

TEN MUTINEERS.

By FRED E. JANETTE.

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(This Story Began Four Weeks Ago)

Brief Summary of Preceding Parts

While temporarily sheltered, secure from capture, in a Michigan woods timber shanty with five tramps, Lofty Rankin, the leader of three runaway academy cadets, had outlined to his two companions, McPherson and Ewen, a plan to seize the school-boat, the steam yacht Venture, just at the time when she would be fully provisioned and fitted for a summer cruise on the lakes, and McPherson had ventured back to the academy to induce seven other boys to join in the scheme.

The leader of the tramps, Ricketts by name, dropping overhead the whole of their talk, and was especially interested in the mention of the Venture, he having use for just such a vessel.

The boys had all wondered what the tramps had in view, but had never obtained a hint until the day McPherson went away. That night two of the tramps, the Detwiler brothers, were very busy over a paper which, when completed, Ricketts put in his coat pocket. After the man was asleep Lofty abstracted the paper from the pocket and found it was an outlined map of the nearby coast town, Petoskey, showing especially the location of the savings bank and of the yacht Venture off shore.

The boy succeeded in restoring the map to the sleeping man's pocket, and in the morning, he and Ewen discussed the matter. The mystery of what connection there could be between the tramps' contemplated robbery of the savings bank, and their own seizure of the yacht was a puzzle they couldn't solve. "All we know is guesswork," Ewen sagely observed, and they were compelled to await developments.

Meantime events were happening elsewhere that were destined to bring the affairs both of Ricketts and of the runaway boys to a climax.

CONTINUED FROM LAST SUNDAY

CHAPTER XIII.

COMMANDER BRANT SUBJECTS LOFTY'S AGENT TO AN INQUISITION.

THE map prepared by the Detwiler brothers for Mr. Ricketts had shown the Westbrook School-boat at anchor off the wharves of Petoskey. This had been the resting-place of the Venture since the day succeeding the escape and flight of Lofty Rankin and his two associates.

While the chase was kept up, the excitement in the little world which the academy composed remained unabated. When, to all outward appearances, the faculty gave up as vain the attempt to recapture the fugitives, the excitement simmered down to an occasional wordy discussion among "our fellows" as to the ultimate chances of the runaways.

"I don't believe the pros will make any further effort to catch them," said Robert Berkley, who had composed one of the group which had urged Ewen and McPherson to visit the guard-house that fateful night, and so had involved them in Lofty's escape. "I believe they've given up the hunt already. All the cadets and cadet officers have been called in; and two days have passed without any clue being obtained."

"I guess they've got away, sure enough," agreed Amicus Dowe, who had been another of Lofty's sympathizers.

This was the general opinion of "our fellows" and they plumed themselves on the distinction which, as the intimates of the fugitives, the escapee of the three boys gave them.

Judge, then, of their unalloyed regret to learn that one of the fugitives had been apprehended even while they were pronouncing upon the runaways' great good luck and good management in eluding pursuit.

The capture was effected by a party of marines from the school-boat. The hunt after the runaways had not been allowed to interfere with the appointed course of events in the academy.

The Venture, in accordance with the plans of the faculty for the summer cruise, had moved over to Petoskey on the appointed day to begin the work of fitting out.

All but five of the vessel's crew remained at Westbrook. The boatswain and four marines were quartered on board, and were to constitute the Venture's guard while she lay at anchor off the town.

Commander Brant divided his time about equally between the academy and the village, whither he went two or three times a day to oversee the work of equipping the vessel.

It was in the afternoon of the third day after the flight of Lofty and his intimates, and Commander Brant was down in the Venture's hold, superintending the stowing away of some part of the Venture's equipment, when Boatswain Durkee came hurrying below with the report that one of the marines, who had just returned from shore, having executed an errand, reported that he had seen one of the runaways "standing in front of a hotel up town."

Brant came up out of the hold and instituted an inquiry on deck.

"Standing in front of a hotel," repeated he, when he had listened to the report of the marine. "That doesn't look like running away. Did you see which of them it was?"

The marine had recognized the fugitive. It was McPherson.

sent the marines around to guard the side entrances. With Boatswain Durkee close at his heels, he then entered the hotel office. They found McPherson comfortably seated, and gazing out of a window at passing vehicles, apparently oblivious to any apprehension of arrest.

