tom asked. "Just for singing the Marsellaise! Why, the hand-organs play that where I live!"

"Ah, yess—Americ'! In Alsace, even before ze war—you sing ze Marsellaise, t'ree days you go to ze zhail. You haf' a book printed in ze French—feefy marks you must pay!" He waived his cigarette, as if it might have been a deadly sword, and hurled it over the rail.

"After Germany took Alsace-Lorraine away from France," said Tom, unmoved, "and began treating the French people that way, I should think lots of 'em would have moved to France."

"Many—yess; but some, no. My pappas had a veenyard. Many years ziss veenyard is owned by my people—my anceestors. Even ze village is name for my family—Lateur. You know ze Franco-

Prussian War—when Zhermany take Alsace-Lorraine—yess?”

“Yes,” said Tom.

“My pappa fight for France. Hees arm he lose. When it is over and Alsace is lost, he haf’ lost more than hees arm. Hees spirit! Where can he go? Away from ze veenyard? Here he hass lived—always.”

“I understand,” said Tom.

“Yess,” said Frenchy with great satisfaction. “Zat is how eet is—you will understand. My pappa cannot go. Zis is hees *home*. So he stay—stay under ze Zhermans. Ah! For everything, *everything*, we must pay ze tax. Five hundred soldiers, zey keep, *always*—in zis little village—and only seven hundred people. Ziss is ze way. Ugh! Even ze name zey change—Dundgart! Ugh!”

“I don’t like it as well as Lethure,” said matter-of-fact Tom.

Frenchy laughed at Tom’s pronunciation. “Zis is how you say—Le-teur. See? I will teach you ze French.”

“How did you happen to come to America?” Tom asked.

“Ah! I will tell you,” Frenchy said, as a grim, dangerous look gathered in his eyes. “You are—how many years, my frien’!”

“I’m seventeen,” said Tom.

“One cannot tell wiz ze Americans,” Frenchy explained. “Zey grow so queeck—so beeg. In Europe, zey haf’ nevaire seen anyzing like zis—zis army,” he added, indicating with a sweeping wave of his hand the groups of lolling, joking soldiers.

“They make fun of you a lot, don’t they?”

“Ah, zat I do not mind.”

“Maybe that’s why they all like you.”

“I will tell you,” said Frenchy, reverting to Tom’s previous question. “I am zhust ze same age as you—sefenteen—when zey throw my seester in ze zhail because she sing ze Marsellaise. Zat I cannot stand! You see?—When ze soldiers—fat Zhermans, ugh! When zey come for her, I strike zis fat one—here—so.”

“I’m glad you did,” said Tom.

“Hees eye I cut open, *so*. Wiz my fist—zhust boy’s fist, but so sharp.”

“I don’t blame you,” said Tom.

“So zen I must flee. Even to be rude to ze Zherman soldier—zis is crime. So I come to Americ’. Zey are looking for me, but I go by night, I sleep in ze haystack—zis I show. (He exhibited a little iron button with nothing whatever upon it.) You see? Zis is—what you call—talisman. Yess?”

“So I come to Epinal across ze border, through ze pass in ze mountains. I am free! I go to my uncle in Canada who is agent to our wines. Zen I come to Chicago, where I haf’ other uncle—also agent. Now I go to France wiz ze Americans to take Alsace back. What should I care if they laugh at me? We go to take Alsace back! Alsace!—Listen—I will tell you!

Vive la France!
A bas la Prusse!
D’Schwowe mien
Zuem Elsass ’nuess!

See if you can say zis,” he smiled.

Tom shook his head.

“I will tell you—see.

“Long live France!
Down with Prussia!
The Boches must
Get out of Alsace!”

“It must make you feel good after all that to go back now and make them give up Alsace,” said Tom, his stolid nature moved by the young fellow’s enthusiasm. “I’d like it if I’d been with you when you escaped and ran away like that. I like long hikes and adventures and things, anyway. It must be a long time since you saw your people.”

“Saw! Even I haf’ not *heard* for t’ree year. Eight years ago I fled away. Even before America is in ze war I haf’ no letters. Ze Zhermans tear zem up! Ah, no matter. When it is all over and ze boundary line is back at ze Rhine again—zen I will see zem. My pappa, my moother, my seester Florette—”

His eyes glistened and he paused.

“I go wiz Uncle Sam! My seester will sing ze Marsellaise!”

“Yes,” said Tom. “She can sing it all she wants.”

“If zey are not yet killed,” Frenchy added, looking intently out upon the ocean.

“I kind of feel that they’re not,” said Tom simply. “Sometimes I have feelings like that and they

usually come out true.”

Frenchy looked suddenly at him, then embraced him. “See, I will give you ziss,” he said, handing Tom the little iron button. “I haf’ two—see? I will tell you about zis,” he added, drawing close and holding it so that Tom could see. “It is made from ze cannon in my pappas’ regiment. Zis is when Alsace and Lorraine were lost—you see? Zey swear zey would win or die together—and so zey all die—except seventy. So zese men, zey swear zey will stand by each other, forever—zese seventy. You see? Even in poor Alsace—and in Lorraine. So zese, ze haf’ make from a piece of ze cannon. You see? If once you can get across ze Zherman lines into Alsace, zis will find you friends and shelter. Ah, but you must be careful. You see? You must watch for zis button and when you see—zen you can show zis. You will know ze person who wears ze button is French—man, woman, peasant, child. Ze Zhermans do not know. Zey are fine spies, fine sneaks! But zis zey do not know. You see?”

It was as much to please the generous Frenchy as for any other reason (though, to be sure, he was glad to have it) that Tom took the little button and put it in his pocket.

“Ze iron cross—you know zat?”

“I’ve heard about it,” said Tom.

“Zat means murder, savagery, death! Zis little button means friendship, help. Ze Zhermans do not know. You take this for—what you call—lucky piece?”

“I’ll always keep it,” said Tom, little dreaming what it would mean to him.

An authoritative voice was heard and they saw the soldiers throwing away their cigars and cigarettes and emptying their pipes against the rail. At the same time the electric light in the converted guard house was extinguished and an officer came along calling something into each of the staterooms along the promenade tier. They were entering the danger zone.

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CHAPTER VII

HE BECOMES VERY PROUD, AND ALSO VERY MUCH FRIGHTENED

Tom’s talk with Frenchy left him feeling very proud that he was American born. He had that advantage over the Frenchman, he thought, even though Frenchy had escaped through a pass in the Alsatian mountains and made such an adventurous flight.

When Frenchy had spoken of the American soldiers Tom felt especially proud. He was glad that all his people so far as he knew anything about them, were good out-and-out Yankees. Even his poor worthless father had been a great patriot, and played the *Star-Spangled Banner* on his old accordion when he ought to have been at work.

Then there was poor old one-armed Uncle Job Slade who used to get drunk, but he had told Tom about “them confounded rebels and traitors” of Lincoln’s time, and when he had died in the Soldiers’ Home they had buried him with the Stars and Stripes draped over his coffin.

He was sorry now that he had not mentioned these things when gruff, well-meaning Pete Connigan had spoken disparagingly of the Slades.

He was glad he was not an adopted American like Frenchy, but that all his family had been Americans as far back as he knew. He was proud to “belong” to a country that other people wanted to “join”—that *he* had never had to join. And as he stood at the rail when his duties were finished that same night and gazed off across the black, rough ocean, he made up his mind that after this when he heard slurs cast upon his father and his uncle, instead of feeling ashamed he would defend them, and tell of the good things which he knew about them.

He stood there at the rail, quite alone, thinking. The night was very dark and the sea was rough. Not a light was to be seen upon the ship.

It occurred to him that it might be better for him not to stand there with his white steward’s jacket on. He recalled how, up at Temple Camp, one could see the white tents very clearly all the way across the lake.

There was no rule about it, apparently, but sometimes, when people forgot to make a good rule, Tom made it for them. So now he went down to his little stateroom (the captain’s mess boy had a tiny stateroom to himself) and put on a dark coat.

The second cabin dining saloon and dining room, which were below decks and had no outside ports, were crowded with soldiers, playing cards and checkers, and they did not fail to “josh” Whitey as he passed through. Frenchy was there and he waved pleasantly to Tom.

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"Going to get out and walk, Whitey?" a soldier called. "I see you've got your street clothes on."

"I thought maybe the white would be too easy to see," Tom answered.

"Wise guy!" someone commented.

Reaching the main deck he edged his way along between the narrow passageway and the washroom to a secluded spot astern. He liked this place because it was so lonesome and unfrequented and because he could hear the whir and splash of the great propellers directly beneath him as each big roller lifted the after part of the vessel out of the water. Here he could think about Bridgeboro and Temple Camp, and Roy Blakeley and the other scouts, and of how proud he was that he was an American through and through, and of what he was going to say to people after this when they called his father a "no good" and Uncle Job a "rummy." He was glad he had thought about that, for back in Bridgeboro people were always saying something.

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Suddenly a stern, authoritative voice spoke just behind him. "What are you doing here?"

In the heavy darkness Tom could just make out that the figure was in khaki and he thought it was the uniform of an officer.

"I ain't doing anything," he said.

"What did you come here for?" the voice demanded sternly.

"I—I don' know," stammered Tom, thoroughly frightened.

Quickly, deftly, the man slapped his clothing in the vicinity of his pockets.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I'm captain's mess boy."

Laying his hand on Tom's shoulder, he marched him into the saloon and to the head of the companionway where the dim light from the passageway below enabled him to get a better sight of the boy. Tom was all of a tremor as the officer scrutinized him.

"You're the fellow that read the semaphore message, aren't you?" the officer demanded.

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"Y-yes, sir, but I didn't notice them any more since I found out I shouldn't." Then he mustered courage to add, "I only went back there because it was dark and lonely, kind of. I was thinking about where I live and things——"

The officer scrutinized him curiously for a moment and apparently was satisfied, for he only added, speaking rather harshly, "You'd better be careful where you go at night and keep away from the ropes." With this he wheeled about and strode away.

For a minute or two Tom stood rooted to the spot where he stood, his heart pounding in his breast. He would not have been afraid of a whole regiment of Germans and he would probably have retained his stolid demeanor if the vessel had been sinking, but this little encounter frightened him. He wished that he had had the presence of mind to tell the officer why he had doffed his white jacket, and he wished that he had had the courage to mention how his Uncle Job had fought at Gettysburg and been buried with the flag over his coffin. Those things might have impressed the officer.

As he lay in his berth that night, his feeling of fright passed away and he was overcome with a feeling of humiliation. That *he*, Tom Slade, who had been a scout of the scouts, who had worked for the Colors, whose whole family history had been one of loyalty and patriotism, should be even—— No, of course, he had not been actually *suspected* of anything, and he knew that the government had to be very watchful and careful, but—— Well, he felt ashamed and humiliated, that's all.

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He made up his mind that if he should see that officer again, and he did not look too forbidding, he would mention how his mother had taught him to sing *America*, how his father had played the *Star-Spangled Banner* on his old accordion and how Uncle Job had died in the Soldiers' Home. Those were about the only good things he could remember about his father and Uncle Job, but weren't they enough?

And since the government was so very particular, Tom got up and hung his coat across the porthole, though no clink of light could possibly have escaped, for his little stateroom was as dark as pitch and even when he opened his door there was only the dim light from the inner passage.

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CHAPTER VIII

HE HEARS SOME NEWS AND IS CONFIDENTIAL WITH FRENCHY

The next morning there was a rumor. Somebody told somebody who told somebody else who told a deck steward who told Tom that a couple of men had gone very stealthily along the dimly lighted passageway outside the forward staterooms below, looking for a lighted stateroom.

"There was never so much as a glint," the deck steward volunteered.

Instantly Tom thought of his experience of the previous night and there arose in his mind also certain passages from one of the letters he had turned over to Mr. Conne.

Acting on his benefactor's very sensible advice, he had not allowed his mind to dwell upon those mysterious things which were altogether outside his humble sphere. But now he could not help recalling that this ship had been the *Christopher Colon* on which somebody or other had thought he might be able to sail. Well, in any event, the ship's people had those things in hand, and after his disturbing experience of the night before, he would not dare speak to one of his superiors about what was in his mind. But he was greatly interested in this whispered news.

"The electric lights are turned off in the staterooms, anyway," he said.

"Yes, but that bunch is always smoking—they engineers," said the deck steward, "and a chap would naturally stick his head out of the port so as not to get the room full of smoke. All he'd have to do is drop his smoke in the ocean if anyone happened along. It's been done more'n once."

"Then you don't think it was spies they suspected or—anything like that?"

The deck steward, who was an old hand, hunched his shoulders. "Maybe, and maybe not. You can't drum it into some men that a cigarette is like a searchlight on the ocean."

"Yet the destroyers signal at night—even here in the zone," Tom said.

"Not much—only when it's necessary. And the transports don't answer. It's just a little brown kind of light, too. They say the tin fish^[1] can't make it out at all."

"Is that where the engineers sleep—down there?" Tom asked.

"The chief and the first assistants up on deck; third and fourth and head fireman are down there, and two electricians. The carpenter's there, too."

"Well, they didn't find anything, anyway," said Tom. "Is that all they did?"

"Did? They opened every room on their way back and searched every nook and corner. Not so much as a pipe or a cigarette or a cigar could they find—nor a whiff of smoke neither. Besides, the port windows were locked shut and the steward had the keys! They're takin' no chances in the zone, you can bet."

"I was thinking, if it was a spy or anyone like that, he might have had a flashlight," said Tom, "and thrown it out if he heard anyone coming."

"With the glass locked shut?"

"No, that spoils it," said Tom.

"They searched every bloomin' one of 'em," said the deck steward. "Charlie was two hours making up the berths again after the way they threw things around. But nothing doing. They found a mess plate with a little black spot on it and he said they thought it might have been from a match-end being laid there, but I heard they told the captain there was nothing wrong down there."

"What made them think there was?" asked Tom.

The deck steward shrugged his shoulders. "You can search *me*. But they're mighty particular, huh?"

He went about his duties, leaving Tom to ponder on this interesting news, and though admittedly nothing had come of that stealthy raid which had exposed neither rule breakers nor spies, still Tom thought about it all day, more or less, and he was glad that Uncle Sam was so watchful and thorough. It made him realize, all the more, how absurd and preposterous it would be for him, the captain's mess boy, to concern himself or ask questions or say anything about serious matters which were none of his business.

All day long they ran a zigzag course, taking a long cut to France, as Pete Connigan would have said, the general tension relieved by the emergency drills, manning the boats and so forth.

In the afternoon hours of respite from his duties he met Frenchy, whose patience had been a little tried by some of Uncle Sam's crack jolliers, and they sat down on the top step of a companionway and talked.

"Zis I cannot bear!" he said, shrugging his shoulders. "To be called ze Hun! Ugh!"

"They're only kidding you," said Tom; "fooling with you."

"I do not like it—no!"

"But if you hadn't become an American before the war," said Tom, "you couldn't have enlisted on our side because you really were a German—a German citizen—weren't you?"

"Subject, yess! Citizen, no! All will be changed. Alsace will be France again! We go to win her back! Yess?"

"Yes," said Tom. "I only meant you belonged to Germany because you couldn't help it."

"You are a lucky boy," Frenchy said earnestly. "Zare is no—what you say?—Mix-up; Zhermany, France, America—no. You are all *American!*"

"I got to remember that," said Tom simply. "I know some rich fellers home where I live. They let me join their scout troop, so I got to know 'em. One feller's name is Van Arlen. His father was born in Holland. They got two automobiles and a lot of servants and things. But anyway my father was born in the United States—that's one thing."

"Ah," said Frenchy, enthusiastically, "zat is ever'ting! You are fine boy."

His expression was so generous, so pleasant, that Tom could not help saying, "I like France, too."

"Listen, I will tell you," said Frenchy, laughing. "It is ze old saying, 'Ever' man hass two countries; hees own and France!' You see?"

