



Pink Lady

By Frank Richardson Pierce

An Irish feud, a practical joke—and the decks of a dreadnought run red!

THE feud between the Moriartys and the O'Sheas dated from the battle of Manila Bay. Apprentice Seaman Moriarty, enjoying his first liberty ashore after many long, cramped months aboard ship, had taken on a quantity of Benoit and Hong Kong Scotch. Due to improper stowage of cargo, Moriarty listed heavily to starboard. Presently he sighted another craft steaming toward him. Alcoholic fog blurred his vision somewhat, but he hazily recalled the rules of the road in such an emergency:

When both side lights you see ahead
Port your helm and show your red.

He executed this maneuver and muttered as he checked up on the situation:

Green to green or red to red
Perfect safety—go ahead.

“Let's see, the craft bearing down is

Ensign Michael O'Shea. Rah for the Irish!” Under the emboldening influence of his cargo he hurled the barriers of regulations and hailed the ensign in the most chummy manner. “It's a fine night for a murder, sir,” he observed and saluted carelessly.

Dewey would have returned the salute and passed on without comment, but an ensign fresh from the Academy is steeped in tradition. Ensign O'Shea frowned. Besides he knew nothing of the potency of Benoit; also the weather was very oppressive. In setting the genial seaman in his proper place he loosened a flow of language that fairly withered him.

Seaman Moriarty's alcoholic gesture was intended as a salute no doubt.

“It's all right with me, brother, only the American Navy sticks to its guns and it's the bes' dam' navy afloat or ashore. It is a fine night for a murder.”

Moriarty wandered away until at length he beached himself in an abandoned hut. He awakened the following morning in

his right mind, harried by an unquenchable thirst. Thanks to the lingering powers of Beno, quantities of water served merely to create a beautiful hangover. It was during the reflective period of the hangover that he recalled an O'Shea had insulted a Moriarty.

"I'll square accounts with that fresh young 'boot' if it takes a lifetime," he vowed.

IN the years that followed Ensign O'Shea became Captain O'Shea and lost none of his youthful ideas of the fitness of things. Traditions of the Academy became unbreakable laws. His two-fisted tactics and a voice any second mate would have envied gave him the justly deserved title, "Roaring Mike."

Seaman Moriarty became Gunner Moriarty, one of the best gunnery technicians in the Navy. Many years' devotion to the work he loved had given him a practical knowledge of guns, torpedoes, shells, bombs and their intricate mechanisms that many a commissioned officer envied. The native ingenuity of many Moriartys has made the Navy what it is today.

On a balmy Spring afternoon Gunner Moriarty viewed the torpedo handling room in the depths of the dreadnaught with pardonable pride. His critical gaze wandered from racks holding slim steel torpedoes to the compressors that filled the air flasks supplying the torpedoes with motive power. Everything was in perfect order.

"Business before pleasure," he commented aloud, "and the business is over with. Now for pleasure."

The dreadnaught was slumbering in a quiet harbor, a goodly number of her crew ashore, enjoying liberty. Moriarty was alone with little prospect of intrusion by either officer or man. Even so he would be amply warned. To reach the compartment one must descend a long ladder. His immediate superior, Lieutenant Gridley, was aboard but

he was doubtless deep in some problem of gunnery or aeronautics. Besides Gridley was a mustang officer. He had come up from the ranks. His sympathetic viewpoint as regards enlisted men was something no Academy man could hope to acquire.

Moriarty opened a steel locker and removed a quart bottle containing fluid of pinkish hue. The same ingenuity that had served his country so well for nearly three decades was now to be applied to a strictly personal problem. The bottle contained grain alcohol required on shipboard for mechanical purposes. To insure its application to mechanical rather than social use a thoughtful Government had diluted it with potassium permanganate, a most effective deterrent. Shock-proof stomachs that accepted White Mule, Moonshine, or weird concoctions of the home distiller in suffering silence, broke forth in red revolution when introduced to "Pink Lady."

