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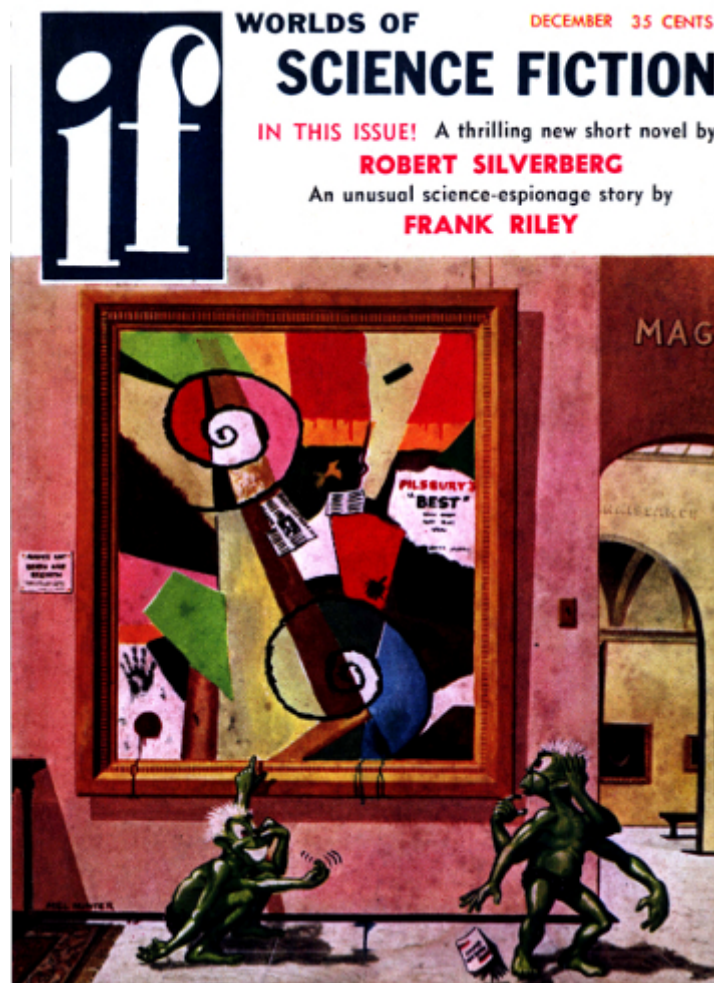
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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CAPTAIN PEABODY ***

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Captain PEABODY

BY ROG PHILLIPS

*He carried the monkey of fear on his back for
all to see; and until he could shake the beast
he knew he would be a captain in name only....*

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The gavel rapped sharply, and the murmur of conversation throughout the banquet room drifted into hushed silence. The occasion was the seventy-fifth meeting of RETSCAP, the organization of Retired Space Captains; the place, a banquet room in the Empire Club on the hundred and sixty-fourth floor of the New Empire State Building in Manhattan; the time, approximately nine thirty in the evening, August 9, 2231 A.D.; those present, the four hundred and eighteen members of RETSCAP—or rather, four hundred and nineteen, including the new member, Captain Arthur Peabody, who had reached his ninety-fifth birthday just two weeks before, and by doing so had been automatically retired from active service and thereby become eligible for membership while still in the prime of life.

"Quiet everybody," the Secretary and master of ceremonies, Captain John Evers, said good-naturedly, rapping the gavel again. He turned to the new member, sitting next to him. "Captain Peabody," he said in his loud clear voice, "The time has come for fulfillment of a traditional part of our get-togethers—one we all look forward to with great pleasure and anticipation."

There was a subdued clapping of hands, then Captain Evers cleared his throat loudly and continued. "Each of us here has become a member of RETSCAP only after a lifetime of space travel, much of that time as a Captain in charge of the destinies of our crews and passengers and ships. Inevitably each of us has had some unusual experiences in his time, and we like to talk about them, boring each other to death, no doubt, as we repeat the same stories among ourselves meeting after meeting. So it's always a treat to us to get a new member and by so doing get some fresh stories to listen to. I am about to give you the floor, and what we would like to hear is the one experience you have had which you think is the most unusual, in some way, of your entire career. The floor is now yours, Captain Arthur Peabody!"

Arthur Peabody stood up slowly, a tall man, long legged and short bodied in his seven foot height, his sharply bridged nose and high forehead giving his features the stamp of authority comfortably worn, and waited, a quiet smile on his firm lips, until the applause subsided. Then he began his speech.

