

NEAL of the NAVY

By WILLIAM HAMILTON OSBORNE

AUTHOR OF "RED MOUSE,"
"RUNNING FIGHT," "CATSPAW,"
"BLUE BUCKLE," ETC.

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THE PHOTO PLAY
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SYNOPSIS.

On the day of the eruption of Mount Pelee Capt. John Hardin of the steamer Princess rescues five-year-old Annette Ilington from an open boat, but is forced to leave behind her father and his companions. Ilington is assaulted by Hernandez and Kento in a vain attempt to get papers which Ilington has managed to send aboard the Princess with his daughter, papers proving his title to the lost island of Cinnabar. Ilington's injury causes his mind to become a blank. Thirteen years elapse. Hernandez, now an opium smuggler with Ponto and Inez, a female accomplice, and the mindless brute that once was Ilington, come to Seaport, where the widow of Captain Hardin is living with her son Neal and Annette Ilington, and plot to steal the papers left to Annette by her father.

THIRD INSTALLMENT

THE FAILURE

CHAPTER XI.

May the Best Man Win.

Neal Hardin, clad in his life-saving uniform, sat upon the gunwale of his lifeboat, gazing seaward—ever seaward. He was seeing visions—always visions of the sea. He caught Annette's hand in his own. He turned to her.

"Annette," he cried, "I've got to do it—I can't help it. It calls to me—the sea. It's in my blood."

The girl smiled—a bit sadly perhaps. But her eyes glowed. She returned the pressure of Neal's hand with her warm, strong, girlish grasp. "It's in your blood," she repeated, "your father was a hero of the sea—he saved me—you saved me, Neal. You've got to go."

"You—want me to?" he asked.

"Yes, I want you to."

"I'll go," said Neal.

The girl held in her right hand a newspaper—the current issue of the local Seaport weekly. "I saved this just for you. Look. Read it, Neal," she said. She pointed to an item on the first page.

CONGRESSMAN PRIME ANNOUNCES PRELIMINARY AN-NAPOLIS EXAMINATIONS.

Congressman James J. Prime of Seaport announces that the preliminary examination for candidacy for Annapolis finals will be held at the High School here on Thursday next at 9 a. m. The congressman's privilege is limited to but one appointment. May the best man win.

"It's your chance, Neal," said the girl. She placed a hand upon his shoulder, and at her touch the blood ran through his veins like wine. "You're the best man, Neal," she whispered, "always the best man. You're bound to win."

Congressman James J. Prime was a Seaport man—and the biggest man in that shore town. He had sprung from boatbuilding, seafaring ancestors; he knew seagoing folk; he liked them. And he liked the sea. And the pleasantest thing he did, he was wont to tell his friends, was to recommend clear-eyed, clean limbed young fellows for Annapolis. At the very time that Annette and Neal were sitting in the lifeboat gazing seaward, the congressman was at the post office, surrounded by a circle of old cronies, holding forth upon the navy. As he talked he examined his mail, opening it with a clumsy forefinger. He had mail aplenty—small envelopes and big ones, long and short. Three times he dropped a letter, once he dropped a check—somebody picked them up for him.

Then, unknown to himself, and unseen of anyone about him, he accidentally dropped something else upon the floor—a long, folded printed paper. He didn't miss it; and when Congressman James J. Prime moved off in the direction of his home, a human being slouched over to that corner, placed a concealing foot upon the folded paper, struck a match and lit a cigarette, stooped suddenly and with nicotine-stained fingers, picked up the document.

The concealing foot and the nicotine-stained fingers belonged to a young and sporty gentleman of the name of Joe Welcher.

He thrust the document into his pocket and then, he too, moved off to some less public place. When he reached a place less public, he examined his find. He was disappointed at first. He was prepared for anything of interest. But he was disgusted when he opened the document and read its headlines:

Questions and Correct Answers to be used in Preliminary Competitive Examination for Congressional Appointment—District of New Jersey, for Navy Academy, Annapolis, Duplicate.

It didn't interest him, but he glanced over its contents; then thrust it into his hip pocket; and went his way—smoking a cigarette.

CHAPTER XII.

The Spider and the Fly.

Back in the Hardin cottage by the sea, Miss Irene Courtier—known in other and less reputable circles by the name of Inez Castro—limped (not ungracefully) downstairs from the

room she had been occupying for some time, and entered the living room.

"Under your kind care," she said to Mrs. Hardin, her hostess—and in her tone was the slightest foreign accent—"I am so well again, that I must leave you."

She paused. Joe Welcher pushed open the door and slouched into the room. Inez Castro glanced at him seductively from under her long lashes and went on.

"With the aid of Mr. Joe Welcher," she proceeded, "I have consulted time-tables, and I find very good connections on the next train."

She opened her handbag, and took out bills. "And," she added, "I insist on paying board."

Mrs. Hardin held up her hand. "Miss Courtier," she returned, "I can't think of it. You have taken what we call pot-luck with us. You have been friendly with us, and I hope we have been friendly with you."