In the warmth of Frenchy's generous admiration Tom opened up and said more than he had meant to say—more than he ever had said to anyone.

"So I got to be proud of it, anyway," he said, in his honest, blunt fashion. "Maybe you won't understand, but one thing makes me like to go away from Bridgeboro, kind of, is the way people say things about my folks. They don't do it on purpose—mostly. But anyway, all the fathers of the fellows I know, they call them Mr. Blakeley and Mr. Harris, and like that. But they always called my father Bill Slade. I didn't ever hear anybody call him Mister. But anyway, he was born in the United States—that's one sure thing. And so was my grandfather and my grandmother, too. Once my father licked me because I forgot to hang out the flag on Decoration Day. That shows he was patriotic, doesn't it? The other day I was going to tell you about my uncle but I forgot to. He was in the Civil War—he got his arm shot off. So I got a lot to be proud about, anyway. Just because my father didn't get a job most—most of the time——"

"Ah!" vociferated Frenchy, clapping him on the shoulder. "You are ze—how you say—*one* fine boy!"

Tom remained stolid, under this enthusiastic approval. He was thinking how glad and proud he was that his father had licked him for forgetting to hang out the flag. It had not been a licking exactly, but a beating and kicking, but this part of it he did not remember. He was very proud of his father for it. It was something to boast about. It showed that the Slades——

"Yess, you are a fine boy!" said Frenchy again, clapping him on the shoulder with such vehemence as to interrupt his train of thought. "Zey must be fine people—all ze way back—to haf' such a boy. You see?"

¹ Submarines.

CHAPTER IX

HE SEES A STRANGE LIGHT AND GOES ON TIPTOE

Of course, it would have been expecting too much to suppose that the boys in khaki would overlook Tom Slade any more than Frenchy would escape them, and "Whitey" was the bull's-eye for a good deal of target practice in the way of jollyng. It got circulated about that Whitey had a bug—a patriotic bug, particularly in regard to his family, and it was whispered in his hearing as he came and went that his grandfather was none other than the original Yankee Doodle.

Of course, Tom's soberness increased this good-natured propensity of the soldiers.

"Hey, Whitey," they would call as he passed with the captain's tray, "I hear you were born on the Fourth of July. How about that?"

Or

"Hey, Whitey, I hear your great grandfather was the fellow that put the bunk in Bunker Hill!"

But Tom did not mind; joking or no joking, they knew where he stood with Uncle Sam and that was enough for him.

Sometimes they would vary their tune and pleasantly chide him with being a secret agent of the Kaiser, "Baron von Slade," and so on and so on. He only smiled in that stolid way of his and went about his duties. In his heart he was proud. Sometimes they would assume to be serious and ply him with questions, and he would fall into their trap and proudly tell about poor old Uncle Job and of how his father had licked him, by way of proving the stanch Americanism of the Slades.

In their hearts they all liked him; he seemed so “easy” and bluntly honest, and his patriotism was so obvious and so sincere.

“You’re all right, Whitey,” they would say.

Then, suddenly, that thing happened which shocked and startled them with all the force of a torpedo from a U-boat, and left them gasping.

It happened that same night, and little did Tom Slade dream, as he went along the deck in the darkening twilight, carrying the captain’s empty supper dishes down to the galley, of the dreadful thing which he would face before that last night in the danger zone was over.

He washed his hands, combed his hair, put on his dark coat, and went up on deck for an hour or two which he could call his own. In the companionway he passed his friend, the deck steward, talking with a couple of soldiers, and as he squeezed past them he paused a moment to listen.

It was evidently another slice of the same gossip with which he had regaled Tom earlier in the day and he was imparting it with a great air of confidence to the interested soldiers.

“Don’t say I told you, but they had two of them in the quartermaster’s room, buzzing them. It’s more’n rule breaking, *I think.*”

“German agents, you mean?”

The deck steward shrugged his shoulders in that mysterious way, as if he could not take the responsibility of answering that question.

“But they haven’t got anything on ‘em,” he added. “The glass ports were locked—they couldn’t have thrown anything out. So there you are. The captain thinks it was phosphorus and maybe he’s right. It’s a kind of a light you sometimes see in the ocean.”

“Huh,” said one of the soldiers.

“It’s fooled others before. So I guess there won’t be any more about it. Keep your mouths shut.”

Tom passed them and went out upon the deck. He did not venture near the forbidden spot astern, but leaned against the rail amidships. He knew he had the right to spend his time off on deck and he liked to be alone. Now and then he glimpsed a little streak of gray as some apprehensive person in a life belt disappeared in a companionway, driven in by the cold and the rough sea.

Presently, he was quite alone and he fell to thinking about home, as he usually did when he was alone at night. He thought of his friend Roy Blakeley and of the happy summers spent at Temple Camp; of the stalking and tracking, and campfire yarns, and how they used to jolly him, just as these soldiers jollied him, and call him “Sherlock Nobody Holmes” just because he was interested in deduction and had “doped out” one or two little things.

One thing will suggest another, and from Temple Camp, with its long messboard and its clamoring, hungry scouts, and the tin dishes heaped with savory hunters’ stew, his thoughts wandered back across the ocean to a certain particular mess plate, right here on this very ship—a mess plate with a little black stain on it, where someone might have laid a burning match-end.

He caught himself up and thought of Mr. Conne. But this was his time off and he had the right to *think* about anything he pleased. He could not be reprimanded for just thinking. Nothing would tempt him to run the risk of another encounter with one of those stern, brisk-speaking officers, but he could *think*.

And he wondered whether that black spot *had* been made by a match-end. The spot would show plainly, of course, for he knew how shiny and clean mess plates were kept. Had he not done his part in scouring and rubbing them down there in the galley?

He wondered how the mess plate had happened to be in the stateroom, anyway. Sherlock Nobody Holmes again! But the crew, as well as the troops, carried their supper wherever they pleased to eat it. So there was nothing so strange about that. If there had been, why, Uncle Sam’s all-seeing eye would not have missed it.

He fell to thinking of Bridgeboro again. And he thought of Adolf Schmitt and—

A phrase from one of those letters ran through his mind—*It’s the same idea as a periscope.*

For a moment Tom Slade felt just as so often he had felt when he had found an indistinct footprint along a woodland trail. *What* was the same idea as a periscope? What was a periscope, anyway?

Why, a thing on a submarine by means of which you could look two ways at once—you could look up through the ocean and across the ocean—all with one look.

He wondered whether Mr. Conne had noticed that rather puzzling phrase and whether the people on this ship had seen that letter. Mr. Conne had seemed to think that one the least important of the lot. Perhaps he had just told the ship’s people to look out for spies. And they would do that anyway. The names of uniformed spies in the army cantonments—names in black and white—that was the important thing—the big discovery.

But Tom Slade was only a humble Sherlock Nobody Holmes and he couldn’t get that phrase out of his head.

It’s the same idea as a periscope.

A periscope is a kind of a—a kind of a—

Tom's brow was knit, just as when he used carefully and anxiously to move the grass away from an all but obliterated footprint, and his eyes were half closed and keen.

"I know what it is," he said to himself, suddenly. "It means how light can be passed through a room even while the room is dark all the time—kind of reflected—and you wouldn't have to use any match."

He stood still, almost frightened at his own conclusion. The clean, shiny mess plate and the phrase out of that letter seemed to fit together like the sections of a picture puzzle. The black spot and the match-end (if there was any match-end) meant just nothing at all. The dim light out in the passageway down below hardly reached the dark staterooms, but—

He could not remember just how it was down there, but he knew that in the staterooms where the glass ports were locked (and that was the case with all of the crews' quarters below) air was admitted by a slightly opened panel transom over the door.

What should he do? Go and tell an officer about his discovery? If it *were* a discovery that would be all very well. But after all, this was only a—a kind of a *deduction*. And they might laugh at him. He had always stood in awe of the officers and since last night he was mortally afraid of them. If he told any of the soldiers or even the steward they would only jolly him. He did not know exactly what he had better do.

He made up his mind that he would go down through the passageway where those under engineers and electricians slept and see how it looked down there. He had been through there many times, but he thought that perhaps he would notice some thing now which would help to prove his theory and then perhaps they would listen to the captain's mess boy if he could muster the courage to speak.

He had just left the rail when he saw, some distance to starboard as it seemed, and well forward of the ship, an infinitesimal bluish brown spark. How he happened to notice it he did not know. "Once a scout, always a scout," perhaps. In any event, it was only by fixing his eyes intently upon it that he could keep it in sight. And even so, he lost it after a few seconds. He tried to find it again, but quite in vain. It had been about as conspicuous as a snowflake would have been in a glass of milk.

"Huh, if there's anyone on this ship can see *that*, he must be a peach. Maybe up in the rigging you can see it better, though. If it's on the destroyer, she's quite a ways ahead of us—"

He squinted his eyes and, seeing a number of imaginary lights, decided that perhaps the other had been imaginary too. He crossed the saloon, went down the companionway and through the second class cabin dining-room where the soldiers hailed him pleasantly, and, passing the stokers' washroom, tiptoed along the dim, narrow passageway.

CHAPTER X

HE GOES BELOW AND GROPE IN THE DARK

There were half a dozen or more staterooms along this passage. At the end of it was the steep, greasy flight of iron steps leading down into the engine-rooms. Here, also, was a huge box with a hinged lid, filled with cotton waste. It was customary for one going down here to take a handful of this waste to protect his hands from the oily rail, and also on coming up to wipe his hands with a fresh lot. The very atmosphere of a ship's engine-room is oily. Here, also, were several fire-buckets in a rack.

Along the side of the passage opposite the staterooms were electric bulbs at intervals, but only two of them were burning—just enough to light one through the narrow passage. Above each closed door was a solid wooden transom, hinged at its lower side and opened at an angle into the room.

Tom moved quickly and very quietly, for he feared to be caught loitering here. He saw at once that only one of these staterooms could possibly be used for any such criminal purpose as he suspected, and that was the one with a light directly opposite it in the passage, for the other light was beyond the staterooms.

For a few seconds he stood listening to the slow, monotonous sound of the machinery just below him. The vibration was very pronounced here; the floor thumped with the pulsations of the mighty engines. And Tom's heart was thumping too.

Within the staterooms all was dark and quiet. He knew the under engineers turned in early. Not

the faintest flicker was to be seen through any of those transoms. He had been mistaken, he thought; had jumped at a crazy notion. And he half turned to go up again.

But instead he listened at the companionway, then tiptoed stealthily along the passage and looked over the oily iron rail, down, down into the depths of the great, dim, oil-smelling space with its iron galleries and the mammoth steel arms, moving back and forth, back and forth, far down there upon the grated floor. A tiny figure in a jumper went down from one of the lower galleries, paused to look at a big dial, then crossed the floor and disappeared, making never a sound. No other living thing was in sight—unless those mighty steel arms, ever meeting and parting might be said to be living. To come up from down there would mean the ascent of three iron stairways.

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Tom withdrew into the passage and quietly lifting one of the fire-buckets from the rack, tiptoed with it to the door which was directly opposite the passageway.

Then he paused again. He could open that door, he knew, for no keys or bolts were allowed on any stateroom door. He could surprise the occupant, whom he would find in darkness. If his suspicion was correct (and he was beginning now to fear that it was not) there would be no actual proof of anything inside of that dark little room, save only just what the authorities had already found—an apparently innocent mess plate. The criminal act would consist of simply holding a shiny plate in a certain position. The moment a sound was heard outside the plate could be laid down. And who would be the wiser?

Tom's heart was thumping in his breast, his eyes anxiously scanning one end of the passage, then the other.

Not a sound—no sign of anyone.

Tom Slade had been a scout and notwithstanding his suspense and almost panicky apprehension, he was not going to act impulsively or thoughtlessly. He knew that if he could only present a convincing case to his superiors, they would forgive him his presumption. If he made a bungle it might go hard with him. Anyway, he could not, or would not, turn back now.

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In truth, he did not believe that anything at all was going to happen. The stateroom was so dark and so still that all his fine ideas and deductions, which had seemed so striking and plausible up on the lonesome, wind-swept deck, began to fade away.

But there would be no harm in one little test, and no one would be the wiser. He tried to picture in his mind's eye the interior of that little stateroom. If it were like his own, then the mirror was on the other side of the passage wall, that is, on the opposite side of the stateroom from the port hole. If one looked into the mirror he would see the port hole. All of the smaller rooms below decks which he had seen were arranged in the same way.

Therefore, thought Tom, if one should hold a shiny mess plate, for instance, up near the transom, so as to catch the light from without, he could throw it down into the mirror, which would reflect not only the glare but the brilliant image of the bulb as well. From out on the ocean that reflected light would be very clear.

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All of which, thought Tom dubiously, was a very pretty theory, but—

Without making a sound he placed the inverted bucket on the floor and listened. He put one foot on it and listened again. Then he stood upon it, his heart pounding like a triphammer.

Not a sound.

Probably the tired occupant of the room was fast asleep—sleeping the peaceful sleep of the innocent.

Tom knew that if his mind's eye picture of the room's arrangement were correct, the metal reflector would be of no avail unless tilted at a slight angle from the horizontal, right inside the transom.

For a moment he stood upon the bucket, not daring to budge. He could hear his own breathing, and far away the steady, dull thud of the tireless machinery. Something creaked in the passage, and he turned cold. He did not stir a muscle.

Only some superficial crevice or crack somewhere—some loose panel or worn hinge responding to the onslaught of a giant wave without— Nothing—

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He turned his head and looked down the passage, clenching his fists in momentary fright, as if he feared the bending of his neck might be heard.

No one. Not a sound.

He tried to look through the transom but his eyes were not high enough. For another second he paused. Then he reached through the transom and moved his hand about in the silence and darkness. He heard the cracking again and waited, trembling, though he knew it was nothing.

Then he groped about with his hand again.

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CHAPTER XI

HE MAKES A DISCOVERY AND IS GREATLY AGITATED

Suddenly his hand encountered something hard and cold, and he grabbed it like lightning. His heart was in his throat now. There was a scuffling sound within and the object was wrenched and twisted and pulled frantically.

But Tom had been a scout and he was prepared. The two big clumsy hands which bore the captain's tray back and forth each day had once torn a pack of thirty cards in half to entertain tenderfeet at campfire. And one of those hands clutched this thing now with the grip of a bulldog.

His excitement and his pounding heart did not embarrass him in the brief tussle. A few dexterous twists this way and that, and he withdrew his hand triumphantly, scratched and bleeding, the light in the passage glinting upon the polished surface of the mess plate which he held.

Scarcely three minutes had escaped since he came down from the deck, but in that short period his usually sturdy nerves had borne a terrific strain and for a moment he leaned against the opposite side of the passage, clutching the dish in consternation.

In that brief moment when he had paused before putting his hand through the transom, he had thought that if indeed the plate were being held there even still the conspirator's eyes would be fixed upon the stationary mirror in order to keep the reflection centered in direct line with the porthole. Evidently he had been right and had taken the plotter quite unaware.

Sherlock Nobody Holmes had succeeded beyond his most extravagant dreams!

The door of the little room flew back and a figure stood in the dark opening, looking at him.

"That—*that's* what you meant," Tom stammered, scarcely knowing what he said, "about the same idea as a periscope. You thought—you thought——"

The man, evidently surprised at seeing no one but the captain's mess boy, stuck out his head and looked apprehensively up and down the passage.

"There's nobody," breathed Tom, "except me; but it won't do you any good—it won't—because I'm going to tell——"

He paused, clutching the mess plate, and looked aghast at the disheveled, half-dressed man who faced him. Then the plate dropped from his hand, and a strange, cold feeling came over him.

"Who are you?" he gasped, his eyes stark and staring. "I—I didn't know—I ain't——"

He stopped, refusing to believe, and groped for the precious mess plate, part of the makeshift periscope which his own keenness had discovered and rendered useless. Then he stood again, fumbling the thing in his clumsy hands and staring, all bewildered, at the traitor who had used it to betray his country.

