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Author: John Graham Bower

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H.M.S. ——

BY

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TO

D. V. B.

When Homer launched his epic on the literary sea,
The critics were as merciful as they can ever be:
"We take it that the author did the best that he can
do,"
"And the book should be remembered for at least a
year or two...."
But Homer let the critics go, and listened with a
smile,
For he had heard a verdict that was better by a mile,
In a code that only Homer as a husband understood,
—
"You *are* a funny clever thing—I'd no *idea* you could."

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H.M.S. —.

"1923."

[The following is the description by Professor J. Scott, F.R.S., of his recent Airship Journey across the old Bed of the North Sea. July 1, 1923.]

It is perhaps unnecessary for me to state the objects and purpose of my journey of last week, as it would be false modesty in me not to recognise the great interest taken by the geologic and antiquarian worlds in my proposed enterprise. For the benefit, however, of those for whose intelligence the so-called "Popular" geologic works are compiled, I will recapitulate some points which are ancient history to my instructed readers.

The winter of 1922 witnessed the greatest geologic change in the earth's surface since the last of the Glacial epochs. Into the causes and general results of this change I do not propose to enter, beyond mentioning my opinion that the theory propounded by Professor Middleton (a theory designed only for one purpose—that of attempting to throw doubt on the data and reasoning of my first monograph on the subject) is not only childish, but based on a fallacy.

I will confine myself to the results as they affected this country and the continent of Europe, of which it is now a prolongation or headland—not, as the Daily Press erroneously labels it, a

peninsula.

The total change in elevation of the land is now calculated at 490 feet 7 inches, but more accurate measurements are still being taken. This great change brings us back to a geologic age when man and mammoth co-existed in the primeval forest of Cromer, and when the Dogger Bank was a great plain where wild beasts roamed and palæolithic man left the traces of his industry in the bones and shaped flints which we hope soon to collect in quantities from the mud and ooze with which thousands of years of sea-action has covered them.

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I had little difficulty in obtaining Admiralty permission to accompany the Captain of a Naval Airship on one of his regular patrol trips across the great expanse of mud which was once the North Sea.

Of course in the six months since the departure of the Ocean from the new lands, the district has been regularly patrolled by the Navy, but the air is as yet the only safe route by which to cross it. It will be some time, perhaps years, before the surface becomes safe to walk on, although the Government is plentifully sprinkling grass and other seeds from all passing aircraft. In the large and powerful airship in which I was privileged to travel, we had every modern device for enabling a close inspection of the surface to be taken. A trail-rope was used when it was desired to drift slowly or to actually hover over some of the points of interest which we observed on our passage.

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The day was fine and clear, and I could not have wished for better weather conditions when we rose over Dover and started the main engines on a north-easterly course. As no maps can yet be compiled of the New Lands (as popular clamour has most inaccurately labelled them) owing to their dangerous surface, we navigated by the old Admiralty charts, marked in depths of water, and I was amused at having the Varne and Goodwin "shoals" pointed out to me—the objects indicated being long ridges of sandy hills rising from the shining surface of the Channel bed. Off Deal and Dover a few of the wrecks are being worked on by enterprising local Salvage Companies—a road being laid out to each composed of gravel, sand, and brushwood. I fear, however, that the speculators will not profit greatly. The roads are good enough over the sand, but where they cross the mud-flats they swallow not only their traffic but the funds of their owners.

As we travelled up the valley with the drone of our engines echoing from the whale-backed ridges on either side, with our gondolas barely a hundred feet from the ground, I discussed our programme with the Captain, whose views and reminiscences I found most entertaining. On general subjects he was like most of his service, almost contemptibly uneducated (I might mention that he did not understand what Magdalenian culture was!), but he was evidently well read in his own trade. He told me several stories which were no doubt excellent, but which were marred to a point of incomprehensibility by a foolish interlarding of technical terms. I gave him a short précis of what is known or deduced of prehistoric life on the New Lands, and spoke of the bones and fossils occasionally found in trawl-nets by the fishermen. His point of view was that the war overshadowed everything. He seemed to think that that event was one from which all others should date, although it had lasted such a short time. As very little of interest to me could yet be seen owing to the general coating of slime with which the land was covered, I amused myself by listening to his experiences on his weekly air patrols, his conversation being somewhat after this style:—

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"Yes, it was a fair snorter while it lasted—that gale,—damn lucky we hadn't many ships out. Yes, most of 'em got in. They either ran down Channel (Lord! the Straits were like opening the caisson gates to a graving-dock!) and made New Queenstown, or else they got into harbour on the East Coast and stranded there. You see, what with mines and wrecks, the North Sea wasn't being used much, and as the navies were taking a rest there wasn't much of value at sea. Some ships got stuck though—fishing boats mostly. No, they were all right—it took a week to drain off, and it was calm weather when they grounded. Most of them have wireless now, and they yelped for help, and we took 'em off. Those that hadn't were a bit hungry when we found them, but I don't think we lost many. You see, all nations sent air fleets out. Have you read the U.S. Magazine? You ought to; there's a damn good argument going on as to whether it would have paid us or Germany most if it had happened during the war. I think us, myself. You see, there's only a narrow channel now running past the Norwegian coast, and we could have mined that. Look at that, Professor! How's that for mines? That's Zeebrugge with the houses showing over the sand-hills. Whose? Oh! both sides put 'em there—that hollow to the east is proper stiff with them, isn't it? Port fifteen—Quartermaster! steer east—What? No, just going to show you something. You said it seemed a wicked waste of material; well, look over there—two of them got it. One's a U.C. boat but the other's a big one. They picked them up coming back, and that big chap's nearly in two halves—Starboard twenty, Quartermaster! No, we needn't go closer, you'll see one every half mile between here and Heligoland—some of ours as well as theirs. Yes—that's a Dutchman—torpedoed by the look of him. See the hole in the stern? Oh, butter and bacon and that sort of thing! No, nobody in her. Why? Well, look at the davits—they left her before she sank—all the boats are gone.

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"Like these glasses? That's the *Hinder* over there. Yes, they still live in her, and she's still useful. A fine big lightship, isn't she? She settled down at her moorings as peacefully as could be, and when we sent a line down to them on our first patrol trip after the show, they sent up a note asking for some 'baccy, and would we post some letters for them? Nothing ever did worry the *Hinder* in the war, and it won't now. You see, English and German used to fight under her tail every other night, and as she was an international light she just flashed away and looked on. I

wonder none of their crew have written a book yet—'Battles round the *Hinder*,' by an Eyewitness. It would be better than most of the truck that has been written in England about it. Yes, she lies in a bit of a hollow, but the light shows up all right, and that's all we want. Here you are; this is what you wanted."

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We had reached the first object of interest in my journey. More trail-rope was paid out, and we swung with our engine stopped, downwind, lying twenty feet above a great pit torn in the earth by some tremendous explosion. All around the pit-mouth lay masses of earth and rock, and the face of the crater was thick with bone-breccia and fossils of every kind. The explosion had occurred over an old beach on the bank of what had once been the old Channel River. For thousands of years prehistoric men and beasts had lived and died there, and had left their skeletons to enlighten us. And more than bones had been left. Almost the first basket-load that our light electric "grab" produced for us contained among its numerous specimens of surpassing interest a rough "hand-axe" of dark flint, possibly of Pre-Chellean culture. However, the whole of my notes and specimens obtained on this visit are now being examined and classified, and I will postpone description of them until the meeting of the Society on the 18th.

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I would have liked to have descended into the pit by a ladder or other means, but was dissuaded, partly by the motion of the airship, which swayed to and fro in the light wind, and partly by the blunt negative with which my suggestion was greeted by the Captain. We took only three baskets of specimens from this spot, as we had others to visit, and our carrying capacity was limited. As we slowly hauled in the trail-rope and prepared to continue our journey, I asked the Captain whether this crater had been intentionally formed by the Government for purposes of research, or whether it had been produced accidentally in the late war.

"Accident?" he said. "Well, no, hardly that—but still, I expect he *thought* he might pull it off without doing himself in." He pointed to one of two big submarines which lay on opposite sides of the crater. The one indicated was the smaller of the two, and the least damaged. She lay upright with a slight tilt up by the bow (which was dented and torn rather badly). The other was in two halves, and lay on her side with a mound of earth, bones, and rock, making a sort of rough junction between the halves. The two submarines looked like great guardians of the pit, and I wondered at the madness of man that makes him revel in war and killing to no purpose. I mentioned something of this thought to the Captain, who was still gazing at the more intact of the two boats, and tapping a flint "Coup de poing" on the side of our gondola.

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"Well, Professor," he said, "the man who made this tool didn't make it to clean his nails with, did he?" I observed that it was now generally agreed that most of prehistoric man's weapons were for use against his greatest foes—which were wild beasts, and not men. The Captain jerked the flint implement back into the basket.

"My oath! you've said it," he snapped. "*We've* been fighting wild beasts, and that chap in the smaller boat was a friend of mine. He took that Fritz fairly amidships with his stem, but he couldn't get free, and they went down locked. When Fritz hit bottom his mines went, and that blew them apart, and so there's your bone pit, Professor."

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I looked back at the pit and the two hulks beside it, now dwindling astern. "How do you know all that?" I asked.

"Read his number on the conning-tower for one thing, and the chap who had that boat would be pretty sure to take a Hun with him when he had to go. The rest? Well, his bows are bashed in, you see, and his lid is still open, so he gave Fritz his bow first on the surface. You may have some relics of curious beasts in that basket, Professor, but I can show you a relic, or a hundred if you like, of a damn sight nastier beast. See the masts over that mudbank? That's a Dutch liner—two torpedoes and no warning. Full of women too. Like to go and look? I thought not. Yes, Professor, I can show you two hundred sunken ships in a few hours' run here, and they haven't all got their davits empty by a long chalk. Never mind—here's something more amusing."

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Our engine slowed and almost stopped while we drifted across a flat, broad, muddy plateau which sloped away to a valley on each side.

"See those lines?" said my abrupt naval friend—"those long straight scores along the mud, I mean. Those are where the submarines—ours and theirs—have been taking bottom for a rest. Taking bottom? Oh! on winter nights, when it's too dark to see or when they're waiting for anything, or got defects or struck fog, you know. They used to take bottom a lot here, because it's good surface and they had twenty fathom of water, too. The marks haven't washed out yet. See this one? He bumped three times before he settled: he must have had a lot of headway on—his track's all of half a mile. That bed is where he settled for the night. It's soft there, and he worked in over his bilge keel. There's another, fifty yards off him. Of course it was probably made a year before or after he made his, but there must have been cases when our boats and Fritz's lay that much apart all night and didn't know it. Pretty queer idea, isn't it? Perhaps a banjo strumming in one boat and a gramophone going in the other. Oh yes, they used to have concerts on the bottom before turning in! One of our chaps gave me a programme once. There were twenty items in it, and it was headed 'C/o G.P.O.—126 feet.' This was a regular submarine traffic lane for both sides. Some parts of the surface up north aren't marked at all,—it was either too deep water or there were too many mines about. Funny thing is, that some of the areas which both sides seem to have studiously gone round and avoided have no mines at all in them. Just rumour, I suppose. They gave the place a bad name and damned it. Eh? No—that's all right—tip 'em out on the deck—we can scrub the place out when we get in."

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He spoke to a sailor, who stepped forward and turned the nearest basket of specimens upside down. As he did so, something rolled from the heap to my feet, and with a thrill which could only be understood by my brother scientists I gazed on the greatest archæological discovery of the ages. I have already announced my discovery to the press, and the scientists of all nations are now gathering in London to inspect it, so I shall not enter now on a detailed description. I may say that my first thought was that I had in my hands a copy of my confrère Keith's reconstruction of the Piltdown skull, and that my own reconstruction had been to a certain extent false; but on mature reflection I decided that this could not be so, and that I must classify my find as belonging to a hitherto unknown branch of the race of Homo Sapiens—akin to, but yet distinct from, Eoanthropus. This prehistoric man I have called Homo Scoticanthropus, and my full report and conclusions will be shortly before the Society.

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The skull is intact and requires no reconstruction. The lower mandible is of the chimpanzee-like type found with Eoanthropus, and as it was picked up by the same basket, must undoubtedly belong to the skull.

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As to the remainder of our voyage, I can only say that I spent the time on the floor of the gondola measuring and inspecting my find. I could not tear myself away from it, and we therefore omitted our visits to other spots where explosions were known to have occurred near the old sea-bed, confining ourselves to a hurried round of the Naval patrol route. Beyond a casual inspection and a remark that it looked like Hindenburg, the airship captain took no interest in this now famous skull, but confined himself to his duties of navigation and control.

It is unfortunate that the exact depth and geological strata of the skull's position cannot be given. The basket was drawn from the bottom of the pit, but the skull may have been either thrown up by the explosion or rolled down later by the action of the tides.

When the new lands have dried we hope to have a careful inspection of that and other pits, when more and perhaps equally valuable discoveries may be made.

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I have perhaps made undue mention of my naval friend in this pamphlet, but to tell the truth his type was new to me. Though, like all his fellow-officers, his limited education had tended to make him narrow-minded, he nevertheless deserves mention here as having assisted, albeit in a humble way, in the most wonderful discovery in history.

PRIVILEGED.

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They called across to Peter at the changing of the
Guard,
At the red-gold Doors that the Angels keep,—
"Lend us help to the Portal, for they press upon us
hard,
They are straining at the Gate, many deep."

Then Peter rose and went to the wicket by the Wall,
Where the Starlight flashed upon the crowd;
And he saw a mighty wave from the Greatest Gale of
all
Break beneath him with a roar, swelling loud—

*Let us in! Let us in! We have left a load of sin
On the battlefield that flashes far below.
From the trenches or the sea—there's a pass for such
as we,
For we died with our faces to the foe.*

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*"We haven't any creed—for we never felt the need,—
And our morals are as ragged as can be;
But we finished in a way that has cleared us of the
clay,
And we're coming to you clean, as you can see."*

Then Peter looked below him with a smile upon his
lips,
And he answered, "Ye are fighters, as I know
By your badges of the air, of the trenches, and the
ships,
And the wounds that on your bodies glisten so."

And he looked upon the wounds, that were many and
were grim,
And his glance was all-embracing—unafraid;
And he looked to meet the eyes that were smiling up

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to him,
All a-level as a new-forged blade.

"Ye are savage men and rough—from the fo'c'sle and
the tent;
Ye have put High Heaven to alarm;
But I see it written clear by the road ye went,
That ye held by the Fifteenth Psalm."

And they shouted in return, "*'Tis a thing we've never
read,
But you passed our friends inside
That won to the end of the road we tread
Long ago when the Mons Men died.*"

"*Let us in! Let us in! We have fallen for the Right,
And the Crown that we listed to win,
That we earned by the Somme or the waters of the
Bight;
You're a fighting man yourself—Let us in!*"

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Then Peter gave a sign and the Gates flung wide
To the sound of a bugle-call:
"Pass the fighting men to the ranks inside,
Who came from the earth or the cold grey tide,
With their heads held high and a soldier's stride,
To a Friend in the Judgment Hall."

ACCORDING TO THEIR LIGHTS.

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The world was a streak of green and white bubbles, and there was a great roaring noise which disturbed his thoughts. "Boots—boots—I must get them off." He remembered the only occasion on which he had experienced an anæsthetic, the mental struggle to retain his ego, and the loss of will-power he had known at every breath. He was going down now, the roaring was less terrible and he felt very tired. A check in his descent and a little voice at the back of his brain: "There was a big sea running." Then a blur of white foam and a long gasping breath. Something rasped his forehead and a rough serge sleeve was across his throat. He fought feebly to keep the choking arm away, but as they rose on the crest of a long blue-green swell, he was jerked from the water by the neck and the belt of his overcoat. His first clear sensation was one of intense chill. Although there was little wind, it was cold in the air. He raised his head and moved to avoid the uncomfortable pressure of something on his chest. As he saw his situation he dropped his head again quickly and lay still. He was across the keel of a broad grey boat which pitched and heaved at terrifying angles as the seas passed. He crawled cautiously round, pivoting on his stomach till his legs straddled the keel and he had a grip on it with his hands under his chin. Facing him in a similar attitude was a seaman he knew, a tall brawny torpedoman whom he had noticed rigging the lights in the Wardroom flat on occasions when Evening Service had been held there. What was his name—Davies? Denny? No, Dunn! of course—the ship's boxer, and the funny man at the concerts. Were they two all that was left? He opened his mouth and gasped a little before speaking.

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"All right, sir—take it easy—I've been off this billet twice, and it's no joke getting back to it. Good thing you're a light weight, sir, or you'd've pulled me in just now."

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"Are there—are there any more, Dunn?"

"God knows, sir—beggin' your pardon, that is—the mine got us forr'd and the magazine went. This is the pinnacle we're on, and it's the biggest bit of the ship I've seen floating yet."

"Good God! Where were you?"

"On the bridge, sir, just sent for by the Officer of the Watch about the telephones; but I'm—I don't know 'ow I got away, sir—flew, I reckon. Where were you, sir?"

"Coming up the Wardroom ladder, and as I got on deck I was washed away. Dunn! do you think we'll be picked up?"

The seaman raised his head and shoulders cautiously and took a rapid glance around as they topped a sea, then resumed his attitude along the keel, his chin on his crossed wrists. "You're a parson, sir," he said, "and you're ready for it, so I'll tell you. We were on detached duty, and there mayn't be another ship here for a week yet."

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"A week! But, man, a merchant ship or fisherman might pass any time."

"A fisherman might, sir; but I never saw a merchantman since we came on this trip, and I don't

see anything now."

There was a pause, and the padre shivered in his thin wet clothes. "The sea was going down this morning; how long do you think we could stay alive on this?"

"That's the trouble, sir. This is the pinnace, and she's stove in a bit."

"Do you mean she'll sink? But they float when they are waterlogged, don't they?"

"Not this one, she won't, and she's got the launch's slings in her too—half an hour I give her; but you're right, sir; the sea's going down, and I'm keeping a watch out for more wreckage if it goes by, sir."

The shivering-fit passed and he tried to collect his thoughts. Yes, the pinnace *had* settled a bit since he had been dragged aboard. She did not lift so easily to the sea, and had lost the tendency to broach-to which had made him grip the keel so tightly at first. He was quite calm now, and everything seemed much more simple. Half an hour! He lowered his forehead to his hands and his thoughts raced. What had he left undone? Yes, the ship was gone, so he had nothing to think of in connection with her. As Dunn would say, his affairs in her were all "clewed up" by her loss. But ashore, now—ah! For a full minute he fought with his panic. He felt a rage against a fate that was blindly killing him when he had so much more of life to enjoy. He wanted to scream like a trapped rabbit. He felt his eyes wet with tears of self-pity, and at the feeling his sense of humour returned. He thought of himself as a child about to be smacked, and when he raised his head he was smiling into Dunn's eyes. "Half an hour is not long, Dunn," he said, "but it is longer than our friends had."

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Dunn took another swift glance to right and left, then, reaching a hand cautiously into his jumper, pulled out a wet and shiny briar pipe, and began to reflectively chew the mouthpiece.

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He was a young *padre*, but he had been in the Service most of the war. He knew enough to choose his words with care as he spoke again.

"Dunn," he said, "we haven't got long. I am going to pray."

"Yessir," said the bony, red face before him.

He tried again. "Dunn, you're Church of England, aren't you?"

"Yessir. On the books I am, sir."

"You mean you have no religion?"

Dunn blew hard into the bowl of his pipe and replaced the mouthpiece between his jagged teeth. "Not that sort quite, sir—but I'm all right, sir."

The *padre* moved a little bit nearer along the keel. The pinnace was certainly deep in the water now, but his mind was at ease and he did not feel the cold. "Listen, Dunn," he said; "I am going to pray—I want you to repeat what I say after me."

Dunn moved his hands from under his chin and took his pipe from his mouth. "Yessir," he said.

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The *padre* paused a moment and looked at the long blue slope of a sea rising above his eyes. He wondered vaguely why he was not feeling sea-sick. "O God, Who made the sea and all that therein is, have mercy on us Thy servants called to-day to Thy judgment-seat. Pardon us the manifold sins we have committed, and lead us to a true repentance; and to us, who have in the past neglected Thee in our hearts, send light and strength that we may come without fear before Thy throne. Have pity, O Lord, upon those who are made widows and orphans this day. Grant to our country final victory and Thy peace. Amen."

The sun was behind clouds now, and the seas were washing occasionally along the sinking boat.

"You did not join me in the prayer, Dunn," he said. "Was it not within the scheme of your religion?"

Dunn put his pipe carefully back in his jumper and took a firmer grip of the keel. "Yes, sir," he said, "it was—but I don't whine when I'm down."

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"Do you mean I was whining, Dunn?"

"No, sir, I don't. You've always prayed and you're not going back on anything. I don't go much on Church, and God wouldn't think nothing of me if I piped down now."

The *padre* was, as has been said, a young man, and being young he did the right thing and waited for more. It came with a rush.

"You see, sir, it's God this, and God that, and no one knows what God is like, but I'm a Navy man and I think of Him my way. If I'm not afraid to die I'm all right, I think, sir. It wasn't my fault the ship sank, sir. I've always kept my job done, and I've got 'Exceptional' on my parchment. When I joined up I took the chance of this, and I ain't kicking now it's come. I reckon if a man plays the game by his messmates, and fights clean in the ring, and takes a pride, like, in his job—well, it ain't for me to say, but I don't think God'll do much to me. He'll say, 'Jack,' He'll say, 'you've got a lot of things against you here, but you ain't shirked your work and you aren't afraid of Me—so pass in with a caution,' He'll say. You're all right, sir, and it may be because you're a good

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Christian; but I reckon, sir, it's because you know you've done your job and not skrimshanked it that you ain't afraid, just the same as me.... Hold tight, sir,—she'll not be long now."

The *padre* ducked his head as a swell passed, but the sea had no crest now, the weather was certainly improving. "I don't say you're right," he said, "but I haven't time to bring you to my way of thinking now."

The pinnace began to stand on end with a gurgling and bubbling of air from her bow. The two men slipped off on opposite sides, still holding the rough splintery keel between them.

"Listen, Dunn—repeat this after me: 'Please God, I have done my best, and I'm not afraid to come to You.'"

"Please God, I've done my best, and I'm not afraid to come to You,' sir. Good-bye, sir."

"Thank you, Dunn—good-bye."

The sunset lit up the slope of a sea that looked majestically down on them, and flashed on something behind it. As they looked the wet grey conning-tower of a submarine showed barely fifty yards away. The startled sea pounded at her hull as she rose and grew, and a rush of spray shook out the folds of a limp and dragged White Ensign that hung from the after-stanchion of her bridge.

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A NAVAL DISCUSSION.

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The air was thick with smoke, and a half-circle of officers sat clustered round the stove in the smoking-room. True—there was no fire in the stove, but that did not count. A stove was a place you sat around and jerked cigarette ash at, or, if you were long enough, rested your heels on. The party consisted of six ship's officers and a guest. A few feet away a Bridge-party was in progress. It was the usual Naval party, and was composed of one man who could play, two who thought they could, and one who had come in in response to urgent demands to "make up a four," and who held no illusions about his own play or his partner's. However, he argued well, which was a help. The game appeared to go in spasms—a few minutes' peace punctuated only by subdued oaths, and then a cross-fire of abuse and recriminations—usually opened by the fourth player, who had somewhere learnt the wonderful feminine art of getting in first accusation, and then dodging his opponents' salvos behind a smoke-screen of side-issues.

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The group by the stove were not in the least disturbed by the game behind them. They had heard Naval Bridge played before, and knew that it was only when the players became polite that trouble was in the offing. The talk, as always, was of the War, and swung with startling suddenness from one queer aspect to another. The Senior Engineer was leaning back in his chair, his pipe between his teeth, listening to the mixture of views and voices from either side of him.

"What do they want this saluting order at all for? They're making everybody salute everybody in London now, and they say it isn't safe to walk down the Haymarket to the Admiralty, because the traffic stands to attention for you."

"All damn nonsense. There's too much saluting—that sort, I mean—and there's too little of the other sort. Let's have an order that every civilian must salute a wounded man, or a man with a wound stripe, and then I'll take Provost-Marshal and see it done."

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"They'd chuck their hands in. They're all talking of Democracy now, and a wounded man would count as a gilded autocrat."

"Democracy, my foot! I know their sort of Democracy. It's like Russia's special brand—do as you please, and make all you can for yourself. A civilian's no good till he's a conscript or done his time in the Territorials. If they want democracy they can come here. This is the most democratic Service in the world."

"But you can't run down civilians over this war; why—the whole Army's civilian now. They haven't done so badly, though they had to wait for war before they moved."

"Whose fault was it they didn't help before? It wasn't ours. But that's just what I'm saying. They're all right once they've been drilled, but no damn good till they have been. We ought to put the whole lot through a short course of drill and a week of trench work, and let them go again."

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The guest's voice broke in—"You mean, I take it, that the people who are going to make the peace are the people who have not yet learnt discipline?"

"Yes, sir—that's about it. They haven't learnt to think for their side instead of their own private ends."

"Call 'em politicians and have done with it, Pongo!"

"Well, they are—aren't they? They get the politicians they like, and they appoint men of their own sort, so they are all politicians really."

"Well, I think that's being rather hard on them. They have to take the men the party whips gave them. I think they're a poor lot, but I wouldn't call them politicians."

The guest moved uneasily. "I don't quite see your point," he said. "Is the term 'politician' one of reproach or praise? I once stood for my local constituency and—" [Pg 36]

The young officer with his heels on the stove gave a sudden snort. "Don't you believe him, he's pulling your legs—so don't apologise. He's no politician, anyway."

The guest laughed. "Well, I'm not in politics now," he said. "What is your definition of this strange animal?"

There was a pause, and then a cautious reply, "Well, he's an M.P."

"But I know some very charming M.P.'s—are they all politicians?"

"Oh no, sir. They're different. It's a question of standards, really."

"Ah, but what are the standards?"

"Well, you see—we have one—and civilians have another, business people and so on, and then there's the politicians."

"You ought to write a dictionary, Pongo—you snub-nosed old shell-back. No, I ain't scrapping, and if you get up I'll take your chair."

"Whose got a cigarette? No, not one of your stinkers—gimme one of yours, Guns." [Pg 37]

The officer addressed politely passed a cigarette across in his fingers, and turning in his chair beckoned to a marine servant who was just returning with an empty tray from the Bridge table.

"A cigarette, please, waiter—and debit it to the account of my honourable friend Mr Maugham, here. I'll stop your cadging, Pongo—if I have to take on the tobacco accounts to do it."

"Lucky there's no shortage of 'baccy, or all the armies would strike."

"Well, that'd be one way to stop the war. You can't fight without it. Wish we had some tobacco shares. Some people must be making a lot."

"Not so much as the food people."

"I don't believe the food people do make so much. It's the world shortage that causes the trouble, not the prices—or rather one involves the other."