The one experience that stands out in my mind more than any other really began about five minutes after I was assigned to my first ship, the *Alabama*, when I was given the list of my officers and crew to check over. Half way down the list I came to a name, Oscar Resnick, and suddenly the thrill of being a captain was gone. For two cents, at that moment, I would gladly have become a retired Space Captain before I started. I was fifty-two years old then, and it had been about thirty years since I last saw Resnick. His rating was still spaceman first class, and I knew if he had ever risen higher he had been demoted again, as was inevitable, sooner or later. He was an incurable bully with the worst streak of sadistic cruelty in him I've ever run across.

Even the sight of his name on that list sent an instinctive fear through me. Once, when I was still a space recruit he had whipped me to within an inch of my life and instilled in me the realization that he could do it any time, anywhere.

A man like that is slightly mad, or strikes you that way. You stay out of his way if you can, and if you can't you let him have his way, swallow his insults, do anything to avoid the beating you would get if he took the whim. Live with that for two years as I had thirty years before, and you never get over it.

Now I was captain of my first ship and he was to be one of the crew. And I knew in my heart that if he walked up to me and suddenly reached up to scratch his head I would cringe and turn pale. I wouldn't be able to help it. And if that happened it would be the

end of me. The crew would think I was yellow—and I was when it came to Oscar Resnick.

Oh, he wouldn't do anything that would give me cause to toss him in the brig, nor even anything that would give me cause to fire him—at least a reason that would stand up under a union inquiry if he demanded one, which he would. He would just grin at me knowingly with eyes that told me he thought I was yellow, and hesitate just long enough after an order to make me wonder if he was going to obey—the kind of stuff that could break me down completely, in time. And there would be nothing I could do about it.

I made a try to keep him off my crew. The Dispatcher admitted Resnick had the reputation of being a trouble maker, but if I didn't take him there was likelihood the Union would call out the whole crew and ground the ship.

Then the Dispatcher pointed out the fact that the list was short one man, my personal orderly. I hadn't thought about an orderly at all, and hadn't chosen one yet. He gave me the list of available orderlies and I looked it over, most of the names meaning nothing at all to me. Suddenly I ran across a name I knew. I didn't know the man, but I had heard of him, and probably all of you have.

The name was David Markham. He was *the* David Markham all right, the Dispatcher said when I asked him—the one who was kicked out of Space Patrol for abject cowardice. The Dispatcher told me the man had been trying for two years to get back into space, the Union wouldn't take him, and the only way he could get into service was an orderly to a Captain—if any Captain took him.

The Dispatcher suggested two or three other men he knew personally, any one of which I would probably like and decide to keep permanently. But a crazy idea was running around in my head. It was a clutching at straws, but what it amounted to was this: I had a bully on my crew, a man who had my number and knew how to use it. Why not balance him out by making my one choice on the crew a man who was the exact opposite, an abject coward? Possibly, on some level of thought, I wanted company if Resnick showed me up to the crew, someone who couldn't look down on me because of the simple fact that he was the lowest there was.

The Dispatcher almost cried with happiness over my choice of David Markham. It turned out he was sorry for the guy, and felt only a man with real guts would have the courage to sign Markham on. He would certainly have been surprised if I had told him the truth.

I met Markham the next morning at seven o'clock when I returned to the Dispatch Office at Spaceport, New Mexico. He was a fine looking fellow, twenty-five, rather short—just over the six foot four minimum of the Space Patrol, about one ninety mass, blonde, square jaw. I took a liking to him at once—but there was a haunting something at the back of his eyes that never went away even when he was smiling, and he smiled often during the time I knew him, though he never laughed but once—and it was a sound I never want to hear again. But that came much later.

I sent him aboard with my bags to get my quarters in order, then steeled myself to check in the crew. You know how it is, you sit at the window and the men come by, one at a time, you introduce yourself, fix his face in your mind, size him up, then call for the next man. Finally it was Oscar Resnick looking through the window at me, his thick shock of sandy red hair glued down, clean-shaven, six foot eight, about two hundred and forty pounds mass, his brown eyes a little too large, his thin lipped mouth a little too small, his teeth a little too long.