Was it——? It could not be—— But the years had wrought more change in Tom himself than in the man who stood there glaring back at him, half recognizing.

Yes, it *was* his own brother, William Slade, who had left home so long ago!

CHAPTER XII

HE IS FRIGHTENED AND VERY THOUGHTFUL

And this was the triumph of Sherlock Nobody Holmes! This was the startling discovery with which he would astonish his superiors and win their approbation! It was not Sherlock Nobody Holmes who heard in a sort of daze the whispered words that were next uttered. It was just the captain's mess boy, and he hung his head, not so much in crushing disappointment as in utter shame.

"Come inside here and keep still. How'd *you* get on this ship? Nobody'll be hunting for you, will they? Come in—quick. What's the matter with you?"

Still clutching the dish, Tom was dragged into that dark little room. He seemed almost in a trance. The hand which had been raised in conspiracy and treason pushed him roughly onto the

berth.

"So you turned up like a bad penny, huh?" whispered his brother, fiercely.

"I—I wrote you—a letter—after mother died," Tom said simply. "I don't know if you got it."

"Shut up!" hissed his brother. "Don't talk so loud! You want to get me in trouble? How'd you know about this?"

His voice was gruff and cold and seemed the more so for his frightened whisper.

"She died of pneumonia," said Tom impassively. "I was——"

"Gimme that plate!" his brother interrupted.

But this roused Tom. He seemed to feel that his possession of the plate was a badge of innocence.

"I got to keep it," he said; "it's——"

"Shh!" his brother interrupted. "Somebody's coming; don't move and keep your mouth shut! It's the second shift of stokers!"

From the companionway came the steady sound of footfalls. There was an authoritative sound to them as they echoed in the deserted passage, coming nearer and nearer. It was not the second shift of stokers.

"Shh," said Tom's brother, clutching his arm. "If they should come here keep your mouth shut and let me do the talking. They ain't got anything on me," he added in a hoarse whisper which bespoke his terror, "unless *you*—shhh!"

"I know what it is," Tom whispered, "and I ain't a-scared. They got a signal from the destroyer. They know the room."

"There's nothing they can find here," his brother breathed. "They were all through here last night. Put that dish down—put it down, I tell you! Shh!"

Tom let go of the plate, scarcely knowing what he did.

Nearer, nearer, came the footsteps and stopped. The door was thrown open and in the passage stood the captain, a sailor and the officer who had spoken to Tom the night before.

Tom's heart was in his throat; he did not move a muscle. What happened seemed all a jumble to him, like things in a dream. He was aware of a lantern held by the officer and of the sailor standing by the porthole, over which he had spread something black.

"Did you know this kid was mixed up in it?" the sailor asked. Tom felt that the sailor must be a Secret Service man.

"They're brothers," said the captain. "You can see that."

"He had him posted for a lookout," said the officer. "He was watching on the deck last night." Then, turning upon Tom he said brusquely, "you were supposed to hurry down here with the tip if the convoy signaled, eh?"

Tom struggled to answer, but they did not give him time.

"You're the fellow that read that semaphore message the other day, too, eh?" the officer said. "Stand up."

Tom stood trembling while the sailor rapidly searched him. "Where's your flashlight?" he demanded apparently disappointed not to find one.

"I haven't got any," said Tom, dully.

"Pretty good team work," said the sailor.

"Here you," he added, proceeding to search Tom's brother, while the captain and the officer fell to turning the little room inside out, hauling the mattress from the berth and examining every nook and cranny of the place. Tom noticed that the plate, which was now on a stool, had a sandwich on it and a piece of cheese, and he realized, if he had not realized before, his brother's almost diabolical foresight and sagacity. It looked very innocent—a harmless, late lunch, brought into the stateroom as was often done among the ship's people.

During the search of the stateroom Tom stood silently by. He watched the coverings pulled ruthlessly from the berth, moved out of the way as the mattress was hauled to the floor, gazed fascinated at the quick thoroughness which mercilessly unfolded every innocent towel and scrutinized each joint and section of the life preserver, until presently the orderly little apartment was in a state of chaos. He saw the officer move the plate so as to examine the under side of the stool. He saw the disguised Secret Service man pick up a little piece of innocent cotton waste and carelessly throw it down again.

But the turmoil about him was nothing to the turmoil in his own brain. What should he do? Would he dare to speak? What could he say? And still he stood silent, watching with a strange, cold feeling, looking occasionally at his brother, and thinking—thinking. As his brother watched him furtively, and a little fearfully, Tom became aware of a queer way he had of contracting his eyebrows, just as Uncle Job used to do when he told a joke. And there came into his mind the memory of a certain day long ago when his big brother and he had shot craps together in front of the bank building in Bridgeboro and his brother had looked just that same way when he watched the street for stray policemen. Funny that he should think of that just now. The sailor

(or whatever he was) gave Tom a shove to get him out of the way so that he could crawl under the berth.

And still Tom watched them dazedly. He was thinking of something that Mr. Ellsworth, his scoutmaster, had once said—that blood is thicker than water. As nearly as he could make out, that meant that after all a fellow's own people came first—before anything else. He had great respect for Mr. Ellsworth.

The man in the sailor suit picked up the plate of food from the berth and slung the whole business into the basin. The jangle of the dish startled Tom and roused him. The others didn't seem to mind it. They had more important things to think of than a mess plate.

And Tom Slade, captain's mess boy and former scout, went on thinking.

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CHAPTER XIII

HE PONDERES AND DECIDES BETWEEN TWO NEAR RELATIONS

When Tom at length did speak his own voice sounded strange to him; but he said what he had to say with a simple straightforwardness which in ordinary circumstances would have carried conviction.

"If you'd let me say something," he said, trying to keep his throat clear, "I'd like to tell you——"

"It's the best thing, sonny," said the man in the sailor suit; "you needn't be afraid of squealing. How old are you?"

"Seventeen," said Tom, "but it wasn't squealing I was thinking about. I ain't a-scared, if that's what you think."

He avoided looking at his brother, who tried to catch his eye, and the men, perhaps seeing this and thinking it might be fruitful to let him say what he would in his own way, relaxed a trifle toward him.

"While you were searching," Tom went on, hesitating, but still showing something of his old stolid manner, "I wasn't a-scared, but I was thinking—I had to think about something—before I could decide what I ought to do."

"All right, sonny," said the man in the sailor clothes. "I'm glad you know what's best for you. Out with it. You've got a key to that porthole, eh? Now where is it?"

"You had a flashlight and threw it out, didn't you?" added the officer. "Come now."

Tom looked from one to the other. His brother began to speak but was peremptorily silenced.

"It ain't knowin' what's good for me," Tom managed to say, "'cause as soon as I—as soon as I—made up my mind about that—then right away I knew what I ought to do——"

He gulped and looked straight at the officer so as not to meet his brother's threatening look.

"I had to decide it myself—'cause—'cause Mr. Ellsworth—a man I know—ain't here. Maybe a feller's own family come first and I wouldn't—I wouldn't—tell on 'em—if—if they stole—or something like that," he blurted out, twisting his fingers together. "And—and—I didn't forget neither—I didn't," he added, turning and looking his brother straight in the face, "I didn't—I——"

He broke down completely and the men stared at him, waiting.

"Anyway—anyway—I got to remember——" He broke off.

"Well, what became of the light?" the officer urged rather coldly.

"And when you saw me standing on the—deck—last night—I was thinking about Uncle Sam——" He gulped and hesitated, then went on, "and—and—that's what made me think about Uncle Sam being a relation too—kind of—and I got to decide between my brother and my uncle—like." He gulped again and shook his head with a kind of desperate resolution. "There—*there* it is," he almost shouted, pointing at the scattered sandwich and the mess plate in the wash basin. "You—picked it up twice," he added with a kind of reckless triumph, "and you didn't know it."

"What?" said the captain, with a puzzled look at his companions, as if he were a little doubtful of Tom's sanity.

"There it is," Tom repeated, controlling himself better now that the truth was out. "He held it—up there—so's the light would shine in the glass. There ain't anything except that. It's—it's the same idea as a periscope. He said it in a letter that I gave Mr. Conne—and—and I found out what he meant. I—I didn't know he was——"

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Trying desperately to master his feeling he broke down and big tears rolled down his cheeks. "I couldn't help it," he said to his brother. "It ain't 'cause I don't remember—but—I had to decide—and I got to stand by Uncle Sam!"

"If you didn't know about this," said the captain, watching him keenly, "how did you suspect it? You'd better try to control yourself and tell everything. This is a very serious matter."

"You see that piece of cotton waste that you kicked?" said Tom, turning upon the disguised government agent. "You can see it's fresh and hasn't got any oil on it. You can see from the flat place on it how it was used to polish the dish. I ain't—" he gulped. "I ain't going to talk about my brother—but I got to tell about the papers he's got somewhere. The same person that said it was like a periscope said something about having plans of a motor. I got to tell that, and I ain't going to say any more about him. So now he can't do any more harm. And—and I want you to please go away," he burst forth, "because I—I got to tell him about how our mother died—'cause maybe he didn't—get the letter."

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CHAPTER XIV

HE IS ARRESTED AND PUT IN THE GUARDHOUSE

But of course his brother *had* received that letter. The circumstances of his mother's death were the least of his troubles now and he must have thought his young brother very innocent and sentimental. He did not understand Tom's wanting to talk about their mother's death any more than Tom understood how Bill could be a spy and a traitor.

In short, the wily, self-seeking Bill, who would stop at nothing, probably thought his brother had a screw loose, as the saying is, and perhaps that is what the others thought also.

Tom was never very lucid in explanation, and his emotion had made his surprising story choppy and unsatisfactory. His explanation of the use of the plate and of the telltale piece of cotton which his keen eyes had not missed, seemed plausible enough, and fell like a bomb-shell among his questioners.

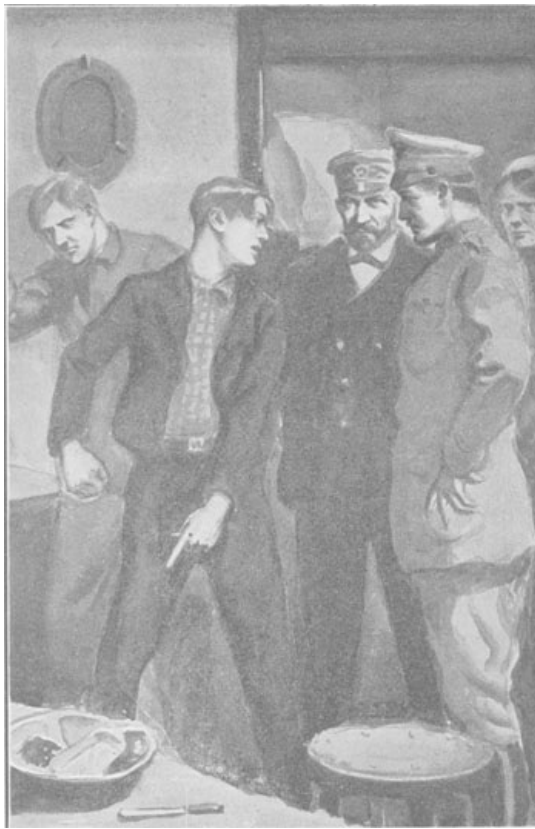
But they did not give him credit for his discovery nor even for his apparent innocence. It was, as the captain had said, a serious business, and Uncle Sam was taking no chances where spies and traitors were concerned. Probably they thought Tom was a weak-minded tool of his shrewder brother.

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"Well," said the officer rather curtly, "I'm glad you told the truth. If you had told me the truth last night when I caught you up there, it would have been better for you. Still, confession made at bay is better than none," he said to the captain, adding as he left the room, "I'll have a squad down."

William Slade sat upon the berth, glaring at the detective who stood guarding the doorway. He looked vicious enough with his disheveled hair and sooty face and the dirty jumper such as the under engineers wore. Tom wondered when he had come east and how he had fallen in with his old patron, Adolf Schmitt.

And this was his own brother! Evidently William had been in the German spy service for some time, for he had learned the rule of absolute silence when discovered and he had even acquired some of that lowering sullenness which sets the Teuton apart from all other beings.



"THERE—*THERE IT IS*," TOM ALMOST SHOUTED.

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Presently there came the steady footfalls of soldiers in formation and a sudden fear seized upon Tom. 99

"They—they ain't going to arrest me, are they?" he asked, with alarm in every line of his ordinarily expressionless face.

"Put you both in the guardhouse," said the captain briefly.^[2]

"Didn't you—didn't you—believe me?" Tom pleaded simply and not without some effect.

"You and your brother get your jobs together?" the captain asked.

"Mr. Conne, who's in the Secret Service, got me mine," Tom said.

"Who did he recommend you to?" asked the detective.

Tom hesitated a moment. "To Mr. Wessel, the steward," he said.

"Humph! Too bad Mr. Wessel died. You'll both have to go to the guardhouse."

Tom saw there was no hope for him. For a moment he struggled, drawing a long breath in pitiful little gulps. If he had followed Mr. Conne's advice he would not be in this predicament. But where then might the great transport be? Who but he, captain's mess boy, had saved the ship and showed these people how the light— 100

"It makes me feel like—" he began. "Can't I—please—can't I not be arrested—please?"

Neither man answered him. Presently the door opened and four soldiers entered. One of them was "Pickles," who had nicknamed Tom "Tombstone," because he was so sober. But he was not Pickles now; he was just one of a squad of four, and though he looked surprised he neither smiled nor spoke.

"Pickles," said Tom. "I ain't—*You* don't believe—"

But Pickles had been too long in training camp to forget duty and discipline so readily and the only answer Tom got was the dull thud of Pickles' rifle butt on the floor as the officer uttered some word or other.

That thud was a good thing for Tom. It seemed to settle him into his old stolid composure, which had so amused the boys in khaki. 101

Side by side with his brother, whom so long ago he could not bear to see "licked," he marched out and along the passage, a soldier in front, one behind and one at either side. How strange the whole thing seemed!

His brother who had gone out to Arizona when Tom was just a bad, troublesome little hoodlum! And here they were now, marching silently side by side, on one of Uncle Sam's big transports, with four soldiers escorting them! Both, the nephews of Uncle Job Slade who had died in the Soldiers' Home and had been buried with the Stars and Stripes draped over his coffin.

Two things stood out in Tom Slade's memory, clearest of all, showing how unreasonable and contrary he was. Two lickings. One that made him mad and one that made him glad—and that he was proud of. The licking that his brother had got, when he could, as he had told honest Pete

Connigan, "feel the madness way down in his fingers." And the licking his father had given *him* for not hanging out the flag.

"*Zey must be all fine people to haf' such a boy,*" Frenchy had said. He hoped he would not see Frenchy now.

But he was to be spared nothing. The second cabin saloon was filled with soldiers and they stared in amazement as the little group marched through, the steady thud, thud, of the guards' heavy shoes emphasized by the wondering stillness. Tom shuffled along with his usual clumsy gait, looking neither to right nor left. Up the main saloon stairway they went, and here, upon the top carpeted step sat Frenchy chatting with another soldier. He was such a hand to get off into odd corners for little chats! He stared, uttered an exclamation, then remembered that he was a soldier and caught himself. But he turned and following the little procession with astonished eyes until they disappeared.

The guardhouse was the little smoking-room where Tom and Frenchy had sat upon the sill and talked and Frenchy had given him the iron button. Into the blank darkness of this place he and his brother were marched, and all through that long, dreadful night Tom could hear a soldier pacing back and forth, back and forth, on the deck just outside the door.

[2] The custom of putting arrested persons in the "brig" on liners and transports was discontinued by reason of the danger of their losing their lives without chance of rescue, in the event of torpedoing. The present rule is that the guardhouse must be above decks and a living guard must always be at hand.