Inez smiled and shrugged her pretty shoulders. She glanced casually at Joe Welcher. She slightly raised her eyebrows—she watched Joe as a cat watches a mouse. And Joe—he was watching something, too—the cash that Inez was holding in her hand. Inez groaned suddenly and put out her hand.

"Stupid," she said, "I have forgot. My outer bandage. I must return." She returned the money to her handbag and laid it down upon the table. Then she left the room and went upstairs. Mrs. Hardin, Welcher's foster mother, sniffed the air.

"There's something burning in the kitchen, Joey," she exclaimed, "if Miss Courtier comes down I'll be right back." She, too, disappeared. And Joey—easy-money Joey Welcher, was left alone with the handbag and the bills. Joey listened for an instant, then tiptoed forward, seized the handbag and drew forth the roll of bills. He needed money badly—he had to pay a debt of honor, which means a gambling debt. He opened the roll of bills and peeled off a few where their absence would least be noted, and then restored the balance of the bills to the handbag—thrusting his share into his pocket.

Inez Castro, seated halfway up the stairs, watching through an inch of open doorway, smiled to herself. Then she tripped a bit noisily, and irregularly—to show her limp—down the stairs and glided gracefully into the room. Joe lit a cigarette and watched her. He was nervous, but game. He watched her closely. She took up her bag and once again took out the bills.

"My charming hostess," she exclaimed, "where should she be?"

"She should be here," said Joey, evading her glance, "wait a bit, I'll get her."

He got her, and Inez resumed her former conversation—once more insisting upon payment for her board. Her offer was quite as insistently declined. She sighed prettily and clicked shut her bag. Welcher also sighed—with unmistakable relief. She turned to him.

"The one-horse vehicle?" she asked.

"Outside," said Welcher, offering his arm, "boy's ready—time that you were off."

Once at the station Inez bought a ticket for New York. But when the train—a local—drew up at Lonesome Cove, three miles north of Seaport, Inez dropped off the rear platform of the last car, and waited on the far side of the track until the train was out of sight. There was no station at Lonesome Cove—merely a shed. Swiftly Inez crossed the track and passed this station and then sped on down toward the shore. She reached a narrow strip of beach, stepped down to the water's edge, and looked about her. Suddenly she saw what she was looking for—a bandanna handkerchief thrust above a clump of bushes. On the sea side of this clump of bushes was a rock. Inez raised her parasol and sauntered gracefully toward this rock, and composed herself—also gracefully—in the shadow of the rock. Before doing so she peered into the bushes, noted the presence there of three shadowy figures, and nodded slightly, in recognition. A man with a foreign accent spoke.

"What progress?" he queried anxiously.

"Best in the world," she answered, "we have a new recruit."

She changed her position. A man thrust his head and face for a moment out of the bushes—a face across which was a saber cut; a livid scar. For a moment, with their heads together, the two whispered. The man with a scowl of satisfaction, finally withdrew his head. Inez rose to her feet and looked about her.

"Where is this Lonesome Cave Inn then?" she queried.

"Half a mile farther up the beach—follow the shore line—turn in at the cove. Follow the water line—it takes you there. Good luck."

CHAPTER XIII.

The Honor Slip.

A crowd of thirty—more or less—

congregated about the steps of the school building in Seaport, N. J. Neal was there. Some of the thirty he knew and some he didn't.

Neal started suddenly. A hand was laid upon his shoulder. He turned. Joey Welcher, his foster brother, faced him. Joey smiled.

"Neal," he said, "I think I'll take a hack at this Annapolis exam myself." For a moment Neal was taken back. Then he recovered. "Gorry," he returned, "I'm glad of that. When did you decide?"

"Before you did," replied Welcher. "I've had this up my sleeve for a year or so. I've been boning on the quiet—boning hard."

"It was quite true that he had been boning hard—and also on the quiet. He had been studying the examination paper dropped accidentally by the congressman in the local post office, and he had mastered every answer by heart. "You bet your life I'm going in," he said.

Ten minutes later Neal and Welcher were seated side by side at desks in the old-fashioned little schoolroom. The examination questions had been written on the ample blackboards that completely circled the room. The examiner had copied them from his printed list of questions.

There was a knock on the door and the congressman came in. The examiner left his desk and met the congressman half way. He whispered to him.

"How goes it?" asked the congressman.

"I've only had the chance to look over young Hardin's papers as they came in—he's been the first to finish. They look good to me. They're well-nigh perfect. There he is now. He's all through."

"May the best man win," said the congressman, "he looks the part at any rate." He glanced about the room; he seemed to be trying to remember; then he remembered. "Say, look a here," he said, "Beecher's letter says he mailed me a duplicate of those questions and answers; and I'll swear I saw a duplicate when I read his note—did I hand you two or one?"

