

**A
UNITED STATES
MIDSHIPMAN
AFLOAT**

by
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Table of Contents

CHAPTER I ENEMY OR FRIEND
CHAPTER II UNDER ARREST
CHAPTER III THE TRACK MEET
CHAPTER IV THE FACE IN THE LOCKET
CHAPTER V HURRIED ORDERS
CHAPTER VI SECRET SERVICE
CHAPTER VII AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY
CHAPTER VIII PRISONERS
CHAPTER IX A TERRIBLE PREDICAMENT
CHAPTER X THE SCENE CHANGES
CHAPTER XI A NAVAL ENGAGEMENT
CHAPTER XII CAPTAIN GARCIA'S STRATEGY
CHAPTER XIII LAZAR'S CUNNING
CHAPTER XIV THE HOUSE ON LA MESA
CHAPTER XV THE DEFENSE
CHAPTER XVI THE ASSAULT
CHAPTER XVII THE ACCUSATION
CHAPTER XVIII AN IMPORTANT WITNESS
CHAPTER XIX THE COURT MARTIAL
CHAPTER XX THE SEARCH
CHAPTER XXI CONCLUSION



***T**HE BOAT HEADED UP
TO THE BUOY*

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CHAPTER I

ENEMY OR FRIEND

THE Navy-Yard at Brooklyn buzzed with its daily turmoil of labor. It was a bright June morning, and the high chimneys of the numerous shops and foundries belched forth flame and smoke. Thousands of begrimed workmen toiled incessantly, hammering, bending and riveting masses of metal, fashioning them into shape to be carried by the steam cranes to be blended into the hulls of waiting battle-ships.

Through this scene of activity two boys walked briskly. Their clothing was new and in the latest style. It clung to their well set up figures, betraying the hand of the military tailor. Each carried a bright leather suitcase to the top of which a cased sword was strapped.

Emerging from the tangle of buildings, the youths glanced about, and an exclamation of pleasure escaped them as a view of their nation's sea power met their eyes: ten huge battle-ships resplendent in their glassy white and contrasting buff paint lay tied up, filling every foot of the dock frontage.

"Which is ours, Phil?" asked one of the youths, stopping and setting his case down with a sigh of relief.

Philip Perry, as he slowly shifted his bag to his other hand, glanced down the long line of stately defenders.

“There she is, Syd,” he finally replied, pointing his free hand in the direction of one moored at the foot of the street. “The one with three smoke-stacks and eight turrets. What a beauty she is!”

Philip Perry and Sydney Monroe were the names stenciled in bold type on the new traveling bags, and underneath the names in smaller capitals were the letters: U. S. N.

Any one familiar with the navy could have told by a glance that they were midshipmen, just graduated from the Naval Academy at Annapolis and in the distribution of their class to the many ships of the navy, these two had received orders and were on their way to report for duty on board one of the powerful battle-ships lying directly before them.

The four years’ course of study at Annapolis had filled their minds with a store of wisdom, and the rigorous outdoor drills had given to their bodies suppleness and strength. They were a sample of the finished output of the Naval National Academy.

The picturesque life on the ocean would give them ample opportunity to benefit themselves and put to good use their stored-up knowledge. They were on the threshold of a new era, in which their character and professional worth would be valued by the success achieved.

As they walked in silence toward their future home, their minds dwelt on the vast intricacies of this creation of steel, but these thoughts were quickly forgotten as they stepped over the side of the U. S. S. “Connecticut” and reported their arrival to the officer of the deck.

They were wrapped in wonder at the work of getting a battleship ready for sea. Ammunition and stores were being taken on board from huge cargo barges with lightning rapidity by hundreds of strong bronzed sailormen. All was activity. The dockyard had completed its work on the steel hull and all hands seemed eager to breathe once more the pure air of the sea.

Five minutes later they were grasping the welcoming hands of their future messmates—those midshipmen who had been graduated from Annapolis one short year ago, yet had mastered the mystery of many things which to the newcomers were as an unopened book.