"It isn't so much that. It's a rise of prices all round. Things get expensive, so the country strikes for higher wages and gets them—then prices go up because the sovereign has depreciated, and they strike again. It goes on in a vicious circle." [Pg 38]

"Can't be a circle—because that's progression. You've got to get to a smash in time."

"Yes, it means there'll be just as much cash in the world, but every one will be poor. Cash isn't wealth—work is wealth, and all work nowadays is wasted. We're chucking it into the air in Flanders."

"Well, we'll last out this war, and then have to lash out."

"Oh yes—there'll be room to lash out in, too. We'll be back in Elizabeth's days—lots of room for every one, but no capital."

"So long as there are no Huns we'll be happy, so what's the odds? Give us a match."

"Well, I want a few Huns left to compare notes with after this. It would be dull to hear our own side only. One couldn't meet their Army, of course, but their Navy's not so bad. They've tried to fight clean, at any rate, and they fight good and 'earty. Yes, I know about Fritz, but if you had orders to torpedo liners, wouldn't you do it? 'Course you would, if you were told they were carrying munitions and you were saving your country by it. There are Fritzes who *like* it, certainly, but we have to give the others the benefit of the doubt." [Pg 39]

"Well, I'd like to read their logs and so on after the war, though we'll be so damn sick of all the truck they'll publish here when the Censor pays off that we won't want to read much of anything."

"It isn't the stuff just after the war one would like to read. I'd like to be alive in a hundred years to read the truth."

"Well, you won't be if you knock my drink over with your hairy hoofs—sit still!"

"It'd do you good if I did knock it over—your hoary-headed old rip. Guns, do you think they'll have raised our pay in a hundred years' time?"

"I doubt it. They'll pay off the Navy and economise as soon as peace is signed—"

"—And we'll have another war on our hands inside six months—we always do; we've always retrenched after a war, and then had to give bonuses to get the men back inside a year." [Pg 40]

"Well, they'll pay off the battleships, anyway—and only keep the fast cruisers and the submarines."

"You and your submarines! Have you heard from your brother lately?"

"Yes, he tells me if I'm going to join I've got to remember it's the greatest honour to be—half a sec., I've got the letter here—to be alive and able to get into the greatest and most efficient Service of the Greatest Navy the world has ever seen, in the Greatest event in History since the Moon broke off."

There was a two seconds' silence (which is long for a Naval discussion), then—

"Well, cutting out the swollen-headed tosh about the Greatest Service, which I take it he means to refer to submarines, I don't know that he's far wrong."

"Well, I suppose we shall have our pasts and presents all looked up, and that people at the U.S. Institution will argue about us like they did a few years ago about Trafalgar." [Pg 41]

"No fear. They'll all be peaceful then, and we'll be barbarians, and not to be spoken of."

"Barbarian, my foot! We're the cleanest lot in England, and the English are cleaner than most races."

"Do you think there'll be another battle?"

"Oh, help! If that cag's going to start, I'm off. Good-night, sir."

"I must go too, Jim," said the guest, with a startled glance at the clock. "Where did I leave my coat?"

The Senior Engineer rose and followed them out, hearing as he passed through the door an unwearying voice by the stove—"I know a chap on Beatty's staff, and he says they'll fight next spring or summer."

THE GUNLAYER.

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"*Hit first—hit hard—and keep on hitting*, is a good rule, but what I want to impress on you is that in this war the last part of that rule is the most important. The enemy shoots remarkably well—at a target—but he does not appear to stand punishment well himself. It is remarkable how the German shooting falls off once he gets a few big shells aboard him, and up to date it has been noticeable that our own practice is, up to a certain point, improved by our being hit. It is just a matter of sticking power...."

The Gunnery Lieutenant paused in his lecture and sighed. "Would these pasty-faced beggars stick it?" He had had a week to train the crew—most of them raw hands—of the latest and fastest light cruiser, into a semblance of war efficiency, and the effort was tiring him. They were so very new and unintelligent, and he had had to go over the A B C of gunnery with them as if they had never been through their course before joining. Seven bells struck, and he dismissed the class and sent them shuffling and elbowing out of the flat.

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They had been stationed at the guns three hours and had seen nothing. This was their second day out, and the first nervousness and feeling of shyness at being in enemy waters was wearing off. The mist that had been with them since dawn was clearing away too, and the gunlayer of No. Five straightened his back and stretched himself against the shield. This was a silly game, he decided. Two cables astern the knife-edge stem of a sister ship was parting their wake into two creamy undulating waves which seemed to spoil the mirror-like surface of what the German wireless has with inimitable humour termed "The fringe of the English barred zone," or as their Lordships more drily put it, "The mouth of the Bight."

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The gunlayer spat carefully over the side and felt in his cap-rim for a cigarette. He calculated that he would make the "fag," with care, last till breakfast. Fourteen days in commission had at any rate taught him that the art of shortening up the frequent spells of boredom consisted in a judicious mixture of tobacco and thinking, and as smoking was barred under heavy penalties during the dark hours, his brain had been somewhat overworked since four. As he fumbled for his matches he froze suddenly still as a bugle blared "Action stations!" from the bridge above him. He heard the beginnings of the clatter of men closing up and the hum of activity along the deck, but till the cold shiver had passed from him he could not move. His one idea was that this was *real*, and he would give anything to be out of it. Then in a flash he was at his sights, his hands on the focussing-ring and his head close up to the telescope, in fear that others might see something

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in his face that he did not want them to see. For exactly the same reasons some hundred other men on the upper deck were becoming feverishly busy, but before the last note of the bugle had died the guns' crews were over their stage fright, and were, with perhaps a little more care and intelligence than they had shown at drill, closing up to their guns.

The gunlayer of No. Five stepped to one side and looked out on the beam. The mists had cleared, and far to the east he could see a line of little smoke puffs that could only mean one thing—ships in station and burning high-speed fuel. The cruiser heeled a little, and the smoke dots swung from abeam to nearly ahead as she turned, and he lost sight of them behind the shield of the next gun. He wanted to go forward and watch them. It seemed worse to have it hanging over him like this. He did not know if he would be quite ready if the ship turned suddenly to bring his gun to bear and he should see the enemy at close range, and no longer as little brown smoke blurs.

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The sight-setter, a boy of seventeen, spoke to him and he looked round. The boy's face was rather white, and his lips trembled a little. The gunlayer woke up at the sight, and broke into a pleased grin.

"Only little beggars," he said, "hardly enough to make a mouthful. Don't you make no blinkin' errors this morning, my lad, or I'll land you one you'll be proud of!"

The speech cheered him up, and he began to believe he *might* come out of it alive—with luck. The ship was travelling now. The white water raced past at a dizzy speed, and a great sloping V of bubbling foam followed them fifty yards astern. Every few seconds a quivering vibration started from forward and travelled through the hull—reminding him of a terrier waiting at a rat-hole. He wanted to smoke—there would be just time for a cigarette—but although he was afraid of death, he was afraid of the Gunnery Lieutenant more. He snuggled down to the shoulder-piece and began working his elevating wheel slowly. There was little roll on the ship, and he realised thankfully that there was going to be no difficulty about keeping his sights on. The oblong port in the shield through which his telescope passed worried him: it seemed so unnecessarily big. That was just like the Admiralty designers, he thought—so long as they didn't have to stand behind the hole they didn't care how big it was. Why, it would let a six-inch shell through! He felt quite a grievance about it. Then, with a heel and an increase of vibration the ship turned. Lord! there they were—one—two—three—four—five of them—going like smoke, too. He pressed close to his telescope, and the enemy sprang into view—many times magnified. The boy sight-setter in a cracked voice repeated an order, and he heard the quick shuffle of feet and the word "Ready" come like a whip-crack from behind him. The leading enemy danced in the heat-haze as his telescope swayed up and down her foremast. It all depended on him and a few others now. The responsibility worried him. The gun's crew behind him were invisible, but he felt that their eyes were glued to his back, and that they were wondering if he was going to make good.

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Boom—Br-r-room—Boom! That was the next ahead. It sounded a rotten salvo. Was she ranging—or would they all start now? He saw no splashes by the ship in his sights. Was it a complete miss, or was it fired at another enemy?

Boom—B-r-room! That was a better one. Weren't *they* going to do anything? As he wondered, the enemy cruiser flashed like a red helio, and he gasped in admiration at the simultaneous firing of her battery. A great sheet of white shut out the view in his telescope, and a deafening crack announced the bursting of a short salvo. *Wow-ooo!* Something whined overhead, and his own gun spoke—rocking the shield, and making him flinch from the sights. *Gawd!* had he fired with the sights on, or were his eyes shut? Anyhow, the men behind him did not seem to notice anything wrong. The breech slammed viciously, and the word "Ready" came on the instant. "*Clang*"—something hit the shield and glanced upwards as his gun spoke again. He knew he hadn't had the sights on then—he hadn't been ready,—how the hell could a man keep the sights on with this going on? Behind him a man began a scream, a scream which was cut short suddenly with the crack of a bursting H.E. shell and the whistle and wail of splinters. *Gawd!* this was chronic—the ship must be getting it thick. The enemy swung into his telescope field again, and he saw the throbbing flame jerk out and vanish from her upper deck.

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B-r-room! That was a better salvo. He must have been on the spot that time—another one—no, he was aiming high then. Still, it didn't matter. They'd all be dead soon and nobody would know who'd fired well or badly. Right abreast the enemy's bridge a great spout of water shot up, and behind it he saw the yellow sheet of flame that told of half a broadside going home. "He *must* keep his sights on"—"*Must* keep his sights on." His gun rocked as it fired, and he swore under his breath at the delay before the crew reloaded. Were they all wounded? They might be—as he estimated at least three full salvos had been aboard since the first shot. The enemy swung out of his field of view again, and he took his eye from the telescope a moment. What the hell was the ship turning for? The flagship must be crazy—just when we were hitting, too. He froze to his eyepiece again, and saw the familiar bridge and curved stem of his target as before. A haze of purplish-grey smoke was over her foremast, and as he fired again he saw the flash of another salvo along her side. What was it "Guns" had said? *The one that sticks it out.* Why couldn't they load quicker behind him? They seemed so slow. The target vanished suddenly in a pall of brown smoke, and he lost her for a moment, his sights swinging down with the gentle motion of the ship. He saw splashes rise from the sea, but heard no whine and hum of splinters following. There she was again! And there was another salvo in the same place. A voice from behind him said something, and he barked a profane response,—a demand for quicker loading. The voice replied with, "Stick it, Jerry—you're givin' 'er bloody 'ell!" And he realised suddenly that the hitting now seemed to be all one way, and that his target was on fire from the bow to the forward

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funnel. His sights swung off again, and a moment later his gun brought up against the forward stops with a bump. He raised his head and looked round. Their next astern was on the quarter now, and they must have all turned together towards the enemy. The bow gun still banged away, sending blasts of hot air back along the deck, but no reply seemed to be coming. The gunlayer scrambled up on the shield and looked ahead to the east. A blur of smoke hid the enemy—a great brown greasy cloud—and he dropped on his knee to the heel that announced another change of helm. Round they came—sixteen points—and he had a view of the Flagship, with a long signal hoist at her masthead, tearing past in her own wake.

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"What the hell—ain't we going to finish it? What's the game?" a chorus of voices spoke from the deck below him, and then came the "still" of a bugle and the pipe, "Sponge out and clean guns—clear up upper deck. Enemy is under the guns of Heligoland."

"Well, who cares for Heligoland?" said the gunlayer—and on the words he came down from his perch on the gunshield with a run. A roar like a twelve-inch salvo and a huge column of tumbling water a hundred yards on the beam had answered him. The next shell pitched in their wake—then another well astern, and they were out of range. He suddenly realised that he was thirstier than he had ever been before, and started forward to the water-tank. As he moved, a hand clutched his arm and he found the boy sight-setter at his side, a fountain of words, dancing with excitement.

"My Christ! that was fine. *Gawd*—what a show, hey? An' you that cool, too. I didn't 'alf shake, till I looked at you, an' saw you was laughin'. We didn't 'alf brown 'em off, did we? an' they—"

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"Aw, go chase yerself," said the gunlayer. "That weren't nothing. Wait till you sees a battle, my son—and you won't think nothing o' to-day."

As he turned to lift the drinking-cup he glanced at the clock and saw with amazement that it was seven-fifteen. With a vague memory of having done so before, he fumbled in his cap-lining for a cigarette.

A WAGE SLAVE.

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The Coxswain nodded to the boy messenger and reached for his cap.

"All right, my lad—'ook me down that lammy. What's the panic, d'ye know?"

"No, *I* dunno. Sez 'e, 'Tell 'im to come up. I want 'im at the wheel,' 'e sez. An' I come along an'—"

"All right—'ook it, and don't stand there blowin' down my neck."

The Coxswain jerked his "lammy" coat on, and clumped heavily out of the mess, chewing a section of ship's biscuit (carefully and cunningly—for the shortage of teeth among torpedo coxswains amounts almost to a badge of office) as he went.

"What's up, Jim—steam tattics?" asked the Torpedo Gunner's Mate—another Lower Deck Olympian—looking up from a three-day-old 'Telegraph.'

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The Coxswain grunted in response. It is not the custom of the Service to answer silly questions. The reason the question was asked at all may be put down to the fact of the 'Telegraph' being not only old but empty of interest.

As he reached the upper deck he buttoned his coat and felt in his pockets for his mittens. It was very cold—a cold accentuated by the wind of the Destroyer's passage. There was no sea, but it was pitch-dark, with a glint of phosphorus from water broken by the wakes of six "war-built" T.B.D.'s running in line ahead at an easy twenty-four knots. The Coxswain could never, in all probability, have explained his reasoning, though the fact that the speed had been increased was noticeable; but he knew, as he swung up the ladders to the unseen fore-bridge, that he had not been sent for a mere alteration of course. His brain must have received some telepathic wave from the ship's hull which told him that the enemy had had something to do with the break in his watch below.

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His sea-boots ceased their noisy clumping as he reached the bridge, and he was standing by the helmsman with a hand on the wheel before the man had noticed his arrival. With an interrogative grunt he stepped to the steering pedestal as the man moved aside, and he stood peering at the dimly lit compass card, and moving the wheel a spoke or two each way as he "felt" her.

"North Seventy East—carryin' a little starboard," said the dark figure beside him, and he accepted the "Turn-over" with another characteristic growl—

"That you, Pember? Follow the next ahead and steer small." The Commander had spoken, the white gleam from his scarf showing for a moment in the reflected compass light.

"Next ahead and steer small, sir." He leaned forward and watched the blue-white fan of phosphorus that meant the stern-wave of the next ship. Low voices spoke beside him, and the

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telegraphs whirred round and reply-gongs tinkled. Half, or perhaps a quarter, of his brain noticed these things, but they were instantly pigeon-holed and forgotten. He was at his job, and his job was to hold his course on the next ahead. Without an order, nothing but death would cause him to let his attention wander from his business. He heard the sub-lieutenant a few feet distant crooning in a mournful voice—

"How many miles to Babylon?"
"Three score and ten."

The back of his brain seized the words and turned them over and over. Babylon was in the Bible—he wasn't sure where it was on the map though. How much was three score and ten? Three twenties were sixty, and—"Action Stations"—Babylon slid into a pigeon-hole, and he relaxed for a second from his rigid concentration on the next ahead. He straightened up, stretching his long gaunt body, and a suspicion of a smile lit his face. Then he resumed his peering, puckered attitude, oblivious to everything but that phosphorescent glow ahead. The glow broadened and brightened, and he felt the quiver beneath his feet that told of a speed that contractors of three years ago would have gaped at. A vivid flash of yellow light lit up the next ahead and showed her bridge and funnels with startling clearness against the sky. By the same flash he saw another big destroyer on the bow crossing the line from starboard to port. His own bow gun fired at the instant the detonations of the first shots reached him, and in the midst of the tearing reports of a round dozen of high-velocity guns, by some miracle of concentration, he heard a helm order from the white scarf six feet away. The little fifteen-inch wheel whirled under his hand, and with a complaining quiver and roll the destroyer swung after her leader to port. In the light of a continually increasing number of gun-flashes he saw the next ahead running "Yard-arm to Yard-arm" with a long German destroyer, each slamming shell into the other at furious speed. He gave a side-glance to starboard to look for his opposite number on the enemy line—and then came one of those incidents which show that the Navy trains men into the same mental groove, whether officers or coxswains.

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The enemy destroyer was just turning up to show her port broadside. She was carrying "Hard-over" helm, and her wheel could hardly reverse in the time that would be necessary if—. The coxswain anticipated the order he knew would come—anticipated it to the extent of a mere fraction of port-helm and a savage grip of the wheel. The order came in a voice that no amount of gun-fire could prevent the coxswain from hearing just then. "*Hard-a-port! Ram her, coxswain!*" The enemy saw and tried to meet the charge bow-on. There was no room between them for that, and he knew it. His guns did his best for him, but a man intent on his job takes a lot of killing at short range. Two shells hit and burst below the bridge, and the third—the coxswain swung round the binnacle, gripping the rim with his left hand. His right hand still held the wheel, and spun it through a full turn of starboard helm. The stiffened razor-edge bow took the enemy at the break of the poop, and went clean through before crushing back to the fore bulkhead. At the impact the shattered coxswain slipped forward on the deck and died with a smashing, splintering noise in his ears—the tribute of war to an artist whose work was done.

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AN "ANNUAL."

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A grey drizzly morning, with yellow fog to seaward and every prospect of a really wet day. At each side of the black basin gates stood a little group of men, the majority "Dockyard mateys" of the rigger's party. A few wore the insignia of higher rank—bowler hats and watch-chains. The bowler hats conferred together in low voices, while the rank and file conferred not at all, but stared solemnly out at the wall of mist that cut the visibility in the harbour down to a bare four hundred yards.

Round the corner of the rigger's store two uniformed figures appeared walking briskly towards the basin entrance. Both wore overcoats. The shorter man was grey where the hair showed beneath his gold-peaked cap, while the pale face and "washed-out" look of the younger man indicated that the hospital ship which took him away from Gallipoli had done so none too soon.

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As they approached, one of the bowler-wearers detached himself from the group and spoke to the senior of the two. There was a three-cornered comparison of watches and then a move to the wall, over the edge of which they gazed down at the slowly moving yellow water.

"We'll give her another quarter of an hour, Mr Johnson, and then pack up," said the officer. "I think it has cleared a little since six, and I know they'll bring her up if they possibly can."

Through the medley of horns, syrens, and whistles that had been sounding through the fog, four short blasts caught the ear of a rigger who leaned against the outward capstan bollard. He lounged forward a couple of paces, and the men nearest looked round at him with a symptom of interest. The blasts sounded again, and he turned and looked at the foreman rigger behind him. The foreman nodded and spoke and the group separated a little, some of the men picking up long flexible "heaving-lines" coiled in neat rings on the cobble-stones.

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"She's coming, sir," said the foreman, turning to the King's Harbourmaster; "she'll just do it

nicely. That was the new tug's whistle."

A couple of capstan bollards began to clatter round as steam was turned on and a heavy wooden fender swung with a crash over the rounded edge of each entrance wall. The mist was clearing now, and the traffic in the harbour could be dimly seen. A foreman pointed to seaward, and the younger officer followed his arm with his tired eyes. Over the fog a slender dark line showed with a blurred foretop below. The unmistakable tripod mast of a big ship showed gradually through, and as he watched he was reminded of a magic-lantern picture out of focus being gradually brought into definition by the operator. The mist cleared faster than she approached, and at a quarter of a mile he could see the great looming bow surmounted by tier on tier of bridges, which mounted almost to the high overhanging top. She crawled slowly on, using her own engines, the hawsers leading to the furiously agitated paddle tugs on bow and quarter sweeping slack along the stream. On the tall "monkey's island" a group of figures clustered together, and the gleam of gold-peaked caps showed among the blue overcoats. At half a cable's length the voices of the leadsmen, inarticulate and faint before, could be clearly heard. "And a *ha-a-a-f* nine"—"and a *ha-a-a-f* nine." The bow tugs sheered off to each side, and whistles blew shrilly. The heavy bow hawsers fell splashing in the water, and the jingle of engine-room telegraph bells echoed up the walls of the entrance. A couple of dingy black "rigger" boats, propelled "Maltee fashion," with the rowers standing facing forward, appeared between the dockyard wall and the great curved stem. Heaving-lines sailed through the air, uncoiling as they flew, and the boats rowed furiously back to the entrance. From somewhere aft by the turret a great bull voice spoke through a megaphone. The riggers at the entrance leapt into sudden activity, and for five minutes the din and clatter of capstans, shrilling of whistles, and splash of hawsers in the water broke the spell of silence. The noise died suddenly, and the note of telegraph bells came ringing again from the high grey monster. Slowly she gathered way, and to the clatter of the dockyard capstans as the slack of the hawsers was taken in, her forty-foot curved stem passed the black caisson gates. The two officers, the young and the old, stepped to the edge of the wall and looked across. Her stem had hit off the exact centre of the entrance, but there was a good two hundred yards of her to come yet. In dead silence, with groups of men fallen in at attention along her side, she flowed on, her speed a bare two knots, but a speed in keeping with her enormous bulk and majesty. As she entered, and the finer lines of her bow passed, she seemed to swell, till she almost filled the entrance, and it looked as if one could step aboard her from the lock-side. The eyes travelled from the mighty turret guns that glistened in the rain, and were attracted up and up till heads were tilted back to look at the highest bridge of all. A quiet incisive voice could be clearly heard: "Port ten"—"Midships"—"Stop both." Again the "kling-kling" of bells and then silence. The grey-haired officer on the wall raised his hand in salute, and a tall grave captain, looking down from above, saluted in return, showing a flash of white teeth in a smile of recognition.

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As she passed the hawsers came with her, transferred from bollard to bollard by gangs of staggering men. The passage of her stern past the outer entrance seemed to break a spell, as if the hypnotism of hundreds of staring eyes had passed away. The caisson gates ground to with almost indecent haste behind her, as some castle portcullis might do as the last prisoner was dragged through. Whistles blew, answering each other across the oily, rain-pitted water of the basin, and to the *weeep we-ooo* of pipes and the roar of the boatswains mates' voices, the lines of rigid men on the great ship's side broke up and fell back. She had left the open sea and had become "Number 955—for refit—in Dockyard hands."

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"How long is she for, sir? Ten days?"

The grey-haired officer turned: "No, only eight. They want her back as soon as possible. Four days' leave to each watch and she'll be off again. You're looking cold, boy—come up to breakfast. That malaria hasn't left you yet."

"I wish it would, sir. I want to get to sea again.

"I know. It's not so bad to watch them come in, but it makes me feel old when I see them leaving again. But you needn't worry, the War's going on a long time yet."

"OUR ANNUAL."

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Up the well-remembered fairway, past the buoys and
forts we drifted—
Saw the houses, roads, and churches, as they were a
year ago.
Far astern were wars and battles, all the dreary
clouds were lifted,
As we turned the Elbow Ledges—felt the engines
ease to "Slow."

Rusty side and dingy paintwork, stripped for war and
cleared for battle—
Saw the harbour-tugs around us—smelt the English

fields again,—
English fields and English hedges—sheep and horses,
English cattle,
Like a screen unrolled before us, through the mist of
English rain.

Slowly through the basin entrance—twenty thousand
tons a-crawling
With a thousand men aboard her, all a-weary of the
War—
Warped her round and laid alongside with the cobble-
stones a-calling—
"There's a special train awaiting, just for you to come
ashore."

Out again as fell the evening, down the harbour in
the gloaming
With the sailors on the fo'c'sle looking wistfully a-lee
—
Just another year of waiting—just another year of
roaming
For the Majesty of England—for the Freedom of the
Sea.

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MASCOTS.

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When the galleys of Phœnicia, through the gates of
Hercules,
Steered South and West along the coast to seek the
Tropic Seas,
When they rounded Cape Agulhas, putting out from
Table Bay,
They started trading North again, as steamers do to-
day.
They dealt in gold and ivory and ostrich feathers too,
With a little private trading by the officers and crew,
Till rounding Guardafui, steering up for Aden town,
The tall Phœnician Captain called the First
Lieutenant down.

"By all the Tyrian purple robes that you will never
wear,
By the Temples of Zimbabwe, by King Solomon I
swear,
The ship is like a stable, like a Carthaginian sty.
I am Captain here—confound you!—or I'll know the
reason why.
Every sailor in the galley has a monkey or a goat;
There are parrots in the eyes of her and serpents in
the boat.
By the roaring fire of Baal, I'll not have it any more:
Heave them over by the sunset, or I'll hang you at the
fore!"
"What is that, sir? *Not* as cargo? *Not* a bit of private
trade?
Well, of all the dumbest idiots you're the dumbest
ever made,
Standing there and looking silly: *leave the animals
alone.*"
(Sailors with a tropic liver always have a brutal tone.)
"By the crescent of Astarte, I am not religious—yet—
I would sooner spill the table salt than kill a sailor's
pet."

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THE SPARROW.

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A perfectly calm blue sea, a blazing June sun, and absolutely nothing to break the monotony of a

blank horizon. The sparrow was deadbeat, and was travelling slowly to the north and west on a zigzag course, about two hundred feet high. The sparrow had no right to be there at all. He hailed from a Yorkshire hedgerow, and nothing but a real three-day fog and westerly winds could have brought him over such a waste of waters. He had been flying in a circle all night, swerving at intervals down to the water in the vain hope of finding rest for his aching muscles. Now he was heading roughly towards his home with but slight hopes of ever reaching it.

A faint droning noise to the north made him turn, and low over the straight-ruled horizon he saw a silvery-white line that every moment grew larger. He headed towards it, but at a mile range swerved away to pass astern of it. It was not an inviting object for even a lost sparrow to rest on. With engines running slow—so slowly that the blades of the great propellers could be easily seen—with a broad white-and-black ensign flapping lazily below and astern, the Zeppelin droned on to the south'ard, a thing of massive grace and beauty on such a perfect summer's day.

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With a vague idea that the monster might lead him home, the sparrow turned and followed. The Zeppelin slowly drew ahead and rose higher, while far to the south another monster rose over the skyline, black against the sun. The great craft passed each other and turned away, the first one heading back to the north whence he had come, and the second disappearing to the east, climbing slowly as he went.

The sparrow turned also and fluttered and dipped in pathetic confidence after his first visitor. The fact of having seen *something*, however unpleasant and strange-looking, had given him a new access of strength, and he was able to keep the great silver thing in easy view. Suddenly the Zeppelin tilted like a hunter at a high fence, and the note of his engines rose to a dull roar. He climbed like—well, like a sparrow coming up to a house-top—and at three thousand feet he circled at full power, levelling off his angle, and showing a turn of speed which left the frightened bird gaping.