Moriarty connected an electric percolator to a convenient socket and poured a portion of the Pink Lady into a receptacle intended originally for orthodox coffee. A small glass was wired into position just above the liquid and above the glass he suspended a smooth glass bowl filled with ice. The vapor from the boiling fluid encountered the cold bowl, condensed and trickled into the glass—good grain alcohol fit for any man with an iron constitution. Moriarty's constitution ran heavily to iron.

The process was somewhat slow and Moriarty filled in the time humming an appealing little ditty of the Puget Sound Country:

Four and Twenty Yankees
Feeling mighty dry,
Motored to Vancouver
For a shot of rye.
When the rye was open
The Yanks began to sing,

To the devil with Volstead
God save the King.

*"It's a fine afternoon for a murder,
sir!"*

He cooled the glass with ice, then downed the contents with an appreciative exclamation. Presently the atmosphere in the handling room became warm and genial, life for the sole occupant took on a rosy hue. Usually reserved and thoughtful, he became loquacious. The immediate outlook was viewed charitably.

"Got to give credit where credit is due," he announced thickly. This is the best dam' Navy in the world." This was followed by a period of grave reflection. "Yes, sir, I'm here to tell yuh my ship is the best dam' ship in the best dam' Navy in the world!" He brought the palms of his hands together with a resounding crack of conviction. "My division is the best dam' division of the best dam' ship of the best dam' ..."

He stopped suddenly as a pair of feet descended the ladder. He blinked a moment and recognized the shoes. His voice lifted musically:

"Lieutenant Gridley came up through the hawse pipe and there's tar in his hair. He's the best dam' gun'ry officer of the best dam' ship in the ..."

The descending feet paused at this point and rapidly ascended. That was one of the many fine qualities about Gridley, he made due allowance for the weakness and falls from grace of efficient men, if not too frequent. He managed to miss seeing a lot he was in duty bound to report if he saw.

Moriarty again glanced approvingly about the handling room. His gaze stopped at the loud speaker. By speaking in a normal tone his voice would boom forth in every compartment in the ship. His expression changed slowly from geniality to firm resolution. He stepped to the instrument, squared off and announced:

Like a voice from the mysterious beyond the words beat against Lieutenant Gridley's ear drums. He left the compartment hurriedly and peered down upon the culprit.

"Pipe down, Moriarty," he ordered sharply. "The captain might have heard you."

"That was my intention, sir, this being a private affair between the Moriartys and the O'Sheas datin' back to the shindy at Manila Bay."

Moriarty stood stiffly at attention when Gridley stepped from the ladder, though it was apparent a warm friendship existed. Many an experiment in gunnery improvement devices had been worked out with Gridley's inventiveness and Moriarty's practical experience.

"I hope ..." Gridley began. The skipper's voice on the loud speaker interrupted authoritatively.

"Gunner Moriarty report to the captain immediately!"

Hot coffee, cold water and fright combined could not have sobered Moriarty as quickly. He hopped to obey. The wardroom country seemed depressingly gloomy as he entered the sacred precincts. He progressed, by a series of mental thrusts and a prayer on his lips. The prayer was answered. Respite came! Unconsciously he muttered, "Pink Lady!"

But a different sort of a lady was Kathleen O'Shea. She went in for delicate shades and tints of pink as exquisite as herself. In addition to her mother's vivid beauty she had more than a dash of Old Roaring Mike's fire and spirit in her makeup. The wills of father and daughter clashed on occasion. Ultra-feminine she might be in appearance, yet she could do a hundred yards in a swimming tank close to the record and had once swum Golden Gate. In Navy circles she proved to be a disturbing

element. Ensigns hovered in the distance, lieutenants made romantic love, and captains regretted the passing of time.

It might be guessed Miss Kathleen was difficult to manage, unless she wished to be managed. She was! Roaring Michael O'Shea could manage a dreadnaught and a thousand men, or a battleship division, but he had tough sledding with either his wife or daughter.