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CHAPTER XV

HE DOES MOST OF THE TALKING AND TAKES ALL THE BLAME

Tramp, tramp, tramp—all through the endless, wakeful hours he heard that soldier marching back and forth, back and forth, outside the door. Every sound of those steady footfalls was like a blow, stinging afresh the cruel wound which had been opened in his impassive nature. He was under arrest and under guard. If he should try to get out that soldier would order him to halt, and if he didn't halt the soldier would shoot him. He wondered if the guard were Pickles.

He did not think at all about his deductive triumph now. And he did not care much about what they would do with him. He wondered a little what the soldiers would say—particularly Frenchy. But if only his brother would talk to him and ask about their mother he could bear everything else—the dashing of his triumph, the danger he was in, the shame. The shame, most of all.

He did not care so much now about being Sherlock Nobody Holmes—he had had enough of that. And no matter what they thought of "Yankee Doodle Whitey," *he* knew that he was loyal. Let them think that all his talk of Uncle Job and the flag and his father's patriotism was just bluff—let Frenchy think he had been just deceiving him—he could stand anything, if only his brother would be like a brother to him now that they were alone together.

It was a strange, unreasonable feeling.

Once, only once, in the long night, he tried to make his brother understand.

"Maybe you won't believe me, but I'm sorry," he said; "if you ain't asleep I wish you'd listen—Bill. Now that I told 'em I feel kind of different—I *had* to tell 'em. I had to decide quick—and I didn't have nobody—anybody—to help me. Maybe you think I was crazy— Are you listenin'?"

There was no response, but he knew his brother was not asleep.

"It ain't because I wanted 'em to think I was smart—Bill—if you think it was that, you're wrong. And anyway, it didn't show I was so smart—you was smarter, anyway, if it comes to that. I got to admit it. 'Cause you thought about it first—about using the dish. It served me right for thinking I could deduce, and all like that, anyway. You ain't asleep, are you?"

"Aw, shut up!" his brother grunted. "You could 'a' kept me out o' this by keepin' yer mouth shut. But you had to jabber it out, you—. And they'll plug me full of lead."

A cold shudder ran through Tom.

"I got to admit I'm a kind of a (he was going to say *traitor*, but for his brother's sake he avoided the word). I got to admit I wasn't loyal, too. I wasn't loyal to you, anyway. But I had to decide quick, Bill. And I saw I *had* to tell 'em. You got to be loyal to Uncle Sam first of all. But—but— Are you listening, Bill? I ain't mad, anyway. 'Cause Adolf Schmitt's most to blame. It ain't—it ain't 'cause I want to get let off free either, it ain't. I wouldn't care so much now what they did to me, anyway. 'Cause everything is kind of spoiled now about all of us—our family—being so kind of patriotic—"

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His brother, goaded out of his sullenness, turned upon him with a tirade of profane abuse, leaving the boy shamed and silent.

And all the rest of that night Tom Slade, whose hand had extinguished the guiding light, perhaps, to some lurking submarine; who had had to "think quick and all by himself," and had decided for his Uncle Sam against his brother Bill, sat there upon the leather settee, feeling guilty and ashamed. He knew that he had done right, but his generous heart could not feel the black, shameless treason of his brother because his own smaller treason stood in the way. He could not see the full guilt of that wretched brother because he felt mean and contemptible himself. Truly, the soldier had hit the nail on the head when he said, "You're all right, Whitey!"

And now, suspected, shamed, sworn at and denounced, even now, as his generous nature groped for some extenuation for this traitor whose scheme he had discovered and exposed, he found it comforting to lay the whole blame and responsibility upon the missing Adolf Schmitt.

"Anyway, he tempted you," he said, though he knew his brother would neither listen nor respond. "Maybe you think I don't know that. He's worse than anybody—he is."

You're all right, Whitey!

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CHAPTER XVI

HE SEES A LITTLE AND HEARS MUCH

Toward morning, he fell asleep, and when he awoke the vibration of the engines had ceased, and he heard outside the door of his prison a most uproarious clatter which almost drowned the regular footfalls of the soldier.

He had heard linotype machines in operation—which are not exactly what you would call quiet; he had listened to the outlandish voice of a suction-dredge and the tumultuous clamor of a threshing machine. But this earsplitting clatter was like nothing he had ever heard before.

The door opened and he was thankful to see that the soldier outside was not one of his particular friends. He was silently escorted to the wash room, in the doorway of which the guard waited while Tom refreshed himself after his sleepless night with a grateful bath.

The vessel, as he could see, was moored parallel with the abrupt brick shore of a very narrow canal, with somber, uninviting houses close on either hand. It was as if a ship were tied up along the curb of a street. Up and down the gang planks and back and forth upon the deck hurried men in blouses with great, clumsy wooden shoes upon their feet and now Tom saw the cause of that earsplitting clatter; and he knew that he had reached "over there."

Down on the brick street below the ship, a multitude of children, all in wooden shoes, danced and clattered about, in honor of the ship's arrival, and the windows were full of people waving the Stars and Stripes, calling "Vive l'Amerique!" and trying, with occasional success, to throw loose flowers and little round potatoes with French and American flags stuck in them, onto the deck.

All of the houses looked very dingy and old, and the men in blouses who pushed their clods about on this or that errand upon the troopship, were old, too, and had sad, worn faces. Only the children were joyful.

As Tom went back along the deck, he glanced through a street which seemed to run almost perpendicularly up the side of a thickly built-up hill, and caught a passing glimpse of the open country beyond. France! He wondered whether the "front" were in that direction and how long it would take to get there, and what it looked like. It could not be so very far. Presently he heard a more orderly clatter of wooden shoes and he saw several of the soldiers, who had not yet gone ashore, hurry to the rail.

He did not dare to do that himself, but as he walked he ventured to verge a little toward the vessel's side, and saw below several men in tattered, almost colorless uniforms, marching in line along the brick street, each with a wheelbarrow.

He heard a woman call something from a window in French.

"There's discipline for you, all right," a soldier said.

"You said it," replied another; "it's second nature with 'em."

He gathered that the little procession of laborers were German prisoners, and that the long ingrained habit of marching in step had become so much a part of their natures that they did it now instinctively.

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Then he realized that he himself was a prisoner and was in a worse plight than they.

He spent the morning wondering what they would do with him and his brother. Of course they believed him to be the accomplice of his brother. They probably thought he had weakened and told in terror and in hope of clemency. He wondered if they had gone through his brother's luggage yet and whether they had found any papers. 110

He realized that it seemed almost too much of a coincidence that he and his brother should have happened on the same ship—and in the same stateroom, all by accident. And he knew that his coming down from the deck just after the signal from the destroyer, looked bad. He knew that back home in America Germans had gone to Ellis Island upon less suspicious circumstances than that. But what would they do with an American? In the case of an American it was just plain treason and the punishment for treason is—

A feeling almost of nausea overcame him and he tried to put the dreadful thought away from him.

"Anyway, the whole business is a kind of a mix-up," he told himself; "it don't make any difference what you do—you get in trouble. But I don't blame them so much, 'cause they judge by looks, and that's the only way you can do. Anyway, you got to die some time. I'm glad I found it out and told 'em, 'cause anyway it don't make any difference if they think I confessed or just found it out—as long as they know it. That's the main thing." 111

With this consoling thought he withdrew into his old stolid self, and was ready to stand up and be shot if that was what they intended to do with him. He did not blame anybody "because it was all a mix-up." If he had chosen to save his brother he might have saved himself. The great ship, with all her brave boys, would have gone down, perhaps, and his brother would have seen to it that they two were saved.

Well, the ship had *not* gone down, the brave boys who had jollied the life out of him were on their way across country now to die if need be, and who was he, Tom Slade, that he should be concerning himself as to just how or when *he* should die, or whether he got any credit or not, so long as he had decided right and done what he ought to do?

He would rather have died honorably in the trenches, but if doing Uncle Sam a good turn meant that he must die in disgrace, why then he would die in disgrace, that was all.

The point was the *good* turn. Once a scout, always a scout. 112

No one spoke to him all through the day—not even his brother. He heard the hurried comings and goings on the deck, the creaking of the big winches as bag after bag of wheat, bale after bale of cotton, was swung over and lowered upon the brick quay. The little French children who made the neighborhood a bedlam with their gibberish and the outlandish clatter of their wooden shoes; the women who sat in their windows watching these good things being unloaded, as Santa Claus might unload his pack in the bosom of some poor family; the United States officers who were in authority at the port, and all the clamoring rabble which made the ship's vicinity a picnic ground, did not know, of course, that it was because the captain's mess boy had made a discovery and "decided right" that these precious stores were not at the bottom of the ocean.

And the captain's mess boy, whose uncle had fought at Gettysburg, and whose brother was a traitor, could not see the things which were going to help win the war because he was locked up in a little dim room on board, called the guardhouse. He was sitting on the leather settee, his fingers intertwined nervously, gulping painfully now and then, but for the most part, quiet and brave. He did not try to talk with his brother now. He wished he could know the worst right away—what they were going to do with him. Then he would not care so much. 113

Outside, upon the deck and quay, he could hear much, and he listened with a dull interest. He knew that old Uncle Sam was out there with his sleeves rolled up, making himself mightily at home, chucking wheat and wool and cotton and sugar and stuff out of the hold, slewing it, hoisting it, and letting it down plunk onto France! The boys in khaki were on trains already. He could hear the silly, piping screech of the French locomotives. His mind was half numbed, but he hoped that all this would encourage those French people and remind them that before Uncle Sam rolled down his sleeves again, he intended to bat out a home run.

Sometimes he became frightened, but he tried not to think of what lay before him. He believed that his brother would drag him down to his own shameful punishment, but he told himself that he didn't care.

"Anyway, I did my bit. I wish—I kinder wish I could have seen Frenchy again. But I ain't scared. I just as soon—stand—up—and be— 'Cause I ain't much, anyway—. And it ain't—it ain't for me to decide how I ought to die." 114

CHAPTER XVII

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After a while the monotony was broken by two soldiers coming to take his brother away. Tom did not know where they were taking him; it might be to court martial and death. He knew nothing about court martial, whether it was a matter of minutes or hours or days, only he knew that everything in military administration was quick, severe and thorough. He wanted to speak to his brother, but he did not dare, and after the grim little procession was gone he listened to the steady, ominous footfalls, as they receded along the deck.

Soon they would come for *him*, and he made up his mind that he would be master of himself and at the last minute he would hold his head up and look straight at them, just like the statue of Nathan Hale which he had seen....

He realized fully now that he had been caught in the meshes of his brother's intrigue, and that there was no hope for him. To have saved himself he would have had to spare his brother and allow the intriguing to go on. Well, it made no difference—here he was. "And it ain't so much, anyway," he said, "if one boy like me does get misjudged, as long as the ship is saved and those papers about the motor were found." 116

So he tried to comfort himself, sitting there alone, twisting his fingers and gulping now and then. All his fine, patriotic memories of the Slades were knocked in the head, but even in these lonely hours he was stanch for Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam might make a mistake—a terrible mistake, as he presently would do—"but anyway he's more important than I am," he said.

Occasionally he listened wistfully to the sounds outside and they made him wish he could see as well as hear. He heard the creaking of the busy pulleys, the men calling "Yo-o-ho!" as they handled the winch-ropes, the dull thud of the heavy bales upon the quay, the cheerful, lusty calls of the workers, the loud voices of the French people, and that incessant accompaniment of all, the clatter, clatter, clatter, of wooden shoes.

Sometimes he would lose his mastery of himself and regain it only to listen again, wistfully, longingly. He hoped those German prisoners who walked as if they were wound up with a key, noticed all this hurry and bustle. They would soon see what it meant for Uncle Sam. 117

There were voices outside and Tom's heart beat like a hammer. Could it be over so soon? The door opened a little and he could see that someone was holding the knob, talking to a soldier. He breathed heavily, his fingers were cold, but he stood up and looked straight before him, bravely. They had come to get him.

Then the door opened wider and a familiar voice greeted him.

"H'lo, Tommy. Well, well! Adventures never cease, huh?"

Tom stood gaping. Through dimmed eyes he saw a cigar (it seemed like the same cigar) cocked up in the corner of Mr. Conne's mouth and that queer, whimsical look on Mr. Conne's face.

"Mr. Conne—" he stammered. "I didn't know—you was—here. *You* don't believe it, do you?"

Mr. Conne worked his cigar leisurely over to the other side of his mouth.

"Believe what?"

"That—I'm—a—a spy and—and a traitor." He almost whispered the words. 118

Mr. Conne smiled exasperatingly and hit him a rap on the shoulder. "Anybody accuse you of being that?"

"That's what they think," said Tom.

"Oh, no, they don't, Tommy. But they've got to be careful. Don't you know they have?"

"I got to go and—get shot—maybe."

"So? Fancy that! Sit down here and tell me the whole business, Tommy. What's it all about?"

"I—got to admit it looks bad—"

"They wouldn't have done anything with you till they saw me, Tommy. Even if they had to take you back to New York. Trouble was, Wessel's dying. How could they prove what you said about me getting you the job?"

He put his arm over Tom's shoulder as they sat down upon the leather settee, and the effect of all the dread and humiliation and injustice and shame welled up in the boy now under that friendly touch and he went to pieces entirely.

"Did you think I didn't know what I was doing when I picked you, Tommy?"

Tom could not answer, but sat there with his breast heaving, his hand on Mr. Conne's knee. 119

"Did you just find your brother there by accident, Tom?"

"I—I got to be—ashamed—"

"Yes," Mr. Conne said kindly; "you've got to be ashamed of *him*. But you see, I haven't got to be ashamed of you, have I? How'd you find out about it? Tell me the whole thing, Tom."

And so, sitting there with this shrewd man who had befriended him, Tom told the whole story as he could not have told it to anyone else. He went away back into the old Barrel Alley days, when he had "swiped" apples from Adolf Schmitt and his brother Bill had worked in Schmitt's grocery

store. He told how it used to make him mad when his brother "got licked unfair," as he said, and he did not know why Mr. Conne screwed up his face at that. He told about how he "had to decide quick, kind of," when the officers confronted him in his brother's stateroom, and how the thought about Uncle Sam being his uncle had decided him. He told how he had had to keep his face turned away from his brother so that he "wouldn't feel so mean, like." And here again Mr. Conne gave his face another screw and Tom did not understand why. That was one trouble with Tom Slade—he was so thick that he could not understand a lot of things that were perfectly plain to other people.

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CHAPTER XVIII

HE TALKS WITH MR. CONNE AND SEES THE BOYS START FOR THE FRONT

"What—what do you think they'll do with him?"

It was the question uppermost in Tom's mind, but he could not bring himself to ask it until his visitor was about to leave.

"Why, that's hard to say, Tommy," Mr. Conne answered kindly but cautiously; then after a moment's silence he added, "I'll strain a point and tell you something because—well, because you're entitled to know. But you must keep it very quiet. They hope to learn much more from him than he has told, but they found in his luggage a lot of plans and specifications of the 'Liberty Motor.'"

"I'm glad," said Tom simply.

"Of course, we suspected from the letters sent to Schmitt that somebody had such plans, but we had no clue as to who it was. You grabbed more than the dish when you put your hand through that transom, Tommy. You got hold of the plans of the 'Liberty Motor' too."

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"I didn't take your advice," said Tom ruefully; "I got a good lesson."

"That's all right, my boy. You've got a brain in your head and you did a good job. It'll all go to your credit, and the other part won't be remembered. So *you* try not to think of it."

"They won't kill him, will they?"

"They won't do anything just at present, my boy. Now put your mind on your work and don't think of anything else—"

"Have I got my job yet?"

"Why, certainly," Mr. Conne laughed; "I'll see you again, Tommy. Good-by."