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The sparrow fluttered on vaguely, passing at 100 feet above the water, below the Zeppelin. He had decided that a pilot who played tricks like that was no sort of use to him, and that he had better stick to his original idea of working to the north and west, however lonely a course it might be. He swerved a little at a rushing, whistling noise that came from above him, and which grew to a terrifying note. A big dark object whipped past him, and a moment later splashed heavily into the mirror-like surface below. The rings made by its impact had hardly started to widen, when there was a great convulsion, and a column of smoky-white water leapt up behind him, followed by the roar of an explosion. The sparrow started to climb—to climb as he had never done in his life. Twice more—his weariness forgotten—he was urged to further efforts to gain height, by the shock of the great detonations from the water below. The Zeppelin was down to a thousand feet now, swinging round on a wider circle. Five hundred feet below, the sparrow saw a faint streak on the water which faded at one end into blue sea, and at the other narrowed to a little feather of spray round a dark point that was travelling like the fin of some slowly moving fish to the north-westward. The Zeppelin saw it too, and came hunting back along the line. Bang—bang—bang! Great columns shot up again ahead and astern of the strange fish, and away went the sparrow to the south once more. Any course was bad in this place, and it was better to die alone in the waters than to be pursued by such a monster of the air. As he went he heard more and more detonations behind him, until the noise of the droning engine had died, when he was again alone over the sparkling unfriendly sea. The exertions and alarm of the last hour had taken the last of his reserve forces, and in uneven flutterings his flight tended lower and lower, till he was a bare twenty feet from what he knew must be his grave. Then came a miracle of war. A bare quarter-mile ahead a thing like a tapering lance began to rise and grow from the water. It was followed by a grey black-lettered tower which also grew and showed a rounded grey hull, moving slowly south with a white band of froth spinning away astern. A lid on the tower clanged open, and two figures appeared. One raised something to his eye, and faced south. The other stood on the rail and pivoted slowly round, staring at sky and sea.

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"I wonder what the deuce he was bombing—bit of wreckage, I suppose," said the man on the rail.

"Well, it wasn't us anyway. The blind old baby-killer." The man with the sextant lowered it and fiddled with the shades. "*We've* got no boats near, have we, sir?"

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"Not for donkeys' miles. I hope it was a Fritz, anyway. I say, look at that spadger!"

"Where? I don't see it. Stand by. Stop, sir."

"All right, I got you. Here, catch this watch. That spadger's gone down into the casing, and he'll drown if we dip with him there. Look out for those Zepps. coming back."

The Captain swung quickly down the foreside of the conning-tower, ran forward and peered into the casing in the eyes of the boat.

"Zepp. coming, sir,—north of us, just gone behind a bit of cloud."

"Zepp. be damned. Ah! got you, you little beggar." He reached his arm into a coil of wet rope and rose triumphantly to his feet. The sparrow cheeped pitifully as he ran aft again and took the ladder in two jumps. He gave a glance astern and another all round the horizon before following his sextant-clutching subordinate below. The lid clanged, and with a sigh, a gurgle, and a flirt of her screws the submarine slid under, the blank and expressionless eye of her periscope staring fixedly at an unconscious but triumphant Zeppelin that was gliding out from a fleecy patch of cloud astern.

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"Here you are, Lizzie. Skipper said I was to let him go soon's we got in, but I just brought 'im to show you. We've 'ad 'im aboard five days now, and 'e can't 'alf eat biscuit. 'E's as full as 'e can 'old now. Open the window, old girl, and we'll let 'im out afore I starts 'ugging yer."

The lid of the cap-box opened wide and the sparrow hopped to the table. He raised his cramped wings and fluffed out his feathers as he felt his muscles again. There was a flutter and a flip of his impudent tail, and quicker than the eye could follow him the wanderer was gone.

A WAR WEDDING.

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Old Bill Dane? Yes, he's married now. We got a week's refitting leave, and I've just been seeing him through it. Ye—es, there was a bit of a hitch when they were engaged, but—Well, I'll tell you the story. I saw most of it, because I was sort of doing second for him then too. You see, he and I got it rather in the neck in the August scrap, and we came out of hospital together. I had a smashed leg and he had a scalp wound. Nothing to write home about, but it didn't make any more of a Venus of him when it healed. They sent us on sick-leave, and we stayed with his people.

His guv'nor's the eye specialist, you know—got a home in town, and keeps the smell of iodoform in Harley Street, and doesn't let it come into the house. We were all right. We led the quiet life, and just potted around, and saw the shows and so on. We gave the social life a miss until Bill's sister let us in. Bill didn't want to go, but she put it to me, and as I was sort of her guest I had to make him come. Who? The sister? Oh! all right, you know. Don't be a fool, or I won't tell you the yarn. Well, she took us poodlefaking, and it cost me a bit at Gieves' for new rig, too. It was about our third stunt that way when Bill got into trouble. We were at some bally great house belonging to a stockbroker or bookie or some one, and they were doing fox-trots up and down the drawing-room, and Bill and I were rather out of it. I was lame and he's no dancing man, unless it's just dressed in a towel or two to amuse guests in the wardroom when there's a bit of table-turning going on. Some woman came and told him he'd got to join up, and took him over to the girl. She was dressed regular war-flapper fashion, you know, like a Bank of Expectation cheque, except she hadn't got a top-hat on as some of them had lately. Most of 'em in the room were togged out like that, and Bill and I had just agreed we didn't go much on the style at all, but Bill is a proper lamb about women. He did one turn of the room with the girl, dancing a sort of Northern Union style, and then she stopped, and he brought her over to me and plumped her on the sofa between us. I think he wanted to see if I was laughing. She started on me at once, and asked me all about my leg and Bill's head, and talked like a Maxim. Asked me if we were great friends, and made me laugh. I said we had only forgathered because I had beaten him in the middle-weights in the Grand Fleet championships, and though I had never seen his face before, his left stop had touched my heart. She dropped me then—she thought I was pulling her leg—and turned to Bill, and then his sister took me off to get her tea. I didn't realise Bill was getting soft about it till his sister told me, though the fact of our going to tea and dinner at the girl's home that week had seemed funny to me at the time. The sister was rather pleased about it—said she knew the girl and liked her. I said I didn't think much of that sort, but she smoothed me down a bit. She thought that they would do each other good. I said Bill was such an old lamb he'd only get sloppy, and do what the girl told him; but she laughed. She told me I might know Jim in the ring, but I didn't know much about him otherwise. I was rather shirty at that, but I think now she was talking sense, though I didn't then. Well, Bill can get quite busy when he makes his mind up, and the way he rushed that girl was an education to watch. They were engaged in ten days from the first time we went to her house, and I don't think we missed seeing her for more than twelve hours in that time. I? Oh, I and the sister were chaperons. I didn't mind. I was sorry for Bill, but I wasn't going to spoil things for him if he was set on it.

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The girl's people were all right. They were rather the Society type, you know—thought London was capital of the world, and that a Gotha bomb in the West End ought to mean a new Commander-in-Chief to relieve Haig; but they were quite decent.

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The trouble? Well, I'm coming to that. It came about a week after they had announced the engagement. Old Bill had been getting a bit restive over things. You see, he had begun to wonder just where *he* came into the business. He wanted to get the girl off by her lonesome to a desert island, and tell her what a peach she was, for the rest of her natural life; but the girl hadn't got an inkling of what he thought about it. He was towed round like a pet bear and told to enjoy himself, while people talked over his head. She was just a kid, and she didn't know. It seemed to her that being engaged was good fun, and getting married was a matter they could think about later, when she'd had time to consider it. She was all for the tango-tea and the latest drawing-room crazes. I didn't feel enthusiastic about his affairs, and I told the sister so; but she laughed about it all. I didn't. The girl, Hilda—her name was Hilda Conron—was just like a kid with a toy. She took him around and showed him off, and she went on quacking away to all her pals as if Bill wasn't in the room. She seemed to take it for granted he was going to join up with her crowd and learn to do the same tricks and talk the same patter as they did. Bill certainly tried; but they treated him like a fool, and he told me several times he felt like one. Well then, we came to the

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smash. Lord, it was a queer show, and I'd sooner have had my leg off than have missed it. We were taken off to a charity auction, Red Cross or something, where they sold bits of A. A. shell with the Government marks on them as bits of Zepp. bombs, and Pekinese dogs for a hundred quid or so. After the sale, about twenty of the household and the guests that had paid most clustered round to add up the takings and drink tea and talk. Miss Conron had been selling things, and was dressed up to the nines. There was a bishop there, and some young staff officers and some civilians, M.P.'s, or editors or something like that. Old Bill was sitting with me and his sister, looking like a family lawyer at a funeral, and the girl was perched on a sofa with a lanky shopwalker-looking bloke alongside her. He was an indispensable of sorts—Secretary to the Minister of some bloomin' thing or other. He was the lad, I tell you,—sort of made you feel you were waiting on the mat when he talked. He was laying down the law about the War and all about it, and he talked like all the Angels at a Peace Conference. But it was the bishop that put his foot in the mulligatawny first. He agreed with the smooth-haired draper-man about the need of peace, but he said we should see that Germany provided suitable reparation for Belgium. Bill sat up and got red and stuttered, and said: "I don't think Germany or anybody can give Belgium back what she has lost."

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They all looked at Bill as if he had just dawned on them, and Bill looked more foolish. The draper-man shipped an eyeglass and looked him over like a new specimen. "Ah!" he said, "our naval friend? Perhaps you will tell us in what way you consider the War can be ended before the world comes to economic ruin. Must we wait until you have had your fill of fighting or have destroyed the High Sea Fleet?"

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Bill stood up and stopped looking silly. Miss Dane leaned back in her chair, and I heard her sigh as if she was pleased about something.

"Never mind the High Sea Fleet," said Bill. "That's not your business to worry about. But as to 'fill of fighting,' you've said it there. When we've had our fill of fighting Germany will have had more, but we're a long way from that yet."

The long stiff turned to Miss Conron. "Why, little Miss Hilda," he said, "your fiancé is charming. He should speak in the Park on Sundays and we would all come to listen."

The girl got red and looked daggers at Bill. She didn't like his making a fool of himself, and she wanted him back in his chair again. The long man put a hand on her knee and spoke quietly to her, and she shook her head at him and laughed. That did it. My oath! that did it all right. Bill shrugged his shoulders back and took station in the outer ring of draper-worshippers, and spoke like a—Demosthenes.

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"You blank, blank, blank," he said, "get off that sofa and get away from Miss Conron."

The Bishop looked as if the end of the world had come and he was adrift with his cash accounts. The staff officers looked blank and the women got scary. I got up and took station on Bill's quarter in case any one got excited. The long man put up his glass again and showed symptoms of an approaching oration.

"You stay then, you half-breed dog," said Bill; "I'm going to talk to you." Bill put his hands in his coat pockets and looked around. "Now listen," he said; "I'm talking for a lot of men who aren't here. *We're* fighting this show, and there are some millions of us. Who are you to talk of War or Peace? By God, if you try and pack up we'll put you to work again. If you're going to compromise with Germany, we won't. Have you forgotten what the Germans can do? My oath, you make me sick. What can it matter if the nations are all broken and ruined so long as we smash Germany? *We* don't want money and luxuries to fight on. Give us food and munitions till we have done what we started to do. You whining people—what do you know of it? Have you got no guts at all? Have you read the Bryce Report? Yes, I bet you have, and locked it away so that your women shouldn't see it. I tell you, it doesn't matter to us, and we're about four million men, if we are all killed so long as we kill eight million Huns. I know a sergeant who has killed five Prussian officers, and I think he's a real man, not like you. He took to it after he saw a five-year-old girl with her hands cut off hanging like a sucking-pig on a meat-hook in a wrecked French village. Doesn't that make you feel it? I tell you, if you play the fool behind our backs we'll take charge of you. Yes, Bishop, you'll keep up the good work in a munition factory, and you'll work hard too. If you can't be a patriot now, you will be when you've been caned across your lathe."

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They were as still as mice, and the rumble of traffic along Piccadilly sounded very loud. Miss Conron was as white as a sheet, and her eyes were staring as if she were scared to death. Bill took a long breath and went on—

"I've tried to see your point of view while I've been among you, and I can't. I'm going to leave you and get back to my own lot. I'm giving up something I didn't think I could give up, but I won't join you just to get it. There are not so many of us as there are of you, but you'll do what you're told if we take charge. Most of us have seen dead men, and some of us have seen dead women. None of you have seen either, and you don't understand. You want to hide things away and pretend they're not there. They *are* there, and they are going on wherever the Germans are, you fools. There's a man here who has been impertinent to me because he thinks I'm a fool. I'm a better man than any six of his sort, and I'm going to show him how. It will do the rest of you good to watch, because you haven't seen death yet, and a man with a bruise or two will seem a big thing to you. Come along, my sofa-king, you're for it."

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Bill walked up to him with his hands down and the women began to squeal. The draper-man was

game. He took a step forward and swung his right. Bill hooked him under the chin and gave him the left in the stomach. The poor beggar backed off, taking a wicked upper-cut as he did so. As he straightened again Bill sent a couple of full swings to his head. He was going down, but Bill wouldn't let him. I think if he hadn't been so clever with Miss Conron on the sofa he would have got off fairly cheap, but a girl makes a lot of difference to any scrap. He took about six more before he hit the deck, and then he looked like a Belgian atrocity picture by Raemaekers. Bill came over to me and signalled his sister to the door. She moved off. My oath, she hadn't turned a hair—she's a sportsman. He looked across at Miss Conron, who was still on the sofa looking at the huddled figure in the middle of the carpet. "I'm going now, Hilda," he said; "your people aren't my people. I'm sorry."

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She never moved, but the colour had come back into her face again. Bill shrugged back his shoulders and turned his back, and we started for the door. Miss Dane was there, holding the handle and looking past us at the horrified group we had left. As we got almost up to her she smiled and came to Bill. She took him by the shoulders and turned him round, and I turned to see what she was looking at. Miss Conron was walking that sixty-foot plank after us, and I knew when I saw her face that she and Bill were going to be all right. She didn't say anything, and the four of us went out, and Bill kissed her in the hall in front of the servants. Trouble? No—not much. You see, Bill had had a scalp wound, and they put it all down to that. The draper-man didn't want to publish things much, and Miss Conron's father has got a bit of a pull. If he had no kick coming other people could shut up, and—oh yes! Sound as a bell—he wouldn't have got married otherwise. But, by gum, his sister was right—wasn't she?

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A HYMN OF DISGUST.

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You wrote a pretty hymn of Hate,
That won the Kaiser's praise,
Which showed your nasty mental state,
And made us laugh for days.
I can't compete with such as you
In doggerel of mine,
But this is certain—*and* it's true,
You bloody-handed swine—

We do not mouth a song of hate, or talk about you—
much,
We do not mention things like you—it wouldn't be
polite;
One doesn't talk in drawing-rooms of Prussian dirt
and such,
We only want to kill you off—so roll along and fight.

For men like you with filthy minds, you leave a nasty
taste,
We can't forget your triumphs with the girls you met
in France.
By your standards of morality, gorillas would be
chaste,
And you consummate your triumphs with the bayonet
and the lance.

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You give us mental pictures of your officers at play,
With naked girls a-dancing on the table as you dine,
With their mothers cut to pieces, in the knightly
German way,
In the corners of the guard-room in a pool of blood
and wine.

You had better stay in Germany, and never go
abroad,
For wherever you may wander you will find your
fame has gone,
For you are outcasts from the lists, with rust upon
your sword—
The blood of many innocents—of children newly born.

You are bestial men and beastly, and we would not
ask you home
To meet our wives and daughters, for we doubt that
you are clean;
You will find your fame in front of you wherever you

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may roam,
You—who came through burning Belgium with the
ladies for a screen.

You—who love to hear the screaming of a girl
beneath the knife,
In the midst of your companions, with their craning,
eager necks;
When you crown your German mercy, and you take a
sobbing life—
You are not exactly gentlemen towards the gentle
sex.

With your rapings in the market-place and slaughter
of the weak,
With your gross and leering conduct, and your utter
lack of shame,—
When we note in all your doings such a nasty yellow
streak,
You show surprise at our disgust, and say you're not
to blame.

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We don't want any whinings, and we'd sooner wait
for peace
Till you realise your position, and you know you
whine in vain;
And you stand within a circle of the Cleaner World's
Police,
And we goad you into charging—and we clean the
world again.

For you should know that never shall you meet us as
before,
That none will take you by the hand or greet you as a
friend;
So stay with it, and finish it—who brought about the
War—
And when you've paid for all you've done—well, that
will be the End.

THE "SPECIAL."

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She was not new, and nobody could call her handsome. She was evidently more accustomed to rough weather than paint, and her sloping fore-castle and low freeboard were old-fashioned, to say the least of them. She jogged slowly along, rolling to a short beam sea, with an apologetic air, as if she felt ashamed of being what she was—a pre-war torpedo-boat on local patrol duty.

She steered no particular course, and varied her speed capriciously as she beat up and down. Being in sight of the land—a grey, hard, low line to the westward—there was no need for accurate plotting of courses. On the bridge stood her Captain, a dark, lean, R.N.R. Lieutenant, pipe in mouth and hands in "lammy" pockets. The T.B. was rolling too much for any one to walk the tiny deck of the bridge; in fact, a landsman would have had difficulty in standing at all. He turned his head as his First Lieutenant swung up the little iron ladder behind him.

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"What's for lunch?" he asked, carefully knocking out his pipe on the rail before him.

"The same," said his laconic subordinate, who was engaged in a rapid survey of the compass card, revolution indicator, and the horizon astern. The two stood side by side a moment looking out at the sea and sky to windward. "Any pickles?" said the Captain.

"No, only mustard."

The Captain sighed and turned to leave the bridge. The First Lieutenant pivoted suddenly—"It's better'n you and I had off the Horn in the *Harvester*. You'd 've been glad to get beef then, even if it was in a tin." He snorted, and turned forward again to look ahead. The Captain remained at the foot of the ladder, reading a signal handed to him by a waiting Boy Telegraphist. The argument on the subject of tinned beef had lasted a year already, and could be continued at leisure.

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The boy received the signal back and vanished below, while the Captain climbed slowly to the bridge again. He spoke to the man at the wheel, and himself moved the revolution indicator.

"Panic?" said the First Lieutenant (neither of them seemed to use more than one word at a time, unless engaged in an argument).

"Sure," was the reply. "Tell 'em to make that blinkin' stuff into sandwiches and send 'em up."

The First Lieutenant went down the ladder in silence. The matter of the tinned beef was to him, as mess caterer, a continual sore point.

The T.B. started on a more erratic course than before, tacking in long irregular stretches out to seaward. Smoke was showing up against the land astern, and there was a sense of stirring activity in the air.

Two more torpedo-boats appeared suddenly from nowhere, hoists of coloured flags flying at their slender masts. The three hung on one course a moment, conferring, then spread fanwise and separated. The first boat turned back towards harbour and the growing smoke-puffs, which rapidly approached and showed more and more mine-sweepers coming out.

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A droning, humming noise made the Captain look up, and he pivoted slowly round, following with his eyes a big seaplane a thousand feet above him.

As the sound of the engines died away, it seemed to start swelling again, as another machine appeared a mile abeam of them, and following the first.

The T.B. swung round ahead of the leading sweepers, and turned back to seaward. Her speed was not great, but half an hour after the turn the sweepers were hull down astern. A small airship slipped out of a low cloud and droned away on the common course. Every type of small craft seemed to be going easterly, and the sea, which an hour ago had been almost blank, was now dotted with patrol ships of every queer kind and rig. From overhead it must have looked like a pack of hounds tumbling out of cover and spreading on a faint line. But, like the hounds, the floating pack was working to an end, and whatever the various courses steered, the whole was moving out to sea.

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The Boy Telegraphist hauled himself, panting, on to the bridge, and thrust a crumpled signal before the Captain's eyes. The Captain grunted and spoke shortly, and the boy dashed off below. A moment later the piping of calls sounded along the bare iron deck, and men in heavy sea-boots began to cluster aft and at the guns. The funnels sent out a protesting spout of brown smoke as the T.B. began to work up to her speed, and the choppy sea sent up a steady sheet of spray along her fore-castle and over the crouching figures at the bow gun. The rest of the pack appeared to have caught the whimper too, for everything that could raise more than "Tramp's pace" was hurrying due east. A faint dull "boom" came drifting down wind as the First Lieutenant arrived on the bridge, and the two officers looked at each other in silence a moment.

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"Bomb, sir?" said the junior, showing an interest which almost made him conversational.

"Sure thing," said the other. "She gave us the tip when she saw him, and that'll be one to put him under."

"How far d'you think it was?"

"Seven-eight mile. You all ready?"

The First Lieutenant nodded and slipped down the ladder again. Three miles astern came a couple of white specks—the bow-waves of big destroyers pushed to their utmost power. The Captain studied them a moment with his binoculars, and gave a grunt which the helmsman rightly interpreted as one of satisfaction. Slow as she was, the old T.B. had a long start, and was going to be on the spot first. The dark was shutting down, and the shapes of the other T.B.'s on either beam were getting dim.

The night was starlit, and with the wind astern the T.B. made easy weather of it. The two officers leaned forward over the rail staring ahead towards the unseen land. Lights showed on either hand, and occasionally they swung past the dark squat shape of a lit trawler, also bound home.

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"Are you going to claim?" asked one of the watching figures. The other paused before replying—

"We-ell," he said, "I'll just report. I think we shook him to the bunt, but it's no good claiming unless you can show prisoners, Iron Cross and all." Another ruminative pause. "Your people were smart on it—devilish smart." Another pause. "What's for dinner?"

A dark mass ahead came into view, and turned slowly into a line of great ships coming towards them.

The T.B. swung off to starboard, and slowed her engines. One by one they went past her—huge, silent, and scornful, while the T.B. rocked uneasily in the cross sea made by their wakes. The Captain watched them go, chewing the stem of his unlit pipe. They were the cause of the day's activity, but it was seldom he met them at close range except like this, in the dark on his way home.

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The line seemed endless, more and more dark hulls coming into view, and fading quickly into the dark again. As the last swung by the T.B.'s telegraph bells rang cheerfully, and she jogged off westward to where a faint low light flickered at intervals under the land.

A stranger, if suddenly transplanted to the spot, would have taken some time after opening his eyes to realise that the boat was submerged. He would probably decide at first that she was anchored in harbour. Far away forward, under an avenue of overhead electric lamps, figures could be seen—all either recumbent or seated—and from them the eye was led on till it lost its sense of distance in a narrowing perspective of wheels, pipes, and gauges. All the while there was a steady buzzing hum from slowly turning motors, and about every half minute there came a faint whir of gear wheels from away aft by the hydroplanes. From the bell-mouths of a cluster of voice-pipes a murmur of voices sounded—the conversation of officers by the periscope; while the ear, if close to the arched steel hull, could catch a bubbling, rippling noise—the voice of the North Sea passing overhead.

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The men stationed aft near the motors were not over-clean, and were certainly unshaven; some were asleep or reading (the literature carried and read by the crew would certainly have puzzled a librarian—it varied from 'Titbits' and 'John Bull' to 'Piers Plowman' and 'The Origin of Species'): a few were engaged in a heated discussion as they sat around a big torpedoman—the only man of the group actually on duty at the moment. His duties appeared only to consist in being awake and on the spot if wanted, and he was, as a matter of fact, fully occupied as one of the leading spirits in the argument.

"Well, let's 'ear what you're getting at," he said. "We 'eard a lot of talk, but it don't go anywhere. You say you're a philosopher, but you don't know what you do mean."

"I know blanky well, but you can't understand me," said the engine-room artificer addressed. "Look here, now—you've got to die some time, haven't you?"

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"Granted, Professor."

"Well, it's all arranged *now* how you're to die, I say. It doesn't matter when or how it is, but it's all settled—see? And you don't know, and none of us know anything about it."

"That's all very well—but 'oo is it knows, then? D'you mean God?"

"No, I don't—I'm an atheist, I tell you. There's *something* that arranges it all, but it ain't God."

"Well, 'oo the 'ell is it, then—the Admiralty?"

The Artificer leaned forward, his dark eyes alight and his face earnest as that of some medieval hermit. "I tell you," he said, "you can believe in God, or Buddha, or anything you like, but it's the same thing. Whatever it is, it doesn't care. It has it all ready and arranged—written out, if you like—and it will have to happen just so. It's pre—pre——"

"Predestination." The deep voice came from the Leading Stoker on the bench beside him.

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"Predestination. No amount of praying's any good. It's no use going round crying to gods that aren't there to help you. You've got to go through it as it's written down."

"Prayer's all right," said the Leading Stoker. "If you believe what you pray, you'll get it."

"That's not true. Have you ever had it? Give us an instance now——"

"I don't pray none, thank you. All the same, it's good for women and such that go in for it, like. It ain't the things that alter; it's yourself that does it. Ain't you never 'eard o' Christian Science?"

"Yes; same as the Mormons, ain't it? Is that what you are?"

"No, it ain't—an' I'm a Unitarian, same as you are."

"I'm not—I'm a Baptist, same as my father was; but I don't believe in it."

"Well, if you believe in one God, that's what you are."

"But I'm telling you, I *don't*. Look here, now. I don't believe there's anything happens at all that wasn't all arranged first, and I know that nothing can alter it."

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"Well, 'oo laid it all down first go off, then?" said the Torpedoman.

"Ah! I don't know and you don't know; but I tell you it wasn't God."

"Well, 'e's a bigger man than me then, an' I takes me 'at off to 'im, 'ooever it is. I tell yer, yer talkin' through yer neck. You say if you're going to be shot, there's a bullet about somewhere in some one's pouch with yer name writ on it. Ain't that it? Well, 'oo the 'ell put yer name on it, then?"

"It doesn't matter to me so long's it's there, does it?"

"Well, if that was so, I'd like to know 'oo 'e was, so's I could pass 'im the word not to 'ave the point filed off of it for me, anyway."

"Well, you couldn't—and he couldn't alter it for you if he was there, either."

The Torpedoman moved along the bench and twisted his head round till his ear was against one of the voice-pipes. The others sat silent and watched him with lazy interest. [Pg 111]

"We're takin' a dip," he said. "Thought I 'eard 'im say, 'Sixty feet.'" The faint rolling motion that had been noticeable before died away, and the boat seemed to have become even more peaceful and silent. The Leading Stoker leaned back against the hull and rested his head against the steel. From the starboard hand there came a faint murmur, which grew till the regular threshing beat of a propeller could be distinguished. The sound swelled till they could hear in its midst a separate piping, squeaking note. The ship passed on overhead, and the threshing sound passed with her and faded until again the steady purr of motors remained the only reminder of the fact that the boat was diving. They felt her tilt up a little by the bow as she climbed back to regain her patrol depth.

"That's a tramp," said the Torpedoman; "nootral, I reckon."

"Squeaky bearing, too," said the Artificer judicially. "Don't suppose he's looked at his thrust since he left port. What's the skipper want to go under her for?" [Pg 112]

"Save trouble, I s'pose; didn't want to alter helm for 'er. What was you talkin' of—yes, Kismet—that's the word I've been wantin' all along. You're a Mohammedan, you are?"

"Aw, don't be a fool; I tell you I'm nothing."

The fourth wakeful figure, another Torpedoman, spoke for the first time. "If you're nothing, and you think you're nothing, what the 'ell d'yer want to make such a fuss about it for?"