The minute I saw him the old fear descended. It took him a few seconds to place where he had seen me before. Then he recognized me, and I could see memory flowing through his mind as his wide eyes widened even more, and his thin lips pulled back into a knowing grin. "Well, *Cap'n* Peabody!" he said, rolling the word *Cap'n* with his tongue as though flavoring it with contempt. "It's a small world. Fancy...." I could read his thoughts as they flashed across his face. He would play a waiting game, taking his time, but it would be a game to his liking. Showing up the yellow streak in a *Captain*. Suddenly, he

was completely respectful, almost too respectful. "It is certainly good to be shipping with you, sir," he said.

"That's the proper spirit, Resnick," I said. "All right, get aboard. Gate seven."

After he had gone I checked in the rest of the crew, seeing liking and respect in their eyes, and wondering how quickly it would change to barely concealed contempt, wondering what Resnick would do to show me up. Like a renegade wolf he would bide his time, staying out of range, until the moment he decided was right, then he would dart in with a swift attack that would tear open my fear of him for all to see—and dart away again to sit and laugh while my soul withered within me. That's all he would do. That's all he would have to do, and he and I both knew it.

In the days following take-off, I watched the slow build-up with a certainty of knowledge that can only come from personal experience. I knew Resnick's methods.

A successful bully must be a shrewd psychologist and know how to capitalize on weaknesses. I watched Oscar Resnick size up this man and that one, and go to work on each. It's a subtle formula he used. Wait until you are alone with a man, then trip him when he goes by you, or dig your elbow into his ribs painfully, then claim it was an accident, but in such a way that both he and you know it wasn't an accident yet nobody else will believe it. Mock him with your eyes and your smile, dare him to do something about it. What can a man do? He can't go running to the Mate with the complaint that you are picking on him. He can't bring the thing into the open by fighting you without striking the first blow and being branded the aggressor in an unprovoked assault, and unless he is a professional fighter your sneering confidence bluffs him out of an open fight at first. Gradually you establish a fear reaction in him that would keep him from winning a fight even if, originally, he could have beaten you.

When you are the victim of that sort of thing you really have only two courses of action open to you. Try to keep out of his way as much as possible, if you have any personal integrity, or kowtow to him, grovel in his presence, sneer with him at his other victims, flatter him, and hope he will direct his sadistic streak elsewhere.

Soon four or five of the crewmen start hanging around with the bully, admiring him too much, laughing too much at what he says, siding with him against others, and even doing a little minor bullying themselves by ganging up on this or that victim as soon as each has recognized the streak of cowardly sadism in the other which binds them together as human jackals.

A man like Resnick leaves the strong alone at first; waits until the jackals have gathered around him. When this stage is reached, when anybody who says anything is a yellow stool-pigeon, you find the best man in your crew a hospital case with bleeding nose, bruised face, black eyes, and maybe a couple of broken ribs caved in by someone's shoe. After the doctor gives him first aid you go to the infirmary and ask him who did it. He clamps his lips together and tells you he didn't see who it was. He's lying, and he knows you know he is lying, but can you torture it out of him or punish him for not telling you? No. And there's nothing a Captain can do about it. He must have the testimony of the injured party in writing, signed and witnessed, and the Code Book must be followed specifically in punishing the aggressors; and if the Captain does anything at all he is almost certain to be tied up in court at the first port of call by the punished parties. Even if the Captain has provable justification for putting a man in the brig or fining him or giving him a demotion in assigned type of work, his ship will be delayed by the trial, and the owners will decide they need a Captain who knows how to avoid such costly delays.

A man like Oscar Resnick is a social cancer, and I saw the symptoms of his presence on the ship come into being, and grow, and I knew he was too cunning and too shrewd to let them get out of hand. Any other Captain, knowing all this, would sit back and do

nothing, knowing that that was his only safe course consistent with his duty of keeping the ship on schedule.

I had to follow this course of action too. But I knew that it was just a prelude, that when Resnick sensed the time was ripe for his purposes, he would get at me.

It would be subtle and would only take a minute. It would take place in the presence of the crew. It would be something that would catch me unawares, bring the light of fear into my eyes for all the crew to see. That would be enough. The word would go back that Captain Peabody was yellow.

Some of the crew would quit the ship at North Marsport, telling the Union business agent they didn't want to ship with a yellow Captain. The business agent would find men refusing to sign on my ship because I was a yellow Captain. And inevitably the time would come when I could not keep a full crew. Then the owners would dismiss me, and I wouldn't be able to get another berth as Captain.