And Tom tried this time to follow his advice. He was soon released and the officer, whom he had so feared, was good enough to say, "You did well and you've had a pretty tough experience." The captain spoke kindly to him, too, and all the ship's people seemed to understand. The few soldiers who had not yet been sent forward to billets near the front, did not jolly him or even refer to his detective propensities. They did not even mimic him when he said "kind of," as they had done before.

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He had little to do during the ship's brief stay in port and Mr. Conne, who was there on some mysterious business, showed him about the quaint old French town and treated him more familiarly than he had ever done before. For Tom Slade had received his first wound in the great war and though it was long in healing, it yielded to kindness and sympathy, and these everyone showed him.

And so there came a day when he and Mr. Conne stood upon the platform amid a throng of French people and watched the last contingent of the boys as they called back cheerily from the queer-looking freight cars which were to bear them up through the French country to that mysterious "somewhere"—the most famous place in France.

"So long, Whitey!" they called. "See you later."

"Good-by, Tommy, old boy; hope the tin fish don't get you going back!"

"Hurry up back and bring some more over, Whitey!"

"*Bon voyage!*"

"*Au revoir!*"

"Give my regards to Broadway, Whitey."

"Cheer up, Whitey, old pal. Kaiser Bill'll be worse off than you are when *we* get at him."

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"*N'importe*, Whitey."

"I'll be there," called Tom.

"*Venez donc!*" some one answered, amid much laughter.

The last he saw of them they were waving their hats to him and making fun of each other's French. He watched the train wistfully until it passed out of sight.

"They seem to like you, Tommy," Mr. Conne smiled. "Is that a new name, Whitey?"

"Everybody kinder always seems to give me nicknames," said Tom. "I've had a lot of people jolly me, but never anybody so much as those soldiers—not even the scouts. I'll miss 'em going back."

"The next lot you bring over will be just the same, Tom. They'll jolly you, too."

"I don't mind it," said Tom. "But one thing I was thinking——"

Mr. Conne rested his hand on Tom's shoulder and smiled very pleasantly at him. He seemed to be going out of his way these days to befriend him and to understand him. 125

"It's about how you get to know people and get to like them, kind of, and then don't see them any more. That feller, Archibald Archer, that worked on the other ship I was on—I'd like to know where he is if he's alive. I liked that feller."

"It's a big world, Tom."

"Maybe I might see him again some time—same as I met my—my brother."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Conne, cheerily. "It's always the unexpected that happens, you know."

"I saw *you* again, anyway."

"Yes, you can't get away from me."

"And Frenchy—maybe I'll never see him any more. He's got people that live in Alsace; he told me all about them. He hasn't heard from them since the war first began.—Gee, I hope Germany has to give Alsace back to France—just for his sake!"

Mr. Conne laughed.

"Most of the people there stick up for France in their hearts, only they dasn't show it. He gave me this button; it's made out of a cannon, and it means the French people there got to help you." 126

"Hmm—hang on to it."

"You bet I'm going to. But maybe he wouldn't like now, even if I met him again—after what he knows——"

"Look here, Tom. You'll be sailing in a day or so and when you come back I'll probably be in Washington. Perhaps you'll wish to enlist over here soon. I'm going to give you a little button, *kind of*, as you would say—to keep in your head. And this is it. Remember, there's only one person in the world who can disgrace Tom Slade, and that is Tom Slade himself."

He slapped Tom on the shoulder, and they strolled up the dingy, crooked street, past the jumble of old brown houses, until it petered out in a plain where there was a little cemetery, filled with wooden crosses.

"Those poor fellows all did their bit," said Mr. Conne.

Tom looked silently at the straight rows of graves. He seemed to be getting nearer and nearer to the war.

"How far is the front?" he asked. 127

"Not as far as from New York to Boston, Tom. Straight over that way is Paris. When you get past Paris you begin to see the villages all in ruins,—between the old front and the new front."

"I've hiked as far as that."

"Yes, it isn't far."

"Do you know where our boys are—what part of it?"

"Yes, I know, but I'm not going to tell you," Mr. Conne laughed. "You'd like to be there, I suppose."

For a few moments Tom did not answer. Then he said in his old dull way, "I got a right to go now. I got a right to be a soldier, to make up for—*him*. The next time I get back here I'm going to join. If we don't get back for six weeks, then I'll be eighteen. I made up my mind now."

Mr. Conne laughed approvingly and Tom gazed, with a kind of fascination, across the pleasant, undulating country.

"I could even hike it," he repeated; "it seems funny to be so near."

But when finally he did reach the front, it was over the back fence, as one might say, and after such an experience as he had never dreamed of. 128

CHAPTER XIX

HE IS CAST AWAY AND IS IN GREAT PERIL

"They're more likely to spill the cup when it's empty," said the deck steward, who was a sort of walking encyclopedia to Tom.

"I suppose that's because we haven't got such a good convoy going back," Tom said.

"That and high visibility. You see, the less there is in the ship, the higher she sets up in the water, and the higher she sets the better they can see her. We're in ballast and floating like a balloon. They get better tips about westbound ships, too. All the French ports are full of German agents. They come through Switzerland."

The first day out on the voyage homeward was very rough. At about dusk Tom was descending the steps from the bridge with a large tray when he saw several of the ship's people (whose time was pretty much their own on the westward trip) hurrying to the rail. One of them called to him, "We're in for it;" but Tom was not alarmed, for by this time he was too experienced a "salt" to be easily excited.

"You can see the wake!" someone shouted.

There was a sudden order on the bridge, somebody rushed past him and then the tray, with all its contents, went crashing upon the steps and Tom staggered against the stair-rail and clung to it.

The ship was struck—struck as if by a bolt out of the sky.

He had been through this sort of thing before and he was not scared. He was shocked at the suddenness of it, but he kept his head and started across the deck for his emergency post, aft. Everyone seemed to be running in that direction.

He knew that however serious the damage, there was but small danger to life, since the convoy was at hand and since there were so very few people upon the ship; there were life-boats enough, without crowding, for all on board.

But the impact, throwing him down the steps, as it did, had caused him to twist his foot and he limped over to the rail for its assistance in walking. Men were now appearing in life-preservers, and hovering impatiently in the vicinity of the lifeboat davits, but he heard no orders for manning the boats and he was distinctly aware of the engines still going.



TOM WAS STANDING, OR TRYING TO STAND, ON A GERMAN SUBMARINE.

He hobbled along, holding the rail, intent upon reaching the davits astern, where the third officer would give him orders, when suddenly there was a splitting sound, the rail gave way, he struggled to regain his balance and went headlong over the side, still clutching the piece of rail which he had been leaning on.

He had the presence of mind to keep hold of it and to swim quickly away from the vessel, trying to shout as he swam; but the sudden ducking had filled his mouth with water and he could do little more than splutter.

He could see as he looked up that one of the upright stanchions which at once strengthened the rail and supported the deck above, was in splinters and it was this that had weakened the rail so that it gave way. Vaguely he remembered reading of a submarine which, after despatching a torpedo, had tried by gunfire to disable the steering apparatus of a ship, and he wondered if that was the cause of the shattered stanchion.

He would not have believed that one could be carried out of hearing so rapidly, but before he realized it, he was thrown down into the abysmal depths of a great sea with only a towering wall of black water to be seen, and when he was borne up on the crest of another great roller he saw the ship and her convoy at what seemed a great distance from him.

The vessels had seemed far apart from his viewpoint on deck, but now, so great was his distance from them, that they seemed to form a very compact flotilla and the hurried activities on the stricken vessel were not visible at all.

He shouted lustily through the gathering dusk, but without result. Again and again he called, till his head throbbed from the exertion. He could see the smoke now, from his own vessel he thought, and he feared that she was under way, headed back to France.

Later, when he was able to think connectedly at all, it was a matter of wonder to him that he could have been carried so far in so short a time, for he was not familiar with the fact known to all sailors that each roller means a third of a mile and that a person may be carried out of sight on the ocean in five minutes.

He could discover no sign now of the flotilla except several little columns of smoke and he realized that the damage to the *Montauk* could not be serious and that they were probably making for the nearest French port.

Tom was an expert swimmer, but this accomplishment was, of course, of no avail now. He was nearly exhausted and his helplessness encouraged the fatal spirit of surrender. With a desperate impulse he all but cast the broken rail from him, resigned to struggle no more with its uncertain buoyancy, which yielded to his weight and submerged him with every other motion which he made.

Then he had an idea. Dragging from the wood was part of the rope network which had been the under part of the ship's rail. It was stiff with paint. Grasping it firmly in his mouth he managed to get his duck jacket off and this he spread across the stiff network, floating the whole business, jacket underneath, so that the painted rope netting acted as a frame to hold the jacket spread out.

To his delight, he found this very buoyant, and with the strip of wood which he lashed across it with his scarf and belt it was almost as good as a life-preserver. He had to be careful to keep it flat upon the water, for as soon as one edge went under the whole thing acted like the horizontal rudders of a submarine. But he soon got the hang of managing it and it was not half bad.

CHAPTER XX

HE IS TAKEN ABOARD THE "TIN FISH" AND QUESTIONED

And then he saw it. Whether it had been near him all the time he did not know. It was in the same wave-valley with himself and seemed to be looking at him. Even before there was any sign of human life upon it, it seemed to be standing off there just looking at him, and there was something uncanny about it. It looked like the little flat cupola of the town hall at home, only it was darker, and on top of it two long things stood up like flagpoles. And it bobbed and moved and just stood there—looking at him.

A life boat might have a name instead of a number but it could not look at him like that.

Then he saw that it was nearer to him, although he could not exactly see it move. On top of it were two persons, one of whom appeared to be looking at him through a long glass. Tom wished that he could see the rest of it—the part underneath—for then it would not seem so unnatural.

Then one of the men called to him through a megaphone and he was possessed by an odd feeling that it was the thing itself speaking and not the man upon it.

"Speak German?"

"No," Tom called, "I'm American."

He waited, thinking they would either shoot him or else go away and leave him. Then the man called, "Lift up your feet!"

This strange mandate made the whole thing seem more unreal, and he would not have been surprised to be told next to stand on his head. But he was not going to take any chances with a Teuton and he raised his feet as best he could, while the little tower came closer—closer, until it was almost upon him.

Suddenly his feet caught in something, throwing him completely over, and as he frantically tried to regain his position his feet encountered something hard but slippery.

"Vell, vot did I tell you, huh?" the man roared down at him.

Tom was almost directly beneath him now, walking, slipping, and scrambling to his feet again, while this grim personage looked down at him like Humpty Dumpty from his wall. The whole business was so utterly strange that he could hardly realize that he was standing, or trying to stand, waist deep, at the conning tower of a German submarine. By all the rules of the newspapers and the story books, his approach should have been dramatic, but it was simply a sprawling, silly progress.

Of course, he knew how it was now. The U-boat was only very slightly submerged, and evidently the removable hand rail had not been stowed and it was that on which his feet had caught and which had caused his inglorious aquatic somersault. He had walked, or stumbled, over the submerged deck and now stood, a drenched and astonished figure, beneath his rescuers—or his captors.

The man lowered a rope which had something like a horse's stirrup hanging to it and into this Tom put his foot, at the same time grasping the rope, and was helped up somewhat roughly.

Upon the top was a little hatch in which the man was standing, like a jack in the box, and now he went down an iron ladder with Tom after him.

"You off der *Montauk*, huh?" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Tom, "I fell off."

"Vell, you haf' good loock."

Tom did not know whether to consider himself lucky or not, but it occurred to him that the domineering manner of his captors might not be an indication of their temper. And the realization of this was to prove useful to him afterward for he found that with the Germans a not unkindly intention was often expressed with glowering severity. He made up his mind that he would not be afraid of him.

The iron ladder descended into a compartment where there was much electrical apparatus, innumerable switches, etc., and two steering gears. In front of each of these was a thing to look into, having much the appearance of a penny in the slot machine, in which one sees changing views. These he knew for the lower ends of the two periscopes. There was an odor in the place which made him think of a motorcycle.

A door in the middle of this apartment, forward, led into a tiny, immaculate galley, with utensils which fitted into each other for economy in space, like a camping outfit. Here a parrot hung in a cage—strange home for a bird of the air!

Another door, midway in the opposite side of the galley, opened into a narrow aisle which ran forward through the center of the boat, with berths on either side, like the arrangement of a sleeping-car. In one of these squatted two men, in jumpers, playing a card game.

The length of this aisle seemed to Tom about half the length of a railroad car. Through it his rescuer led him to a door which opened into a tiny compartment, furnished with linoleum, a flat desk, three stationary swivel chairs and a leather settee. It was very hot and stuffy, with an oily smell, but cosy and spotlessly clean.

Directly across this compartment was another central door with something printed in German above it. The man knocked, opened this door, spoke to someone, then came back and went away in the direction from which they had come.

Tom stood in the little compartment, not daring to sit down. He seemed to be in a strange world, like that of the Arabian Nights. He did not know whether the boat had descended or was still awash, or had come boldly up to the surface. He knew that the tower through the hatch of which he had descended was about in the middle, and that he had been taken from that point almost to the bow. He thought this cosy little room must be the commander's own private lair, and that probably the commander's sleeping quarters lay beyond that door. Forward of that must be the torpedo compartments. As to what lay astern, he supposed the engines were there and the stern torpedo tubes, but the Teutons were so impolite that they never showed him and all Tom ever really saw of the interior of a German U-boat was the part of it which he had just traversed, and which in a general sort of way reminded him of a sleeping-car with the odor of a motorcycle.

Presently, the forward door opened, and a young man with a very sallow complexion entered.

He wore a kind of dark blue jumper, the only semblance of which to a uniform was that its few buttons were of brass. He was twirling his mustache and looked at Tom with very keen eyes.

"Vell, we are not so pad, huh? Ve don'd kill you!"

Tom did not know exactly what to say, so he said, "I got to thank you."

The man motioned to the settee and Tom sat down while he seated himself in one of the swivel chairs.

"Vell, vot's der matter?" he said, seeing Tom shiver.

"I'm wet," said Tom; adding, "but I don't mind it."

The man continued to look at him sharply. His questions were peremptory, short, crisp.

"You had a vite jacket?"

"Yes, sir. I made a kind of a life preserver out of it."

Tom suspected that they had seen him long before he had seen them and that they had watched his struggles in the water.

"Steward's poy, huh?"

"I was captain's mess boy. The railing was broke and I never noticed it, so I fell overboard. I don't think anybody else got hurt," he added.

The man twirled his mustache, still with his keen eyes fixed on Tom.

"You bring ofer a lot of droops?" It was a question, but he did not keep his voice raised at the end, as one asking a question usually does. In this sense a German never asks a question. He seemed to be making an announcement and expecting Tom to confirm it.

"Quite a lot," said Tom.

"Two thousand, huh?"

"I couldn't count them, there were so many."

"How many trips you make?"

"This was my first on a transport," said Tom.

"Huh. You make Brest? Vere?"

"It wasn't Brest," said Tom, "and I ain't supposed to tell you."

"Vell, I ain't supposed to rescue you neither."

"If you'd asked me before you rescued me, even then I wouldn't of told you," said Tom simply.

"Huh. You talk beeg. Look out!"

And still he twirled his mustache.

"Dey catch a spy, huh?"

"Yes, they did," said Tom, feeling very much ashamed and wondering how his questioner knew. Then it occurred to him that this very U-boat had perhaps been watching for the signal light, and it gave him fresh satisfaction to remember that *he* had perhaps foiled this man who sat there twirling his mustache.

The commander did not pursue this line of inquiry, supposing, perhaps, that a mess boy would not be informed as to such matters, but he catechised Tom about everything else, foiled at every other question by the stolid answer, "I ain't supposed to tell you." And he could not frighten or browbeat or shake anything out of him.

At length, he desisted, summoned a subordinate and poured a torrent of German gibberish at him, the result of which was that Tom's wet clothes were taken from him and he was ushered to one of the berths along the aisle, presumably there to wait until they dried.