“The captain will see you both as soon as you are ready, sir,” the marine orderly reported to Phil.

Donning their bright new uniforms, which had been the sole contents of their valises, and buckling on their swords, they were ushered into the captain’s spacious quarters.

They found him brusque and businesslike. A hand to each in turn, with a firm manly pressure:

“Glad to have you with us;” then to the attentive orderly:

“Show these gentlemen to the executive officer,” and the ordeal was over.

Phil and Sydney had no time for conversation during the next twenty minutes, while they found themselves hurried through the rounds of official formality and then sent to their quarters to unpack and be ready for immediate duty.

“They gave me no choice of a roommate, did they, Syd?” said Phil, ten minutes later, as he dived into his trunk and commenced to toss his belongings on to his bunk to have them more handy to stow into the numerous small receptacles located about the narrow room which he and Sydney had been ordered to occupy.

“No, they didn’t,” answered Sydney, with a grin, “but we have stood each other for four years; I guess we can do it for two more.”

The last of their belongings was scarcely stowed when a servant announced that the midday meal was ready in the mess room.

They entered and were greeted by more of their former schoolmates. Phil found his seat next to Marshall, an old friend of Annapolis days, who was anxious to give him all the tips possible on what he could expect in his daily life on a battleship. Phil listened intently while he breathlessly recited all the gems of wisdom that came into his head:

“You are in Lazar’s division. It’s a crackerjack, too; you’ve got your work cut out for you. He’s a hustler. He isn’t much liked by the middies because he ‘horses’ us so much, but the captain swears by him. Beaty—you remember old ‘Pike’?—he had your job, but I guess Lazar was too many for him. We sent him to the hospital with nerves a week ago. Some of the fellows saw him yesterday, doing the gentleman act there, looking as pink and fresh as a girl. Hope you will manage all right.”

Phil tried to look cheerful, but Marshall's quick eye detected something wrong.

"Do you know Lazar? of course you were at the Academy with him, but——"

He stopped and glanced hurriedly into Phil's face, then dropped his voice:

"Why, it was you that fought him. How unfortunate!" Then musingly, "He is not the man to forget."

"I can't believe that he would allow a boy's quarrel—remember, that was nearly four years ago—to influence his feelings for me now," answered Phil, gaining but scant comfort from his own words.

He remembered how bitter Lazar had been in his relations to him the few months before the older man graduated and left him in peace. He was but a plebe then. Well, the future would tell.

As soon as the short meal was over Phil went to his room and changed his uniform, donning the oldest he owned, but the bright lace and lustrous braid was in great contrast to the uniforms of those officers and midshipmen who had received their baptism of salt spray, in the year at sea on board the battle-ship, cruising and drilling until their ship was considered to be in efficient condition to join the fleet and compete in all the drills and games that go to make up the very full itinerary of the sailor's life afloat.

Sydney came in full of enthusiasm, having seen his divisional officer and obtained an idea of what he had to do.

“I have a fine job,” he cried, as he threw his coat on his bunk and started to get out his older clothes. “Four seven-inch guns, all my own; Lieutenant Brand says if I don’t make all hits at target practice, he won’t give me a two-five——”

Then, stopping and catching sight of his chum’s face in the mirror back of the washstand:

“Whatever is wrong, Phil?” he exclaimed anxiously. “You look as glum as an oyster.”

Phil hesitated. Should he confide in his roommate of Annapolis days? Or should he fight it out alone? He felt it was a situation needing every ounce of his manhood and tact. What harm could be done by asking Syd’s friendly advice?

“I have great misgivings, Syd,” he commenced cautiously. “I was prepared for almost anything, but Lazar for my divisional officer had never occurred to me. Do you blame me for looking and feeling glum?”

Sydney’s joyous face became serious in an instant.