"One," returned the examiner. He stepped back to his desk. Neal handed in his final paper. The examiner thrust in front of Neal a slip of paper and a pen. "Sign this, please," he



"I'm Disgraced," Cried Neal. "You Tell Them, Joe."

said. This is what it said—and Neal signed it as requested:

I do solemnly declare on my honor as a gentleman that I have neither obtained nor given aid of any kind during the course of this examination.

Neal Hardin, Candidate.

He had no sooner finished signing than Joe Welcher approached the desk.

"Through, Joey?" queried Neal, "I'll wait for you."

Welcher signed his own honor slip. Neal waited—and while he waited, he thrust his hand into his coat pocket. There was something unfamiliar there. Involuntarily he drew it out—it was a crumpled printed paper. The examiner's eagle eye was upon it in an instant.

"Haven't been cribbing, boy?" he exclaimed.

"No," stammered Neal, "I—I don't know what it is." The examiner knew it however, for the thing it was. He grabbed Neal's hand and snatched the paper from him.

"Oh!" he said, "the missing duplicate—questions and answers both. No wonder Hardin's papers were well-nigh perfect."

He turned to the congressman—who nodded understandingly.

"I don't know how it got there," stammered Neal, "I didn't put it there—I never saw the thing before. On my honor—"

"Pah!" cried the congressman, his eyes flashing, "look at it—thumbed and soiled—he's had it for a week—he's learned the thing by heart."

Angrily he tore up the honor slip—tore up Neal's answers—and flung them to the floor. He pointed to the door.

"Go," he exclaimed, "the navy's well rid of sneaks like you."

Once outside his pace slackened. He didn't want to go home. And yet he must go home—he'd have to tell them all about it—tell his mother—tell Annette—how much would they believe?

Again a friendly hand was placed upon his shoulder. Again it was Joe Welcher. He sighed with relief. "Look here, Joe," he pleaded, "you don't think I did this thing?"

Joe shrugged his shoulders. "It's all right, old man," he said finally, "remember, no matter what has happened I'm your friend."

Side by side they entered the cottage. Annette was there—so was Neal's mother—both waiting eagerly.

Neal strode to the table, and faced to the two women, the young one and the old. He started to speak. Then he slumped down into a chair and hid his face in his hands.

"I'm disgraced," he cried, "you—you tell 'em, Joe."

Welcher told them—with considerable unction, putting in fancy touches of his own.

Neal sprang to his feet—his face ablaze with anger and determination. "Never mind," he cried, "I can't get into Annapolis—but I can get into the navy and I will. Mother—Annette—Joe—I've got to go—the navy calls for me. I'm going to enlist. I've got to go."

CHAPTER XIV.

Wind and Limb.

Dress suit case in hand Neal stopped in front of a cigar store in New York. Next to the cigar store was an entrance to a stairway that led to the second floor above. In front of this entrance paced an officer in uniform. "Recruiting station?" queried Neal, saluting.

"Nothing but," returned the man in uniform, "you're as welcome as the flowers in May." Ascend. He waved his hand invitingly. Neal ascended.

Half an hour later he had regularly enrolled—he was an apprentice seaman in the navy. The United States at its own expense shipped him with a squad of recruits to the naval training school at Norfolk.

As the hours flew by, Neal's eyes were opened. He loved the sea—had always loved it. He plunged into the life of an apprentice seaman.

He wrote his mother and Annette that afternoon after drill was over.

"This is the life," he said to them, "I've been fighting all the afternoon—aiming thirteen inch guns at hostile battleships, handling a cutter; splicing

ropes, tying sailor's knots, cutting off imaginary heads with cutlasses—and tonight for the first time since the eruption of Mt. Pelee, I'm sleeping in a hammock. This is the life and no mistake. We even have the ple that mother used to make."

Neal's letter reached home next day. And next day something else happened. Joe Welcher burst into the living room at the Hardin cottage, early in the evening, with the local paper, still damp from the press, in his hand.

"I've just sent one of these to Neal," he said, "and here's a copy for you. Read it, Annette. Now what have you got to say?"

Annette read it. This is what it said:

JOSEPH WELCHER OF SEAPORT WINS ANNAPOLIS APPOINTMENT.

In Congressman James J. Prime's recent competitive examination for the Annapolis appointment, Joe Welcher, our young townsmen, came very near the hundred mark and distanced all his fellows. Good work, Welcher. Seaport will back you through Annapolis and through the navy. Become an admiral. Hitch your wagon to a star.

Mrs. Hardin, Joe's foster mother, caught him in her arms. "Both my boys—Neal and Joe—in the navy," she exclaimed.

"Yes," returned Welcher, with a sneer, "but there's a difference. I go in as an officer—and Neal's nothing but a common seaman, understand?"

Annette flushed, but gave no other sign.

CHAPTER XV.

Finesse.

It was somewhat early in the morning. Joe Welcher, seated at a round table in the Seaport house bar, still celebrated with three boon companions, his success as a passer of com-

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