He was sorry that they would not let him accompany his wet clothing aft where the engines were, but he was relieved to find that he was evidently not going to be thrown back into the ocean.

CHAPTER XXI

HE IS MADE A PRISONER AND MAKES A NEW FRIEND

It was just another German mistake in diplomacy or strategy or browbeatery, or whatever you

may call it. Tom had been rescued for the information which he might give, and he gave none. It was not that he was so clever, either. A fellow like Frenchy could have squeezed a whole lot out of him without his realizing it, but Captain von Something-or-other didn't know how to do it. And having failed, perhaps it was to his credit that he did not have Tom thrown back into the ocean.

Tom would have liked to know whether the boat was still awash or completely submerged. Above all, he was anxious to know what they intended to do with him. The fact that the boat did not pitch or roll at all made him think that it must be far below these surface disturbances, but he did not dare to ask.

When his clothes were returned to him he was given a piece of rye bread and a cup of coffee, which greatly refreshed him, and he lay in one of the bunks along the long aisle watching two of the Germans who were playing cribbage. Once the commander came through like a conductor and as he passed Tom he said, "Vell, you haf' more room soon."

He said it in his usual gruff, decisive tone, but Tom felt that he had intended to be agreeable and he wondered what he meant.

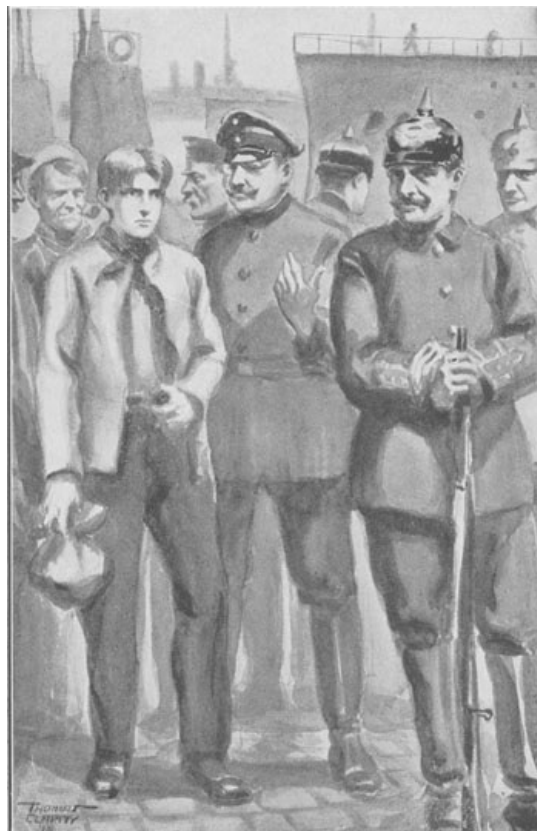
After a while he fell asleep and slept the sleep of utter exhaustion. When he awoke there was no one about, but he heard voices outside, talking in German. Presently a soldier in one of the familiar German helmets came in and beckoned to him.

Tom followed him up the iron ladder, out through the hatch and down another little ladder which was leaning against the outside of the conning tower. The deck was quite free of the water and already it was cluttered with tanks and cases ready to be stowed aboard. On either side, ranged sideways in a long row, as if they were ready to start on a race, were other U-boats, as many as thirty Tom thought, their low decks the scene of much activity.

On the wharf was a long line of hand trucks, each bearing what he supposed to be a torpedo, and these looked exactly like miniature submarines, minus the conning tower.

These things he saw in one hurried, bewildered glance, for he was allowed no opportunity for observation. Scarcely had he stepped off the deck when two lame soldiers took him in hand. Another soldier, who was not lame, stepped in front of him and he was directed by an officer who managed the affair and spoke very good English, to keep his eyes upon the little spire of that soldier's helmet. What he saw thereafter, he saw only through the corners of his eyes, and these things consisted chiefly of German signs on buildings.

In this formation, with Tom's eyes fixed upon the little shiny spire before him, a lame soldier limping on either side and an officer in attendance, they marched to a stone building not far distant. Here he was ushered into a room where two men in sailor suits and three or four in oilskins sat about on benches. Two crippled soldiers guarded the door and another, who stood by an inner door, wore a bandage about his head.



TOM WAS DIRECTED TO KEEP HIS EYES UPON THE SOLDIER'S HELMET.

"Blimy, I thought I was 'avin' me eyes tested," said one of the sailors. "It's a bloomin' wonder they don't clap a pair o' blinders on yer and be done with it!"

Tom had not expected to hear any English spoken and it had never sounded so good to him

before. The sailor did not seem to be at all awed by the grim surroundings, and his freedom from restraint was comforting to Tom who had felt very apprehensive. He was soon to learn that the most conspicuous and attractive thing about a British sailor or soldier is his disposition to take things as he finds them and not to be greatly concerned about anything.

"Hi, Fritzie," he added, addressing one of the soldiers, "are we for Wittenberg or carn't yer s'y?" The guard paid no attention.

"It's no difference," said one of the men in oilskins.

"It's a bloomin' lot o' difference," said the sailor, "whether you're civilian or not, I can jolly well tell you! It's a short course in Wittenberg—there and Slopsgotten, or wotever they calls it. And the Spanish Ambassador, 'e calls to inquire arfter yer 'ealth every d'y. Hi there, Fritzie, 'ave we long to wite, old pal?"

As there seemed to be no objection to this freedom of speech, Tom ventured a question.

"Is this Germany?"

"Germany? No, it's the Cannibal Islands," said the sailor, and everyone except the guard laughed.

"You're not from Blighty,^[3] eh?" the sailor asked.

"I'm American," said Tom; "I was ship's boy on a transport and I fell off and a U-boat picked me up."

"You're in Willamshaven," the sailor told him, expressing no surprise at his experience.

"He's civilian," said one of the men in oilskins. "He's safe."

"Mybe, and mybe not," said the sailor; "'ow old are yer?"

"Seventeen," said Tom.

"Transports aren't civilian," said the sailor.

"Ship's boys are not naval in American service."

"It's the ige of yer as does it," the sailor answered. "I'll wiger you me first package from 'ome 'e goes to Slopsgotten."

"What is Slopsgotten?" Tom asked.

"It's the ship's boys' 'eaven."

"I guess it ain't so good," said the man.

"It's a grite big rice track," said the sailor. "Me cousin was there afore the Yanks came in. Mr. Gerard 'e got him exchanged. They got a 'ole army o' Yanks there now—all civilian."

"Is it a prison camp?" said Tom.

"A bloomin' sailors' 'ome."

"Were you captured?" Tom asked.

"We're off a bloomin' mine l'yer," the sailor answered, including his companion; "nabbed in the channel—'i, Freddie?"

"An' I 'ad tickets in me pocket to tike me girl to the pl'y in Piccadilly that night. Mybe she's witing yet," responded Freddie.

"Let 'er wite. Hi, Fritzie, we're a-goin' to add four shillins' to the bloomin' indemnity, to p'y fer the tickets!"

Further conversation with this blithesome pair elicited the information that they had been taken by a German destroyer while in a small boat in the act of mine inspecting, and that the men in oilskins (the one who had spoken being an American) were captives taken from a sunken British trawler.

One by one these prisoners were passed into an inner room where each remained for about five minutes. When the sailor came out, he held up a brass tag which had been fastened with a piece of wire to his buttonhole.

"I got me bloomin' iron cross," he said, "and I'm a-goin' to mike me 'ome in Slops! Kipe yer fingers crossed w'en yer go in there, Yank; tike me advice!"

"I hope I go there too if you're going," said Tom, "'cause you make it seem not so bad, kind of, bein' a prisoner."

"Hi, Fritzie!" the sailor called. "I got me reward for 'eroism!"

But apparently the German soldier could not appreciate these frivolous references to the sacred iron cross, for he glowered upon the young Englishman, and turned away with a black look.

"Hi, Fritzie, cawrn't yer tike a joke?" the sailor persisted.

Tom thought it must be much better fun to be an English soldier than a German soldier. And he thought this good-natured prisoner would be able to hold his own even against a great Yankee drive—of jollyng.

[3] England.

CHAPTER XXII

HE LEARNS WHERE HE IS GOING AND FINDS A RAY OF HOPE

It seemed to Tom that the two German officials who sat behind a table examining him, asked him every question which could possibly be framed in connection with himself. And when they had finished, and the answers had been written down, they made a few informal inquiries about American troops and transports, which he was thankful that he could not answer. When he returned to the ante-room he had fastened to his buttonhole a brass disk with a number stamped upon it and a German word which was not "Slopgotten," though it looked as if it might be something like it.

"Let's see," said the sailor; "didn't I jolly well tell yer? Congratulations!"

"Does it mean I go to Slopgotten?" Tom asked.

"They'll keep us there till the war's over, too," said the one called Freddie. "We'll never get a good whack at Fritzie now." 152

Tom's heart fell.

"We'll be wittling souveneers out o' wood," Freddie concluded.

"We'll have plenty o' wood," said his comrade. "The old Black Forest's down that w'y."

"It's just north of Alsice," Freddie said.

"A pair o' wire nippers and a bit o' French——"

"Shh," cautioned Freddie.

"We m'y be ible to s'y 'Owdy' to General 'Aig yet."

"Shh! We aren't even there yet."

Tom listened eagerly to this talk and thought much about it afterward. For one whole year he had longed to get into the war. He had waited for his eighteenth birthday as a child waits for Christmas. He had gone on the transport with the one thought of its bringing him nearer to military service. He was going to fight like two soldiers because his brother was—was not a soldier.

And now it appeared that his part in the great war, his way of doing his bit, was to lie in a prison camp until the whole thing was over. That was worse than boring sticks in Bridgeboro and distributing badges. Tom had never quarreled with Fate, he had even been reconciled to the thought of dying as a spy; but he rebelled at this prospect. 153

Instinctively, as he and his two philosophical companions were placed aboard the train, he reached down into his trousers pocket and found the little iron button which Frenchy had given him. He clutched it as if it were a life preserver, until his hand was warm and sweaty from holding it.

It seemed his last forlorn hope now.

CHAPTER XXIII

HE MAKES A HIGH RESOLVE AND LOSES A FAVORITE WORD

Miss Margaret Ellison, the stenographer in the Temple Camp office, had once pronounced judgment on Tom. It was that if he made up his mind to do a thing he would do it. There was something about his big mouth and his dogged scowl which made this prophecy seem likely of fulfilment.

And now, silently, he threw his challenge down before Fate, before Germany, before barbed

wire entanglements—before everything and everybody. He did not know whether they ever paroled ordinary prisoners, but he hoped they would not parole him, because then he would be bound by honor. And he did not want to be bound by honor. He kept his hand in his pocket, grasping his precious button, and it was well that the German officials did not know what was in his mind.

“I ain’t goin’ to be cheated out of it now,” he said to himself; “I don’t care what.”

All day long they journeyed in the box car, but Tom could see nothing of Germany save an occasional glimpse now and then when the sliding door was opened at the stations, usually to admit more prisoners. Whatever became of the men from the British trawler he never knew, but his jack-tar companions were with him still and helped to keep up his spirits. He never knew them by any other names than Freddie and Tennert—the first name of one and the last name of the other—but so great was his liking for them that it included the whole of sturdy, plodding, indomitable old England into the bargain. They never talked patriotism, and seemed to regard the war merely as a sort of a job that had to be done—just like any other job. Early in the day before the car filled up, Tom talked a good deal with them and as there was no guard inside, the conversation was free.

“When you said, ‘Shh’,” said Tom at one time, “I knew what you was thinkin’ about. I was never in a war,” he added innocently, “so I don’t know much about it. But if I was sent to jail for—say, for stealing—I wouldn’t think I had a right to escape.”

“You’d be a pretty honorable sort of a thief,” said Freddie.

“But, anyway,” said Tom, “I was going to ask you about escapin’ from a military prison. That ain’t dishonorable, is it?”

“No, strike me blind, it ain’t! But it’s jolly ‘ard!” said Tennert.

“It’s fer them to keep yer and fer you to grease off, if you can,” said Freddie. “If you give your parole, it’s like a treaty—”

“A bloomin’ scrap o’ piper,” interrupted Tennert. “They wouldn’t put you on yer honor because they don’t know what honor is. It ain’t in Fritzie’s old dictionary.”

Tom was glad to think of it in this way. *It’s for them to keep you and for you to grease off* (which evidently meant “get away”). He had great respect for the opinions of these two Britishers and his mind dwelt upon this only hope even before he had so much as a glimpse of his prison.

He meant to fight with the American forces, in spite of Fate and in spite of Germany. Germany had armed guards and barbed wire entanglements. Tom, on his side, had an iron button, a big mouth, a look of dogged determination, a sense of having been grossly cheated after he had made a considerable investment in time and a good deal of scout pluck and Yankee resource. The only thing that had stood in the way was the question of honor, and that was now settled on the high authority of the British navy! Who but sturdy old John Bull had come forward when Belgium was being violated? And now a couple of John Bull’s jack-tars had told him that it was for Germany to keep him and for him to get away if he could.

He was on the point of telling them of his double reason for wanting to escape; that he had to fight for two—himself and his brother. Then he thought he wouldn’t for fear they might not understand.

But he made up his mind that henceforth all his efforts and activities should be of double strength—to make up. He would think twice as hard, work twice as hard, fight twice as hard. Above all he would try twice as hard as he otherwise would have done, to get out of this predicament and get to the battlefield. He was glad of his scout training which he thought might help him a great deal now. And he would put every quality he had to the supreme test.

“Do you believe,” he asked, after a considerable silence, “that a feller can do more, kind of, if he’s doing his own work and—I mean if he thinks he’s got to do two people’s work—for a special reason?”

Freddie did not seem quite to “get” him, but Tennert answered readily, “You jolly well can! Look at Kippers wot cime ‘ome fer orspital treatment arfter Verdoon. ‘E lived in Chelsea. ‘Is pal got sniped an’ Fritzie took ‘is shoes. They’re awrful short o’ shoes. Kippers, ‘e s’ys, ‘I’ll not l’y down me rifle till I plunk^[4] a German and get ‘is shoes.’ Two d’ys arfter ‘e comes crawlin’ back through No Man’s Land and the color sergeant arks ‘im did ‘e carry out ‘is resoolootion. ‘Yes,’ s’ys ‘e, ‘but blimy, I ‘ad to plunk seven Germans before I could get a pair o’ clods to fit me.’ ‘E was usin’ ‘is pal’s strength too besides ‘is own. Any Tommy’ll tell yer a lad wot’s dyin’ on the field can leave ‘is fightin’ spunk to anyone ‘e pleases.” Tom stared open-eyed. He found it easy to believe this superstition of Tommy Atkins’. And he made up his mind anew that he would square matters with Uncle Sam by doing the work of two.

In the afternoon this pleasant chatting was made impossible by the numbers of military prisoners who were herded into the rough box car. They had come far enough south to be abreast of Belgium now and there must lately have been a successful German raid along the Flanders front, for both British and Belgian soldiers were driven aboard by the score. All of the British seemed exactly like Tennert and Freddie, cheerful, philosophical, chatting about Fritzie and the war as if the whole thing were a huge cricket game. Some of these were taken off farther down the line, to be sent to different camps, Tom supposed.

At last, after an all day’s ride, they reached their destination. But alas, there was no such place

as Slopsgotten! Tom was sorry for this for he liked the name. It sounded funny when his English friends said it. Schlaabgaurtn, was the way he read it on the railroad station. He felt disappointed and aggrieved. He was by no means sure of the letters, and pronunciation was out of the question. He liked Slopsgotten. In Tennert's mouth he had almost come to love it.

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It was the only thing about Germany that he liked, and now he had to give it up!

Slopsgotten!

[4] Kill.

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CHAPTER XXIV

HE GOES TO THE CIVILIAN CAMP AND DOESN'T LIKE IT

"'Ere we are in bloomin' old Slops! Not 'arf bad, wot? Another inch and we'd bunk our noses plunk into Alsice! Wot d'ye s'y, Freddie?"