Gunner Moriarty steamed by the skipper's door at full speed and permitted Miss Kathleen to enter. There was no ceremony. She merely thrust her head through the opening and said, "Hello, Old Dear!"

"Old Dear" grunted.

"Be seated, Kathleen," he rumbled. "I wish to have a serious talk with you."

"Fire when ready, Gridley!" she lightly invited.

"It's concerning that damned mustang, Kathleen, that I sent for you!"

Into the word "mustang" the skipper put all the aversion an Academy man of the old school has for the officer who comes from the ranks, or the hawse pipe. There was a fine blending of contempt, indignation and rage in his tone. Except for a fleeting flash of fire in her eyes the daughter seemed unruffled.

"Them's harsh words, Dad," she said sweetly.

"Roarin' Mike hasn't got the range at all," mused Moriarty, "but she's putting him in a frame of mind that'll make it tough for me, or kill his spirit for the time being."

"Very harsh words, Dad," the girl repeated.

"Gridley's worse than a mustang. He had his chance in the Academy but was kicked out."

"I believe the Academic diagnosis of the malady was ineptitude," she replied, "but I am told the real reason was because the fires of inventive genius consumed hours intended for study. However, he came into the wardroom through the hawse pipe, thanks to

the war. I believe he did a number of thrilling things with a seaplane and annexed a medal or two to wear along with his cocked hat on formal occasions."

The skipper made a brave effort to be calm and succeeded temporarily.

"Kathleen, be serious. This is a serious matter, yet you seem utterly shameless! Don't you realize this service has traditions? Why do you flaunt yourself brazenly in public with the damned cuss, when any number of Academy men are standing by awaiting the word to come alongside?"

"Really, Dad, much as I dislike to ruffle your feelings, the traditions of service are nothing in my young life where that big boy is concerned."

"Hell's delight!" groaned the skipper. "Are you engaged?"

"No such luck. He hasn't asked me." She managed to say it without blushing, thanks to pent-up rage.

"Dam' his impudence! He's the only officer footloose and in his right mind that hasn't. Why hasn't he?" He had always known Gridley was a dreaming ass. This proved it.

"Why hasn't he?" she repeated. "How should I know? I've done my best with the few charms nature has given me, plus a moonlight night, waving palms and soft music, but he won't give me a tumble. I think perhaps I shall have to throw myself at him."

"Kathleen!" Roaring Mike stood up and paced the room. "Don't make light of this affair!"

"I'm not. Far be it from such. It is a tragedy when a girl throws her heart at a man's feet and he can't even see it."

"I've tried to approach this affair with my usual diplomacy." At this point Kathleen repressed a giggle. "Now I shall assert my authority. You can go to the dance with him tonight as you planned, but that ends it! He's through for all time. Make it plain to him.

Emphatic! If he still, persists, then who knows but he'll be ordered to Guam or some jungle post for extended duty?"

She caught the threat and the feminine counterpart of Old Roaring Mike's jaw hardened, then relaxed in a soft smile. Something told the skipper this last salvo was a misfire. Following regulations he elevated his guns and waited the prescribed time before pulling the charge.

"If you weren't such a lovable old bluff," she said softly, "I should be angry at the bare suggestion of such unfair tactics as a transfer, but ..." She again smiled as she fired a salvo of her own, every projectile of which found its mark. "Lieutenant Gridley has resigned from the Navy!"

"Resigned, eh? Boys made it too hot for him!" The skipper rubbed his hands in satisfaction.

"Quite the contrary. I rather think the feeling toward mustang officers has died down since the war. Lawrence Gridley resigned because rules and regulations cramp his style. He can't argue with superior officers very well, so he is returning to the attack as a civilian. When he has proved to certain stubborn staff and line officers that it is possible to bomb a battleship out of the water with his new type of plane and gear and his rather interesting system of range finding, I think he will then return to the service."

"He mentioned certain stubborn officers, did he? Hah! I'm one of 'em. I told him he'd better make good as a lieutenant before tackling problems a staff of veterans is working on."