"I don't make a fuss. It's all you people who think you're something who make a fuss. You can't alter what's laid down, but you think you can. You fuss and panic to stave things off, but you're like chickens in a coop—you can't get out till your master lets you, and he can't understand what you say, and he wouldn't pay any attention to it if he did."

The big Torpedoman put out a hand like a knotted oak-root and spoke—

"You an' your Kismet," he said scornfully. "Look 'ere, now. This is Gospel, and *I'm* tellin' of yer. S'pose there *is* a bullet about with your name on it, but s'posing you shoot the other — first, and there's to 'ell with yer Kismet. Gawd 'elps those that 'elp themselves, I say. S'pose we 'it a Fritz now, under water—'oo's Kismet is it? Never mind 'oo's arranged it or 'oo's down in the book to go through it, the bloke that gets 'is doors closed first and 'as the best trained crew is goin' to come 'ome and spin the yarn about it. I say it may be written down as you say, but there's Someone 'oldin' the book, an' 'e says: 'Cross off that boat this time,' 'e say. 'They've got the best lot aboard of 'em,' 'e'd say. Is it Kismet if yer thrust collars go? Are you goin' to stop oilin' 'em because it's in the book an' you can't alter it? Yer talkin' through yer neck. Call it luck, if yer like. It's luck if we 'it a mine, and it's luck if we don't; but if we met a Fritz to-night an' poop off the bow gun an' miss—that's goin' to be our blanky fault, an' you can call it any blanky name, but you won't alter it." [Pg 113]

"But you don't understand," said the Artificer. "I didn't——"

"*Action Stations—Stand by all tubes.*" The voice rang clearly from the mouth of the voice-pipe, and the group leapt into activity. For sixty seconds there was apparent pandemonium—the purr of the motors rose to a quick hum, and the long tunnel of the hull rang with noises, clatter and clang and hiss. The sounds stopped almost as suddenly as they had begun, and the voices of men reporting "Ready" could be heard beyond the high-pitched note of the motors.

The big Torpedoman stretched across his tube to close a valve, and caught the eye of the fourth participant in the recent debate. "Say, Dusty," he whispered, "'ere's Someone's Kismet—in this blanky tube, an' I reckon I ain't forgot the detonator in 'er nose, neither." [Pg 114]

The Captain lowered the periscope, his actions almost reverent in their artificial calm. He looked up at the navigating officer a few feet away and smiled. "Just turning to east," he said. "We'll be in range inside three minutes." He glanced fore and aft the boat and then back at his watch. "By gum," he said, "it's nice to have a good crew. I haven't had to give a single order, and I wouldn't change a man of 'em." [Pg 115]

LIGHT CAVALRY.

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I.

Peter Mottin was an acting Sub-Lieutenant, but even acting Sub-Lieutenants from Whale Island may hunt if they can get the requisite day's leave and can muster the price of a hired mount. The

hounds poured out of Creech Wood, and Mottin glowed with intense delight as his iron-mouthed horse took the rails in and out of the lane and followed the pack up the seventy-acre pasture from whence the holloa had come. It was late in a February afternoon, and most of the dispirited field had gone home, so that there was no crowd—and a February fox on a good scenting day is a customer worth waiting for. Mottin sat back as a five-foot cut and laid hedge grew nearer, and blessed the owner of his mount as the big black cleared the jump with half a foot to spare. Two more big fences, cut as level as a rule, and the field was down to six, with three Hunt servants. The fox was making for Hyden Wood, and scent was getting better every minute. A clattering canter through a farmyard, and Mottin followed the huntsman over a ramshackle gate on to grass again. The huntsman capped the tail-hounds on as he galloped, and Mottin realised that if they were going to kill before dark they would have to drive their fox fast. Riding to his right he saw Sangatte—a destroyer officer, whom he knew only by name, but whom he envied for the fact that he seemed able to hunt when he liked and could afford to keep his own horses. As they neared a ragged bullfinch hedge at the top of a long slope, he saw Sangatte put on speed and take it right in the middle, head down and forearm across his eyes. Mottin eased his horse to give the huntsman room at the gate in the left-hand corner. The pilot's horse rapped the top bar slightly, and as Mottin settled himself for the leap, he saw the gate begin to swing open away from him. There was no time to change his mind—he decided he must jump big and trust to luck, but the black horse failed him. The hireling knew enough to think for himself, and seeing the gate begin to swing, decided that a shorter stride would be safer. The disagreement resulted—as such differences of opinion are liable to do—in a crash of breaking wood and a whirling, stunning fall. Mottin rose shakily on one leg, feeling as if the ankle of the other was being drilled with red-hot needles, and swore at the black horse as it galloped with trailing bridle down the long stubble field towards Soberton Down. He saw Sangatte look back and then wrench his brown mare round to ride off the hireling as it passed. He caught the dangling reins and swung both horses round, and came hurrying and impatient back. As he arrived he checked the mare and turned in his saddle to watch the receding pack.

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"Come on," he said. "*Quick*—you'll catch 'em at Hyden." He turned to look at Mottin by the gate-post, in irritation at feeling no snatch at the black horse's rein. His face fell slightly. "Hullo—hurt?" he said, and leapt from his mare.

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"Go on. Don't wait. Go *on*," said Mottin. "I'll be all right. You get on—it's only my ankle."

"Damn painful too, I expect. I'm not going on. They'll be at Butser before I could catch them now, and I bet they whip off in the dark." He threw the reins over the mare's head and left her standing. "Now," he said. "It's your left ankle; come here to the near side, and put your left knee on my hands and jump for it."

Mottin complied, and to the accompaniment of a grunt and a pain-expelled oath arrived back in the muddy saddle.

"I say, this is good of you—you know," he said; "but you've——"

"Cut it out—it won't be anything of a run, anyway," lied Sangatte gloomily.

"Come along—it's only three miles to Droxford, but you'll have to walk all the way, and we'd better get on."...

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II.

The big seaplane circled low over the harbour and then headed seaward, climbing slowly. There were two men aboard—a young Sub-Lieutenant as pilot and Mottin as observer. Mottin sat crouched low and leaning forward as he studied the chart-holder before him and scratched times and notes in his log-book. They were off on a routine patrol, but there was the additional interest to the trip that on "information received" they were to pay a little more attention than usual to a particular locality.

From his seat Mottin could see nothing of the pilot but his head and shoulders—a back view only, and that obscured by swathings of leather and wool. The two men's heads were joined by a cumbersome arrangement of listeners and tubes which, theoretically, made conversation practicable. As a matter of fact, the invariable rule of repeating every observation twice, and of adding embroidery to each repetition, pointed to a discrepancy between the theory and practice of the instrument. The machine was a big one, and its engines were in proportion. The accommodation in the broad fuselage was considerable, but on the present trip the missing units of the crew were accounted for by an equal weight of extra petrol and T.N.T. "eggs."

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The morning had been hazy and they had delayed their start till nearly noon. It was not as clear as it might be even then, for in a quarter of an hour from leaving the slip the land was out of sight astern. At a thousand feet the pilot levelled off and ceased to climb. He flew mechanically, his head bent down to stare at the compass-card. At times he fiddled with air and throttle, twisting his head to watch the revolution indicator. The occasional bumping and rocking of the machine he corrected automatically without looking up. He had long ago arrived at the state of airmanship which makes a pilot into a sensitive inclinometer, acting every way at once.

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Mottin finished his scribbling and sat up to look round. He raised himself till he sat on the back of his seat, and began to sweep the sea and horizon with a pair of large-field glasses. The wind roared past him, pressing his arm to his side as he faced to one side or the other, and making him strain the heavy glasses close to his eyes to keep them steady. An hour after starting he touched the pilot on the shoulder and shouted into his own transmitter. He waited a few seconds and shouted again, with the conventional oath to drive the sound along. The pilot nodded his swathed and helmeted head and swung the machine round to a new course. Mottin crouched down again and began to study his chart afresh. Navigation was easy so long as the weather was clear, but with poor visibility, which might get worse instead of better, he knew that it was remarkably easy to get lost in the North Sea, and at this moment he wanted to see his landfall particularly clearly. Five minutes later he saw it, and signalled a new course to the pilot by a nudge and a jerk of his gloved hand. A low dark line had appeared on the starboard bow, a line with tall spires and chimneys standing up from it at close intervals. The seaplane banked a little as they turned and headed away, leaving the land to recede and fade on their quarter. The hazy sun was low in the west and the mist was clearing. It had been none too warm throughout the journey, but it was now distinctly cold, the chill of a winter evening striking through fur and leather as if their clothes had been slit and punctured in half a dozen places.

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Mottin had just slid back in his seat after a sweeping search of the sea through his glasses, and was slowly winding, with cold fur-gloved fingers, the neat carriage clock on the sloping board before him, when he heard a yelping war-cry from the pilot and felt the machine dive steeply and swerve to port. He half rose in his seat and then slipped back to feel for his bomb-levers. The submarine was just breaking surface eight hundred feet below and a mile ahead. As he looked she tucked down her bow and slipped under again, having barely shown her conning-tower clear of the short choppy waves. The pilot throttled well down and glided over the smooth, ringed spot which marked where she had vanished. As it slid past below them he opened up his engines again and "zoomed" back to his height. He turned his head to look at Mottin, but said nothing. Mottin made a circular motion with his hand and they began a wide sweep round, climbing all the while. Mottin sat back and thought hard. No, it had not been indecision that had prevented him from dropping bombs then. He knew it was not that, but the exact reasons which had flashed through his mind at the fateful moment must be hunted out and marshalled again. He knew that his second self, his wide-awake and infallible substitute who took over command of his body in moments of emergency, had thought it all out in a flash and had arrived at his decision for sound reasons. Yes, it was clear now, but that confounded fighting substitute of his was just a bit cold-blooded, he thought. They had petrol for the run home with perhaps half an hour to spare. Fritz had not seen them, as his lid had not opened—or at any rate if he had seen them through his periscope, the fact of no bomb having been dropped would encourage him to think that the seaplane had passed on unknowing. Of course they might have let go bombs, but, well, Fritz must have been at anything down to 80 feet at the moment they passed over him, and it was chancy shooting. Yes, it was quite clear. Fritz should be up again in an hour (he evidently wanted to come up), and if they were only high up and ready they would get a fair chance at him. Of course, they would not get home if they waited an hour; but if that cold-blooded second self of his thought it the right thing and a proper chance to take, well, it was so. Mottin looked over the side and wished it was not so lippy. A long easy swell was nothing, but this short choppy sea was going to be the devil. The pilot shouted something to him and pointed at the clock and the big petrol tank overhead. Mottin nodded comprehension, and shouted back. The Sub took a careful look overside and studied the water a moment. Then he laughed back at Mottin, and shouted something about bathing, which was presumably facetious, but which was lost in the recesses of the headpieces.

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The sun was down on the horizon, and the hour had grown to a full ninety minutes before the chance came. They had not worried about clocks or thoughts of petrol after the first half-hour of circling. They were "for it," anyhow, after that, and it was going to come in the dark too, so that the question of whether it was going to be fifty or a hundred miles from land did not make much difference. Almost directly below them the long grey hull rose and grew clear, the splashing waves making a wide area of white water show on each side of her. The seaplane's engines stopped with startling suddenness, and to the sound of a rushing wind in the wires and of ticking, swishing propellers they began a two-thousand-foot spiral glide, coming from as nearly overhead as the turning circle of the big machine would allow. At two hundred feet the pilot eased his rudder and began a wider turn, and then the German captain saw. He leapt for the conning-tower, leaving a startled look-out man behind. The man tried to follow him down, but the lid slammed before he could arrive at it. He turned and looked helplessly at the big planes and body rushing down a hundred yards astern. With his hands half raised and shoulders hunched up the poor devil met his death, two huge bombs "straddling" the conning-tower and bursting fairly on the hull as the boat started under. Mottin had a vision of a glare of light from the rent hull, a great rush of foaming, spouting air, and then a graceful knife-edge stem, with the bulge of torpedo-tubes on each side of it, just showed and vanished in the turmoil of broken water. The seaplane roared up again, heading west, the young pilot—apparently oblivious to the fact that he hardly expected to be alive till morning—displaying his feelings on the subject of his late enemy by a series of violent "switchbacks."

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Mottin checked him, rose, and began a careful look round. Any ship would be welcome now, neutral or not; but this was an unfrequented area to hope to be picked up in. The petrol might last five minutes or half an hour—one could not be certain. The gauge was hardly accurate enough in this old bus to work by. As he looked the engines gave a premonitory splutter and then picked up again. Well, it was five minutes, he reflected, not half an hour—that was all. The pilot

turned and headed up wind. With the engines missing more and more frequently they glided down, making a perfect landing of the "intentional pancake" order on the crest of a white-topped four-foot wave. Instantly they began to feel the seas—the hard, rough, senseless water that was so different to the air they had come from. The machine made wicked weather of it, and it was obvious that she could hardly last long. She lurched and rocked viciously, constraining them to cling to the sides of the frail body. Mottin pulled off his headpiece, and the pilot followed suit.

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"Well," said Mottin, "it was worth it—eh?"

"By gum, yes! It was that, and I give you full numbers, sir. I thought for a moment you had taken too long a chance, but you were right."

A wave splashed heavily over the speaker and laid three inches of water in a pool around his ankles.

"This is going to be a short business, sir, unless we get busy."

"I know," said Mottin. "Case of four anchors and wish for the day. Sea anchor indicated, and mighty quick too."...

An hour later it was pitch-dark, and a semi-waterlogged seaplane drifted south, head to sea, bucketing her nose into the lop. Two figures crouched together in the body of her, baling mechanically. On the upper plane an electric torch glowed brightly, pointing westward. The figures exchanged disjointed sentences as they baled, and occasionally one of them would stretch his head up for a glance round for possible passing lights.

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"Cheer up, Sub!" said Mottin. "Your teeth are chattering like the deuce. Bale harder and get warm."

"It's not the cold, it's the weather that's doing me in, sir. I'm so damned sea-sick."

"Yes, it's a filthy motion, but she's steadier than she was. 'Fraid she's sinking."

The Sub-Lieutenant ceased baling for a moment and looked into his senior's face, dimly lit by the reflection from the torch overhead. "Do you know, sir," he said, "I don't feel as bucked as I did? I believe I've got half-way to cold feet about the show."

"Do you know, Sub"—Mottin copied the hesitating voice—"I've had cold feet the whole blinkin' time? If it wasn't for one thing I keep thinking of, I'd be properly howling about it."

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"And what's that, sir?"

"D'you remember a line of Kipling's in that 'Widow of sleepy Chester' poem? It's about 'Fifty file of Burmans to open him Heaven's gate.' Well, that's keeping me cheered up."

"'Mm—that's true. How many do you think that boat carried?"

"Round about forty—she was a big packet."

"Only twenty file—still, that's good enough. Besides, they'd have done damage to-morrow if we hadn't got them."

"True for you, Sub—and they might have killed women on that trip. Now they won't get the chance."

"Twenty file. Ugh! I'll make 'em salute when I see them. Hullo! See that, sir?" The two men rose to their knees and stared out to the west. A bright glow showed beyond the horizon, and through it ran a flicker of pulsating flashes of vivid orange light. The glow broke out again a point to the northward, and the unmistakable beam of a searchlight swung to the clouds and down again. As they looked, the glow spread, and the rippling flashes as gun answered gun came into view over their horizon. Mottin fumbled for the glasses, but found them wet through and useless. The action was evidently coming their way, and was growing into a pyrotechnic display such as few are fortunate enough to see.

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"Destroyers—coming right over us—Very's pistol, quick! We may get a chance here. Don't let the cartridges get wet, man—put 'em in your coat." The guns began to bark clearly above the straining and bumping noise of the crumbling seaplane, and a wildly-aimed shell burst on the water half a mile to windward. Both men were standing up now, staring at the extraordinary scene. A flotilla of destroyers passed each side of them, one leading the other by nearly a mile. The searchlights and gun-flashes lit the sea between the opposing lines, and the vicious shells sent columns of shining water up around the rapt spectators, or whipped overhead in a continued stuttering shriek.

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A big destroyer passed at half a cable's length in a quivering halo of light of her own making. The short choppy beam sea sent a steady sheet of spray across her forecastle, a sheet that showed red in the light of the guns. As she passed the Sub-Lieutenant raised his hand above his head, and a Very's light sailed up into the air, showing every detail of the battered seaplane with startling clearness for a few seconds. A searchlight whirled round from the destroyer, steadied blindingly on their faces a moment, and was switched off on the instant. As swiftly as it had approached, the fight flickered away to the eastward, till the last gleam was out of sight, and the two wet and aching men crouched back into the slopping water to continue their baling.

"If they *do* find us, it'll be rather luck, sir," said the younger man. "She isn't going to last much longer."

"Long enough, I reckon. But they may go donkey's miles in a running fight like that. Is that petrol tank free?" [Pg 134]

"Yes, I couldn't get the union-nut off—it was burred; so I broke the pipe and bent it back on itself. It'll hold all right, I think—at least it will only leak slowly. Hullo, she's going, sir."

"Not quite. Pass that tank aft and we'll crawl out on the tail. That'll be the last bit under, and we may as well use her all we can."

With gasps and strainings they half-lifted, half-floated the big tank along till they had it jammed on end between the rudder and the control-wires. They straddled the sloping tail, crouching low to avoid the smack of the breaking seas, their legs trailing in the icy water. With frozen fingers the Sub-Lieutenant removed two Very's cartridges from his breast-pocket and tucked them inside his leather waistcoat.

A flurry of snow came down wind. The two were too wet already to notice it, but as it grew heavier the increased darkness made Mottin lift his head and look round. At that moment a gleam of brightness showed through to windward; as he looked it faded and vanished. He leaned aft and shouted weakly— [Pg 135]

"Come on, man—wake up! Fire another one. They're here!"

It seemed an age to him before the pistol was loaded, and his heart sank as a dull click indicated an unmistakable misfire. He watched the last cartridge inserted with dispassionate interest. If one was wet, the other was almost certain to be, and—Bang! The coloured ball of fire soared up into the driving snow, and the pistol slipped from the startled Sub-Lieutenant's hand and shot overboard. The searchlight came on again and grew stronger and nearer, and as the glare of it became intolerable, a tall black bow came dipping and swaying past at a few yards' range. Mottin almost let his will-power go at that point—the relief was too great. He had a confused memory afterwards of crashing wood as the tailplane ground against a steel side, and of barking his shins as he was hauled across a wire guard-rail and dropped on a very nubby deck. The wardroom seemed a blaze of intense light after the darkness outside, and the temporary surgeon who took charge of him the most sensible and charming person in the Service. [Pg 136]

"Sit down—take your coat off—lap this down. That's right. Now, I have two duties in this ship—I'm doctor and I'm the wine caterer. They are not incompatible. You will therefore go to bed now in the Captain's cabin, and you'll have a hot toddy as soon as you're there; come along now and get your clothes off. Your mate is in the First Lieutenant's cabin, and he won't wake up till morning."

Twenty minutes later Mottin, from beneath a pile of blankets, heard a tinkle of curtain rings and looked out. A muffled, snow-covered figure entered quietly and began to peel off a lammy coat. Mottin coughed.

"Hullo! How are you feeling? I've just come for a change of clothes. I won't be long—I'm Sangatte. No, that's all right. I won't be turning in to-night; we're going right up harbour, and I'll be busy till daylight." [Pg 137]

He bustled round the chest of drawers, pulling out woollen scarves, stockings, &c., and talking rapidly. "Lucky touch our finding you. I noted position when your first light went up, but as the chase looked like running on ninety mile yet, I didn't expect to find you. Your joss was in, because the snow came down and they put up a smoke-screen and ceased fire, so we lost touch, and I hadn't far to come back to look for you. Got a Fritz, did you? Good man! We'll have a bottle on your decoration when we get in. The Huns? Yes, they lost their rear ship right off, and the others were plastered good and plenty. We lost one on a mine, but we took the crew off and sank her. I sank your 'plane just now—tied a pig of ballast to her and chucked it over. I thought you might have left some papers—oh! you've got 'em, have you? That's good." [Pg 138]

"Yes, they're in my coat pocket. I say, haven't I seen you before? I seem to remember you. Do you hunt?" Mottin stretched his legs out sleepily as he spoke.

"Yes—met you with the Hambleton or Cattistock, I expect. Haven't been on a horse for all of three years, though; and I don't suppose there'll be much doing that way for a long time, now

they're putting half the country under plough. S'long. I'm for the bridge; ring that bell if you want anything. The Doc.'s got one or two wounded forrard, so he'll be busy, but my servant'll look out for you." The curtain clashed back, and Mottin, turning over, slid instantly into a log-like sleep.

A TRINITY.

[Pg 139]

The way of a ship at racing speed
In a bit of a rising gale,
The way of a horse of the only breed
At a Droxford post-and-rail,
The way of a brand-new aeroplane
On a frosty winter dawn.
 You'll come back to those again;
 Wheel or cloche or slender rein
 Will keep you young and clean and sane,
 And glad that you were born.

The power and drive beneath me now are above the
 power of kings,
It's mine the word that lets her loose and in my ear
 she sings—
 "Mark now the way I sport and play with the rising
 hunted sea,
Across my grain in cold disdain their ranks are
 hurled at me.
But down my wake is a foam-white lake, the
 remnant of their line,
That broke and died beneath my pride—your
 foemen, man, and mine."
The perfect tapered hull below is a dream of line and
 curve,
An artist's vision in steel and bronze for gods and
 men to serve.
If ever a statue came to life, you quivering slender
 thing,
It ought to be you—my racing girl—as the Amazon
 song you sing.

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Down the valley and up the slope we run from scent
 to view.
"Steady, you villain—you know too much—I'm not so
 wild as you;
You'll get me cursed if you catch him first—there's at
 least a mile to go,
So swallow your pride and ease your stride, and take
 your fences slow.
Your high-pricked ears as the jump appears are
 comforting things to see;
Your easy gallop and bending neck are signals flying
 to me.
You wouldn't refuse if it was wire with calthrops
 down in front,
And there we are with a foot to spare—you best of all
 the Hunt!"
 Great sloping shoulders galloping strong, and
 a yard of floating tail,
 A fine old Irish gentleman, and a Hampshire
 post-and-rail.

[Pg 141]

The sun on the fields a mile below is glinting off the
 grass
That slides along like a rolling map as under the

clouds I pass.
The early shadows of byre and hedge are dwindling
dark below
As up the stair of the morning air on my idle wheels I
go,—
Nothing to do but let her alone—she's flying
herself to-day,
Unless I chuck her about a bit—there isn't a
bump or sway.
So *there's* a bank at ninety-five—and here's a
spin and a spiral dive,
And here we are again.
And *that's* a roll and twist around, and that's the sky
and there's the ground,
And I and the aeroplane
Are doing a glide, but upside-down, and that's a
village and that's a town—
And now we're rolling back.
And *this* is the way we climb and stall and sit up and
beg on nothing at all,
The wires and strainers slack,
And now we'll try and be good some more, and open
the throttle and hear her roar
And steer for London Town.
For there never a pilot yet was born who flew a
machine on a frosty morn
But started stunting soon,
To feel if his wires were really there, or whether he
flew on ice or air,
Or whether his hands were gloved or bare,
Or he sat in a free balloon.

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IN THE MORNING.

[Pg 144]

Back from the battle, torn and rent,
Listing bridge and stanchions bent
By the angry sea.
By Thy guiding mercy sent,
Fruitful was the road we went—
Back from battle we.

If Thou hadst not been, O Lord, behind our feeble
arm,
If Thy hand had not been there to slam the lyddite
home,
When against us men arose and sought to work us
harm,
We had gone to death, O Lord, in spouting rings of
foam.

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Heaving sea and cloudy sky
Saw the battle flashing by,
As Thy foemen ran.
By Thy grace, that made them fly,
We have seen two hundred die
Since the fight began.

If our cause had not been Thine, for Thy eternal
Right,
If the foe in place of us had fought for Thee, O Lord!
If Thou hadst not guided us and drawn us there to
fight,
We never should have closed with them—Thy seas
are dark and broad.

Through the iron rain they fled,
Bearing home the tale of dead,
Flying from Thy sword.
After-hatch to fo'c'sle head,
We have turned their decks to red,
By Thy help, O Lord!

It was not by our feeble sword that they were
overthrown,
But Thy right hand that dashed them down, the
servants of the proud;
It was not arm of ours that saved, but Thine, O Lord,
alone,
When down the line the guns began, and sang Thy
praise aloud.

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Sixty miles of running fight,
Finished at the dawning light,
Off the Zuider Zee.
Thou that helped throughout the night
Weary hand and aching sight,
Praise, O Lord, to Thee.

AN AFFAIR OF OUTPOSTS.

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The wardroom of the *Depôt* ship was just emptying as the late-breakfast party lit their pipes and cigarettes and headed for the smoking-room next door, when a signalman brought the news in. The Commander, standing by the radiator, took the pad from the man's hand and read it aloud. He raised his voice for the first few words, then continued in his usual staccato tones as the silence of his audience showed that they were straining their ears in fear of missing a word:—

"*Lyddite*, *Prism*, *Axite*, and *Pebble* in action last night with six enemy destroyers—*Pebble* sunk—fifty-seven survivors aboard *Lyddite*—enemy lost two sunk, possibly three—*Lyddite* with prisoners and *Prism* with *Axite* in tow arriving forenoon to-day."

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There was a moment's pause as the Commander handed the signal back, and then half a dozen officers spoke at once. The Fleet-Surgeon was not one of them. He gathered up his two juniors with a significant glance, as one sees a hostess signal to her Division as the dessert-talk flags, and the three vanished through the door to get to work on their grim preparations. The Engineer officers conferred for a minute in low tones and then followed them out. The signal had given clearer data for the workers in flesh and bone to act on than it had for those who work in metals, and there was nothing for the latter to do but to get their men ready and to guess at probabilities. The remainder of the Mess broke into a buzz of conversation: "*Axite*, she must be pretty well hashed up; it must have been gun-fire, a torpedo would have sunk her.... Rot! why should it? What about the *Salcombe* or the *Ventnor*? *They* got home.... Yes, but not from so far out, and there's a sea running outside too.... Well, the Noorder Diep isn't a hundred miles, and that must be where...."

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The Commander beckoned the First Lieutenant to him, as that officer was rising from his chair at the writing-table. "You'd better warn the Gunner, Borden, that the divers may be needed; and tell my messenger as you go out that I want to see the Boatswain and Carpenter too—thank you." He turned to the ship's side and looked out through the scuttle at the dancing, sunlit waters of the harbour. He had supervised the work of preparation for assisting and patching lame ducks more than once before, and he knew that his subordinates needed little assistance from him. What was troubling his mind was the question of the casualties. The *Pebble* was gone, so there was no need for spare hands to be provided for her, while her survivors were actually a gain. They would not be fit for work for a bit, though, a good few of them probably wounded, and the remainder perhaps needing treatment after immersion in a December sea. Then the three others—it sounded like a hard-fought action, and hard fights meant losses. That was the worst of these destroyer actions, the casualties were mostly good men, and it took so long to train good ratings. If only one saved the officers and men it wouldn't really matter how many destroyers were lost, he reflected, as he walked out of the mess towards his cabin and the little group of Warrant and Petty officers who awaited him by the doorway.