His behavior was explained when, upon seeing the officers approach, he stood up and saluted.

"I was on the point of coming down to the Venture, to give myself up," he said, before the young commander could speak.

"I have anticipated your intention, then," replied the officer. "Consider yourself under arrest."

McPherson supposed he would be marched away instantly. Instead of that, Commander Brant ordered him to stand where he was, and, by a significant gesture, instructed the boatswain to keep close eyes on the prisoner.

Then Brant went up to the desk where the hotel clerk stood, curiously regarding the scene, and inquired whether the two companions of the runaway were in the house, or had been seen thereabouts.

The clerk could tell him nothing; the prisoner had entered the hotel only a few moments before, and had come alone. Up to this moment the clerk had paid no particular attention to him, believing him to be over from the academy on leave.

McPherson was a little nettled, because the Venture's first officer did not question him instead of the clerk. The young com-

mander's course of procedure implied that he was not prepared to place much reliance on the statement of the prisoner.

smile, and sat down to write a report of the capture, to be delivered to the superintendent by Boatswain Durkee. Then the prisoner was ordered down into the Venture's gig, and, still in custody of the boatswain, was rowed up to the academy.

They arrived during one of the recitation hours, and there were few loungers in sight when they landed; but these few made haste to draw near as the captive was marched by on his way to the superintendent's office.

McPherson scanned their faces narrowly. He was gratified to discover one of "our fellows" among the number. To this boy, Robert Berkley, who had felt so sure that all of the runaways had made good their escape, McPherson made a sign by looking back over his shoulder as he went by. Berkley, in obedience to the signal, set out to follow the marines and their prisoner at a safe distance.

While McPherson was detained in the superintendent's office, Berkley loitered about in view of the entrance. When McPherson came out, this time alone, the marines having all been sent back to their vessel, he was chewing on one corner of a crumpled piece of paper. This he threw carelessly aside as he left the building and walked away, in the full sight of a group of officers, who stood near by, waiting to enter the office in response to a summons from the superintendent.

Berkley did not follow McPherson, who walked straight away without looking back. Instead, Berkley continued to loiter, on the pretense of having also to report to the su-

perintendent, till the officers had gone into the room.

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Then he hastily secured the crumpled paper McPherson had dropped, and retired with it to the privacy of his own room in the barracks.

This is what McPherson had written on the paper:

"I have just told Salisbury a fairy tale, and he believes it. I gave myself up for a purpose. I am to be let go on parole. Meet me in my room tonight, and bring the following fellows with you: Dowe, Cranstone and Guipe. Will they explain all. Rankin and Ewen send regards."

Berkley destroyed the note, and set out forthwith to find the three boys named, and apprise them of what was in the wind.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT USE McPHERSON MADE OF HIS PAROLE.

EXCEPTING the three prospective mutineers named in McPherson's note, the friends of Robert Berkley and Berkley himself, none of "our fellows" suspected the truth relating Thad's return to Westbrook.

The story of his apprehension quickly gained currency, and, as everybody could see that McPherson really had thrown himself in the way of capture, nobody doubted the truth of his story that he had had enough of trying to run away, and was going now to try to redeem himself in the eyes of the faculty and the cadet officers.

The majority of "our fellows," therefore, were disgusted with Thad, and they kept away from him, which was precisely what Thad hoped they would do.

Cranstone and Guipe, coached by Dowe, who was a youth exceedingly wise in the way of mischief-making, also held aloof, awaiting the hour when they were to meet the emissary of the chief conspirator in secret conference.

McPherson, by right of his parole, was allowed to resume his studies, which he affected to do with ardor. He was conscious that he was constantly under supervision by his officers, but the fact did not trouble him any. The conspirators within the academy were so few in number that, by the exercise of ordinary caution, they could meet and disperse with little danger.

No cadet of Westbrook, not even one of "our fellows," had ever been known to vi-

late his parole, and the fact established a mask for the agent of the chief wrong-doer which he was quite unscrupulous enough to take advantage of.

Thad waited that night for the chosen four in the solitude of his room, on the second floor of the dormitory, possessing his soul in patience, and mentally preparing himself for the work he had in hand.