"He has spent a considerable part of his private fortune in this work. There are two people who have faith in him, and the most important one is Lieutenant Gridley. Recognition is due him and he is clever enough to force it."

"Hmmm! Just let him tread on my toes with his recognition forcing and see what

happens! I've never been beaten yet and I don't propose to spoil a lifetime record by yielding to a damned mustang." With this defiance the skipper looked for a loophole of escape and found it "Come here and kiss your old Dad and stop arguing with me. There, that's better. Now shove off. Can't you see I'm busy?"

Because she knew this Dad of hers Kathleen O'Shea obeyed. She knew there would be no relenting where Gridley and his ideas were concerned. Each belonged to a school of clashing military thought, the one believing the battleship was doomed, the other regarding planes as merely valuable aids.

Roaring Mike O'Shea was silent for several moments after his daughter's departure. Then, becoming conscious of an alien presence, he glanced up.

"What the devil do you want, Moriarty?"

"You passed the word for me, sir!" Moriarty awaited the deluge.

"Huh! The devil! That girl knocked it out of my head. Get out!"

Moriarty did not wait for a second order. He silently faded away.

He found Lieutenant Gridley in dungarees working on a range-finding device that would permit a man two miles in the air to direct the fire of a battleship at a target below the horizon.

"What happened?" queried the lieutenant with keen interest. "You've been gone long enough."

"Miss O'Shea slipped in ahead of me. She was the target for the Old Man's guns, but he didn't have the range. She left him a shattered, smouldering hulk. He treated me almost decently and forgot what he wanted me for." Into Moriarty's eyes crept an expression of reproach. "You've resigned!"

"Yes, it takes effect tomorrow. I thought I told you. Don't look so glum about it, I've got it figured out. You are due to retire

a month hence. Very well, retire and come work for me. Even after I have proved a number of things there will be plenty of work for you. But you've got to lay off the hooch, Moriarty."

"That's fine, sir. I swore off!"

"When?"

"About five minutes ago, when Roarin' Mike was trying to recall what he wanted me for. Terrible sensation!"

"Swearing off?"

"No, wondering if the old boy was a mind reader. I'm through for good. I've said it a couple of hundred times in my life, but this time goes. No more Pink Lady unless . . . well, I might want to celebrate some big day, but it'll have to be a bigger day than the Fourth of July or New Year's."

Moriarty, as usual, was very serious. All men are serious about swearing off. It is a serious thing at the time.

THE O'Sheas had leased a comfortable home during the period of the ship's overhaul at the Navy Yard. Lieutenant Gridley in formal dress, medals and all, stepped from his car and was duly announced. He wondered if the old skipper would be at home, but he did not care much.

The skipper was.

"Come in," he ordered, "and sit down. Kathleen will be ready in fifteen minutes."

He regarded Gridley critically and grudgingly admitted he was handsome and looked like an Academy man. Roaring Mike tapped an article he had been reading in a Navy publication.

"You're the author of this damned libel!" he shouted.

"Aircraft vs. Seacraft," read Gridley. "My honest opinion, sir!"

"How the devil can the Navy Department get a decent appropriation from Congress for the improvement of yards, the elevation of guns to a par with those of foreign

fleets, when stuff like this comes out? One would think the battleship was ready for the junk heap. It's piffle and bunk and you know it!"

"I can . . ." Gridley began.

"You can do nothing," interrupted Roaring Mike, tapping his contentions into the younger man's knee. "Granted bombers destroyed the battleships *Virginia* and *New Jersey*; neither was manned nor attempted a defense. The Allies bombed the Zeebrugge flood gate for four years and never hit it, while the Germans bombed the flood gate at Dunkirk with no better success. A German battle-cruiser was bombed a thousand times when she was aground, hit sixteen times, then shoved off for the Black Sea."

"Which gets us down to the matter of efficient devices in range-finding," replied Gridley calmly enough. "It is no idle boast when I say I can take my light bomber out any time and give your ship a fine old pelting. I can even give you advance warning and do it. I'll go further. You can send your airplanes up and if they can outmaneuver me I'll call it a day and not drop a bomb."