I didn't know how to avoid it. It was only a question of time. *When* would it happen? Today? Not for six months yet? Tomorrow? When?

David Markham proved from the start to be an extremely conscientious orderly. My quarters were kept spotless, I had only to lift my eyebrows and he was there ready to obey. How many hours a day he spent wiping up imaginary dust, rubbing nonexistent detergent off my eating utensils for the nth time before I sat down to eat, polishing my already mirror-bright shoes, and the million and one things I didn't even know about, I'll never know.

Few orderlies mix with the crew, and he was no exception. Most orderlies either have the personality of a spinster to start with or acquire it after a few years. He had none of that, but then he wasn't the type that orderlies are made of.

There was a tension in him at all times that was so strong it seemed almost visible—a tension that made each minor chore a matter of life and death to him. It was pitiful to watch, and I usually avoided watching him as much as possible. But a Captain may not pick up something he has dropped, or do a lot of things that any ordinary man does for himself but which are the traditional duties of the orderly—if for no other reason than to keep him busy; so by necessity David Markham was with me during most of my waking hours.

A pattern of speculation about him grew up in one corner of my mind. David Markham was the type of man you instinctively like and respect, the type that in the service *should* have climbed the career ladder to an Admiralship by the time he was seventy-five.

As the days passed the haunting fear in the depths of his eyes seemed almost to have vanished. If I had not known who he was I would have laughed at the possibility of his being a coward. Even knowing who he was, I began to doubt it.

I thought a great deal about the circumstances brought out at his court-martial, the testimony that proved he had broken cover and run, then groveled at the feet of his captors, crying and pleading for his life. Later the enemy had captured outposts they could not have located without his help, proving that he had spilled his guts to save his skin. That had, of course, been in the fuss on Venus with Porter's Renegades. I didn't see how there could be any doubt of David Markham's guilt, even though the more I saw of the man the more unbelievable it seemed. I tried to figure out alternative explanations. I tried to believe them. I *wanted* to believe.

I would catch Markham gazing through a viewport into the subdued silver velvet of infinity and at the millions of flashing jewels that are the individually visible suns of our galaxy and the nebulae that are other galaxies, with his tortured soul, for the moment, at peace. I would hesitate, wanting to join him in his quiet mood as I would have joined any

other man, then I would steal away, unable somehow to bring myself to create any kind of bond between us. I had, I realized by then, chosen David Markham in the hopes that he might become a tidbit I could toss to Resnick to pacify him and divert him from me. A cowardly motivation, no matter how you look at it. It had been an impulse I was now ashamed of. It haunted me. Because of it I couldn't bring myself to extend to him a Judas friendship, which is what I felt it would be.

We were forty days out from Earth when Resnick turned his attention to David Markham. I discovered it quite by accident. Ten minutes after my regular sleep period had begun the First Mate saw fit to inform me that an uncharted meteor swarm was going to intercept us in four hours, and of course it was my responsibility to determine what precautions should be taken.

Under ordinary circumstances I would merely have rung for my orderly, but I was half asleep and did the more natural thing. I went to the door to his room, next to mine, and opened it without knocking. He had just undressed, getting ready for bed. He stood there, startled at my unexpected entrance. And I saw the ugly purple splotch over his kidneys that could have come only from the blow of a fist.

I pretended I hadn't noticed it. I merely told him that there would be emergency duty, and backed out, sliding the door shut.

When he came out two minutes later, he gave no indication of whether he thought I had noticed the bruise or not. And for the next few hours I was far too busy to concern myself about it anyway. But I felt as though I had given him that bruise myself, with my own fist, and I was as surely responsible for it as though I had.

To make it worse, I realized that despite the guilt I felt I still hoped that Resnick would settle for a *famous* coward, and leave me alone.

While I plotted the courses of hundreds of chunks of meteor iron to search out safe holes through the intercepting meteor group my thoughts whispered gleefully, "All you have to do is pretend you don't know anything and maybe Resnick will be grateful and leave you alone."

Later, trying to get some sleep, I tried to think what could be done. Could I come right out and ask Markham about that bruise? Suppose I did, and he told me Resnick had done it, and I used that as an excuse to toss Resnick in the brig? Then the men would throw Markham's reputation in my face and claim it was a cowardly lie; and if I didn't release Resnick it would mean an official investigation at North Marsport—on the first leg of my first command. Suppose he told me and I did nothing. Then *he* would know I was afraid of Resnick!