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It was barely an hour later, and the bustle of preparation aboard the *Depôt* ship was still in progress when they came in sight. The outer forts had reported them as approaching the entrance, and the next news was good also, for it was simply the deduction on the part of the watching ships' companies, when they saw the big black-and-yellow salvage tugs that had been out since dawn come chugging up harbour alone, that the victors had disdained assistance. Then the *Lyddite* showed her high bow and unmistakable funnels as she swung round the entrance shoals and steadied up harbour at a leisurely ten knots. At that distance she looked dirty and sea-worn, but intact. Close astern of her came *Prism* and *Axite*, and as they showed, the watchers involuntarily caught their breaths.

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The *Prism* looked queer and foreign somehow, with no foremast, a bare skeleton of a bridge, and a shapeless heap where the forward funnel had stood. The *Axite* looked just what she was—a mere battered hull, with very little standing above the level of her deck, her stern nearly awash, and her bow bent and torn as if some giant hand had gripped and twisted it. As the pair of

cripples neared the dock entrance, two smaller tugs which had followed astern came hurrying up to close on the *Axite's* sides, while the towing hawser that had been watched with such anxiety through three cold and stormy watches splashed in the churned-up water under the *Prism's* counter. The *Prism* increased speed slightly, and up against the blustering wind came the faint sound of cheering from the cruisers down the harbour as she passed them. She eased down into station astern of the *Lyddite*, and the Yeoman of Signals on the Depôt ship's bridge shifted his telescope from the shaking canvas of the wind-dodger to the steadier support of a stanchion.

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"What's she like—can you make 'er out?" A Leading Telegraphist had walked out from the wireless office, and, in obvious hopes of getting hold of the telescope, was standing at his elbow.

"Pretty sight, I don't think," replied the Yeoman grimly. "Dirty work for the hospital there, and I reckon it's 'Port Watch look for messmates'—all along under the bridge she's been catching it, and I can't see—Yes, O.K.—He's up there on the bridge—*Who?* The skipper, of course. Mister Calton, Commander—begging his pardon. Me and him were in the old *Cantaloup* two years. Gawd! but ain't they been in a dust-up! What do you say? *Lyddite?*"

He turned to look as the big destroyer passed, half-raised his glass, and then lowered it. There was enough for his naked eye to see to discourage him from a closer view. Her decks were crowded with men, lying, standing, or sitting down. The white bandages showed up clearly against the general background of dull grime, and the bandages were many. A torpedo-tube pointing up like an A.A. gun, and a dozen or so of splinter holes in funnel and casing, showed that some, at least, of the wounded were her own. About the casing, between the wounded, lay dozens of dull brass cartridge-cases, and aft—a curious touch of triviality—two seamen and a steward were emptying boxes of smashed glass and crockery overside. A few men waved and shouted in reply as the Depôt ship roared a welcome across to her, but the greater number were silent. The two scarred and blood-spotted craft swung gently in to the jetty, where the lines of ambulances and stretchers awaited them, and as the first heaving-lines flew, the Yeoman turned to the Telegraphist with a look almost of pride on his dark saturnine face—

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"Well, I'm —," he said admiringly, "if that ain't swank! Did you see 'em? Why, stiffen the Dutch—they've got new Sunday Ensigns hoisted to come up harbour with, and"—he swung round and levelled his glass at the *Axite*, now almost hidden in the smoke and steam of the group of tugs around her at the lock gates—"I'm damned if she ain't got a new one up too. Here, have a look at it, man. It's on a boathook staff sticking in the muzzle of the high-angle gun—"

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The "liaison officer" felt distinctly nervous as his steamboat approached the gangway. He had no qualms as to his capabilities of carrying out the work he was detailed for—that of acting as signals-and-operations-interpreter aboard the Flotilla leader of a recently allied destroyer division—but the fact that he had been told that he must be prepared to be tactful weighed heavily on his mind. His ideas on the subject of Americans were somewhat hidebound, but at the same time very vague. Would they spring the statement on him that they had "come over to win the War for you," or would they refer at once to their War of Independence? Did the Yankees hate all Britishers, or— His boat bumped alongside the neat teak ladder, and he noted with a seaman's appreciation the perfectly-formed coachwhipping and Turks' Heads on the rails. A moment later he was standing on a very clean steel deck, gravely returning the salute of what appeared to be a muster of all the officers in the ship.

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A tall commander took a pace forward. "*Malcolm*," he said, "I'm Captain—glad to meet you." The Englishman saluted, and they shook hands. "My name's Jackson," he replied, and turned as the American, taking his arm, ran through a rapid introduction to the other officers. Each of these repeated the formula, accompanied by the quick bow and handshake. Jackson followed suit as best he could, and began to feel that on such formal occasions he had the makings of a real *attaché* or diplomatist in him.

A few minutes, and he found himself sitting in a long-chair in a wardroom which might have been a counterpart of his own, and accepting a long cigar from the box handed him. "Did you have a good trip over?" he ventured.

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"We sure did, and saw nix—not even a U-boat. Had a bit of a gale first day out, but it blew off quick. But say, there wasn't a German ship for three thousand miles. Don't you ever see some about?"

"Well, you see—er—no. They only show out now and then, and it's only for a few hours when they do. Of course, there are plenty of Fritzes, but they keep under most of the time—you don't see them much."

"Well, we thought it real slow, didn't we, Commander? We were just ripe for some gunplay, but we never got a chance to pull."

Jackson looked across at the Commander and smiled. "We felt that way for a long time, sir. But now we just go on hoping and keeping ready. We've had so many false alarms, you see."

The Commander laughed. "That's one on you, Benson," he said. "We won't get so excited next time we see the Northern Lights."

There was a general shout of laughter, and Jackson turned cold. This, he thought, was a little early for him to start putting his foot in it. The officer called Benson, however, did not appear to be about to throw over the alliance just yet. He walked to the sideboard, and returned with a couple of lumps of sugar in his hand. "Lootenant," he said gravely, "in the absence of stimulants in the U.S. Navy, I can only give you what we've got. We've no liquor aboard, but we've sure got sugar."

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"Yes," said the Commander. "We're all on the water-waggon here, whether we like the ride or not."

Jackson sat up in his chair and shed his official pose. He could, at any rate, talk without reserve on Service subjects. "Well, sir," he said, "I'm not a teetotaler, but it doesn't worry me to go teetotal if I've got to. I don't worry about it if I'm in training for anything; and the fact is—well, if there was a referendum, or something of that sort, in the Navy as to whether we were to be compulsory teetotalers or not, I believe the majority would vote for 'no drinks.' I would, anyway, and I'm what you'd call an average drinker."

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"They didn't ask us to vote any, but if they had—in war-time—I guess we'd have voted the same way. If you can't get it you don't want it, and we've kind of got used to water now. And so your name's Jackson? Any relation?"

Jackson's brain worked at high pressure. This was a poser. Sir Henry Jackson? Stonewall? How many noted Jacksons were there? He played for safety and replied with a negative.

"Ah, well! there's perhaps some connection you don't know of," said the Commander encouragingly. "Which part of England are your folk from? Birmingham. Well, of course, it's a big family.... My father knew him well, and was with him through the Valley Campaign."

Jackson sighed with relief. "You're from Virginia then, sir?"

"No, sir—I'm from Maryland. My father joined the Army of Virginia two days before Bull Run."

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"Are you all Southerners here, then?"

"We're sure *not*," came a chorus of voices. "Nix on Secesh ... John Brown's Body...." Jackson developed nerves again. He felt as if he had asked a Nationalist meeting to join him in drinking confusion to the Pope. The company did not seem disposed to let him off, however.

"Which do you think ought to have won, Lootenant? You were neutral—let's hear it."

Jackson looked apologetically at the Commander.

"Well, sir, I think the North *had* to win; and" (he hurried on) "it's just as well she did, because if she hadn't there wouldn't be any U.S.A. now—only a lot of small states."

"That's so; but there need not have been any war at all."

"There needn't, sir; but it made the U.S.A. all the same. The big event of the Franco-Prussian War wasn't the surrender at Sedan; it was the crowning of the German Emperor at Versailles. And in the Civil War—well, it made one nation of the Americans in the same way as the other did of the Germans."

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"Well, Lootenant, if wars are just to make nations into one, what was the good of our wars with you?"

Jackson was getting over his self-consciousness, and it was dawning on him that the American Navy has a method of "drawing" very similar to that in use in his own.

"They were a lot of use," he protested. "We sent German troops against you, and you killed lots of them."

There was a general laugh.

"Say, Jackson," came a voice, "this little old country of yours isn't doing much with the Germans now except kill them. Say, she's great! You're doing all the work, and you've kept on telling us you're doing nix. Your papers just talk small, as if your Army was only a Yale-Princeton football crowd, and you were the coon and not the Big Stick of the bunch that's in it."

"Well, you see, we don't like talking about ourselves except to just buck our own people up."

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Jackson's tone as he said this was, I regret to say, just what yours or mine would have been. It could only be described as "smug."

"You sure don't. We like to say what we're doing when we come from New York."

Jackson prepared for an effort of tact. "I hear," he said, "you've got quite a lot of troops across already."

They told him—and his eyes opened.

"*What!*" he said. "And how many—?" He digested the answers for a moment, and decided that

his store of tact could be pigeon-holed again for a while. "But what about—your papers haven't—I don't call that talking much. We still think you're just beginning."

"So we are,—we've hardly started. But our papers were given the wise word, and they don't talk war secrets."

Jackson readjusted his ideas slightly, and his attitude deflated itself. The transportation of the First Expeditionary Force had been talked of as a big thing, but this—and he had until then heard no whisper of it.

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"And the country?" he asked. "What about all your pro-Germans and aliens?"

"They don't," came the answer. "What do you think of Wilson now?" Jackson edged away to cover again. "He's a very fine statesman, and a much bigger man than we thought him once."

"Same here; and he knows his America. He waited and he waited, and all the time the country was just getting more raw about the Germans, and then when he was good and ready he came in; and I guess now he's got the country *solid*."

Jackson pondered this for a moment, studying the clean-cut young faces—all of the universal "Naval" stamp—around him.

"I don't know," he said slowly, "that it wouldn't have been better for us if we'd been able to stop out a few months ourselves at first. It would have made *us* more solid too. But we simply had to come in at once."

"You had; and if you hadn't, we'd have talked at you some."

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Jackson laughed. "What! 'Too proud to fight,' and all that sort of thing? Yes, we'd have deserved it too. I say, what a shame Admiral Mahan died right at the beginning! There's nobody to take his place and write this war up."

"Yes, he'd have been over here first tap of the gong. And he'd have seen it all for himself, and given you Britishers and us lectures on the war of 1812—and every other war too."

"Yes, it's a great pity. He taught us what sea-power was, and till then we hardly knew we had it at all."

"Well, he taught you enough to get us busy mailing you paper about the blockade last year."

Jackson grinned. "You couldn't say much. You made all the precedents yourselves when you blockaded the South in '61. We only had to refer you to your own letters to get out of the argument."

The First Lieutenant beckoned for the cigar box again. "You knew too much diplomatic work for us in those days. We were new to that card game. But I'd sooner hear our talk now than the sort of gentle breathing of your folks when it comes to diplomacy."

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"Never mind," said Jackson. "We're getting better. We'll have an autocracy, like you, before the war's over, instead of the democracy we've got now."

The circle settled down and waited. This was evidently not an unarmed foe, in the ancient Anglo-Saxon game.

"Amurrica's the only real democracy in the universe," said an incautious voice. Two heads turned towards the speaker, and several pairs of eyes spoke volumes.

"I beg your pardon," said Jackson. "America's a great country, but as you told me just now, she's solid. That means she's so keen on getting on with the work that she's chosen a boss and told him to go ahead and give his orders, and so long as he does his best to get on with the work, the people aren't going to quarrel with him. Now we are not really solid, just because we're too much of a democracy."

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"Say, you wouldn't think that if you'd been over and seen our last elections; but there's sense in it, all the same. But Lloyd George— isn't he the same sort of Big Stick over here?"

"You read our political papers and see," said Jackson. "Do you take much interest in politics in your Navy?"

"Do we hell—does yours?"

"Not a bit, except to curse at them. Navies are outside politics."

"Except the German's, and their army and navy and politics are all the same thing; and they'll all come down together, too."

"Yes, but it's going to take some tough scrapping to do it. Let's hope no one starts fighting over the corpse when she's beaten."

"Well, I guess you won't, and we won't. We've both got all the land we can do with, and if there are any colonies to hand out after, we won't mind who gets 'em so long as the Kaiser doesn't. What we ought to do is to join England in a policing act for the world, and just keep them all from fighting."

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"That'd be no good. The rest of them would combine against us. It would only mean a different Balance of Power."

"Oh! Now you're talking European. We stand out of the old-world Balance."

"You can't now. You've got hitched up in it, and you'll find you're tangled when you want to get back."

"We sure won't. We'll pull out when this round-up's over—you watch us."

The Commander glanced at his watch and rose. "Dinner's at 'half-six,'" he said. "You'd better let me show you the way to your room."

Jackson rose and followed him aft to the spare cabin. "Here you are," said the American. "Hope you'll be comfortable. The boys will do their best to make your stay here real home-like, and I hope you'll stay just as long as you can."

"I sure will, sir," came the answer, in a voice that was fast losing its English drawl; and Jackson, alone with his thoughts, stared at the door-curtain, and wondered why on earth it should have been considered necessary to tell him that a supply of tact would be useful to him in his new job.

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IN FORTY WEST.

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We are coming from the ranch, from the city and the mine,
And the word has gone before us to the towns upon the Rhine;
As the rising of the tide
On the Old-World side,
We are coming to the battle, to the Line.

From the valleys of Virginia, from the Rockies in the North,
We are coming by battalions, for the word was carried forth:
"We have put the pen away
And the sword is out to-day,
For the Lord has loosed the Vintages of Wrath."

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We are singing in the ships as they carry us to fight,
As our fathers sang before us by the camp-fires' light;
In the wharf-light glare
They can hear us Over There,
When the ships come steaming through the night.

Right across the deep Atlantic where the *Lusitania* passed,
With the battle-flag of Yankee-land a-floating at the mast,
We are coming all the while,
Over twenty hundred mile,
And we're staying to the finish, to the last.

We are many—we are one—and we're in it overhead,
We are coming as an Army that has seen its women dead,
And the old Rebel Yell
Will be loud above the shell
When we cross the top together, seeing red.

A RING AXIOM.

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When the pitiless gong rings out again, and they whip your chair away,
When you feel you'd like to take the floor, whatever the crowd should say,
When the hammering gloves come back again, and the world goes round your head,

When you know your arms are only wax, your hands
of useless lead,
When you feel you'd give your heart and soul for a
chance to clinch and rest,
And through your brain the whisper comes,
"Give in, you've done your best,"
Why, stiffen your knees and brace your back
—and take my word as true—
*If the man in front has got you weak, he's just
as tired as you.*
He can't attack through a gruelling fight and finish as
he began;
He's done more work than you to-day—you're just as
fine a man.
So call your last reserve of pluck—he's careless with
his chin—
You'll put it across him every time—Go in—Go in—*Go
in!*

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CHANCES.

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The boxing-stage was raised a clear three and a half feet above the deck, and the mat showed glaringly white in the northern sunshine. The corner-posts were padded and wound with many layers of red and blue bunting. A glance round showed a great amphitheatre of faces, rising tier on tier up to the crouching figures of men on the main-derrick, funnel-casings, and masts. The spectators numbered, perhaps, close on three thousand, and there was hardly a man among them who had not qualified as a critic by personal experience at the game. The last two competitors had just left the ring in a storm of hand-clapping, and the white-sweatered seconds ceased their professional chatter and their basin-splashing employment to jump up and place the chairs back against the corner-posts as the next two officers entered.

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Lieutenant Cairnley of H.M. T.B.D. — pulled the loose sleeves of his monkey-jacket across his chest and stretched out his legs as he sat down in the Blue corner. He looked across at his opponent, who was standing talking in a low voice to a second. Yes, he was evidently only just inside the middle-weight limit, and he, Cairnley, must be giving away all of half a stone. Still, that was half a stone less to carry about the ring, and he felt really fit and well-trained. An officer was standing in the ring, with a paper in one hand, and the other raised to call for silence.

"First round of the Officers' Middle-weights. In the Red corner, Lieutenant Santon of the—, in the Blue corner, Lieutenant Cairnley of the—." He slipped under the ropes and jumped down from the stage as the voice of the timekeeper followed his own—"Seconds out!" Cairnley felt the coat plucked from his shoulders, and he stood up as his chair was drawn away. "*Clang!*" went the heavy gong, and he walked forward with his right hand out and his eyes on his opponent's chest, in the midst of a great silence. As their gloves touched, Cairnley jumped quickly to one side and began his invariable habit of working round to his opponent's left hand. He was not allowed much time for "routine work." He had an impression of a looming figure getting larger, a whirl of feinting, and he was being rushed back across the ring in a storm of punches. His habit of keeping his chin down, shoulders up, and elbows in, saved him. He felt a thrill of respect for Santon's punch as his head rocked from heavy hook-blows on either side, and then he was inside his opponent's elbows, working his head forward, and lowering his right for a body punch before they struck the ropes. As he felt their springing contact at his back, he stiffened up and pushed his man away. The recoil of the hemp assisted him, and Santon gave ground a yard. Cairnley jumped at him, and, taking an even chance, sent a straight right over, which landed cleanly on the mouth. His left followed at once, but only touched lightly. Santon gave ground again, and the lighter man slid after him, sending a long left home to the nose. Cairnley thrilled as it landed. This man was strong, he felt, but not quick enough in defence. He half-feinted with his right, and sent his left out again. As the punch extended he slightly lifted his chin, and the ring whirled round him as he took a tremendous cross-counter that came in over his elbow. He came forward quickly to get to close quarters, but his opponent had no intention of letting him. There was a whirl of gloves and a sound of heavy, grunting hitting, and Cairnley found himself on his hands and knees, with a very groggy feeling in his head, looking across at Santon's white knees by the ropes at the far side of the ring. He stretched his neck, took a long breath, and rose shakily. He did not feel as shaky as he looked, for he had been in the ring before, and knew that a knock-down blow sometimes entraps the optimistic giver of it into sudden defeat, but in this case he was engaged with a boxer who took no chances. Santon approached quickly and began rapid feinting just outside hitting distance. Cairnley gave ground slightly and waited for the rush. This chap had a wicked right, he reflected, and he did not want to get caught napping again. Then Santon was on him slamming in lefts and rights, and working furiously to get him into a corner. Cairnley stooped and struggled to get in close. A muscular change in the body a foot from his eyes gave him warning of an approaching upper-cut, and he brought his right glove in front of his face in time to stop it. He felt Santon's left on the back of his head, and instantly shifted feet and

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escaped round his opponent's left side. As he shifted he jerked a hard, short left punch into the mark, and then repeated the blow. Santon broke away, and received a perfectly-timed straight left on the nose as the gong rang. There was a storm of applause as the men went to their corners, for Cairnley's recovery had been well guarded, and his quick hitting at the end of the round showed that he had not lost much speed. He lay back in his chair while his seconds fussed around him, and thought hard. That right cross-counter of Santon's was certainly a beauty, so much so that it must be his favourite punch. Could he be absolutely certain of its being produced if he gave it the same chance? Well, he had to win this on a knock-out, or not at all. He could not pick up all the points he had lost in the first round with only two to go, so it was a case of chancing it on his brains alone. Yes, he would just check his idea once, and if that proved that Santon would use the same punch for the same lead, he would go all out on the next. *Clang!* He rose and walked straight forward to meet his man. At six-feet range he jumped in and drove his left for the mark. It did not land true, but it enabled him to close and start a succession of furious body punches. The two hammering, gasping white figures reeled about the ring for half a minute, heads down and arms working like pistons.

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Cairnley knew that his man was too strong for him at that game, but for that round, brain and not muscle was his guide, and he wanted Santon to be warmed up and made to act by habit and use. They locked in a clinch, and a moment later broke clear at the word of the Referee—the first he had spoken in that fight. For a second they stood on guard swaying from side to side as they waited for an opening. Then Cairnley leaped in and sent out a full straight left. Even with his chin tucked well down he felt the jar of the right that slid again over his elbow, and striking full on the cheek, made his head ring and his neck ache. He stopped the left that followed, then landed on the face with his own left and closed again to hammer in short arm punches. He felt as he did so that the work he was engaged on must be done soon, as at this high-speed work he would not have the strength for a hard punch for long. Santon appeared to be a little inclined for a rest, too, for it was he who clinched this time. Cairnley rested limply against him and took a long breath as the voice of the Referee called them apart. He caught his breath again and called up all his reserve strength as they posed at long range, then he jumped forward as before, sent his left out three-quarters of the way, and showed his chin clear of his chest. Without a check in the movement his left dropped, his body pivoted, and he sent a full "haymaker" right up and across to the half-glimpsed head in front of him. A bony right wrist glanced from the top of his bent head, and at the same instant a jar, from his right knuckles to his back, told him that brains had beaten skill. He slipped aside, his hands mechanically raised in defence, and stumbled over Santon's falling body. As he scrambled up to cross the ring he looked back, and knew at once that not ten nor twenty seconds would be enough for that limp figure to recover in.

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"Yes, I've got leave now, and Cairnley's in hospital; he had a couple of splinters in him, and they packed him off, though he wanted to get leave and treat himself. The old packet's got to be just about rebuilt from the deck up, and he's certain to get a bigger one instead. He's going to take me on with him,—good thing for me,—as I'll be pretty young to be Number One of one of the Alpha class ships. I tell you, it was a devilish funny show, and all over in a second. It came on absolute pea-soup at four and we had only heard the guns in the action. Never saw a thing. We had been out away from the line four hours. Had nothing but wireless touch to tell us they had got into a mix-up. We went to stations at full speed trying to close on them, and we'd hardly got ready when the Hun showed up four hundred yards off. My word! she was smart on it. She was only a cruiser, but in the fog she showed up like the *Von der Tann*, and she was going all of twenty-four. She let fly at the moment we saw her, and she spun round and charged right off. We let go too as she fired, but her turning to ram saved her. We turned too and bolted, and she just cut every darned thing down from the casing up. The mast went on the first salvo, one funnel and most of the guns. The shooting was just lovely, and if it hadn't been such close range we'd have been shot down in one act. As it was, they just shaved us clean as if we'd gone full speed under a low-level bridge. At six hundred yards we could only see her gun-flashes, and we yanked round across her bow and opened out. The skipper gave her five minutes and then levelled up on the same course we had been on before, and eased a bit to keep station on her beam. We did a bit of clearing up and he sent for me. He was on the bridge—which had damn little left on it, bar him,—it was a proper wreck—and told me to arrange hands to shout orders to the engine-room if required, as the telegraphs were gone. The wheel was all right—or at least the gearing was,—the wheel itself had only a bit of rim and two spokes on it. He told me to get what fish we could fire set for surface, and that he was going to go for her again and fire at twenty-five yards. I thought he was mad, but I went down and got 'em ready. (The gunner was killed.) I shouted up to him when I had done, and had mustered a tube's crew, and we whacked on full bat again and began to close. You see we had crossed her bow once, and Cairnley reckoned then that she would have altered back to her original course of East, so he had kept on her port beam at about a mile, going the same speed. I did not get what he was driving at till afterwards. At the time I thought he was just going to do it again, because he thought he ought to make another effort. We saw her first this time as we were closing on the opposite side, and the skipper told them to poop off the bow gun, which was all we had, to wake them up. They woke up all right, and we got the same smack from all along her side we'd had before. She was just abaft our starboard beam going the

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same course, and I was wondering what the deuce he'd meant by telling me to train the tubes to port, when we went hard a-port and came round all heeled over and shaking. I just thought to myself, Well, if the Hun keeps on and doesn't try to ram, we're going to look damn silly, when I saw her again and she *was* ramming. Her guns did no good then,—the change was too quick for any sights to be held on. He banged away all right, and I believe he put more helm on—but he couldn't get us. The skipper had said twenty-five yards, but it looked to me like *feet*. He was going all out, and so were we, and I pulled off as his stem showed abreast the tubes—all spray and grey paint—and those fish hit him abaft the second funnel. Eh? Well, perhaps it was a few yards, but it's the closest I've seen to going alongside a gangway. Well, that's all I knew about it for half an hour. The bang put me out. Skipper said he turned back and searched for her, but it was so thick then he couldn't have found an island except by mistake. We'd been hit below water too and couldn't steam much. We got a tow home. Good egg! Here's St Pancras, and there's a flapper—thirty if she's a day—Good old blinkin' London!"

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THE QUARTERMASTER.

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I mustn't look up from the compass-card, nor look at
the seas at all,
I must watch the helm and compass-card,—If I heard
the trumpet-call
Of Gabriel sounding Judgment Day to dry the Seas
again,—
I must hold her bow to windward now till I'm relieved
again—
To the pipe and wail of a tearing gale,
Carrying Starboard Ten.

I must stare and frown at the compass-card, that
chases round the bowl,
North and South and back again with every lurching
roll.

By the feel of the ship beneath I know the way she's
going to swing,
But I mustn't look up to the booming wind however
the halliards sing—
In a breaking sea with the land a-lee,
Carrying Starboard Ten.

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And I stoop to look at the compass-card as closes in
the night,
For it's hard to see by the shaded glow of half a
candle-light;
But the spokes are bright, and I note beside in the
corner of my eye
A shimmer of light on oilskin wet that shows the
Owner nigh—
Foggy and thick and a windy trick,
Carrying Starboard Ten.

Heave and sway or dive and roll can never disturb
me now;
Though seas may sweep in rivers of foam across the
straining bow,
I've got my eyes on the compass-card, and though
she broke her keel
And hit the bottom beneath us now, you'd find me at
the wheel
In Davy's realm, still at the helm,
Carrying Starboard Ten.

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A LANDFALL.

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The dawn came very slowly—a faint glow in the sky spreading until first the streaming forecastle and then the dirty-yellow seas could be seen. The destroyer was steaming slowly along the coast with the wind just before the beam. She made bad weather of it, lurching at extraordinary angles from side to side, yawing from two to four points off her course, and throwing her stern up as

each wave passed under her, until the water spouted in the wake of her slowly-moving propellers. The wind and the mist had come together, and the visibility extended to perhaps three or four foaming wave-crests away. They knew within a dozen miles where they were, but a dozen miles is too vague a reckoning to make a mine-guarded harbour from, and her captain, with the greatest respect for the fact that he was on a dead lee shore, and a most inhospitable and rocky shore at that, was feeling for the land with an order for "Hard-over" helm running through his head. Occasionally he ceased his staring out on the lee bow to look back along the deck. The sight each time made him frown and tighten his lips. The beam-sea was sweeping across the ship regularly every half-minute. The water shot across her 'midships three feet deep, and foaming like a Highland burn in spate. The squat funnels showed through the turmoil of water and spray, streaked diagonally upwards with crusted white salt, through which showed patches of red funnel-scale; from them came a steady roaring note—the signal of suppressed power below them. Battened-down as she was, he knew that the hatches were not submarine ones; built as they were on a foundation little thicker than cardboard, they could not keep out such seas, and he visualised the turmoil and discomfort there must be beneath him on the flooded decks. He, personally, had not seen in what state she was below, having been on the bridge for the last nine hours, but he felt he would like to take a look at his own cabin and see if his worst foreboding—a foot of water washing to and fro across a sodden carpet—was true.