"I s'y it's the back o' the old front. The only thing in the w'y is the mountains. Hi, Yankee! You see 'em? It's the ole mountains out of the song."

Tom looked at a distant range of blue-gray heights. Crossing those somewhere was the battle line—the long, sweeping line which began far off at the Belgian coast. How lonesome and romantic it must be for the soldiers up in those wild hills. Somewhere through there years ago Frenchy had fled from German tyranny and pursuit, away from his beloved ancestral home. Funny, thought Tom, that he should see both the eastern and western extremities of France without ever crossing it.

He was much nearer the front than he had been when he talked with Mr. Conne in the little French cemetery. Yet how much farther away! A prisoner in Germany, with a glowering, sullen Prussian guard at his very elbow!

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"We used to sing about them when I went to school," he said. "'The Blue Alsatian Mountains.'"

"I'd jolly well like to be on the other side o' them," said Freddie.

Tom clutched the little iron button in his pocket. Something prompted him to pull a button off his trousers and to work his little talisman into the torn place so that it would look like a suspender button. Then he turned again to gaze at the fair country which he supposed to be one of France's lost provinces—the home of Frenchy.

"There ain't much trouble crossing mountains," said he; "all you need is a compass. I don't know if they have tree-toads here, but I could find out which is north and south that way if they have."

"Blimy, if we don't listen and see if we can 'ear 'em s'ying 'polly voo Fransay' in the trees!" said Tennert.

"But a feller could never get into France that way," said Tom. "'Cause he'd have to cross the battle line. The only way would be to go down around through Switzerland—around the end of the line, kind of."

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"Down through Alsice," grunted Tennert.

"'E'd 'ave a 'underd miles of it," said Freddie.

"Unless Fritzie offered 'im a carriage. Hi, Fritzie, w'en do we have tea?"

They made no secret of this dangerous topic—perhaps because they knew the idea of escape from the clutches of Germany was so preposterous. In any event, "Fritzie" did not seem greatly interested.

They were grouped at the station, a woebegone looking lot, despite their blithe demeanor. There were a dozen or more of them, in every variety of military and naval rags and tatters. Tom was coatless and the rest of his clothing was very much the worse for salt water. The sailor suits of his two companions were faded and torn, and Freddie suffered the handicap of a lost shoe. The rest were all young. Tom thought they might be drummer boys or despatch riders, or something like that. Several of them were slightly wounded, but none seriously, for Germany does not bother with prisoners who require much care. They were the residue of many who had come and gone in that long monotonous trip. Some had been taken off for the big camps at Wittenberg and Göttingen. As well as he could judge, he had to thank his non-combatant character as well as his youth for the advantages of "Slopsgotten."

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When the hapless prisoners had been examined and searched and relieved of their few possessions, they were marched to the neighboring camp—a civilian camp it was called,

although it was hardly limited to that. They made a sad little procession as they passed through the street of the quaint old town. Some jeered at them, but for the most part the people watched silently as they went by. Either they had not the spirit for ridicule, or they were too accustomed to such sights to be moved to comment.

Tom thought he had never in his life seen so many cripples; and instead of feeling sorry for himself his pity was aroused for these maimed young fellows, hanging on crutches and with armless coat sleeves, hollow-eyed and sallow, who braved the law to see the little cavalcade go by. For later he learned that a heavy fine was imposed on these poor wretches if they showed themselves before enemy prisoners, and he wondered where they got the money to pay the fines.

The prison camp was in the form of a great oval and looked as if it might formerly have been a "rice track," as the all-knowing Tennert had said. It was entirely surrounded by a high barbed wire fence, the vicious wire interwoven this way and that into a mesh, the very sight of which must have been forbidding to the ambitious fugitive. It was not, however, electrified as in the strictly military prisons and on the frontiers. Tom was told that this was because it was chiefly a civilian camp, but he later learned that it was because of a shortage of coal.

The buildings which had formerly been stables and open stalls had been converted into living quarters, and odds and ends of lumber gathered from the neighboring town had been used to throw up rough shacks for additional quarters.

Straw was the only bedding and such food as the authorities supplied was dumped onto rusty tin dishes held out by the hungry prisoners. Some of these dishes had big holes in them and when such a plate became unusable it behooved its possessor to make friends with someone whose dish was not so far gone and share it with him. Some of the men carved wooden dishes, for there was nothing much to do with one's time, until their knives were taken from them. The life was one of grinding monotony and utter squalor, and the time which Tom spent there was the nightmare of his life.

Occasionally someone from the Spanish Embassy in Berlin would visit the camp in the interest of the Americans, the effect of these visits usually being to greatly anger the retired old German officer who was commandant. He had a face like the sun at noon-day, a voice like a cannon, and the mere asking of a question set him into a rage.

Many of the prisoners, of whom not a few were young Americans, received packages from home, through neutral sources—food, games, tobacco—which were always shared with their comrades. But Tom was slow in getting acquainted and before he had reached the stage of intimacy with anyone, something happened. He still retained his companionable status with Tennert and Freddie, but they fell in with their own set from good old "Blighty" and Tom saw little of them.

There was absolutely no rule of life in the prison camp. They were simply kept from getting away. Besides conferring this favor upon them, about the only thing which the German government did was to send a doctor around occasionally to look down their throats and inspect their tongues. If a prisoner became ill, it behooved him to find another prisoner who had studied medicine and then wait until old General Griffenhaus was in a sufficiently good humor to give him medicines. General Griffenhaus was not cruel; perhaps he would have been pleasant if he had known how.

As fast as Tom learned the custom, he adapted himself to the lazy, go-as-you-please kind of life. He scared up a rusty tin plate, made himself a straw bed in a boarded-in box stall, got hold of an old burlap bag which he wore as a kind of tunic while washing his clothes, and idled about listening to the war experiences of others. He had thought his own experiences rather remarkable, but now they seemed so tame that he did not venture to tell them. Fights with German raiders, rescues after days spent on the ocean, chats about the drive for Paris, the "try" at Verdun, the adventures of captured aviators—these things and many more, were familiarly discussed in the little sprawling groups among which he came to be a silent listener. In a way, it reminded him of camping and campfire yarns, except for the squalor and disorder.

Of course, there was general work to be done, but the officials did not concern themselves about this until it became absolutely necessary. No one could say that the German discipline was strict. When the prisoners discovered that one or other of their number was good at this or that sort of work they elected him to attend to those matters—whether it was sweeping, settling quarrels, cooking, writing letters, petitioning "Old Griff," shaving, pulling teeth, or what not. Each prisoner contributed his knowledge and experience to make life bearable for all. The camp was a *democracy*, but Germany didn't seem to object. If the prisoners wished to dig a drain trench or a refuse pit, they asked for shovels. And sometimes they got them. Prisoners, ragged and forlorn, came to be known by the most dignified titles. There was the "consulting architect," the "sanitary inspector," the "secretary of state," the "chairman of the committee on kicks," etc.

And one momentous day Tom met the "chief engineer."

CHAPTER XXV

HE VISITS THE OLD PUMP AND RECEIVES A SHOCK

"It's all happy-go-lucky here," said a young American from somewhere in Kansas, who had been raked in with a haul of prisoners from a torpedoed liner. "We used the water at the pump as long as the engines worked; then we shouldered our buckets and began going down to the brook. When the buckets went to pieces, we made a few out of canvas and they're not half bad."

Tom had inquired why they went down to the end of the oval to get water when there was a pump up in the middle of the grounds.

"So there you are," concluded his informer.

"Is the engine supposed to pump water up from the brook?" Tom asked.

"It isn't supposed to do anything," said the other, "it used to be supposed to, but it's retired."

"I thought Germany was so efficient," said Tom. "I should think they'd fix it. Can't it be fixed?"

"Not by anyone here, it seems. You see, they won't let us have any tools—wrenches, or files or anything. If you mention a file to Old Griff, he throws a couple of fits. Thinks you want to cut the barbed wire."

"Then why don't *they* fix it?"

"Ah, a question. I suppose they think the exercise of trotting down to the brook will do us good. I dare say if the chief engineer could get hold of a file he could fix it; seems to think he could, anyway. But gas engines are funny things."

"You're right they are," said Tom, thinking of the troop's motor boat away home in Bridgeboro. "Of course, *I* don't mind the walk down there," he added, "only it seemed kind of funny——"

"It's tragic for some of these lame fellows."

"Who *is* the chief engineer," Tom asked.

"Oh, he's a kid that was a despatch rider, I think. Anyway, he's wise to motorcycles. He's had several consulting engineers on the job—Belgian, French, and British talent—but nothin' doing. He's gradually losing his head."

"You couldn't exactly blame them for not letting him have a file," Tom said, reasonably enough, "or a wrench either for that matter, unless they watched him all the time."

"Nah!" laughed his companion. "Nobody could file through that fence wire without the sentries hearing him; it's as thick as a slate pencil, almost."

"Just the same you can't blame General Griffenhaus for not being willing to give files to prisoners. That's the way prisoners always get away—in stories."

About dusk of the same day Tom wandered to the pump, which was not far from the center of the vast oval. On the earth beside it a ragged figure sat, its back toward Tom, evidently investigating the obstreperous engine. Tom had never taken particular notice of this disused pump or of the little engine which, in happy days of yore, had brought the water up from the brook and made it available for the pump in a well below.

"Trying to dope it out?" he asked, by way of being sociable.

The "chief engineer," who had half turned before Tom spoke, jumped to his feet as if frightened and stared blankly at Tom, who stood stark still gaping at him.

"Well—I'll—be——" began the "chief engineer."

Tom was grinning all over his face.

"Hello, Archer!"

"Chrr-is-to-pherr *Crrinkums!*" said Archer, with that familiar up-state roll to his R's. "Where in all *get-out* did *you* blow in from? I thought you was dead!"

"You didn't think I was any deader than I thought you was," said Tom, with something of his old dull manner.

"Cr-a-ab apples and custarrd pies!" Archer exclaimed, still hardly able to believe his eyes. "I sure did think you was at the bottom of the ocean!"

"I didn't ever think I'd see *you* again, either," said Tom.

So the "chief engineer" proved to be none other than Archibald Archer—whose far-off home in the good old Catskills was almost within a stone's throw of Temple Camp—Archibald Archer, steward's boy on the poor old liner on which he had gotten Tom a job the year before.

"I might of known nothing would kill *you*," Tom said. "Mr. Conne always said you'd land right side up. Do you eat apples as much as you used to?"

"More," said Archer, "when I can get 'em."

The poor old gas engine had to wait now while the two boys who had been such close friends sat

down beside the disused pump in this German prison camp, and told each other of their escape from that torpedoed liner and of all that had befallen them since. And Tom felt that the war was not so bad, nor the squalid prison community either, since it had brought himself and Archibald Archer together again.

But Archer's tale alone would have filled a book. He was just finishing an apple, so he said, and was about to shy the core at the second purser when the torpedo hit the ship. He was sorry he hadn't thrown the core a little quicker.

He jumped for a life boat, missed it, swam to another, drifted with its famished occupants to the coast of Ireland, made his way to London, got a job on a channel steamer carrying troops, gayed the troops and became a torment and a nuisance generally, collected souvenirs with his old tenacity, and wound up in France, where, on the strength of being able to shrug his shoulders and say, *Oui, oui*, he got along famously. 174

He had managed to wriggle into military service without the customary delays, and in the capacity of messenger he had ridden a motorcycle between various headquarters and the front until he had been caught by the Germans in a raid while he was engaged in giving an imitation of Charlie Chaplin in the French trenches. He spoke of General Haig as "Haigy;" of General Byng as "Bing Bang;" and his French was a circus all by itself. According to his account, he had been a prime favorite with all the high dignitaries of the war, and he attributed this to the fact that he was not afraid of them. In short, it was the same old flippant, boastful, R-rolling Archibald Archer who had won many a laugh from sober Tom Slade. And here he was again as large as life—larger, in fact.

It was a long time before they got down to the subject of the engine, but when they did they discussed it for the greater part of the night, for, of course, they bunked together.

"First I thought it was the triphammer," said Archer; "then I thought it was the mixing valve; then I thought it was bronchitis on account of the noise it made, and after that I decided it was German measles. Blamed if I know what's the matter with it. It's got the pip, I guess. I was going to file a nick in the make-and-break business but they're too foxy to give me a file. Now I wish I had a hammer and I'd knock the whole blamed business to smithereens." 175

"Have a heart," laughed Tom. "And keep still, I want to go asleep. We'll look at it in the morning."

"Did I tell you how we made a hand grenade full of old tomatoes near Rheims?"

"No, but I want to go to sleep now," said Tom.

"It landed plunk on a German officer's bun; Charlie Waite saw it from his plane."

"Good night," laughed Tom.

CHAPTER XXVI

HE HAS AN IDEA WHICH SUGGESTS ANOTHER

In the morning, after grub line-up, they lost no time in going to the pump. Here, at least, was something to occupy Tom's mind and afford Archer fresh material for banter.

"D'I tell you how I was kiddin' the niggerr we had in the life boat—when it was leakin'?"

"No," said Tom, ready for anything.

"Told him to bore another hole so the waterr could get out again. Did I tell you 'bout——"

"Here we are, let's take a look at the engine," said Tom.

It was one of those one-cylinder kickers, about two horse power, and had an independent disposition.

"Know what I think would be the best thing for it?" said the chief engineer. "Dynamite. D'I tell you 'bout the sharrk eatin' a bomb?"

"Is there any gas in the tank?" said Tom.

"Sure is, but I dunno what kind it is. Mebbe it's poison gas, for all I know. There was a fellow in Ireland when we——" 177

Tom ignored him, and making a guess adjustment of the mixing valve, opened the gas and threw the wheel over. "No batteries—magneto, huh?"

"Yes, but it don't magnete. I'd ruther have a couple o' batteries that would *bat*."

A few crankings and the little engine started, missing frightfully.

"She'll stop in a minute," said Archer, and so she did. "We've all taken a crack at the carbureter and the timer," he added, "but nothin' doin'. It's cussedness, *I* say."

Tom started it again, listening as it missed, went faster, slowed down, stopped. It was getting gas and getting air and the bearings did not bind. He tried it again. It ran lamely and stopped, but started all right again whenever he cranked it, provided he waited a minute or two between each trial.

"Can you beat that?" said Archer.

"There's water getting into the cylinder," Tom said.

"Cylinder's lucky. *We* poor guys got to go way down the other end of the earth to get water." 178

"Maybe the water in the water jacket froze last winter and cracked the cylinder wall and the crack didn't let any through at first, most likely. You can't get your explosions right if there's water. That's why it starts first off and keeps going till the water works through. 'Tisn't much of a crack, I guess. A file wouldn't be any more use than a teaspoon."

"A *what?* Believe *me*, I wouldn't know a teaspoon if I saw one," said Archer.

"If we had a wrench to get the cylinder head off," said Tom, "I could show you."

"It's the end of that engine," said Archer.

"Depends on how bad it is. If it's only a little crack sometimes you can fix it with a chemical—sal ammoniac. It kind of—*corrodes*, I think they call it—right where the crack is and it'll work all right for quite a while. We had a cracked cylinder on our scout boat one time."

Archer was generously pleased at Tom's sagacity and showed no professional jealousy. Before that day was over every prisoner in the camp knew that the rusty, dilapidated engine which languished near the pump was good for another season of usefulness. If Archer was not a good engineer he was at least a good promoter, and he started a grand drive for a rejuvenated pump. The R's rolled out of his busy mouth as the water had not flowed from the pump in many a day. 179

A petition a yard long was passed about and everybody signed it with lukewarm interest. It besought General von Griffenhaus either to have the cylinder head of the engine removed or a wrench loaned to Tom Slade for that purpose.