I didn't sleep much. I didn't get much sleep for several days. Coupled with my guilt feeling, my hate for myself, was a growing feeling that striking my orderly was the first step in Resnick's plan to get at me, smoke me into the open where he could find an opportunity to expose me.

It was obvious how Resnick had gotten to Markham. It had to be when Markham went to the kitchen to bring my meals, and it had to be with the knowledge of the cook, which meant that Resnick already ruled the crew openly, behind the scenes.

There was no danger of mutiny or any of the claptrap of fiction, of course. Resnick was no fool, and had no insane ambitions other than that of feeding his streak of sadism.

A few days later I noticed a small spot of blood on the back of Markham's shirt. I said nothing, but that evening after I had dismissed him and he had gone to his room I took a small flat metal mirror and slid it under his door just far enough to peek in and watch him undress, and I saw the welts across his back.

Worse, I saw him crying. He shook with silent sobs while tears streamed from his eyes, and hopelessness and discouragement and friendlessness held possession of him.

At that moment I knew with absolute conviction that the court-martial had been right. He was a coward and would never be anything else. But at the same moment, I suddenly

understood him. It was something he couldn't help.

I lay in the darkness of my own cubicle, a dull anger growing within me, turning me into a slightly irrational being.

There was, I suppose, a sort of self-flagellation to it. A psychiatrist would possibly diagnose it as that, anyway. In my own mind I was responsible for everything Resnick did to David Markham, which meant that by "punishing" Resnick I was punishing myself. When you descend to such levels of pure and obsessing emotional thinking, logic gets mixed up quite a bit.

I came out of that sleepless sleep period with one thing quite clear in my thoughts. *Things couldn't go on the way they were.*

Oh, sure, I had a sneaking hunch that this frame of mind I was in was what Resnick had been angling for. By now I had invested Resnick with omniscience so that it seemed perfectly logical that he should know I had spent a sleepless night, that he should know I had seen those welts on Markham's back. In my mind's eye I could see him, a sneer on his thin lipped small mouth, while he waited for me to stick my neck out. I could see his muscular arms, covered by freckled skin that covered sleek muscles, dangling at his sides, fingers uncoiled but ready to double into fists—fists that had once beaten *me* into shuddering unconsciousness, years ago—fists that could do it again while slightly mad brown eyes glittered at me, mocking....

David Markham served my breakfast, the perfect orderly, quick to anticipate my wishes, so attuned to my habits by now that he almost seemed to read my thoughts before I was aware of them myself. He seemed to have not a care in the world. A cold shower can cover a multitude of inner tortures with a pink glow of well being....

Suddenly the idea came to me. I would talk to Oscar Resnick. I would plead with him. I would offer him money—my whole salary on this trip. Such men have their price. As Captain I made five times more than he. I would give it all to him if he would agree to lay off.

All I wanted was to get through my first command without trouble, get back to Earth on schedule, make a good showing. I was, suddenly, pathetically confident that he would agree. A deal like that would have to be discussed in absolute privacy, however. The slightest inkling of it to the crew—

In a panic of haste lest my confidence wane, I skipped my third cup of coffee and hurried to my office. Switching the intercom to crews' quarters I said with the crisp tones of command, "Mr. Resnick, report to the Captain's office," repeating it three times as is customary on intercom calls aboard ship. Then I made sure the intercom was off, and sat there behind my desk waiting, my heart pounding painfully within my chest, my fingers clenched into white knuckled fists to keep them from trembling.

Five minutes later there came a polite knock at the door. Composing myself as much as possible I said, "Come in," in what I hoped was a calm authoritative voice.

The door slid open and Oscar Resnick stood there, his shoulders almost as wide as the door opening, his space-faded sandy hair neatly combed back, his brown eyes darting around the room in a quick survey and just as quickly masking their triumphant glitter as he saw that I was alone, his thin lips which had been in a firm straight line breaking into a satisfied and anticipatory smile.

"Come in and close the door," I commanded, my voice breaking into nervous uncertainty on the last three words.