“That’s certainly hard luck. Why couldn’t I have been assigned to his division instead of you?” exclaimed he, generously. “I never liked him, but he doesn’t know me from an old shoe, and he has a good reason to know you.” Then, reminiscently, “I can remember his face after your fight with him as plainly as if it were yesterday; the referee called it a draw, but every one knew that you had the better of the fight. He was in the

hospital for a week until his face healed up, while you were in ranks at the next formation, with no more marks than I give myself daily shaving.”

“Do you believe he has forgotten, or at least forgiven?” asked Phil.

“You or I would have long ago,” replied Sydney thoughtfully, “but Lazar always seemed so vindictive to me; maybe his Latin blood makes him so. Jules Lazar is not an appropriate name for a forgiving nature; it sounds very belligerent to me.”

“You certainly are comforting,” smiled Phil, as he started to leave the room to report to his divisional officer and find out for himself what the outward signs of friendship or enmity might tell.

With many misgivings he went up the companion ladder leading to the quarter-deck. As his foot touched the clean white deck, he raised his hand to his cap in salute to the flag.

Standing near the great twelve-inch turret, managing the labor of filling the spacious storerooms and magazines, was Lazar, the spy-glass in his gloved hand identifying him as the officer of the deck, in charge of the progress of work on the big fighter.

Phil stepped smartly up to him and saluted.

Lazar turned slowly toward him. His brow contracted imperceptibly as he returned the salute of the midshipman.

“Mr. Perry reports to you, sir, as junior officer of the fourth division,” Phil said in the official tone he had been taught to use

at Annapolis. His eyes unwaveringly sought the restless energetic face of his divisional officer.

Would Lazar give him his hand? Phil was ready to believe that his boyish quarrel and fight were forgiven. He waited what seemed a long time while officer and midshipman each looked straight into the eyes of the other. Neither wavered, and each seemed to wish to sweep aside the other's mask and read the thoughts behind the cold impassive exterior.

"Aye, aye, Mr. Perry," finally replied Lazar. "Get a correct list of the division, and a copy of our station bills. You will find them posted in the division bulletin-board." Then glancing at the bright clean uniform of the youth before him, "You had better put on your oldest clothes, then come up here, and I shall give you something to occupy you. You stand watch with me, you know?"

Phil held his hand at his side ready to offer it at the first intimation that it would be accepted by the older man, but Lazar did not show by voice or sign that he wished for anything more than purely official relations with the midshipman.

"I am ready now for duty, sir," answered Phil in a voice that, strive as he could to hide it, betrayed a tone of disappointment, tinged with indignation. Glancing down at his converted Annapolis uniform, "I have no older ones," he confessed. "I might as well break this in, sir."

"Very good; you will take charge of the work on the forecastle." Glancing about and motioning a smart-looking petty officer to advance, "O'Neil, here, is in our division." Then addressing the

attentive coxswain, "You are excused from other work and will lend Mr. Perry a hand. He is our new midshipman, and is about to direct the work on the forecastle." Then again turning to Phil and dropping his voice: "That's a splendid man, he knows the name of every man on board. You will find him a willing subordinate."

Phil saluted stiffly in Annapolis fashion, while O'Neil jerked his hand toward his cap and in a businesslike voice announced his readiness by a hearty, "Aye, aye, sir."

O'Neil led the way through the battery deck, the men engaged in work there standing aside in respectful attention to allow the new arrival to pass.

Phil's mind wavered between the decision that Lazar would give him a fair showing, and the contrary one that he would make his life as unpleasant as possible; and from the accounts he had heard of Beaty, the midshipman in the hospital with "too much Lazar," as one of the midshipmen had diagnosed his complaint, he knew his new divisional officer, by voice and action, could make the life of one he disliked so unhappy that a cot in the hospital might be preferable.

He found his work on the forecastle just what he needed to keep his mind off his troubles, and in the language of O'Neil: "he made good," as he encouraged, directed and helped the men handle the bulky packages.

