

# THE ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET

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"Holler, Ye Harps! I Don't Wonder!"

**B**ILL MARLIN, master gunner and able seaman, croaked melodiously at his domestic duties; but his song was solely one of defiance to his enemy, the First Lieutenant of U. S. S. Chicago, who had condemned him to hard labor, in collaboration with a scrubbing brush, a bucket of suds, and a bar of yellow soap, scouring the perfectly immaculate steel floor of the Captain's cabin; and he was doing it with a great deal of unnecessary disturbance.

It was not the first time, by long odds, that Gunner Marlin had tasted discipline for the good of the service; but it so happened that while he was doing present penance the cruiser steamed into the tropical harbor, dropped anchor, and announced her presence off the Central American town with the thr-rump of a six-pounder. The bang of the saluting gun, the bo's'n's pipe, and the joyous clamor of Jackies on the gun deck made Marlin rise scowling to his cramped knees.

"Holler, ye harps!" he growled. "I don't wonder, w'en the whole bunch o' monkeys is goin' off the ark, an' me sticked up aboard comb'n the Captain's cat an' doin' chores like a bloomin' chambermaid w'at don't know a solar plexus from a sassidge!"

A rusty looking battleship, squatting like a horned toad on the bright blue waters of the harbor, slammed off tardy answer to the Chicago's salute. A flotilla of shore boats, scenting dollars, made for the anchored American; while, as a last straw, on the waterfront a perfect rainbow of feminine frippery waved a welcome to the land hungry Jackies.

The exasperated Marlin balanced the scrubbing brush in his brawny hand, with a look of vengeful longing at the First Lieutenant, who lined the rail with the other officers, spick and span in their shore going uniforms.

"If I had my choice, jest for ten consecutive seconds," he said yearningly, "I'd swarm aboard that old Central Ameriky war-junk, an' I'd line up her old turret gun on that there First Lieuten'nt, an' I'd blow 'is brass trimmings clean through his map. I would, if I took the count d'rec'ly afterwards!"

**T**HE voice of authority broke in on his Homeric thoughts of vengeance. "You Bill Marlin! You better quit sojerin', me man, or I'll report you to the First Lieuten'nt! You 'ear?"

It was a bad time for the cabin steward to disturb a fallen warrior's meditations. Marlin glanced at the deck and smiled ingratiatingly. The fatuous steward ventured nearer. The gunner's big claw shot out like a grappling iron and the trim little steward stood on his head in the bucket of soapy water.

"Ho! You'll repawt me to the First Luff, will you, my little man? Well, now, your face is nice and clean, an' that's uncommon. You run right along, me bucko, an' tell 'im—"

He stood appalled. The steward fled; but the form of the First Lieutenant blocked the cabin doorway. Behind him glared the commander himself, who had just come aboard, with a face like a thunder cloud.

"Clap that man in irons!" the commander snapped. "Or wait—" The officer drew the Lieutenant aside.

Through the open port Marlin heard the latter explaining, and he crawled to the window to listen. He was in for it, anyway.

"The fellow has reached the end of his rope!" the Lieutenant said. "I've tried everything short of anesthetics; but he can't or won't stop fighting. You saw for yourself, sir?"

"E calls that fightin'!" Marlin murmured. "M'm. Marlin? Yes, I recall the man." The commander suppressed a laugh. "Gun Captain? Piled up our target record in Hampton Roads?"

"And then rounded up the fleet picking fights on the other gunners!" the officer said bitterly. "When I disrated him, he cleaned up No. 1 turret. The man is a good gunner, all right," the officer grudgingly admitted; "but he's an anarchistic anachronism!"

Marlin doubled his fists doubtfully. "That brings us down to business," the commander

said seriously. "I have just seen our Consul. We're taking him aboard and sailing at once, under orders for Panama. There'll be no shore leave for the men this trip. President Castello and the revolutionists are about to come to grips ashore. The Consul says that nothing but a miracle can save the Government. You have just time to pay your respects at the palace before we sail."

"If Castello had only had sense enough to get a foreign navy man to whip the Oquinda, that dilapidated battleship of his, into shape," the Lieutenant grumbled, "he could command the coast and put down the revolution in jig time! By George, sir! If the revolutionists take her, I'd like to sprinkle the rascals with a machine gun!"

"Yes, it is hard on you, Mr. Selden. The President's daughter is certainly a charming young lady. Unfortunately, naval warfare does not contemplate the killing of men nowadays. One might ram and sink a ship. If I had my way, I'd slip a gunner aboard to help Castello out of the hole, a first class fighting man; like our friend Bill Marlin, for instance." The commander chuckled. "And, speaking of Marlin, you'd better transfer the rascal to the torpedo boat Ironton at the isthmus. A month or so in a steel oven will sweat the surplus fight out of him. Come down to the wardroom, Mr. Selden."