He stepped inside and closed the door firmly behind him, his eyes never leaving me. When the door was firmly closed he said, "Sure, Art, old boy." With those four words he took command of the situation. They had been uttered so softly that they could not have sent a whisper over the intercom even if it had been on. He walked toward me until he came to the edge of the desk, then planting his fists on the desk top, he said, "I've been

wondering how long it would take for you to call me in for a little talk." He exuded an aura of quiet contemptuous strength as his eyes flicked over me in speculation.

"That's right," I said, hearing the nervous squeak in my voice, not sure whether my comment had any relation to what he had said or not. "I want to have a talk with you. Things can't go on the way they are!"

Resnick drew back in pretended surprise. "Why, I don't know what you mean, *sir*," he said.

"You know perfectly well what I mean," I said, my voice breaking completely. "This is my first command! My whole future hangs on it. What satisfaction could you possibly get from ruining me?"

In that moment the past descended upon me completely. Once again I was pleading for mercy where there was no mercy, hoping against hope before those soft mad eyes, searching for something that could never be there.

"Why, *sir*," he said, mockingly, "I don't know what you mean at all. Perhaps the stress of your new duties...?"

"How much would you take?" I blurted desperately. "How much, to lay off of—David Markham—leave me alone...?"

"Birds of a feather, huh?" he said. His eyes became thoughtful. "Every man has his price, I suppose...."

A surge of hope coursed through me. Maybe we could dicker. Maybe it wouldn't cost as much as I was prepared to pay.

He scratched his chin slowly, then said, "Well—how about your salary for this trip and five thousand dollars?" His thin lips flicked back in a grin. "And a promise on your part that you will sign me on for the next trip—or turn in your Captain's papers?"

The universe stood still as I saw ruin facing me. There was no way out. No way out at all. I heard myself blurt, "Why? Why? WHY?"

He leaned over my desk slowly, his fists planted on it once again, until his face was scant inches from mine. He whispered, "Because you're yellow. That's why. You never had any business becoming a captain." His hoarse, taunting whisper hung in the silence of the room like the knell of doom.

There is a madness beyond madness, of that I am sure. I should have been grovelling in fear, I should have been making a decision to step into an airlock and eject myself into space, a suicide unable to live longer with himself, because what he said was true and I knew it was true beyond any shadow of doubt.

Instead, I heard myself saying, "All right, Resnick. You win." My voice was perfectly calm. It was not me. Whatever it was, it was not me, talking. My part of my mind was in a numb stupor, unable to act, unable even to think. I heard my voice say, "It's a deal. You promise to lay off. In return I promise to turn my salary for this trip over to you when we get paid, and to sign you on for the next trip." My voice was perfectly calm, even practical. I felt my lips curve into a calculated and bitter smile of defeat. I heard myself say, "Such an agreement can't be put into writing, of course, but—shall we drink on it?"

I saw disappointment, disbelief, amazed surprise, cross his lean angular features as I rose from behind my desk. As though in a dream I turned my back on him as I crossed the office to the liquor cabinet, the prerogative of a space Captain. I opened it up with unshaking hands. He followed me, came to stand behind me, very close. I lifted out a bottle of Scotch, the seal still unbroken, and turned to him.

"Scotch?" I asked.

He hulked over me, his thin lips stretched into a gleeful grin. "Sure," he said softly, his lips pasted against his stained teeth.

He sensed my sudden movement, a movement I was not conscious of dictating, but he was too slow as the full bottle crashed down on his skull, shattering and sending a shower of alcohol over his uniform and the floor. His eyes did not close, but blanked into unconsciousness as he sagged to the floor.



I stood there for a moment, blinking down at his unconscious form, not quite believing what had happened. Even in unconsciousness he sent fear icing through my veins.

In one mad moment I had ruined it all. When he recovered he would be unforgiving, without mercy. For a minute or two I broke down completely, crying like a baby.

Then, gradually, a calm settled over me. I turned him over onto his back and pulled his slack arms together. I took off my belt and wrapped it around his wrists until I could fasten the buckle firmly.

Then I went to my cubicle and brought back a roll of adhesive tape and taped his lips closed, laughing in a low, mad voice that was not my own.

I used the rest of the roll of tape to fasten his ankles together. And just as I finished he opened his eyes.

It took him a few minutes to organize his thoughts and fix his attention on me, his eyes questioning me. I continued to chuckle under my breath. I was mad, conscious of the fact that I was mad, and beyond caring.