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He glanced at his wrist-watch, and then to the east. Half-past seven and full daylight. Well, he thought, it might as well be just dawning still for all the light there was. Air and sea were the same colour, a creamy dull white, and they merged into one at a range of perhaps five hundred yards. If only he could—he raised his head sharply and turned to face out on the beam. Bracing his feet and gripping the rail with wet-gloved fingers he held his breath in an intensity of listening concentration. Yes, it was clearer that time, a faint high whine broad on the beam. He walked, timing the roll so that he had no need to clutch for support, to where the helmsman crouched over a wildly swinging compass-card, and gave an order. The destroyer came bowing and dipping round till she met the full drive of the sea ahead. With a roar and a crash the water tumbled in over the forecastle, shaking the bridge, and falling in tons over the ladders on to the upper deck. The destroyer still turned, shaking from end to end, until she had the sea on the other bow. The telegraph reply-gongs rang back the acknowledgment of an order, and easing to barely steerage-way, the ship settled in her new position—hove-to in the direction from which she had come overnight. The faint sound he had heard had seemed too distant for the captain to be assured of his position, and until he could hear it clearly and from fairly close he was not going to risk taking a departure from it. He knew that hove-to as she was the destroyer was going to be driven closer in, and with a steep-to shore he could allow her to accept the leeway for some time. He moved across and stood on the other side of the bridge, looking out to leeward, his attitude less strained and anxious now, as the ship was making fairly easy weather of it. The motion, it is true, was far more uncomfortable. She sidled, dived, and wallowed in a way that would have thrown a man unaccustomed to T.B.D.'s completely off his feet; but far less water was coming aboard, and the amount that did so arrived on a bearing from which she was better fitted to receive it. At the end of twenty minutes the captain began to resume his rigid attitude. There was something wrong somewhere. Sounds came erratically through fog, but this could not be counted on. He knew he had made no mistake in the sound he had heard. It was certainly the high note of the lighthouse, and not a steamer's whistle. The low note should have been heard in between the high ones, but the fact of not having heard the low was not surprising to him. One seldom heard both notes in a fog. But this silent gap was a nuisance, considering the rate at which they must be closing the land. At half an hour from his first hearing the sound he turned uphill to gain the wheel again, but froze still as the voice of the fog-horn came afresh, this time with no possibility of doubt. A great thuttering roar broke out, as it seemed, almost overhead, a deep bass note that made the air quiver. The captain jumped amidships and barked an order. The wheel spun hard down and the telegraphs whirred round, bringing the destroyer diving and leaping back head to sea. Looking aft, the captain had a glimpse of three pinnacle rocks showing a moment in the trough between two seas, and then the fog shut down over them again, leaving only the regular deep roar of the fog-signal, that grew gradually fainter astern. Two points at a time he eased the ship round till she was hove-to on the opposite tack, then he called to another oilskinned figure that stood swaying to the roll by the helmsman. "Will you take her now?" he said; "I am going to look for some breakfast. Hold her like this half an hour, and then turn her down wind for the run in. The tide's setting us well round the point now. All right?"

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"Yes, sir. I'll lay it off again on the chart before I turn. That was a queer hole in the fog, sir."

"Yes, quite a big blank. Glad it wasn't much bigger. Still, we could see four cables under the land, and the land's alright if you've got your stern to it."

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With a huge yawn of relief he stretched his arms back and up, then started down the thin iron ladder on his perilous trip to the inevitable chaos and confusion of his cabin.

NIGHT ROUNDS.

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It was a dark night with no moon, while only occasionally could a star be seen from the leader's

bridge. The next astern could be made out by the bands of blue-white phosphorescence that fell away from her bow, but the rest of the line was quite invisible. The flotilla slid along at a pace that to them was only a jog-trot, but which would have been considered rather too exciting for night work by the big ships. The night was calm, with hardly a breath of wind, while the *hush—hush—hush* from the bow-waves seemed to accentuate the silence and to increase the impression the destroyers gave of game moving down on a tiptoe of expectancy to the drinking-pool, ready at a sight or sound to spring to a frenzy of either offensive or defensive speed. On the leader's bridge men spoke in low tones, as if afraid that they might be overheard by the enemy—actually to enable them to listen better to whatever sound the echoes from the sea might carry. On bridges and at gun-stations look-outs stared out around them at the night, and there was no need for the officers to be anxious as to whether their men kept good watch or slept. The crews knew the rules of destroyer-war in the Narrow Seas—that "The first one to see, shoots; and the first one to hit, wins." It is true that they did not always see first. There were exceptions. Not so long before, they had been seen at a range of perhaps half a mile by an officer on the low unobtrusive conning-tower of a submarine. This officer had instantly and accurately smitten on the back of the head the sailor who shared his watch, and had rapped out one word "*Down!*" The sailor (evidently quite accustomed to this procedure) had vanished down the conning-tower like a falling stone, the officer's boots chasing the man's hands down the ladder-rungs. The lid had clanked down and locked just a few seconds before a little "plop" of water closed over the swirling suction that showed where a big patrol submarine had been. The boat was English (that is to say, her Captain was Scotch, and her First Lieutenant Canadian, while the remainder of her officers and men together could hardly have mustered half a dozen men from the Home Counties), but she had no intention of risking explanations at short range with her own friends. She had been warned of their coming, but she looked on it as a piece of extraordinarily bad luck to have been met with at visibility range on such a dark night and to have been inconvenienced into a matter of ninety feet in a hurry. But it is known that submarines dive for almost everything and swear at everybody.

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As the flotilla moved on its way a portent showed on the bow to landward. A faint red glow began to light up the low clouds over the Belgian frontier, and the bridge look-outs whispered together as they watched it brighten. As it grew clearer it showed to be not one light, but a rapid-running succession of instantaneous lights far inland. The white pencil of a searchlight beam showed and swung to the zenith and back—perhaps half-way between the watchers and the flicker in the sky. Ten minutes later, as the light drew farther aft, a faint murmur of sound (that began as a mere suspicion, and grew to be unmistakably but barely audible) announced the origin of the glow.

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On the leader's bridge the tall officer in the overcoat spoke to the shorter one in the "lammy." "That's a bit on the big side for a night raid—they must be attacking round by—"

"Yes, sir; there's something like what they call 'drum-fire' going on. Wonder why they put searchlights on for it, though?"

"Can't guess. They'll have 'em on on the coast in a minute too, if I know them. Perhaps when they hear guns inland they think it's airbombs coming down. There they go! Two of 'em—"

The searchlights came on together, and on such a clear and dark night they seemed startlingly close. They swept the heavens over and back, steadied awhile pointing inland, and went out again, leaving an even inkier blackness than before, and setting the watchers blinking and rubbing their dazzled eyes. Away to the south-east the pulsating growl of the guns continued, though the breadth and height of the glow in the sky was gradually decreasing.

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"There isn't any fighting on near the coast now, sir. That must be away down in France. If they'd only fire slow we'd be able to get a sort of range by the flash."

"You'd have to hold your watch for some time, then," said the taller officer. "I haven't the inland geography well enough in my head to say where it is, but that scrap's nearer seventy than sixty miles from here. Good Lord! And I suppose we'll read in the papers when we get in that 'there was activity at some points.'"

"And from here it looks like Hell. What it must be like close to—! Wish we could run up one of the canals and join in, sir."

"You'd be too late if we could. It's dying out now. Just as well, too; it keeps all the look-outs' heads turned that way. How's the time? All right, we'll turn now and try back."

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The glow faded and passed, and left the velvety dark as blank as before. The leader swung round on a wide curve, and, as if held by one long elastic hawser, the flotilla followed in her gleaming wake. At the same cantering speed as they had come, they started on the long beat back of their bloodthirsty prow, at the moment when the Scotch submarine officer turned over the watch to his Canadian subordinate.

"I've sheered right out now, and they ought to be clear of us all right, but keep your eyes skinned for them and nip under if you see them again. They're devilish quick on the salvoes in this longitude, and 'pon my soul I don't blame 'em either."

They called us up from England at the breaking of
the day,
And the wireless whisper caught us from a hundred
leagues away—
"Sentries at the Outer Line,
All that hold the countersign,
Listen in the North Sea—news for you to-day."

All across the waters, at the paling of the morn,
The wireless whispered softly ere the summer day
was born—
"Be you near or ranging far,
By the Varne or Weser bar,
The Fleet is out and steaming to the Eastward and
the dawn."

Far and away to the North and West, in the dancing
glare of the sunlit ocean,
Just a haze, a shimmer of smoke-cloud, grew and
broadened many a mile;
Low and long and faint and spreading, banner and
van of a world in motion,
Creeping out to the North and West, it hung in the
skies alone awhile.

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Then from over the brooding haze the roar of
murmuring engines swelled,
And the men of the air looked down to us, a mile
below their feet;
Down the wind they passed above, their course to the
silver sun-track held,
And we looked back to the West again, and saw the
English Fleet.

Over the curve of the rounded sea, in ordered lines
as the ranks of Rome,
Over the far horizon steamed a power that held us
dumb,—
Miles of racing lines of steel that flattened the sea to
a field of foam,
Rolling deep to the wash they made,
We saw, to the threat of a German blade,
The Shield of England come.

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A MATTER OF ROUTINE.

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There was little or no wind, and only a gentle swell from the south. The ships rose and fell lazily as they steamed to the south-eastward, while only occasionally a handful of light spray fell across a sunlit fore-castle, drying almost as it fell. But if the air was still the ships were certainly not so—as vast as a great moving town, the Fleet was travelling at the speed of a touring car. From the Flagship's foretop the view was extraordinary. Destroyers or light cruisers when pressed seem to be slipping along with something always in hand and with no apparent effort; a battleship, however, seen under the same conditions, makes one think of St Paul's Cathedral being towed up the Thames; she carries a "bone in her teeth," and her bows seem to settle low and her stern to rise. In this case the Grand Fleet was hurrying—moving south-east at full speed, because—well, they *might* just cut the enemy off; but the Hun was canny, and knew exactly the danger-limit in this game of "Prisoner's base."

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The visibility was good, and as far as the eye could see the water was torn and streaked with the wakes of ships—cruisers, destroyers, battleships, and craft of every queer and imaginable warlike use. The great mass of steel hulls had one thing only in common—they could steam, and could steam always with something in hand above the "speed of the Fleet." From the ships came a faint brown haze of smoke that shimmered with heat and made the horizon dance and flicker. From the foretop, looking aft, it seemed incredible that there could be any power existing which could drive such a huge beamy hulk as the Flagship was, and leave such a turmoil of torn and flattened water astern. Battleships in a hurry are certainly not stately; an elderly matron in pursuit of a tram-car shows dignity compared to any one of them. But if they looked flustered and undignified, they carried a cargo which no one could smile at. "*Battleships are mobile gun-*

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platforms." I forget who said that—probably Admiral Mahan—but it is true; and if these ships showed an ungraceful way of moving, they certainly complied with the definition of gun-platforms. The low-sloped turrets all pointed the same way—out to the starboard bow. The long tapering guns moved up and down, following the horizon against the roll, and sighing as they moved, as if the hydraulic engines were weary of the long wait. On the tops of the turrets the figures of officers could be seen pacing to and fro across the steel—checking now and then to stare at the southern horizon. Somewhere out there beneath the blazing sun were the scouts, and beyond them—well, that question was one that the scouts were there to answer. The smaller ships in sight seemed like motor-cycle pacers escorting a long-distance foot-race. With their sterns low and their bow-waves running back close to the beautifully-shaped hulls, they gave the impression of sauntering along at their leisure and of looking impatiently over their shoulders at the big heavy-weights astern of them. A destroyer division suddenly heeled and altered course like redshank, each ship turning as the leader swung, and with a fountain of spray at their sharp high stems they cut through the intervals of a Battleship division, swinging up again together to the south-east course as they cleared. The watcher in the top had seen the trick before, but familiarity could not prevent his eyes from widening a little as he saw the stem of his next astern throw up a little cloud of spray as it met the foaming V-wake that followed a few yards from the leader's counter. He smiled as he thought of an old picture in 'Punch' of a crowd of small children urging and dragging a huge policeman along to a scene of disturbance. The darting, restless destroyers seemed like the small bloodthirsty boys—hurrying on ahead to see the fun, and then back to wait for the ponderous but willing upholder of the law—*anxious to miss nothing of the excitement.*

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The Fleet was running down to intercept, and might be in action at any moment if the luck held, but there was no signalling or outpouring of instructions. There was just nothing to be said. Everybody knew more or less what the tactical situation was; all knew that the enemy might be met with any time in the next few hours, but in the turrets the guns' crews proceeded with the all-important task of getting outside as much dinner as they could comfortably stow. The procedure of endeavouring to meet the High Sea Fleet and of dealing with it on sight had been rehearsed so often, that the real thing, if it came, would call for one signal only, and no more. Many prophets have said that the increase of Science and Applied Mechanics in the Navy would make men into mere slaves of machines, and into unthinking units. This is another theory which has been shown to be hopelessly wrong—certainly so in the Navy, as in it both officers and men are taught, and have to be taught, far more of the reasons for and the object aimed at in the Rules for Battle than ever Nelson thought it necessary to communicate to his subordinates in the last Great War. The Prussian system may be good, but it produces a bludgeon—ours produces the finest tempered blade.

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The sight from the foretop was a thing that one would remember all one's life, and be thankful not to have missed. The almost incalculable value of the great mass of ships—the whirl of figures conjured up by a rough estimate of the collective horse-power and the numbers of men present; the attempt and failure to even count the actual ships in sight; the vision of a scared and wondering neutral tramp lying between the lines with engines stopped as the great masses of grey-painted steel went past her along the broad highroads of churned water,—this was the Fleet at sea; and the known fact that it would wheel, close, or spread at the word of one man, from the ships that foamed along four hundred yards away to those whose mastheads could only just be seen above the horizon, made the wonder all the greater. One thought of the thousands of eyes looking south in the direction of the big gun-muzzles, of the shells that the guns held rammed close home to the rifling, and of the thousands of brains that were turning over and over the old question, "Is it to be this time, or have they slipped in again?"...

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WHO CARES?

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The sentries at the Castle Gate,
We hold the outer wall,
That echoes to the roar of hate
And savage bugle-call—
Of those that seek to enter in with steel and eager
flame,
To leave you with but eyes to weep the day the
Germans came.

Though we may catch from out the Keep
A whining voice of fear,
Of one who whispers "Rest and sleep,
And lay aside the spear,"
We pay no heed to such as he, as soft as we are hard;
We take our word from men alone—the men that rule
the guard.

We hear behind us now and then

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The voices of the grooms,
And bickerings of serving-men
Come faintly from the rooms;
But let them squabble as they please, we will not turn
aside,
But—curse to think it was for them that fighting men
have died.

Whatever they may say or try,
We shall not pay them heed;
And though they wail and talk and lie,
We hold our simple Creed—
No matter what the cravens say, however loud the
din,
Our Watch is on the Castle Gate, and none shall enter
in.

THE UNCHANGING SEX.

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When the battle-worn Horatius, 'midst the cheering
Roman throng—
All flushed with pride and triumph as they carried
him along—
Reached the polished porch of marble at the doorway
of his home,
He felt himself an Emperor—the bravest man of
Rome.
The people slapped him on the back and knocked his
helm askew,
Then drifted back along the road to look for
something new.
Then Horatius sobered down a bit—as you would do
to-day—
And straightened down his tunic in a calm, collected
way.

He hung his battered helmet up and wiped his
sandals dry,
And set a parting in his hair—the same as you and I.
His lady kissed him carefully and looked him up and
down,
And gently disengaged his arm to spare her snowy
gown.
"You *are* a real disgrace, you know, the worst I've
ever seen;
Now go and put your sword away, I *know* it isn't
clean.

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And you must change your clothes at once, you're
simply wringing wet;
You've been doing something mischievous, I hope you
lost your bet....
Why! you're bleeding on the carpet. Who's the brute
that hurt you so?
Did you kill him? *There's a darling*. Serve him right
for hitting low."
Then she hustled lots of water, turning back her
pretty sleeves,
And she set him on the sofa (having taken off his
greaves).

And bold Horatius purred aloud, the stern Horatius
smiled,
And didn't seem to mind that he was treated like a
child.
Though she didn't call him Emperor, or cling to him
and cry,
Yet I rather think he liked it—just the same as you
and I.

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His age was possibly nineteen, and his general appearance had decided the members of his last gunroom mess in their choice of a nickname for him. "Little Boy Blue," or "Boy" for short, would probably stick to him throughout his naval career. The name had certainly followed him to his present appointment as "third hand" of a destroyer, where the other sub-lieutenants of the flotilla were not likely to allow him to forget it. He would have made a perfect model for a Burne-Jones angel. His mother would have worded that comparison differently, being under the impression that no angel could hope to equal him: on his part, he always took most filial care not to disillusion her on such a point. At the moment, in the first flush of glory induced by the fact that he had left gunroom life for ever, and that his midshipman's patches were things of the recent past, he was making the most of a week's leave, and making the most also of the opportunity of cultivating the society of a home Attraction whom the discerning eyes of his mother may or may not have yet noticed. The Attraction was aged sixteen, extremely pretty, and, as is usual in such cases, extremely self-possessed.

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The Boy, as he accompanied her along the garden path, was not feeling self-possessed at all. He had discovered from frequent experience that the only position he could retain with reference to the lady as she walked was, as he would put it, "half a cable on the starboard quarter." Knowing as he did that he was being kept thus distant by intention, he followed the broad lines of strategy which his naval training had taught him, and acted in a way which on such occasions is always right—that is, he aroused doubt and curiosity in the mind of his adversary.

The lady, who—carrying a ball of string in one hand and a bowl of peas in the other—had walked in cool silence for at least fifty yards, turned suddenly and spoke.

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"I suppose this is the first time you've—What *are* you staring at?"

The Boy blushed at once. "I beg your pardon," he murmured; "I——"

"Is my hair coming down?"

The Boy looked fixedly again at a large black bow which, as he told me afterwards, "held the bight of it up." "No-o," he said slowly.

"Then don't stare at it, and don't lag behind. What was I saying?"

"You asked me how long leave I'd got."

"I didn't—you've told me that, and anyhow I've forgotten. I was going to ask you if this is the first time you've done any war-work."

"Yes, I was out in the Straits till last Thursday week, and——"

"Don't be silly. I mean work like this, digging and doing without things, and helping, and so on."

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"Yes, I suppose it is. I haven't had time, really——"

The lady turned on him in righteous scorn. "*Time*—oh, you're one of the worst I know. Won't you *ever* take the war seriously? You just look on it all as a joke, and you won't make *any* sacrifices. Now come here—take the other end of this string, and lay it out till I tell you to stop."

The Boy meekly obeyed instructions. He pegged the end of the string firmly down and returned to the Attraction, who was engaged in hunting out a hoe from among a litter of horticultural implements that lay in a corner of the garden wall. He stood watching her for a moment, and with her eyes away from him, his attitude altered slightly and became almost proprietary, while his face seemed to harden a shade and give an inkling of the naval stamp that it would develop later on. She looked round suddenly and saw him again as a shy and awkward youth.

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"Have you done it?" she said. "All right, you can really start doing some work now. I'm going to make you dig a trench. *That's* the best way to serve your country when you're ashore and have the chance. And to think you've never used a hoe before!"

The Boy scraped the hoe reflectively with the toe of his boot. It did not seem to him politic to mention the fact that vegetable gardens do not usually grow either on the decks of battleships or on the shell-beaten slopes of Gallipoli. He made no attempt to follow the tortuous wanderings of a feminine mind, but held on his own course. "Are you going to help?" he said.

"No. You'd only loaf at the work if I did, and I've got other things to do, too. Now, come along and start, or you'll never get it finished by to-night."

"I'm leaving to-morrow," said the Boy.

"So you've told me—heaps of times to-day. But you must finish that trench before you go."

The Boy nodded and walked away towards the pegged-out end of the string. The lady, without turning her head, walked back up the path until she came to the grassy slope at its end. Selecting a spot from which a view could be obtained through the hedge of her oppressed admirer, she sat down and carefully laid the basin of peas on the bank beside her.

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"He's rather a dear," she observed cautiously to herself. "But he *is* such a child. 'Wonder why boys are always so awfully young compared to women?"

The flotilla would have turned round for its run back in another half-hour if the last destroyer in the enemy's line had not shown a faint funnel-glare for the fractional part of a second. They were only a couple of miles from the end of the "beat" when it showed, and considering the poor visibility that accompanied the frequent snow-showers, it was a piece of happy luck that the glare was seen at all. Three people on the leader's bridge saw it together; two of them gave a kind of muffled yelp, as foxhound puppies would at sight of their first cub, while the third gave an order on the instant. The destroyer settled a little by the stern, her course altered slightly, and she began really to travel. For some hours she had been jogging along at seventeen knots, but her speed now began to rise in jumps of five knots at a time, till in a few minutes she had become a mad and quivering fabric of impatient steel. As she gained her speed the snow began to pour down again, blotting out the faint shadow that had meant the bow of her next astern. The Captain glanced aft once, and then continued his intent gazing forward. He had passed a rough bearing and the signal to chase to his subordinates astern, and could do no more till he could get touch again. He had no intention of easing his speed to wait for clearer visibility. He knew too much of flotilla war to let a chance of fighting go by in that way. If he once got to the enemy, the rest of his flotilla would steer to the sound of the guns; and anyhow, he decided, if he did have to fight single-handed, the worse the visibility was and the greater the confusion and doubt among the enemy, the better would be the chances for him. The snow ahead cleared for a minute to leave a long narrow lane between the showers, and he saw the loom of the last ship of the enemy's line. The German destroyer seemed to fall back to him, as if she was stopped, though in reality she was holding station on her next ahead at a fair sixteen knots. With a startling crash and a blaze of blinding light the guns opened from along the leader's side—the German guns waiting, surprised, for a full minute before they replied. When they did open fire, the duel had become too one-sided to be called a fight at all. Between the crashes of the guns, the clatter and ring of ejected cartridge-cases could be heard but faintly, yet as the big leader passed her battered opponent at barely half a cable distance, through the din and savage intensity of a yard-arm fight the quartermaster stooped over his tiny wheel, oblivious to all things but the clear quiet voice that conned the ship past and on to her next victim. The rear destroyer of the enemy swung away, stopped, and remained—a horrible illustration of the maxim of naval warfare, which says that he who is unready should never leave harbour.

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At the head of the German line a man of decision had acted swiftly. As the blaze of the gun-fire broke out astern of him, and before the first German gun had fired a round, he had swung the leading division four points off its course. As the British destroyer tore on up the line, he swung inwards again and closed on her to engage on her disengaged side. As a piece of tactics it was pretty and well performed, but nothing can be judged to perfection in war, and this evolution was no exception to the rule. As he closed in on the British leader, she started her broadside on her second quarry,—an opponent better prepared than her first,—and the snow-laden air quivered to the shock of furiously worked guns. The flashes lit the contending ships in rippling, blinding light, and across the foaming waters that the fighters left in their passage, the drifting snow showed up like flying gold. At short range the leading German division broke in with a burst of rapid fire, and in his swift glance towards this menace from his disengaged side the British leader saw the flaw in his enemy's harness. The last of the German division was too far astern for safety in view of the fact that the British ship was at the moment fighting-mad. The German leader had a glimpse of a high bow swinging round towards him in the midst of salvos of bursting shell—then came an increased burst of firing from down the line astern, followed by a great crash and a dull booming explosion. The gun-fire died down and stopped as the guns' crews lost sight of their target, until the scattered flotilla was running on in the same darkness as had preceded the fight, though in far different condition. The German leader was not sure as to what had happened to the first of his command to be attacked, but he knew well what had come to the rear ship of his own division. She had been blown up in the shock of being rammed by the English madman, and although she had probably taken her slayer with her, she had left an impression on the minds of the rest of the flotilla on the subject of what odds an English ship considered to be equal, that would take some considerable drilling to eradicate. He flashed out a signal to tell his unseen ships to concentrate, and the signal, shaded as it was, drew down a salvo of shell from half a mile away on his quarter. At full speed he tore on for home, realising a fact that he had only suspected before—that the savage who had attacked him had been but the forerunner of a flotilla of unknown numbers and strength. The crackling sound of battle—a battle at a longer range now—passed on and died down as the unheeding snow smothered both light and sound. Both flotillas were occupied, and in their occupation had no time to think of what was left astern of them,—a shattered German destroyer stopped, helpless, and an easy prey for the returning British—a litter of lifebelts, corpses, and wreckage, that marked the grave of the rammed ship—and a barely-floating hulk, her stern and half her deck only above water, that lay rolling to the swell; a broken monument to a man who had fought a good fight and gone to his death with the sound of the trumpets of the Hall of all Brave Men calling in his ears.

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The Boy twisted the seaman's silk handkerchief more tightly round his left wrist, and drew another fold across his broken hand. He snapped his orders out furiously, and men hastened to obey them. He knew that his after-gun was the only one above water, and that the sloping island of the stern that formed its support was not likely to retain buoyancy long, but so long as there were survivors clustered aft and dry ammunition with which they might load, he was going to be ready for fighting. To the luck that caused one of his flotilla to lose touch in the chase and blunder across him, he owed the fact that he was ever able to fight again. She came tearing by

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down wind—threw the narrow beam of a searchlight full on to him—and recognising by that extraordinary nautical "eye for a ship," which can see all when a landsman could see nothing, that the sloping battered wreck was the remnant of a ship of her own class, turned on a wide sweep to investigate. The Boy knew nothing of her nationality, and cared less what her intentions were. In the midst of a litter of ammunition, wounded men, and half-drowned or frozen survivors, he slammed shell at her from his sightless and tilted gun till his store of dry cartridges dwindled and failed him. His shooting was execrable; he could hardly make out the dark blotch that was his target as, astonished and silent, she circled round him. Savage and berserk, he fired till his last round was gone, then drew his motley collection of ratings around him, and with pistol, knife, and spanner they waited for their chance to board.

A long black hull slid cautiously into view and closed them, till up against the beating snow and rising wind a voice roared out through a megaphone a sentence which no German could ever attempt to copy—"You blank, blank, blank," it said, "are you all something mad?"

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The Boy stood up, and his wounded hand just then began to hurt him very much. "No sir," he called in reply. "I'm sorry, sir; I made a mistake. We've got a lot of wounded here."

The night seemed to turn suddenly very cold, and he realised that at some moment since the collision he must have been in the water.