**O**H, yeould—incin'j'rary!" Marlin barely checked a shout of defiance. He had once seen service in a torpedo boat in northern waters. He had no desire to repeat the experiment under the blazing sun of the equator, with a chance of winding up his career with "stoker's madness" and a plunge over the side.

The last thought made him catch his breath. For with it was coupled a sudden inspiration. Why, his oppressors had just shown him a way to splice a new length on the "end of his rope," whereby he might climb to temporary safety at least. He sprang up, slapping his thigh.

"By Jinks! that's the ticket! The old man shanghai's the Consul w'ile the row's on, so they won't be nobody ashore to pinch me. I'll jine them re'volutionists. We'll shoot up the Lieuten'nt's paw in law an' make him produce, an' then I'll skip out. Oh, I ain't a prize gunner for nothing! I'll make ole Casteller sit up!"

On the cruiser's gun deck growls of disappointment had succeeded to gleeful larking as the news of sailing spread. A flotilla of bumboats crowded the ports. It all fell in with Marlin's plan to desert ship.

"They won't be no trouble slippin' ashore—not w'en the bunch knows who's going off," he grinned. "Only, if I'm goin' to run a bluff ashore, I want a swell front." He was alone in the cabin. He caught up the scrub bucket, emptied it over the side, and slipped into the Captain's stateroom. He came out, stuffing a bundle of clothes into the bucket.

"The Captain an' me's about the same ginerall style o' beauty, excep' I'm a better figger," he chuckled. "Mr. Nosy Steward'll get forty-eight days for swipin'

his new clo'es an' his fancy cutlery, and that's poetic justice!"

Walking a little stiffly with one leg, he slipped below. Shortly thereafter Gunner Marlin was noticed in close confab with a few bosom friends whose battle scarred countenances bore about the same general plan of decoration as his own. Then things happened rapidly.

"Old Glory" fluttered down with the sunset gun. The First Lieutenant came off shore with the American Consul and a boatload of consular baggage. In the confusion of getting under way a sound rose as of a bulky body falling into the water. It was capped by a shout of "Man overboard!" and a rush of frantic Jackies to the side.

"It's Marlinspike, sir! Ho! it's pore Bill Marlin!" a husky seaman wailed. "E fell off'n the bridge; leas'-wise, he tripped over the gun turret. Anyways, the blighter hit on 'is head," the husky man said desperately, "an' he sinked like a shot. We ain't never goin' to see our pore ole Bill Marlinspike no more!"

"The man's crazy. Get out!" the First Lieutenant shouted. "Drop a life buoy aft there and over with the first cutter! Lively, men! And stop that confounded howling!" the officer cried irritably. "The man'll turn up, like all bad pennies."

But Bill Marlin did not turn up, though the first cutter went over the side, and the second and the third cutters, also a dozen intimate friends of Gunner Marlin's, clothes and all. The tide was running strong to sea. One by one the boats picked up the swimmers, most of whom were headed for the shore and resisted capture. The ship's crew went about their duties, strong men shaken by sobs. On the bridge the First Lieutenant looked morosely at the commander, who answered his unspoken query with a grim smile.

"Of course a gunner's a gunner," the officer remarked; "but what strikes me, the men rather overdid the thing. One would think a real calamity had occurred."

"Yes, I noticed that," the commander said thoughtfully. "They are suspiciously hysterical."

So was the cabin steward, hunting high and low for the Captain's best shore-going uniform and gold hilted sword. So was the American Consul, rummaging his baggage for a favorite sole leather suitcase, inexplicably lost in the process of transshipment. Both of them continued searching long after the Chicago headed to sea.

But the First Lieutenant, wise in his generation, interviewed the wireless operator; for it occurred to him that President Castello's palace was equipped with wireless telegraph, after the fashion of Central American rulers, who sometimes find it convenient to call for help on the shortest possible notice.

**I**N the meantime, Gunner Marlin, tucked under the sun shield of a banana boat, down shore, with his feet on the thwart and a cutty pipe in his mouth, had witnessed with great interest the frantic efforts of his shipmates to rescue him.

When the Chicago's yellow funnels and "peach basket" mast dwindled away in the mist he knocked out his pipe with a sigh of contentment.

"The bunch sure treated me white, coverin' my retreat and dumping the Consul's luggage overboard for a bluff. Wat I am going to do now," he pursued with luxurious indolence, "I'm goin' to take to the bush, an' get me a vally. W'en the native surviver ain't fannin' off the skeeters, he's goin' to say to me, he says—"

"Los insurrectos, señor! The revolutionists!"

The boom of a gun and the exclamation of the negro boatman roused Marlin from his dream of bliss. The shot came from a little plateau where a squad of excited soldiers surrounded a field piece, which was elevated skyward, at an angle of forty-five degrees.

As he looked in amazement,



"I Am Chief of Police," the Sob-r Faced Man Said.