"You have nice eyes," I heard myself say. "Nice soft brown eyes." I examined his scalp with careful concern for a moment. "Good thing," I said. "The bottle broke, so there will

be no sign of abrasion that could be proof of anything."

I took out a cigarette and lit it with trembling fingers, while he watched me. Blowing out a streamer of smoke and jabbing in his direction with my fingers, I said, "I'm learning a few things, Resnick. Already—I'm learning. I wonder how much it will take to break *you* down."

I pushed his head back and tried to put my thumb against his eyeball. He closed his eyes tightly and I forced his right eye open and pressed the ball of my thumb against the exposed eyeball.

"Not too much or it will make your eye bloodshot," I said, in hardly more than a whisper. "Evidence, you know. Who's going to believe that the Captain did such a thing? Not even the crew! Sure, they'll agree with you to keep from being beat up. That is, if you have any stomach for that sort of thing when I get through with you. I'm just beginning, you know."

I lifted my thumb from his eye and squeezed his nostrils together, watching the terror build up in him, watching his struggles, watching him grow weaker and weaker, and releasing him at the last moment before he lost consciousness, and watching his chest heave as he sucked in lungfuls of air.

"I just thought of something," I said to him. "You wouldn't *dare* retaliate after I let you go. To strike me would be treason, punishable by life imprisonment, wouldn't it? And what would be your defense? That the Captain had tortured you? Who would believe that? Who are your witnesses? See how I have stolen your weapons?" I pried his left eye open and pressed against it with a thumbnail. "A half hour ought to do it," I taunted. "No marks. I have to be very careful so that an examination by the ship's doctor won't show a thing."

In ten minutes—or was it ten eternities?—he became a quivering mass of flesh.

I did things to him that left him too weak to move. At the end of half an hour I pulled the tape off his mouth and listened to him blubber. I took the tape off his ankles, and the belt off his wrists. I tortured him some more and he took it.

"And when I call for you over the intercom," I said, "if you don't come at once I have you for gross insubordination to your Captain. And if you so much as touch one member of the crew again I'll call you, boy. I'll call you."

Finally I let him go.

After he had gone I trembled like a leaf. Slowly a little bit of sanity returned to me, and with it a realization of what I had done. Nausea overcame me and I staggered into the washroom and got rid of my breakfast, then returned to my desk.

For hours I sat there while my mind picked up the threads of life and began functioning again. There was still the feeling that Resnick was omniscient, that he would be able to topple me into disgrace. But with it, gradually, came the realization that he wouldn't, that he couldn't.

I had used his own psychological weapons on him, building up in him a fear psychosis that he couldn't successfully fight. I had turned the tables.

I couldn't really believe it just yet, but I couldn't disbelieve it either. For the next three days I went about my customary routines with a calm exterior, waiting for the storm to break, but it never did.

Finally, to test it, I deliberately went on a tour of inspection through the ship, until I came to where Resnick was working, along with several others of the crew. As I entered the compartment and saw him look up, I saw the instinctive cringing that he couldn't help. In

a flash of inspiration I saw that his sadism was a cover for his own cowardice, a compensation mechanism.

I knew then that I had won. After one long silent moment I turned my back on him and left the compartment.

As I walked by myself to the central tube and pulled myself up to the Captain's deck, for the first time I began to realize what being Captain meant. It means a lot of things, of course, but most of all it means facing up to one's command, being in charge.

I knew that I would never again be afraid—least of all afraid of Oscar Resnick. Nor would I ever again be afraid of fear. In the future I might be faced with the problem of a bully on my crew again, but I would know how to deal with him—with his own weapons, the ones he used *because he would be most vulnerable to them himself*.

When the *Alabama* reached North Marsport Resnick quit the ship. I was glad to see him go. The rest of the crew remained with me, and I had no more trouble during the five years I commanded the *Alabama*.

David Markham remained with me as my orderly until I retired, and he is still with me. A few years after the incidents of this story I had an opportunity to get him a commission but he turned it down and refused to leave me. Sometimes I think he knows what happened in my office that day that I called Resnick in, but he has never given any hint whether he does or not.

You wonder that I am not ashamed to confess publicly to you that I was a coward? You shouldn't wonder. We are all cowards—or fools. I am not ashamed of the fact that once I was a coward. Bravery, in a way, consists in not being afraid of being afraid.

Just one thing remains in my story. When I reached North Marsport on that first leg of my first command, I was a Captain.

I have been one ever since.

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