The Boy did not see her till he had left the train and was half-way along the station platform. Then she came forward from the ticket-collector's barrier, and he discovered with a start that not only was the sun shining, but that the world was a very good place to be alive in. He dropped his suit-case to shake hands, and then hastily snatched it up to forestall her attempt to carry it for him. She turned and piloted him out of the station to where an ancient "growler" waited, its steed dozing in the sunshine. "I ordered this old thing, as I thought you mightn't be strong enough to walk, but you're not such an invalid as I expected. The carrier is bringing your luggage." The lady spoke, looking him carefully over from under the shade of her hat.

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"Walk! Yes, of course I can. I'm not an invalid. I—No, I mean—let's drive." He slung his suit-case hastily in through the open cab door.

The lady seemed to see nothing inconsistent in his incoherencies. She may have possibly followed his train of thought. She merely nodded, and reached in for his suit-case, which she swung easily upwards, to be received by the driver and placed on the roof. She then stepped in, and watched as the Boy cautiously entered and took his station beside her. With what seemed almost a yawn, the old horse roused and began to work up to his travelling pace, a possible five miles to the hour.

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"Well, Boy," said the lady, "and what sort of a time did they give you in hospital?"

"Oh—quite decent, you know; but mighty little to eat. I believe they put every one on low diet as soon as they get there just to keep them humble and quiet."

"Well, your mother's just dying to feed you up, so you'll get awfully fat soon. How's the hand?"

The Boy stretched out his left arm and showed a suspiciously inert-looking brown glove. "Only three fingers gone and some bits missing. It's stopped my golf all right, though."

"But you'll still be able to hunt and shoot and you'll work up some sort of a golf handicap again when you're used to it. What was the battle like, Boy?"

"Oh—just the usual sort of destroyer scrap. We saw them first in our packet, and so we got most of it. It was a good scrap, though."

"Will you be able to go to sea again, or will they—?"

The Boy flushed and leaned back. "Of course I will—I've got a hand and a half, and they can't stick me in a shore job when I've got that much." The lady put a hand swiftly out and rested it on the padded brown glove. "Of course they can't. Sorry, Boy. I never thought they would, you know." The Boy instantly brought his right hand across, and, catching the sympathetic hand that lay on his glove, kissed it with decision. He then leaned back again to the musty padding of the cab, rather shocked at his own temerity. The lady, however, showed no signs of confusion at all.

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"How long sick leave did they give you? Do you have to go back to the hospital, or do you just report at the Admiralty?"

"I don't know,—look here, when are we going to be engaged?"

"When we're old enough, Boy—if you're good. Are you going to be?"

"That's a bet," said the Boy firmly. "So long as I know it's going to be all right, I'll be awfully good. What are you going to do with me on leave? I can't dig trenches for peas now—at least, not properly."

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"No; but if you took a little more interest in the subject, you'd know that at this time of year you

can pick them. Now, here's your house, and you're going in to see your mother, and I'm going home; and you're not to laugh at her if she cries, and—pay attention, Boy—there's no need for you to wear that glove on your hand; she isn't a baby any more than I am."

AN URGENT COURTSHIP.

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[Written with a lot of assistance from a partner.]

The solitary figure in the R.N. Barracks smoking-room rose, stretched himself, and lounged across to a table to change his evening paper for a later edition.

"Hullo! old sportsman. Where's everybody?"

The "sportsman"—a precise-looking surgeon who wore a wound-stripe on his cuff—looked round from the litter of newspapers he had been turning over.

"Why, lumme! if it ain't James the Giant-Killer. Here, waiter! Hi! Two sherry—quick! What the deuce brings you here, James?"

"Just down from the North,—joining the *Great Harry* to-morrow. Where's every one? Is there an air-raid on, and were the cellars too full for you, my hack-saw expert?"

"They were not. They're damn near empty, worse luck. But the Depôt Boxing is on to-night, and I'd be there too, only it's my turn for guard. It's no good your going now, you old pug; they'll finish in half an hour, and it's a mile away."

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"Oh! Well, I'm tired, anyway. I want dinner and then a bed. Of all filthy games, give me a war-time train journey. I've found a cabin here, and I found a bath, and I won't quarrel with any one for an hour or two."

"Then, you may as well keep the cabin while you've got it, because the *Great Harry* is having her mountings altered, and won't commission for a week yet."

James Rainer swivelled round in his chair to take the sherry glass from the waiter. "Here's luck, Doc. I thought she commissioned to-morrow, though."

"Gun trials to-day, and the experts didn't like her. Not much wrong, I believe, but she's delayed a week. Here's long life and a——" The surgeon paused and put his glass down. James Rainer stared at him somewhat truculently.

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"James, my boy, I was forgetting. Your little flapper's here. Ah! I see you know all about that."

"Doc.—you're an ass; I wasn't thinking of that at all."

The surgeon leaned back in his arm-chair and prepared to enjoy himself.

"Ah! James, me old friend—pot companion of me youth! What a chicken-butcher you are! If only you hadn't been so young; two years ago, was it not? How the years do roll on, to be sure. And what a little romance it was—the blue-eyed flag-lieutenant and the admiral's daughter—*always* the first two down to breakfast. And we used to hear, too, in the Yard, of the little expeditions when you were detailed to take her back to school and—*No!* hands off! Would you touch me with a cheild in me arrms? Let me go and I'll tell you all about her—and look out for my drink, you great ruffian."

"Never mind your drink." James released the surgeon's head from under his arm and sat down again. "Is she down here?"

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"She is, James—and she's a devilish pretty girl now, too. If it wasn't that we're most of us crocks here we'd——"

A signalman entered and glanced inquiringly round the room.

"Who is it for, signalman? Anybody hurt?"

"No, sir." The man looked at his signal-pad again. "Send despatch officer to Admiralty House instantly."

"Help!" The surgeon turned to Rainer. "There's only one available to-night, and he's at the Boxing. It's probably only stuff to be brought back here. What about——? But I forgot, you're tired, aren't you? They'd better telephone."

Rainer picked up his cap. "I'm not supposed to join till to-morrow night, and I'm going even if it means another filthy railway journey. 'Night, Doc!"

The door banged decisively, and the surgeon chuckled at some deep jest of his own.

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Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Woodcote grunted ferociously as a knock sounded at his study door.

"Come in!" he barked. "Who is it?"

He looked up to see a tall clean-shaven lieutenant enter—a broad-shouldered athletic figure with a heavy jaw and twinkling grey eyes.

"Eh—Rainer, how are you, my boy? I was expecting the despatch officer."

"Yes, sir; but as I was at a loose end at the barracks I came myself. I'm joining the——"

"The *Great Harry*—yes, so you are. Well, it's a long time since I saw you. You must come and dine with us before you sail. Now, you'd better get off with these. I'm going to send you in the car." He pressed a bell and a seaman entered. "The big car at once, *and* the headlights. Tell Thompson to hurry up."

"Please, sir, Thompson's hurt his wrist, sir. Starting the——"

"*Confound* Thompson—he's always doing it. *Why* does he do it? Eh? Eh? You can't tell me? Tell Miss Ruth to get the other car round at once, d'you hear?" [Pg 239]

"Now, Rainer," said the Admiral, "here's the despatch. Take it to Shortholme aerodrome, and bring a receipt back, d'you hear? and keep that girl of mine out of mischief. *Come* in!"

The door opened, and a slim leather-coated figure appeared. Rainer tried to keep his eyes on the Admiral, but failed dismally, his efforts resulting in a distressing squint. His flapper of two years ago was now a calm, self-possessed, and extremely pretty girl, who, in her rôle of amateur chauffeur, did not seem even to be aware of his presence in the room.

"The car is ready, father," she said, and vanished, leaving the startled Rainer gaping at a vision of neat black gaiters beneath her short skirt.

"Well, you'd better get on then," said the Admiral. "But, by the way, tell Forrest—Wing-Commander Forrest—to keep an eye on his machines. There are three German prisoners loose near here—two pilots and a mechanic from their Flying Corps. They may try and steal a machine to get away on. Tell him to lock up his hangars, or whatever he calls the things, and—all right—get on—get on. What are you waiting for?" [Pg 240]

Rainer, nothing loath, took his dismissal. He hurried across the hall, cramming the despatch, in its stiff parchment envelope, into the inside pocket of his overcoat as he went. The car was standing purring at the door, a leakage of light from the side-lamps shining on a demure little face behind the screen, and showing him also that the back near-side door was standing invitingly open.

"You little darling," he thought, "as if you didn't *know* what you are in for." He firmly closed the back door, sat down in the vacant front seat, and reached over to pull in a rug from behind him. As he did so the clutch was gently engaged and the car slid quietly down the drive.

"It's jolly nice your driving me like this, Miss Woodcote," he said. "Do you drive many despatch officers?" [Pg 241]

"Why, yes, Mr Rainer; Thompson and I take turns at it."

"Are you an official chauffeur, then?"

"I have been for some time now."

"Always here?"

"No, I was at Portsmouth a bit."

"Indeed? How far is it to Shortcombe?"

"About twenty miles, by this road."

"You didn't seem surprised to see me in your father's study."

The car dodged round a tram and began a louder purr as it felt the open road ahead.

"Well, Hickson told me you had come."

"Oh! he did, did he? Did Hickson tell you anything else?"

"Yes; and I don't think it's quite nice for an officer to bribe a butler to write and tell him things about his master's daughter."

"Well, I'm damned. Hickson is a scoundrel. I told him he wasn't to."

"Well, he did tell. I made him. And I think it was very wrong of you." [Pg 242]

"But I'd always looked after you before, and it's only natural I should like to hear you weren't getting into trouble after my eagle eye had left you."

"Never mind about eagle eyes. It was very rude, and it mustn't go on."

"It won't. I promise you."

Miss Woodcote, a little piqued at such easy acquiescence, drove in silence for a few minutes, then, unable to restrain her curiosity, fell into the trap.

"Well, I'm glad to hear you say so. It was a silly thing to do."

"Yes, it was, perhaps. But the necessity for it has gone now, so I don't mind."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, I'm going to marry you now you're grown up, so——"

"Will you please stop talking nonsense?"

"Will you marry me?"

"No."

"Well, that's one proposal over. I think a girl can't be very distant with a man who's proposed to her, can she? It implies a certain intimacy, so to speak...?"

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"No."

"It means, you see, a secret shared together, and that should...."

A stony silence.

"Of course—it's not the only secret we've had together. There was the matter of the fire in the kitchen, when we were making toffee and upset the paraffin...."

Still silence.

"You know two years ago I was going to marry you if I could, and I knew that you——"

"What did you know?"

"Well, you knew I'd never let you marry any one else."

"Mr Rainer—will you please be quiet? I don't want to speak to you."

"Damn," said Rainer, leaning back sulkily.

"And don't swear, please."

Rainer sat up again. "Haven't I got cause for swearing? We've come ten miles and I wanted to kiss you before we'd done twenty. You're wasting time, you know."

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"I don't want to kiss any one, and certainly not you."

Rainer's confidence began to evaporate slightly. This was not quite the flapper he had known. He sighed heavily, and, leaning back again, turned slightly away from her, wishing that he had eyes in the back of his head.

Miss Woodcote, secure in the knowledge that he was not so favoured by nature, had glanced three times in his direction before the trouble started. The car whirled round a corner, its speed regulated more by the state of the driver's temper than by good judgment, and the headlights shone full on a heavy farm cart which lay right across the road. There was a grinding of brakes, a lurch and skid, and Rainer had just time to throw a protecting arm across Ruth as the collision occurred. The screen went to pieces as the headlights went out, and the frightened Rainer and the extremely angry chauffeuse stared at each other in the dim glow of the side-lamps.

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"Are you hurt? Are you all right? *Ruth...*"

"The *beasts*, the *beasts*. I've *never* hit anything before. *Oh!* Just look at all the glass."

The tone of her voice reassured the trembling lover beside her, and rising to his feet, he began to shed his overcoat.

"Cheer up," he said. "There mayn't be as much damage as you think. We'll have a look at it. Hullo!"

Two dark figures showed by the near side of the bonnet, and a harsh voice rasped out: "Out of the car and put your hands up. Quickly, now, or you'll get hurt."

Rainer obeyed part of the order with startling alacrity. This was a straightforward and simple problem to deal with compared with the attempt to instil sense into an unreasonable, albeit delightful, girl. His overcoat dropped to the floor-boards and he landed on the road at the same moment. Two to one in a bad light was very fair odds, he felt, and he only regretted that he had not got his gloves on, as he foresaw broken knuckles for himself by the morning.

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He shuffled forward a few feet and went in for his left-hand adversary. The left feint was only a concession to orthodoxy, but the right hook which followed it was delivered with a grunt and twist that meant business. He sprang back at once behind the side-lamp, perfectly satisfied that the recipient of the blow was going to be a sleeping partner for some minutes at least. The second man came forward a little doubtfully, swearing in excellent German. Rainer heard a cry from Ruth and turned half round. A third opponent had appeared from behind the car, and a club or heavy stick was whirling over his head. For an instant Rainer hesitated, then tried to jump in

under the weapon. He felt as he did so that it was too late, but he arrived safely on his man's chest, clutching for the upraised arm. The left hand seized something it had not expected to find—a girl's hand in a leather glove. The club-man roared with rage, swung round and struck savagely behind him. Rainer had a glimpse of a white face going down, and a little moan of pain from the ground sent him berserk. An arm came around his throat from behind, and he knew that what he had to do must be done quickly. He tripped the club-man and hurled himself sideways and back. The three figures, swaying and straining together, struck the car and came down. Rainer felt the arm round his neck slip and change to a hand. The owner of the hand instantly began to regret this, as Rainer's teeth were not only in good condition but had a grip like a bulldog's. The club-man began to scream, and not without reason. To be held against a car-wheel by a twelve-stone rough-and-tumble expert who doesn't mind being killed if only he leaves his mark on you, is a bad position for any man to be in. Rainer's hands were on his throat, the knuckles working and straining upwards for the carotids, and Rainer's legs were quietly but surely engaged in breaking his left ankle.

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Then the man with the prisoned hand began to talk rapidly, and Rainer threw his reserve strength into his hands. He knew what was coming. His first opponent had awakened. He felt the man behind him wriggle his body clear, and then came a smashing concussion. With a feeling of regret that he had not been allowed another ten seconds' grip he sank into oblivion.

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Two men rose from beside him and leaned panting and gasping against the car. One of them subsided and sat on the running board, his breath rasping and tearing in his throat. The man who had felt Rainer's punch dropped the club, took off a side-lamp and made a hasty examination of the front of the car. Returning, he spoke in short abrupt sentences to the others, and assisted the seated man to his feet with a kick. The three stood and listened for a moment, then broke through the hedge and vanished into the night.

It seemed to Rainer in his dreams that his ship was coaling. He could hear the crash and rattle and roar of the winches, and there was a gritty taste in his mouth as if he was working in the collier's hold. He spat out a mouthful of dust and lifted his head. No—they weren't coaling. He was lying against a very hard and nobbly car, and he had a devil of a headache. He considered the situation a moment, and then woke up suddenly with a cold feeling of fear. He rose and steadied himself by a wing, then looked round. Yes, there she was, a few feet away, and at the sight of her his strength came back. He knelt down and lifted her shoulders. She moved a little and moaned. With trembling fingers he felt the top of her head and found that the cap was gone, and that there was a suspiciously sticky lump on her forehead. He felt for his handkerchief, but remembered that it was in his overcoat. Lifting the girl in his arms he tottered to the car and sat down in the front seat, while he searched the coat pockets. He found the handkerchief, and noted, as a side-issue, that the despatches were still there. Unscrewing the filling cap of the petrol tank he plunged the handkerchief in, but turned his head at a voice at his elbow.

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"Jim! What are you doing?"

"Thank God! Ruth, lie still. I'm going to put some petrol on your head."

"*Ooo!*" The lady had straightened up in her seat. "My poor head—it does hurt. Jim! if you put petrol on my head I'll *never* marry you."

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"But, darling—I—"

"Don't do it. Have you got the despatches?"

"Yes. I don't think they were after them. Ruth, d'you know that chap would have brained me if you hadn't tackled him?"

"Why did you kiss me just before I woke up?"

"I didn't. I swear I didn't."

"You did. I know you did."

"I—I—Ruth, were you angry?"

"Don't you think you might see if you can move the car, or do something useful?"

"Ruth, were you? Ruth, I say—"

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"Jim, there's a car coming. All right, be quick. That will do. *There*, you old brute—now go and meet that car. Give me your hanky."

Rainer reluctantly dodged round the farm cart, holding a side-lamp in his hand. The headache was forgotten, and the world seemed a remarkably pleasant place in spite of bruises and stiff joints. The car pulled up and a group of figures came towards him. "Hullo," said one, "what's all this?"

Rainer recognised the speaker. "That you Deane?" he replied. "Three escaped Huns have attacked us. They've gone now. I was bringing despatches for the Wing-Commander, but they

didn't get them. Miss Woodcote's in the car. She's smashed—the car, I mean—and she's had a blow on the head from a club."

"Lord! Those are our men. They walked out to one of our machines at dusk just after it landed, but they ran when they were challenged. We're after them now."

"Well, they can't get far. One's groggy and one's lame. What about Miss Woodcote? She'll have to be sent home. She's got a nasty crack on the head." [Pg 252]

"We'll send her to Admiralty House in this lorry. Give me the despatches and you go back with her. I'm going to spread my men out and hunt the fields. They must have been after your car."

Rainer walked back as the air-mechanics began to move the farm cart out of the road. "Ruth," he said, "we're going back on this lorry. I've handed the despatches over, and I'm going to take you home."

"Only ten miles, Jim, and you expected forty, didn't you?"

"I did, but I hoped to have kissed you all the last twenty of them, you little angel."

"Well, Jim, it looks a very dark lorry, doesn't it? But as for kissing me in the other car—Well, you may have decided on the last twenty miles, but I had arranged for the last hundred yards up the drive. Why? You silly old thing. I can't do two things properly at once, and I made up my mind when we started I was not going to be kissed when I was driving. Carry me across carefully, Jim, dear. I'm feeling rather fragile now...." [Pg 253]

LOOKING AFT.

[Pg 254]

I'm the donkey-man of a dingy tramp
They launched in 'Eighty-one,
Rickety, old, and leaky too—but some o' the rivets are
shining new
Beneath our after-gun.

An' she an' meself are off to sea
From out o' the breaker's hands,
An' we laugh to find such an altered game, for devil a
thing we found the same
When we came off the land.

We used to carry a freight of trash
That younger ships would scorn,
But now we're running a decent trade—howitzer-
shell and hand-grenade,
Or best Alberta corn.

We used to sneak an' smouch along
Wi' rusty side an' rails,
Hoot an' bellow of liners proud—"Give us the room
that we're allowed;
Get out o' the track—the Mails!"

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We sometimes met—an' took their wash—
The 'aughty ships o' war,
An' we dips to them—an' they to us—an' on they went
in a tearin' fuss,
But now they count us more.

For now we're "England's Hope and Pride"—
The Mercantile Marine,—
"Bring us the goods and food we lack, because we're
hungry, Merchant Jack"
(As often I have been).

"You're the man to save us now,
We look to you to win;
Wot'd yer like? A rise o' pay? We'll give whatever you
like to say,
But bring the cargoes in."

An' here we are in the danger zone,
Wi' escorts all around,
Destroyers a-racing to and fro—"We will show you
the way to go,

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An' guide you safe an' sound."

"An' did you cross in a comfy way,
Or did you have to run?
An' is the patch on your hull we see the mark of a
bump in 'Ninety-three,
Or the work of a German gun?"

"We'll lead you now, and keep beside,
An' call to all the Fleet,
Clear the road and sweep us in—he carries a freight
we need to win,
A golden load of wheat."

Yes, we're the hope of England now,
And rank wi' the Navy too;
An' all the papers speak us fair—"Nothing he will not
lightly dare,
Nothing he fears to do."

"Be polite to Merchant Jack,
Who brings you in the meat,
For if he went on a striking lay, you'd have to go on
your knees and pray,
With never a bone to eat."

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But you can lay your papers down
An' set your fears aside,
For we will keep the ocean free—we o' the clean an'
open sea—
To break the German pride.

We won't go canny or strike for pay,
Or say we need a rest;
But you get on wi' the blinkin' War—an' not so much
o' your strikes ashore,
Or givin' the German best.

GRIT.

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The Captain of H.M. T.B.D. *Upavon* was in a bad humour. He had decided when he left harbour that this patrol was going to be an uninteresting one, as the area allotted to him covered no traffic lane, and was therefore unlikely to hold an enemy within its boundaries. The dulness of a blank horizon had continued to confirm him in his opinion since the patrol began. He spoke from his arm-chair as the First Lieutenant struggled into his oilskins preparatory to going on deck for the First Watch.

"I don't care what courses you steer so long as you work along to the west'ard and keep the alterations logged. Beat across in twelve-mile tacks, and tell your relief to do the same. I'll be keeping the morning, and I'll turn round and work east at six. Got it?"

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The First Lieutenant intimated that he had "got it," and, pulling his sou'wester well down over his ears, passed out: he was none too cheerful at the moment himself. The rain had been beating down in heavy streams since dusk, and the long oily swell that had been with them since leaving harbour had, although it had not wetted their rails, made the steady rolling rather monotonous.

The big tramp steamer might have had a fighting chance if it had not been for the torpedo. It hit fairly abreast her bridge, and two boats at the port-davits broke to splinters above the explosion, while the wireless instruments developed defects that would have taken a week to cure. The Chief Mate never saw the periscope. The explosion, and the sight of a hard white line stretching away to port at right angles to their course, were impressed on his brain simultaneously. It was a few seconds later when he rose shakily to his feet and mechanically set the engine-room telegraphs to "stop." As he did so, the Captain arrived with a rush on the bridge and released him from his post. He hurried below to examine the damage, and to fight, by every means possible to seamanship, the great Atlantic waters that he knew must by then be flooding nearly half the hold-space of the ship. Ships have reached harbour with worse damage than she had received, and she might have added another name to the list of tributes to good seamanship had not the enemy

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risen astern of them to complete his work. A shell hummed over them, skimming the tilted deck from two thousand yards away. The second shell arrived as the tramp's stern-gun fired, and the steamer quivered to a dull rumbling shock that told of a well-delayed fuse and a raking shot.

The tramp's big propeller threshed along, half out of water, as her Captain rang down for speed with which to dodge and manoeuvre; but the vicious shells came steadily home into her, and it was a question only of whether the straining bulkheads forward would go before her stern was blown in. The stern-gun could hardly be depressed enough to get a clear view of its target, and Fritz knew it. The Chief Mate reckoned that it was about the twelfth shell that finished them. Following its explosion, he heard a noise that told him much,—a hissing, rushing sound of air from beneath his feet—the sigh of flooding holds.

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There was little time, but they did what they could. The gun's crew, wrestling with a refractory cartridge-box lid, hardly seemed to look up as the tramp sank, carrying them down as so many British seamen have gone down, intent only on the job in hand. In five minutes' time the ocean was clear again save for a half-dozen bobbing heads clustered round a small white upturned boat.

The sea, that from the deck of the tramp had seemed to be only a long gentle swell, now appeared tremendous and threatening. With a cable's length between their smooth crests the big hills came majestically on, giving the numbed survivors glimpses of the empty spaces of the sea at intervals before lowering them back to the broad dark valleys between. For a few minutes the men simply paddled their feet in silence as they clung with unnecessary strength to the life-lines, stem, and stern-posts of the capsized boat; then the Chief Mate called to two of them by name. He gave the white-bearded, semi-conscious figure he supported into their charge and commenced diving, or rather ducking down, under the gunwale. He was blue with cold and weariness before he gained his object—a heavy eighteen-foot ash oar. The other two men came to his assistance, and between them they succeeded in passing the oar-loom across and under the boat, and in working it about until it caught and held at the far side. It took the Chief Mate a ghastly quarter of an hour before he could climb to the swaying keel, but once there he easily hauled the lighter of his assistants up beside him. With the other man steadying the loom in position, they swung their weight back on the painter clove-hitched to the bending blade. Time after time the oar slipped and had to be replaced, and on each failure the cramped workers panted and shivered a while before patiently setting to the task again. As they toiled, the swell of the sea worked the boat broadside on, and suddenly as they threw back on the line she came sharply over, throwing them into the sea before they could clutch the rising gunwale with their hands. Followed an hour of heart-breaking baling with caps and hands, and then one by one the six came aboard—the old Captain, who in the face of active work was recovering consciousness, insisting on being at any rate one of the last three to leave the water.

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The Chief Mate collapsed at once across the after-thwart. He had been working with the strength of desperation, and the effort had been great. The others knelt or sat on the thwarts, staring around them as they swung periodically on the crests of the waves in hungry desire for the sight of help. One man faced aft and began swearing, cursing the cold, the Germans, the war, and, in a curious twist of recollection, the ship's cook, who had died twenty minutes before, but who had done so suffering under the accusation of having stolen the swearer's sugar ration. The Captain rose, steadying himself by a hand on the gunwale: "Stop that swearing, you," he said; "lay aft here and rummage these lockers. You other hands, muster the gear in the boat and clear away the raffle. Mr Johnson, you and I will bail for an hour; the boat is leaking, and we'll take the first spell. We want warming, I think."

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The Chief Mate raised his head from against the thwart—"I can't bale, sir; let the men do it. I'm done."

"Mr Johnson, I'm sixty-five years old and I'm going to bale, and I'm captain of this ship."

The Chief Mate clawed himself up to a kneeling position, and taking a sodden cap from the stern-sheets set feebly to work. As he went on he warmed a little, and the deadly feeling of despair began to leave him. The movements of men about him as they hunted for missing masts and oars roused him at length to an oath at a seaman who lurched against him.

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An hour later the dusk closed down, and with two men baling wearily the boat rose and fell to what was undoubtedly a threatening sea, tugging and jerking at her sea anchor. The other four crouched in the stern-sheets, huddled together to find warmth beneath the beating rain.

"If the sail wasn't gone, sir, would you 'ave tried to make land?" A seaman spoke, his cheek against the Chief Mate's serge sleeve.

"I would, Hanson; and if we had two sound oars, I'd use those too," said the old Captain. "But even like this, I'm not going to give in or stop trying."

One of the balers dropped his cap and leaned sideways across the stern-sheets. "Tell 'em the truth, sir," he said. "I know, and both you officers know. If we had sails and oars too and a fair wind, we couldn't make land under a week. We'll not live three days in this cold and on this ration, and there's no traffic here. For Gawd's sake stop shammin', an' let's take our medicine quiet."

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The Chief Mate swore and started to rise, but the Captain checked him. "One moment, Mr Johnson," he said, and turned to the ex-baler: "Listen now, my lad; it's not that you're afraid, it's just that you haven't got guts, that's your trouble. I'm an old man and I've got to die soon anyhow,

so it oughtn't to matter to me. But I tell *you* that I'm going to work till I freeze stiff on this job, and I'll never stop trying if every one of you does. It's true, there isn't much chance for us, but there *is* a chance, and I won't let go of it. If we were told to come this route, it means some one else may be told to use it. There may be a ship just over the horizon now. I tell you, I don't want some one to pick me up drifting about and say, 'They haven't been dead an hour yet; if they'd used a bit more pluck they'd have pulled through. No, by God, the man that sank my ship thinks he's finished me, but as long as I can lift a hand I'll try to beat him. I'll sail ships yet in his dirty German teeth, and I'll take you with me in my fo'c'sle. Now get on and bale till your watch is up.'