"Huh! Is that a challenge?" There was plenty of fight in Old Roaring Mike's attitude now. He was leaning forward, his gray mustache seemed to bristle, his teeth set. "Is it a challenge?"

"Most assuredly, if you wish to take it as such?"

"Hah! Then I accept! Do your damnedest, and let me tell you I'll have several newspaper men aboard when we sail to join the fleet. I propose to settle this once and for all!"

"And if you lose?"

"I won't lose! You'll have to step like hell to convince me. Nothing in the way of a perfunctory demonstration goes. You've got to drive your facts home and make 'em stick. If you do all that, I'll back water. Yes, by the eternal I'll ..."

He glanced toward Kathleen O'Shea, who stood in the doorway waiting, then back to Gridley. A flash of understanding seemed to pass between them.

"Yes," said the skipper, "if you do all you claim, you're entitled to anything in the world."

Long after the sound of Gridley's motor had died Roaring Mike puffed angrily at his pipe. Presently he chuckled.

"I'll get two of the best newspaper men I know, let 'em see what happens with their own eyes, and they'll set that chump in his place. One thing Kathleen can't stand is a person who makes himself ridiculous."

RED TAPE upset-plans, as it frequently does, and Moriarty did not quit the dreadnaught until a day previous to sailing. Two tight-lipped, keenly observing individuals had taken quarters aboard. Moriarty recognized them as newspaper writers who would have made fine umpires. In all they did they called the play as they saw it, regardless of who might be hit by chips they scattered.

Moriarty found the hangar deserted, but Gridley's seaplane was in readiness for the test. The gunner was moved to boundless admiration as he inspected the laboratory. Everything had the stamp of the Navy about it.

In the plane itself he found dual controls and the most compact range finder he had ever seen. The service had nothing to equal it as yet. Mirrors and lenses combined to reflect what lay below. The scene appeared on a square of ground glass. There were cranks to turn and indicators that changed numbers with every movement. Altitude, drift, speed of plane, speed of target, were all taken care of. Gridley had gone straight to the heart of things and devised instruments comprehensive to even an untrained mind. The delicate combination of trained operators and complicated instruments had been eliminated.

"He's got to win," Moriarty muttered.

"Those newspaper boys have got to be impressed with what's taking place over their heads. Now ... if I hadn't taken the pledge, I'd give my mind a bit of stimulant and there'd be things doing tomorrow. A mind sure sparks when encouraged a bit. Then there's the grudge of the Moriartys against the O'Sheas. If I was a bit clever I'd tie the two together."

He indulged in a period of reflection. Five minutes later it dawned upon him this was one of the greatest days of his life. Retirement from the service with an honorable record of duties well performed! The thought was so pleasant he unconsciously hummed a tune:

Four and twenty Yankees,
Feeling mighty dry,
Motored to Vancouver. . . .

This gave him an idea. Navy habits are difficult to shake, hence Gridley must have a bit of grain alcohol for mechanical purposes. The search was lengthy and thorough. Gridley did have grain alcohol for mechanical purposes. Incidentally it had been diluted as a matter of course.

Moriarty hesitated briefly, very briefly, then searched the Gridley apartment close at hand. He returned with a percolator, glass, bowl and cracked ice. Some minutes later he turned on the switch and awaited results. The result was held up for inspection.

"Well, as the Governor of North Carolina said to the Governor of South Carolina . . . Ahh! Here's another to the conclusion of long and honorable service in the best dam' Navy in the world. Ahh!"

A period of reflection, then:

"And still another to all officers that come up through the hawse pipe. May they never get the tar out of their hair. Ahh! Boy, you're going strong tonight."

He glanced about the hangar until he caught sight of the telephone directory. This

gave him a brilliant idea. Failing to find the number, he called information and was rewarded in due time with a gruff hello.