The prisoners did not lose any sleep over this enterprise, for both Tom and Archer were young and Archer at least was regarded as an irresponsible soul, whose mission on earth was to cause trifling annoyance and much amusement. Tom, sober, silent and new among them, was an unknown quantity.

"Doncher care," said Archer. "Robert Fulton had a lot o' trouble and nobuddy b'lieved him, and all that."

Tom was ready to stand upon his pronouncement of a cracked water jacket and, that established, he believed a little bottle of sal ammoniac would be easy to procure. When the pump was running again they would all be glad to use it and meanwhile they might laugh and call him the "consulting engineer" if they wanted to. 180

At last Archer, having boosted this laggard campaign with amazing energy, elected himself the one to present the imposing petition to General von Griffenhaus, because, as he said, he was never rattled in the presence of greatness, which was quite true. He caught the general on inspection tour and prayed for a monkey wrench with the humility but determination of the old barons before King John.

When he returned to their box-stall abode he triumphantly announced that "Old Griff" had surrendered with the one portentous sentence, "Ach! I vill see about this!" He found Tom sitting back against the board partition, arms about his drawn-up knees, sober and thoughtful.

"Ain't gettin' cold feet, are you?" Archer asked.

Tom looked at him, but did not speak.

"You ain't afraid there's something else the matter with the engine, after all, are you?" Archer asked, anxiously. "I don't want this whole bunch guyin' me—after the petition, and all."

"It's the way I said," said Tom dully.

"Not sore 'cause they've been kiddin' us, are you? You can't blame 'em fer that; they've got nothin' else to do. Look at Columbus, how they guyed him—and all. But they were thankful afterward all right, all right—those greasy Spaniards. D'I tell you 'bout the way I—"
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"I don't mind their kiddin'," Tom interrupted; "I had a lot of that on the ship. And I know they'll be glad when the pump's running. I was thinkin' about something else. Come on, let's go out and hike." He always called those little restricted walks about the enclosure, hiking. He could not forget the good scout word.

When they had walked for some little way Tom looked about to see if there was anyone near. The safest place for secrets and confidences is out in the open. He hesitated, made a couple of false starts, then began:

"There's somethin' I've always thought about ever since I came here. I don't know if you've ever thought about it—I know you like adventures, but you're kind of—"
He meant irresponsible and rattle-brained, but he did not want to say so. "And I wouldn't want to see you get in any □

trouble on account of me. You're different from me. You see, for a special reason I got to go and fight. Whatever you do, will you promise not to say anything to anybody?"

Archer, somewhat bewildered, promised.

"I'm going to get away," said Tom simply.

"You must be crazy," Archer said, staring at him in astonishment. "How are you going to do it? Didn't I tell you, you couldn't even get a file?"

Tom went on seriously.

"I'd like to have you go with me only I don't know if you'd want to take a chance the same as I would."

"Sure, I'd take a chance, but——"

"*You don't have to go and I do,*" Tom interrupted. "That's what I mean. If the war should end and I didn't fight, I'd be a kind of a—— I mean I got to fight for two people. I *got* to. So it ain't a question of whether I take a chance or not. And it ain't a question of whether it's fair to try and escape. 'Cause I got that all settled."

Archer said nothing, but looked at Tom just as he had first looked at him a year ago, and tried to dope him out. For a few paces they walked in silence.

"If you take a chance, I take a chance with you," Archer said.

"If anybody should discover us and call for us to halt, I'm not going to halt," said Tom.

"Believe *me*, I'll sprint," said Archer, "but that part's a cinch anyway——"

"It ain't a cinch," said Tom, "but I got to do it. I got a little button a French soldier gave me that'll help me get through Alsace. His people live there—in Leture—I mean Dundgardt."

"That's only six miles down," said Archer.

"That's so much the better," said Tom; "if I can once get that far——"

"Don't say *I*—say *we*."

"We'll be all right," finished Tom.

"But what's the use talking about it, when we got that tangle of wire out there in front of us all the way round?"

"You know where it runs through the bushes at the other end?" said Tom.

"Yes, and if you made a sound down there you'd be heard! Besides, where you goin' to get the file?"

"I'm hoping to have that to-morrow."

"You got your work cut out for you, gettin' it."

"If that stuff will corrode a cylinder wall it'll corrode wire," said Tom, after a few moments' silence. "It might take a few days, but after that you could break the wire with your fingers. It wouldn't make any noise. That ain't what I wanted to ask you about—'cause I know about that. The thing is, are you with me? You got to judge for yourself, 'cause it's risky."

Archer hit him a rap on the shoulder, then put his arm in friendly fashion about his neck.

"Slady, I'm with you strong as mustarrd," said he; "did I tell you 'bout the feller I met in France that escaped from Siberia——"

"And keep your mouth shut," said Tom. "First we got to fix the engine."

CHAPTER XXVII

HE PLANS A DESPERATE GAME AND DOES A GOOD JOB

Archer was thoroughly game, Tom knew that, but he did not want to involve him in his own peril unless his friend fully realized what it meant. With himself, as he had said, it was different. But he might have saved himself any worry about his friend. Archer was not only game; he was delighted.

Needless to say, they slept little that night. In the morning they were given a wrench with which they removed the cylinder head amid the gibes of a group of spectators. And there, sure enough, after the piston was disconnected and removed, they found a little, thin crack in the inner cylinder wall.

"Feel o' that," said Archer, triumphantly rubbing his finger nail across it, for it was more easily felt than seen, "and then go away back and sit down, the whole bunch of you. We got a *regular* chief engineer here now," he added generously, "and you better treat him decent while he's here."

Tom shuddered for fear he would say too much.

"He might get exchanged any time," said Archer.

"*Some* boys," remarked one of the prisoners.

"But findin's ain't fixin's," said a British soldier.

"Oh, ain't they though!" said Archer. "We'll have it fixed in— How long'll it take to fix it, Slady?"

"Maybe a couple of days," said Tom.

"Mybe a couple o' weeks," said the Britisher.

"Mybe it won't, yer jolly good bloomin' ole London fag, you!" mimicked Archer. "It's as good as fixed already."

"Better knock wood, Archie."

"I'll knock something thickerr'n wood if you don't get out o' the way!" said Archer.

One by one they strolled away laughing.

"I'll give that bunch one parting shot, all right!" said Archer.

"Shh!" said Tom, "look out what you're saying."

Whether it was because the grim authorities who presided over this unfortunate community believed that the renewed activity of the pump would be advantageous to themselves, or whether it was just out of the goodness of their hearts that they supplied the small quantity of sal ammoniac, it would be difficult to say, but in the afternoon a small bottle was forthcoming with the label of Herman Schlossen-something-or-other, chemist, of the neighboring town.

The boys smeared some of it on the crack and then poured some into a little vial which had contained toothache drops.

"Things are so bad in Gerrmany they have to use sal ammoniac for files," said Archer. "If the warr keeps up much longer the poor people'll be usin' witch hazel for screw drivers."

"Shhh!" said Tom. It was about all he ever said now.

After dark, with fast beating hearts, they went down to the place which Tom had selected for their operations. It was near the extreme end of the grounds, at a place where the wire ran through some thick shrubbery. Even a file might have been used here, if a file had been procurable, for one might work fully concealed though always in danger of the sentry's hearing the sound. But no file could ever get inside of that camp. They were not even obtainable in the stores of the neighboring town, except upon government order and every letter and package that came to the camp was scrutinized with German thoroughness. Since the recent army reorganization in which the number of sentries at camps all through the Empire had been reduced, and since the discontinuance of electrified wiring at this particular camp, the little file was watched for with greater suspicion than ever before, so that the prisoners had regarded it as a joke when Archer expressed the wish for one. The very thought of a file on the premises was preposterous. And what other way was there to get out?

It was necessary, however, to watch for the sentry outside and here was where the team work came in. Archer spotted the gleam of his rifle at some distance up near the provision gate, and he scurried in that direction to hold him with his usual engaging banter, for even glowering "Fritzie" was not altogether proof against young Archer's wiles and his extraordinary German.

Meanwhile, Tom, first looking in every direction, slipped under the bushes and felt carefully of the wiring. It was not simple flat fencing ranged in orderly strands, but somewhat like the entanglements before the trenches. As best he could, in the dim light, he selected seven places where, if the wiring were parted, he believed it would be possible to get through. The seven points involved four wires. He had to use his brain and calculate, as one does when seeking for the "combination" of a knotted rope, and his old scout habit of studying jungle bush before parting it when on scout hikes, served him in good stead here. He was nothing if not methodical, and neither the danger nor his high hopes interfered with his plodding thoroughness.

Having selected the places, he poured a little of the liquid on the wiring at each spot and hid the bottle in the bushes. Then he rejoined Archer, the first step taken in their risky program.

"How'll I know the places if I go there?" Archer inquired.

"You won't go there," said Tom. "I'll be the one to do that."

"I'm the entertainment committee, hey?"

There was no sleep that night either—nothing but silent thoughtfulness and high expectation and dreadful suspense; for, notwithstanding Archer's loquacity, Tom refused positively to talk in their box stall for fear some one outside might hear.

In the morning they gave the crack in the cylinder another dose (but oh, how prosy and unimportant seemed this business now), and at evening they screwed down the cylinder head, and with a gibing audience about them, wrestled with the mixing valve, slammed the timer this

way and that, until the dilapidated old engine began to go—and kept on going.

“There you are,” said Archer blithely, as if the glory were all his. “Who’re the public benefactors now? Every time you get a drink at that pump you’ll think of Slady and me. Hey, Slady?”

The engine kept on going until they stopped it. And the Philistines put aside their unholy mirth and did not stint their praise and gratitude.

“Two plaguy clever American chaps,” said a ragged British wireless operator.

“Slade and Archer, Consulting Engineers,” said Archer.

It was a great triumph—one of the greatest of the world war, and the only reason that mankind has not heard more about it is probably because of the grudging German censor.

“I’m glad it went,” said Archer confidentially. “I was shaking in my shoes.”

“There wasn’t any reason to shake,” said Tom. “I knew it would go.”

“Same as we will.”

“Hush,” said Tom.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

HE DISAPPEARS—FOR THE TIME BEING

Tom was too sensible to make his trip to the bushes each night. For one thing he wanted to give the mildly corrosive process a chance to weaken the wires. It was a case for small doses. Also he could not afford to attract attention. His hardest job was keeping Archer patient and quiet.

When he did manage a second trip he was gratified to see that the spots he had “treated” were white and salty, like the bar in a battery. He gave them another dose and crawled out cautiously.

Archer, in his excitement, had supposed the whole thing would be a matter of a day or two and his impatience greatly disturbed Tom.

“Don’t you see, if I try to break the wires before they’re ready, we’ll be worse off than ever?” he said. “Leave it to me.”

At last there came a dark night when Tom announced in a whisper that he had used the last of the sal ammoniac.

“The wires are all white,” he said, “and you can scrape into them with your finger-nails. It’s good and dark to-night. If you want to back out you can. I won’t be sore about it. Only tell me again about the road to Dundgardt.”

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“Didn’t I tell you I was with you strong as mustarrd? I don’t want to back out.”

A while after dark Tom went down to the bushes. It was understood that Archer should follow him, timing his coming according to the sentry’s rounds. Meanwhile Tom, not without some misgivings, bent the thick wire in one of the weakened spots and it broke. He paused and listened. Then he broke another strand, trembling lest even the breaking might cause a slight sound. The life had been eaten out of the wires and they parted easily.

By the time Archer arrived he had opened a way through the thick entanglement large enough to crawl through. His nerves were on edge as he wriggled far enough through to peer about in the dark outside.

“Anyway, your head has escaped,” said Archer.

“Shh,” whispered Tom.

Far down the side of the long fence he could see a little glint bobbing in the darkness.

“Shh,” he whispered. “I don’t know which way he’s going. Keep your feet still.”

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For a few seconds more he waited, his heart in his mouth and every nerve tense.

The tiny bobbing glint disappeared.

“Is he there?” Archer whispered.

“Shh! No, he’s gone around the end.”

“He won’t go all the way round; he’ll turn back when he gets to the gate. Go on, make a break —”

“Shh!” said Tom, straining his eyes in all directions.

For one moment of awful suspense he waited, his thumping heart almost choking him. Then he moved silently out into the night, and paused again, holding a deterring hand up to keep his companion back until he knew the way was clear.

Then he moved his hand.

"Come on," he whispered, his whole frame trembling with suspense. "Let's get away from the fence. Don't speak."

There was something of the old stalking and trailing stealth about his movements now as he hurried across the field adjacent to the camp. "Follow me," he whispered, "and do just what I do. What's that you've got in your hand?"

"Nothin'. Where you goin'?' The road ain't over there."

"Shhh!"

Silently Tom stole across the field.

"You're goin' out of your way," whispered Archer again.

"I don't want the road, I only want to know where it is," Tom answered; "I know what I'm doing."

He had never dreamed that his tracking and trailing lore would one day serve him in far-off Germany and help him in so desperate a flight. Never before had he such need of all his wit—and such an incentive.

Archer followed silently. Presently Tom paused and listened.

"Anybody comin'?"

"No, I was listenin' for—it's down there."

He turned suddenly and grabbing Archer around the waist, lifted him off his feet and ran swiftly down a little slope and into the brook which in its meanderings crossed an end of the prison grounds. Then he let Archer down.

"They'll never track us here," he panted, and felt for his precious button to make sure that Archer's body had not pulled it off. "They'll think only one came this way, maybe, and they won't know which way to go—Shh!"

Archer held his breath. There was no sound except that of the water rippling at their feet.

"Is that upstream?" Tom asked. "It ought to be shallow all the way. Keep in the water."

"Step on that shore and you're in Alsace," said Archer.

"Don't step on it," said Tom. "Shores are tell-tales. Which is the hill?"

"That one with the windmill on it."

"That black thing?"

"The road runs around that," said Archer, "the other side."

"We'll follow the road," said Tom, "but we'll keep in the brook till we get about a couple of hundred feet from the road. Come on."

"You heading for Dundgardt?" Archer whispered.

"Don't talk so loud. Yes—I got to find some people there named Leture—I can't pronounce it just right. That's nothin' but a tree——"

"I thought it was a man," said Archer.

"We ought to be there in an hour," and again Tom felt for his precious button. "If they'll keep us till to-morrow night we can get a good start for the Swiss border; I—I got some—some good ideas."

"For traveling?"

"Yes—at night. They'll do—anything after I tell 'em about Frenchy. Quiet. Bend your toes over the pebbles like I do."

But did they ever reach Dundgardt—once Leteur? Did they make their way through fair Alsace, under the shadow of the Blue Alsatian Mountains, to the Swiss border? Did Tom's "good ideas" pan out? Was the scout of the Acorn and the Indian head, to triumph still in the solitude of the Black Forest, even as he had triumphed in the rugged Catskills roundabout his beloved Temple Camp?

Was he indeed permitted to carry out his determination to fight for two?

Ah, that is another story.

But one little hint may be given now, which perhaps throws some light upon his future history. Some months after this momentous night Mrs. Silas Archer, whose husband had a farm with a big apple orchard in the vicinity of Temple Camp, received a small box containing a little piece of junk and a letter in a sprawling hand. And this is what the letter said:

DEAR OLD MUDGIE:

"Wish I was home to get in the fall russets. They don't have any decent apples over here at all. Stand this piece of wire on the whatnot in the sitting room and show it to

the minister when he comes. It's part of a German barbed wire fence. I kept it for a souvenir when I escaped from Slops prison. You won't find that name on the map, but nobody can pronounce the real name. You don't say it—you have to sneeze it. I had a bully time in the prison camp and met a feller that used to go to Temple Camp. We escaped together.

"Send your letters to the War Department for we're with Pershing's boys now and they'll be forwarded. Can't tell you much on account of the censor. But don't worry, I'll be home for next Christmas. Give my love to dad. And don't use all the sour apples when you're making cider.

"Down with the Kaiser! Lots of love.

"ARCHIE."

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