"Dowe and Cranstone and Guipe," he told himself, "can be depended on to listen favorably to Lofty's scheme. If they decide to give it their support, why, then I'll undertake to see the thing through to the end."

Five or six times he looked at his watch, noting the flight of time. No hour had been appointed for the rendezvous, but the four elect could be trusted to make their way to the trusting spot at the earliest convenient moment.

Dowe was the first to arrive. He came tiptoeing into the room in his stocking feet, and took a seat without uttering a loud sound. Five minutes later Cranstone pushed open the door and entered, and close upon his heels came Guipe and Berkley.

"All quiet along the line?" queried McPherson, when Guipe had softly closed and locked the door.

The answer was one of assent. It was dark within the room; the plotters did not dare to show a light. They drew as closely together as they could get, and, prompted by an interrogatory "Well?" from Cranstone, McPherson began his recital.

He told of the reunion which he and Ewen had made with Lofty at the camp of Ricketts and how they had received shelter there. Then he went on to give the details of Lofty's plot to seize the Venture. He presented all the arguments in favor of the conspiracy which Lofty had himself used, framing his whole statement with splendid impartiality.

When he had done, his auditors understood perfectly what the scheme was, and understood, moreover, that it was Lofty's scheme, and that McPherson did not affect to stand sponsor for it.

It took over an hour to round up the discourse, and during all this time the auditors listened with breathless attention. The magnitude of the scheme did not appall them, but rather appealed to their craving for intrigue and adventure—just as Lofty Rankin had known it would. The difficulties in the way, which Lofty appeared to have foreseen and provided for without exception, involved risk, but risk, with a fair chance of gain, was meat and drink for Lofty's adherents.

Dowe, who proved himself the most discreet of any of the four listeners, had a few questions to ask when McPherson's tale was told, and, receiving satisfactory replies thereto, announced that he was willing to enlist in the proposed undertaking. Guipe, Cranstone and Berkley were equally compliant.

"If you have made up your minds, then," said McPherson, "all that remains is to take in three more fellows, and effect our escape from the academy. It must be done, too, between now and twelve o'clock tomorrow night. They are pushing the work of fitting out the school-boat, and it won't do to delay another twenty-four hours. I noticed today, while I was on board the Venture, that the stores were coming aboard at a lively rate, and probably the work of provisioning the vessel has been concluded. By tomorrow night they'll have her hauled up at the coal docks, and the bunkers will be full. If we can pounce down upon her while she is lying at the dock it will simplify the attack a good deal. If not, then we'll have to carry her by boarding."

"Ten of us ought to be able to do it against the force they keep on board the boat," said Dowe. "The trouble, it seems to me, will be to muster in the other three fellows we want, and get away in a body. Recent events have made the pros and the flunkies lie awake nights to watch us fellows."

"You are right," assented McPherson. "To muster in three more good fellows, and get away in a body is the Waterloo we shall have to pass. As for mustering in the necessary three, I'll have to leave that to you. It wouldn't be policy for me to be seen arguing with any of our fellows after what has happened. I'm out of the guard-house on parole, remember, and I've got a string tied to me."

His satellites were confident of their ability to accomplish the required task of filling their ranks.

"I presume," said Guipe, "that you want us to enlist fellows, who, like ourselves, have had some experience on board a steam vessel. There's Alf Bertrand and his cousin, Howard Mackey. They are both the sons of lake captains, and have had their experience in helping to work a steamboat."

"Bertrand and Mackey will do, then, if nobody has any objections," agreed McPherson. "And the other one?"

The third name proposed was that of Terence Brophy, who, in spite of the fact that he was one of "our fellows," was advanced among the Westbrook boys in the theoretical and practical knowledge of a marine engine.

All these cadets had been spoken of by Lofty in his instructions to McPherson, Brophy especially. McPherson was satisfied that they would approve of the crew he was to find at his command.

Equipped with many suggestions as to how the three additional conspirators were to be approached, and fully instructed as to how they were all to proceed the following night, McPherson's visitors left. He could observe them at work the next day, but he only made his observations from a distance. Taking their initiative from him, not a sign was made to him to indicate how affairs were progressing.



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