“Gunner Moriarty, U. S. N., retired, sends his compliments to Cap’n Michael O’Shea, U. S. N., unretired, an’ reminds him *’t’s a fine night for a murder!*”

The click of the receiver on the other end of the line nearly took Moriarty’s head off.

True to his prediction the Moriarty mind commenced to spark under encouragement. With dignity born of the occasion he inspected the practice bombs in the plane’s magazine. They were designed to hit, but not harm. Moriarty shook his head.

“No good. It’ll take more’n that to dent Roarin’ Mike’s hide. It’s tougher’n the skin of a conning tower. No sense in a man like Gridley awaiting to be rewarded in heaven. I’m in favor of making the decks run red, yep, red! I’ll incorp . . . incorp . . .I’ll corporate ideas of my own!”

In the gray of dawn he refilled the plane’s magazine with bombs of his own choosing, then blissfully fell asleep, where Gridley found him a half-hour later. Gridley read the signs correctly and dismissed the incident with a crisp, “Might have known he’d celebrate. He’ll be all right in the morning.”

STIRRED into wakefulness, Moriarty licked dry lips with a tongue suggestive of a wad of cotton and looked about.

“How’d I get here?” he queried.

“Climbed there, I suppose,” replied Gridley. “Found you asleep in the plane last night. Figured the way you felt you’d sleep as well there as anywhere. We’re ready to shove off as soon as we eat a bite.”

“I’ll be ready as soon as I drink a gallon of water and spill another gallon over my head.”

Swearing cheerfully, Moriarty loosened cramped joints and adjusted his

clothing. The percolator reminded him in part of the night’s doings, but only in part. The highest lights did not intrude just then. They came later with brilliance little short of blinding.

The hangar was located on a quiet lake, one of thousands along the sea-coast from which a seaplane might be launched in smooth water and return to in safety after a raid. Moriarty was cold even when garbed for the flight. Somewhat hazily he recalled tucking a bottle into his overcoat pocket the previous night. He investigated and presently drained a half-filled pint flask. Hidden fires in his being kindled. He felt warmer and cracked the palms of his hands together.

“Let’s go!” he shouted. “The enemy awaits.”

Gridley eyed him hopelessly, then grinned.

“Might have known you had an eye opener cached away. Oh, well, climb in, but don’t fool with the controls until I pass the word.”

The plane taxied down the mirroring waters of the lake, cleared, circled, skimmed the tree tops and shot straight seaward. Within a few minutes a range of mountains came over the horizon and vanished beneath their wings as if they remained moveless in midair while the world turned with velvet smoothness below.

It was dark in the valley when the sun caught their wings. By the time the light line had crept from crested peak to valley floor the sea was dead ahead. From their elevation it seemed placid, except where land and water met—a line of seething surf, smothering, irregular, like a swan’s-down boa carelessly flung aside.

The section directly below moved in natural colors across the ground glass field of the range finder as if fed in at one edge and spilled out the other. Here and there surf-fringed rocks stood bleakly alone. Once a

flock of startled ducks, dangerously close to the plane, yet indicated on the field by tiny black dots in V-formation, came and vanished.

The battleship had evidently entered fully into the spirit of the game. No tell-tale wisp of smoke drifted above the horizon to betray her position. When at last Gridley located her she was steaming full speed southward.

A reckless smile flashed across his face. A thrill akin to that he had known in the North Sea swept through him.

The world below turned rapidly and brought the great ship nearer and nearer. Like the bleak rocks, she was ringed with white. Foam spreading fanlike from her clipper bow seethed along her beams and spread astern.

Gridley was too high for them to spot him except by sheer accident. He intended to remain so until the moment of attack. Forward, neatly toggled, swung two bombs filled with chemicals similar to those used in life buoy markers.

Contact with water started both a flare and smoke cloud. The plane swooped down. A moment later two white smudges marked the spot where the bombs had struck. He checked up on his range in a series of swift movements. The battleship blurred, then focused sharply on the ground glass field.

"Let 'em go, Gridley!" shouted Moriarty over the telephone. In his tone was repressed excitement and utter elation.