"That's a fine young gentleman," O'Neil confided to a brother petty officer, as he watched Phil put his shoulder against a twelve-inch shell and guide it clear of an iron hatch top. "Do

you see the way the boys are working? As if they were to get shore leave at the end of this job. It's a pity to see him spoil them bright new clothes, but when I tried to help him he told me he wanted exercise."

Phil had found his thoughts very unpleasant companions as he had watched the work progress, and now doing the manual labor of a leading man, he had forgotten, for the time at least, the sombre reflections that had, like spectres, come into his mind.

Would this man attempt to ruin him? And could he do so if he so wished?

He considered going to the captain and asking to be assigned to another division, stating his reasons, but he saw immediately how childish it would seem to that busy officer. A boys' quarrel, long ago forgotten, he would call it.

Phil wished it were so.

CHAPTER II

UNDER ARREST

PHIL awakened the next morning at an early hour. Hurriedly dressing, he went on deck.

His sleep had refreshed him and his mind was less ready to dwell on the dark side of his life on board ship. He believed when he and Lazar had become better acquainted the old grudge would be overshadowed in the intimacy of the life on the ocean.

With muster-roll and station bills neatly copied in his notebooks, he was impatient for the bugle to sound the call to "quarters," when he would meet his division for the first time.

He watched with interest the scene about him. Petty officers and men were busily engaged putting the finishing touches to the clean deck and bright brass work of the vessel. Others were using a clothes-brush carefully on their neatly fitting blue uniforms or giving a parting rub to their broad shoes. The gunners' mates guarded their huge guns jealously, occasionally rubbing an imaginary spot of rust or dirt.

While the bugle call was being sounded on each of the many decks, he was an interested spectator of the magic effect of the clear notes. Confusion seemed to melt away into the most perfect order as men took their places in ranks abreast the guns they served.

Lazar stood facing his division,—fifty well set up, youthful men. Back of him were the turret guns for which his division formed the crews. Across the deck the marine guard was paraded, the military bearing of the soldier-sailors contrasting with the easy pose of the picturesque sailormen about them.

The executive officer was at his station across the deck from Lazar.

Such is the formation for quarters on board a war-ship of the navy. Each divisional officer musters his men, inspecting carefully, in order that the standard of neatness may be maintained. He then reports the result to the executive officer, receives his orders for drill and returns to his station.

Upon the completion of muster the captain will be informed of the number of absentees and then this report is signaled to the flag-ship.

Upon such a scene Phil gazed for the first time as an officer and thrilled to the impressive ceremony. He stood at “attention” on the right of the division.

Lazar, muster-book in hand, glanced along the double line of men until his eyes rested on his midshipman. The precision in the attitude of his junior caught his eye. His glance wavered and the slightest of sneers appeared on his face. For the fraction of a second he seemed to hesitate, then words that brought the blush of shame and anger to the face of the unsuspecting boy struck harshly upon his ears:

“Mr. Perry, I gave you the credit for knowing that at quarters all officers must wear sword and gloves. Go below, sir, and get yourself in proper uniform.”

Phil stood motionless. He was stunned for the moment, not so much by the words as by the scorn in his voice.

Almost overcome with confusion and embarrassment, he turned away and hastily descended the ladder to the deck below.

Once more in his room he found his sword and gloves where he had placed them but ten minutes before the call to quarters. Then had come a call to the executive officer, and once on deck all save the scene about him was driven from his mind. His own thoughtlessness alone could be blamed, but the sneer in Lazar’s voice rankled.

When he again reached the deck, the men had broken ranks and the sharp pipe of the whistles of the boatswain and his mates filled the air, followed in sonorous tones and in perfect chorus:

“All hands unmoor ship.”

The stout hemp lines and chains securing the battle-ship to the dock were cast off, and like writhing serpents, hauled aboard by the lusty crew. The two great propellers churned the muddy water and the war-ship glided out into the crowded waters of the East River.

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