"My string has gone. We'll check up and cut yours loose," Gridley replied.

THE dreadnaught's quarterdeck had once been a joy to Captain O'Shea's eyes. It was spotless and roomy. Then the madness or planes came and yard workmen built a catapult down the center, a device that profaned the gaze of one who loved quarterdeck traditions. It was an outrage, a crime and an abomination, but an order, and that settled it. Like birds poised for flight two

planes rested on either side.

The drone of Gridley's plane as it dropped from the blue sent a tingle of excitement through the battleship. Aft, the skipper peered through binoculars with skeptical eyes. He mistook the chemical bombs for misses and an exclamation of satisfaction escaped him.

No one was prepared for what took place when the plane swept back to the attack. Officers and men alike were dumfounded. Then training told and a number of things took place swiftly. Two men rushed forward and picked up a seaman knocked to the deck by a descending missile. His head and shoulders were a gory mass.

The officer of the deck swore furiously. From the ship's funnel came the dense black plumes of the smoke screen. The dreadnaught veered from its course in an effort to get out of range.

Forward a bosun's mate lay groaning, his head and white hat stained deeply. At the skipper's elbow his messenger suddenly crumpled. The skipper himself was stricken by the same blast from the blue.

A newspaper man with rare presence of mind dove headlong for a turret. In one second he had seen enough to spread through eight columns, but as dead men tell no tales he wanted to live to relate this smashing story.

High above the plane banked and returned for the final attack. The radiophone brought a frantic message to Gridley's ears.

"For God's sake, Gridley, cease firing!"

They came into range at that moment and Moriarty released the contents of the second magazine. A brief interval and they had cleared the smoke screen. Again, the voice:

"Gridley, are you mad?"

An AA gun suddenly let go and a shell burst near enough to rock them. This was the real thing. Gridley tensed with excitement and

utter joy. Of course they wouldn't hit him, but they intended to give him some real action, perhaps frighten him into descending alongside to be laughed at, then hauled aboard.

A shift in the breeze cleared the battleship's stern. One plane had been shot from the catapult, the second was preparing to follow. Gridley banked and watched the result. The plane left the ship perfectly and winged its way swiftly aloft.

"That puts a crust on the whole thing," said Moriarty. "We can show 'em the getaway now."

Gridley fled, the other plane in hot pursuit. Twenty miles down the coast he alighted in a protected cove and taxied to the beach. Within two minutes the pursuing plane came alongside. When the pilot stepped ashore he carried a service pistol in his hand. On his face was written lingering amazement and present determination. Here was a young man who meant business.

He covered the pair without hesitation.

"Are you crazy, Gridley?" he cried, watching them narrowly. "You've convinced the world of your ability to hit a ship, but man, oh, man, our decks ran red with brave American blood! From bow to stern they died like flies. They were carrying the captain below when I left."

"What do you mean, Stuart?" Gridley

realized the other was in deadly earnest. In some way his experiment had resulted in horrible tragedy.

Stuart was convinced he faced madness now.

"What do I mean? Man alive you bombed us with those infernal bombs of yours and scored hit after hit. The ship is a shambles." He came closer. You are under arrest, of course!"

Gridley ignored the pilot and his pistol. He recalled the empty bottles of Pink Lady, the damning percolator and . . . Moriarty. He whirled on his assistant furiously.

"Moriarty, did you tamper with my bombs?"

Moriarty seemed suddenly to realize that he had, and inwardly he thanked God for the American sense of humor.

"Aye-aye, Sir, now that you mention it, I did. I wanted you to score hits they'd remember, hits the higher ups couldn't pigeonhole when reported, and I loaded the magazines with the biggest bombs I could get of their kind."

"Go on, man. What were they?" Both officers looked at Moriarty with drawn faces.

"Mr. Stuart, will you present the Moriarty compliments to the O'Sheas on your return to the ship, and just mention this was a fine day for a murder? The bombs were very red, overripe tomatoes."