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The man reached forward to the floating cap and without a word continued to use it, ladling the icy water overside in pitifully small quantities. The white-bearded captain subsided again beside the Chief Mate.

The *Upavon* was still rolling heavily as her Captain came on the bridge for the morning watch. She rolled a little uneasily now, and there was a suspicion of a "top" to the seas as they lifted her. The Captain glowered at the crescent moon—having lost none of his ill-humour in the night,—while the Sub-Lieutenant nervously turned over the watch to him.

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"And we're to turn east at six, and the First Lieutenant said to be careful to log all alterations ___"

The Captain dismissed him abruptly and turned away. As if he didn't know his own orders! Nice thing to be told them by a young cub like that! He would alter round just when he liked, of course. Damn the rain! He'd alter course now and run down before the wind. If those young beggars thought he was going to spend the next two hours facing the rain, they were very much mistaken. Why, when he'd been their age he'd faced more rain than they were ever likely to meet, so—he spoke an order, and the ship came slowly round through ten points of the compass.

"Steady, now. How's her head? South? All right; put that in the log—time, four-twenty...."

It was six-thirty, and the dawn and two cups of cocoa had removed a good deal of the Captain's temper. He lit a cigarette and faced to windward to look at the coming weather.

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"M'm," he soliloquised; "and it's going to breeze up a bit too. There'll be some breaking seas by noon."

As he was turning to continue his pacing of the bridge, he started and fumbled for his binoculars. He stared a while to windward, and then, without lowering the glasses, spoke—

"Starboard fifteen, quartermaster.... Steady, now.... Steer for that white boat on the port bow,—see it?... *Messenger!* go down and tell the First Lieutenant I want him; and call the surgeon, too."

A MAXIM.

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When the foe is pressing and the shells come down
In a stream like maxim fire,
When the long grey ranks seem to thicken all the
while,
And they stamp on the last of the wire,
When all along the line comes a whisper on the wind
That you hear through the drumming of the guns:
"They are through over there and the right is in the
air,"
"And there isn't any end to the Huns."
Then keep along a-shooting till you can't shoot more,
And hit 'em with a shovel on the head.
Don't forget a lot of folk have beaten them before,
And a Hun'll never hurt you if he's dead.
If you're in a hole and your hopes begin to fail,
If you're in a losing fight,
Think a bit of Jonah in the belly of the whale,
'Cause-he-got-out-all-right.

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FROM A FAR COUNTRY.

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Announced by the jangling of the curtain that he had almost brought down with his heavy suitcase, a cheerful curly-haired officer entered noisily and dropped into one of the Wardroom arm-chairs. He stretched his legs out and, lighting a cigarette, leaned back luxuriously.

"Well?" said a chorus of voices, "*well*—how's London?"

The curly-haired one smiled reminiscently. "Still standing, still standing," he replied. "No place for you though, I'm afraid. You're none of you good-looking enough to pass as Yanks or Colonials."

"Oh, cut it out. Tell us what it's like. You know, you're the first one to go there from us for a year, and we want to know."

"What? all about it? All right; chuck a cup of tea across and I'll give you the special correspondent's sob-stuff. *Aah!* that's better; this train-travelling has given me a mouth like—I won't say what. Well, I'll try and tell you what I thought of it and the people that live there. I may say at once that they are civilised to the extent that they'll take English money without complaining about it, and—*all* right, I'll get on.

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"Well, you know how I went off laden with meat and other cards till I was bulging, and how I reckoned to find people looking hungry at me as if they were reckoning what I'd boil down to in a stock-pot? Well, I've got all these cards still—didn't need 'em. I'd usually left them in my other coat when I got started on meals, and as they've got the trick of camouflaging fish and eggs till you don't know what you're eating, it wasn't worth hunting 'em out. All London seems to live on eggs, and where the deuce they all come from I don't know; they must be using up dumps of them. Oh, and another thing, I'd forgotten that in London they don't grow electric lighters on every bulkhead, and it was lucky I had a few matches with me. The first day I was stopped by fellers wanting a light off my cigarette just three times in a dog-watch, but the other days I didn't get asked at all—I'd lost the country-cousin look, I s'pose. Men? Yes, there's a fair sprinkling there still, but nothing under forty, I should say. Yes, there seem to be crowds of women. Perhaps there are actually more, or it may be that the shortage of men makes 'em look more; but there do seem to be heaps of them. It just made me marvel, too, at the extraordinary lack of imagination the women have. They still wear devilish short skirts, and yet there isn't one in forty of 'em that has a foot and ankle that one could call it decent to show. You'd think they'd see one another's defects and get wise, but they don't. I suppose that now the secret's out about their legs, they reckon it's too late to hide the truth and they face it out; but I'm surprised the young ones don't camouflage themselves a bit and get a fair start. Theatres? Yes; I went through the list, revues and all. I read Arnold Bennett's account of a music-hall—you know the book? Yes, I read it in the train going down. Well, I gathered from his description that things had flashed up a bit since the dear dead days of nineteen-sixteen, and that I would find myself in a hall of dazzling Eastern et-ceteras; but, my word! it was like tea at the Vicarage. I don't know what revue Arnold Bennett found, but I guess I missed it. It's true, I saw one perfectly *reckless* lieutenant drop a programme out of a box into the orchestra; but as the orchestra didn't notice it, and I doubt if the lieutenant did either, it could hardly be put down to riotous conduct induced by drink and sensual music. Oh, I noticed one thing—all the theatre programmes had directions printed as to what to do in case of air-raids during the performance. They had it printed small and sandwiched in between the *hats by Suzanne* and *dresses by Cox* announcements. I liked that. It was British and dignified. I'd like to have sent some copies to Hindenburg. News? Yes, I heard a whole lot, but it was mostly denied in the papers next morning. It's a queer town for rumours. I think they all live too close together, and they get hysterical or something—like in that Frenchman's book, you know, the 'Psychology of Crowds,' or something like that. They weren't worrying much about the war, though. I stopped to look at the tape-messages in the club, and there was an eight-line chit on the board mentioning that the Hun was coming on like a gale o' wind towards Paris, while the rest of the board had eight full-length columns on the latest Old Bailey case, and there was another column coming through on the machine with a crowd waiting for more. No, I'm *not* trying to be cynical. I read 'em all, but I hadn't quite got the London sense of proportion in two days, and it worried me that there was no more war news coming.

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"Cost? Yes, *rather*. I've spent whole heaps of bullion, and I'll have to ask the Pay for an advance now. It's quite easy; you just exist and the cash trickles off you. There's not so much of the old 'men in uniform free' or 'half-price to officers' going now. There aren't many civilians left, and I guess *they're* just taking in one another's washing. Everything that isn't a necessity is double price at least, and I believe the shopkeepers would like to make breathing a luxury too. On the whole, I'm glad I only had a few days there. The air's so foul, you know. Mixture of scent and petrol, I think. Oh but, by the way, I saw a hansom—a real hansom—in Regent Street. Quite a neat well-kept one, too. No, nothing new in the way of dresses. Just the same as nineteen-sixteen, as far as I could see. There may have been some good-looking faces among the thousands in the West-end streets, but they were cancelled by the awful legs underneath. I wonder they ever manage to get married. Well, I saw thousands of that kind of female—more than one ever saw before; but I met some others who squared things up in my mind. Ten hours a day and clean the car herself for one, and oxyacetyline welding eight hours and overtime for another at two-five a week. Doing it to win the War, and not because they wanted to or liked it. Made me feel small to be on leave when I talked to 'em. And then, as I was leaving the hotel, a whole crowd of Swiss porters and servants, that had been fairly coming the Field-Marshal over me for three days, came oiling round me for tips, and pocketed the cash without a word when they got it; and—and—while they were doing it, a Scotch corporal walked past the taxi with three wound-stripes on his arm and four notches on his bayonet hilt. It's all a bit too puzzling for me. As soon as I got settled in

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one impression, I'd get jolted out of it by another. Heigho! I'm not sorry to have gone there to look, and I'm not sorry to be back." He rose, and moving across the Wardroom, flung open the door of his tiny cabin and passed in. His voice sounded hollow through the thin partition. "Hi! outside there—some shaving water *eck dum*," and then a contented murmur—"Lord! but it's good to be home again."

THE CRISIS.

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When the Spartan heroes tried
To hold the broken gate,
When—roaring like the rising tide—
The Persian horsemen charged and died
In foaming waves of hate.

When with armour hacked and torn
They gripped their shields of brass,
And hailed the gods that light the morn
With battle-cry of hope forlorn,
"We shall not let them pass."

While they combed their hair for death
Before the Persian line,
They spoke awhile with easy breath,
"What think ye the Athenian saith
In Athens as they dine?"

"Doth he repent that we alone
Are here to hold the way,
That he must reap what he hath sown—
That only valour may atone
The fault of yesterday?"

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"Is he content that thou and I—
Three hundred men in line—
Should show him thus how man may try
To stay the foemen passing by
To Athens, where they dine?"

"Ah! now the clashing cymbal rings,
The mighty host is nigh;
Let Athens talk of passing things—
But here, three hundred Spartan kings
Shall greet the fame the Persian brings
To men about to die."

A SEA CHANTY.

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There's a whistle of the wind in the rigging overhead,
And the tune is as plain as can be.
"Hey! down below there. D'you know it's going to
blow there,
All across the cold North Sea?"

And along comes the gale from the locker in the
North
By the Storm-King's hand set free,
And the wind and the snow and the sleet come
forth,
Let loose to the cold North Sea.

Tumble out the oilskins, the seas are running white,
There's a wet watch due for me,
For we're heading to the east, and a long wet night
As we drive at the cold North Sea.

See the water foaming as the waves go by

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Like the tide on the sands of Dee;
Hear the gale a-piping in the halliards high
To the tune of the cold North Sea.

See how she's meeting them, plunging all the while,
Till I'm wet to the sea-boot knee;
See how she's beating them—twenty to the mile—
The waves of the cold North Sea.

Right across from Helgoland to meet the English
coast,
Lie better than the likes of we,—
Men that lived in many ways, but went to join the
host
That are buried by the cold North Sea.

Rig along the life-lines, double-stay the rails,
Lest the Storm-King call for a fee;
For if any man should slip, through the rolling of
the ship,
He'd be lost in the cold North Sea.

We are heading to the gale, and the driving of the
sleet,
And we're far to the east of Three.
Hey! you German sailormen, here's the British
Fleet
Waiting in the cold North Sea.

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THE WAR OF ATTRITION.

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A wonderfully deep-blue sea stretched away to meet a light-blue sky, which was dotted with soft wool-like patches of cloud. There was a slight smooth swell from the south-west, and the air was cool and salt-laden. Looking from the conning-tower the hull of the boat could be clearly seen as she rose and fell to the waves, the sunlight flashing back steel-blue from her grey side six feet below the surface. It was a day that showed the sea at its best—a high Northern latitude in June, and a high barometer producing conditions under which it seemed to be a shame to be at war.

There were two men on the submarine's conning-tower. The smaller of the two was her captain, a fair-haired man with a Prussian name which seemed hardly to fit in with his Norse features. The other man hailed from Bavaria—a tall, thin, large-headed individual, with wide-set eyes and a nose and lower lip that hinted of Semitic ancestry. The big U-boat jogged along at half speed, beating up and down in erratic courses—keeping always to a water area of perhaps ten miles square.

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The two officers leaned against a rail, their heads and shoulders twisting and turning continuously as they watched the distant horizon. Each carried heavy Zeiss glasses slung round the neck, and from time to time one of them would search carefully the western sea and sky, his doing so invariably infecting his companion into doing the same. The U-boat was running with a little less than half her normal cruising buoyancy—for speed of diving and not surface speed was the important qualification for her for that day. From the open conning-tower lid came the dull hum of the engines; while as the boat rolled, a shaft of sunlight, shining down the tower itself, sent a circle of yellow light swinging slowly from side to side across the deck beneath the eyepiece of the periscope.

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"Is it a big convoy this time, sir?" The First Lieutenant spoke without checking his continual twisting and turning as he glanced at every point of the skyline in turn.

"Yes, it is a big convoy. But there is no doubt of their course or their speed. We shall be among them before the sunset."

"You would not then dive now? That is, if you are sure—"

"I do not dive till I am sure. And also we will want all the battery power we have before the dark. Did I not say it was a big convoy?"

"You think there will be a big escort?"

"We will see. I know it will be an escort I do not like to take a chance with."

The Lieutenant fidgeted awhile, his glasses at his eyes. His Captain looked at his profile and at the glint of perspiration on the slightly shaking hands, and yawned. His face, as he swung round again to scan the horizon astern, looked bored and perhaps a little lonely. A submarine is a small ship in which to coop up incompatible natures, and the terrible losses of personnel in the

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Imperial submarine service had sadly reduced the standard of officers. He felt sometimes as if he were an anachronism, an officer of nineteen-fourteen who had miraculously lasted four years. He felt that it had been only the fact that a misdemeanour had caused him to be driven forth to the big ships for two years that had saved him from sharing the unknown fate of his contemporaries. Well, he reflected, it was only a matter of time before he would join them. The law of averages was stronger than his luck, wonderful though the latter had been. He extracted a cigar from his case and reached out a hand to take his subordinate's proffered matchbox. As he did so he glanced again at his companion's face, and a sudden feeling of understanding, and perhaps a touch of compassion, made him ask—

"Well, Müller? You have something that worries you. What is it, then?"

The First Lieutenant turned and took a careful glance round the circle of empty ocean. Then his speech came with a rush— [Pg 288]

"I want to know what you think, sir. You don't seem to worry about it. I know you can do nothing more—that one can only do one's work as best one can and all that—but I still feel restless. How is it going to end? We are winning? Yes—oh yes, we are winning, but we have done that four years, and how far have we got? Before I came into submarines I believed all they told us, but now I know that we are not strangling England at sea, and that we never can now. What are we going to do next? Is it to go on and on until we have no boats left? Gott! I want to do something that will frighten them—something that will make them understand what we are—something that will make them scream for pity." He paused, gulped, and stared again out to the westward. The Captain straightened himself up against the rail and stretched his arms out in another prodigious yawn.

"My good Müller," he said, "you cannot carry the cares of Germany on your back. Leave that to the Chancellor. One can be sufficiently patriotic by doing one's work and not asking questions that others cannot answer. As to the submarine war—well, blame the men who would not let the Emperor have his way, that hindered him when he would have built an equal fleet to the English. I do not mean the Socialists—I mean others as well. I mean men who grudged money for the Navy because they wanted it for the Army. Curse the Army! If we had had a big fleet we would have won the war in a year, but now—ach! Look now, Müller—you have read Lichnowsky's Memoirs? Yes, I know you are not allowed to, but I know you have. Now I say that what he says at the end is true,—that the Anglo-Saxon race is going to rule the West and the sea, that we shall only rule Middle Europe, and we were *fools* to play for Middle Europe when we might have had the sea. We would now give all the Russias and Rumania and all our gains just for Gibraltar and Bermuda, for if we had those stations all the rest would come to us. We fight now for our honour, but if it were not for that—and that is everything—we would give our enemies good terms." [Pg 289]

"But if that is true—if we can gain no more—we have lost the war!"

The Captain shrugged. "We will have won what we do not want, and lost all that we do; but we shall have won, I suppose. It depends on our diplomatists. If we can get but a few coaling-stations we shall have won, for it would all come to us when we were ready again. But you will not gain a victory by a great stroke as you say you wish, Müller. The war is too big now for single strokes, and the English will not scream for mercy now because of frightfulness. They are angry, and they hate us now."

"But you yourself have sunk a liner, and you showed them as she sank that the orders of Germany must be obeyed."

The Captain's face did not alter at all. "I did do so, and I would do so again. My honour is clear, because I obeyed my orders. Would you have dared to question?" [Pg 290]

"No—by God! and I would do it gladly." The Lieutenant's face worked, and he scowled as he glanced astern. "I would wish that every ship of every convoy carried women."

The Captain laughed almost genially. "It is easy to see you are not a Prussian," he said. "It does not matter whether you like or dislike a thing. All that counts is whether or not it is to the advantage of the State. So the Roman World-Empire was made. Myself, I doubt if killing women pays us; there is this talk now of the boycott of Germany after the war. They add time to the boycott for every time we fire on ships that are helpless, and the boycott is to be by sailors. I would laugh at such a threat if it was from any others, but sailors are not to be laughed at. They are likely to mean what they say. It is as I said: if we had fought to the West and to the sea, no man would have dared to threaten us with a sea-boycott now."

"But even with our small Navy we have held the English checked. It is not our Navy that is lacking. What is it, then?" [Pg 291]

"It *is* the Navy. It should have been as big as the English Fleet. And the men—Gott! Müller. I tell you, if we had done the Zeebrugge attack ourselves, and I had been there, I would feel that my honour and the Navy's honour was safe, that we could stop and make peace. I would be proud to die on such a service, and I envy the Englishmen we buried when it was over."

"But this is—Herr Capitan, you talk as if you were an Englander—"

The Captain whirled on him, his eyes sparkling dangerously. "*Dummkopf!*" he said. "Report me if you like. I hate the English and I love my Fatherland, but report me if you like. Ach! You may report me in Hell, too; for I know—I know—"

He stopped suddenly and tilted back his head to listen. The First Lieutenant shrank back from him, his mouth open and his hands feeling for the periscope support. A faint murmur of sound came down wind from the fleecy cloud-banks to the west. The Captain jumped to the opening of the conning-tower and stood, impatient and anxious by the lip, until his lieutenant had slipped and scrambled half-way down the ladder.

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Then he jumped down himself, pulling the lid to after him. Simultaneously there came a rush and roar of air from venting tanks, the stem of the boat rose very slightly as her bow-gun went under, and in twenty seconds the submarine was gone, and the bubbles and foam of her passage were fading into the level blue of the empty sea. A minute later she showed a foot of periscope a cable's length away, and a small airship topped the western horizon and came slowly along towards her. The periscope vanished again, and forty feet below the surface the captain watched a gauge needle beside the periscope creep round its dial inch by inch till it quivered and steadied at the forty-metre mark.

"Diving hands only. Fall out the rest. Remain near your stations. Lower the periscope." The First Lieutenant barked out a repetition of each order as the Captain spoke. There was a shuffling of feet, some guttural conversation that spoke of a flicker of curiosity among the men of the crew, and then all was quiet but for the hum of motors and the occasional rattle of gearing as the hydroplane wheels were moved. The Captain moved forward to the wardroom, removing his scarf and heavy pilot-cloth coat as he walked. "Order some food, Müller," he said. "I'm hungry—that airship was farther ahead of them than usual." He threw himself down in a long folding-chair and stretched out his sea-booted legs. "I won't come up to look now until I hear them. Relieve the listeners every half-hour, Müller. I want to have good warning. We should hear a big convoy like this at twenty miles to-day." The curtain rings clashed and a seaman spoke excitedly as he entered. The Captain nodded and reached out to the table for his coffee-cup. "Just the bearing we expected," he said, "but if they sound as faint as he says there's time to get something to eat first."

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It was a big new standard ship which drew the unlucky card in the game of "browning shots." The torpedo hit her well forward, its tell-tale track being unperceived in the slight running swell until too late. A big bubble of water rose abreast the break of the forecastle till it reached deck-level, then it broke and flung a column of spray, black smoke, and fragments skyward. As the ship cleared the smoke-haze, she was obviously down by the head and steering wildly. Two auxiliary patrol vessels closed on her at full speed, and the nearest freighter increased speed and cut in ahead of her in readiness either to tow or screen. The torpedoed ship, after yawing vaguely for a few minutes, steadied back to the convoy's course, slowing her engines till she only just retained steerage way. There was a rapid exchange of signals between her and the escort vessels, and then an R.N. Commander on an adjacent bridge gave a sigh of relief. "Good man that," he said. "We'll have him in dry dock to-morrow. It hasn't flurried him a bit, and I like his nerve."

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The explosion had caused more than the salvage vessels to leap into activity. The white track of the torpedo showed clearly after it had gone home, and the first to take action was a tramp, across whose bows the track passed. The tramp was a ship of the early 'nineties, and her full speed was at the most nine knots, but her skipper at once jammed her helm hard over to steer along the torpedo-wake with a somewhat optimistic hope of ramming. Two destroyers and an armed auxiliary did the same thing, with the result that the tramp skipper found himself suddenly in the cross-wash of the warships as they passed him at a few yards' distance at twenty knots. Somebody on the bridge of one of them screamed a profane warning at him through a megaphone, and the skipper, after a hurried glance at the quivering destroyers' sterns, jumped to the telegraph and stopped his engines. A couple of seconds later his ship shook to a great detonation, and a mighty column of water rose and broke close ahead of him. He starboarded his helm and swung round after the rest of the convoy, his ship shaking to successive explosions as more escorting vessels arrived at the spot where he had turned.

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As his torpedoes left the tubes the U-boat captain barked out an order. The attack had been fairly simple, but his hardest problem was only beginning. The boat's bow dipped sharply in answer to the tilted hydroplanes, and she began her long slide down to the two-hundred-foot mark. She had got to fifty before a sound like a great hammer striking the hull told them of a successful torpedo-run. The Captain looked up from his watch and smiled. A moment later he was watching the gauges with a grave and impassive face. He knew that the fact of his torpedo hitting would mean greater difficulty for him in the next few hours than he would have known had he missed altogether. At a hundred feet the first depth-charge exploded, smashing gauge-glasses, electric lamps, and throwing a couple of men off their feet. The boat rocked and rolled under the shock, while orders were roared through voice-pipes for more emergency lights to be switched on. More charges exploded as the boat slid downwards, but each charge was farther away than the last. The half-light of the hand-lamps round the periscope showed the source of a sound of pouring

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waters—two rivets had been blown right out of the inner hull close before the conning-tower. The Captain shouted orders, and the submarine levelled off her angle and checked at the fifty-metre line, while two men began frantically to break away the woodwork which stretched overhead and prevented the rivet-holes being plugged. At that depth the water poured in through the holes in solid bars, hitting the deck, bouncing back and spreading everywhere in a heavy spray which drenched circuits and wires.

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"Müller! where the devil are you? Start the pumps—I can't help it if they hear us. Start the pumps, fool!"

"But you will come up? You will——"

"*Schweinhund! Gehorsamkeit! Go!*"

The pumps began to stamp and clatter as they drove the entering water out again, but above the noise of the pumps the Captain could hear the roaring note of propellers rushing far overhead. If it had not been for those infernal rivets, he thought, he would have been at three hundred feet by now, but he could not risk the extra wetting which a pressure of a hundred and thirty pounds to the inch on the entering water would give to his circuits. The weight of extra water in the bilges was nothing—he could deal with that—though the thought of the six hundred odd fathoms of water between him and the bottom was a thing to remember anxiously in case of his getting negative buoyancy; but if this continual spray of salt water reached his motor circuits it would be fatal. He cursed the men who were vainly trying to block the rivet-holes with wood wedges, and jumping on the periscope table he tried to guide the end of a short plank—intended as a baffle-plate—across the stream. As he stood working, a terrific concussion shook the U-boat from stem to stern. The bows rose till men began to slip aft down the wet deck, and from aft came a succession of cries and shouted orders, "Close all doors! the after-hatch is falling in—Come up and surrender—Lass uns heraus!" The Captain rose from the deck beneath the eye-piece, shaky from his fall from the table. He hardly dared look at the gauge, but he kept his head and his wits as he gave his orders. With the motors roaring round at their utmost power and an angle up by the bow of some fifteen degrees, the U-boat held her own, and as tank after tank was blown empty, she slowly gained on the depth gauge and began to climb. As she rose, she was shaken again and again by the powerful depth-charges that were being dropped on the broken water left by the air-bubble from her after compartment—a surface-mark now a quarter of a mile astern.

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Beneath the conning-tower more and more men were gathering, some calm, some white, trembling, and voluble. The boat broke surface with her stem and half her conning-tower showing, then levelled a little and tore along with the waves foaming round her conning-tower and bridge. From inside they could clearly hear the shells that greeted her, and in a moment there was a rush of men up the ladder. Among the first few the Captain saw his First Lieutenant's legs vanish upwards, and at the sight a sneering smile showed on his sunburnt face. The first man to open the lid died as he did so, for a four-inch shell removed the top of the conning-tower before he was clear of it. The escort was taking no chances as to whether the boat's appearance on the surface was intentional or accidental, and they were making the water for a hundred yards around her fairly boil with bursting shell. As the boat tore ahead, holding herself up on her angle and her speed, a few men struggled out of her one by one past the torn body of the first man to get out. Two of them leaped instantly overboard, but the next clawed his way up to a rail, and while others scrambled and fought their way overside, and shells crashed and burst below and around him on water and conning-tower casing, he stood upright a moment with arms raised high above his head. At the signal the firing ceased as if a switch had been turned by a single hand, and he subsided in a huddled heap on the bridge as the riddled submarine ran under. Down below the Captain still smiled, leaning with his elbows on the periscope training-handles and watching the hurrying men at the ladder's foot, until the great rush of water and men, that showed that the end had come, swept him aft and away across the border-line of sleep.

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THROUGH AN ADMIRALTY WINDOW.

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The room was exactly the same as any room in any Government building, except that the Naval observer would have at once noticed one fact—that the furniture was of the unchanging Admiralty pattern. The roll-top desk, the chairs, and even the lamp-shades, would have been to him familiar friends. They were certainly familiar to the Post-Captain who sat at the desk. Captain Henry Ranson had been a noted Commander before his retirement—a man of whom many tales, both true and apocryphal, still circulated when Senior Officers of the Fleet forgathered at the lunch intervals of Courts-Martial and Inquiries. He had little opportunity in his present War appointment to display any of the characteristics on which his Sagas had been based, for neither seamanship, daring, or, well—Independent Initiative, were quite in keeping with the routine of an Admiralty Office.

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To-day he was feeling the claustrophobia of London more acutely than usual. The sun was shining through the big window across the room, and he wanted to rise and look out at the blue sky and white cloud-tufts that he knew to be showing over the buildings across the Horse Guards Parade.

His desk gave him no view through the window—he knew the weakness of his powers of concentration on his eternal paper work too well to have allowed himself such a distraction; but as the door opened to admit his clerk—a firm and earnest civilian with the zeal of monastic officialdom shining through his spectacles—he rose abruptly and moved out into the sunlight glare.

"Yes, Collins? What is it?"

"A small matter, sir, which is not quite in order. If you will glance through this you will no doubt agree with me." [Pg 305]

The Captain took the sheets from the clerk's outstretched hand and moved a little away from the glaring light to read.

SIR,—I have the honour to bring to your notice the conduct of Skipper A. P. Marsh, of the Admiralty tug *Annie Laurie*, on the 22nd-23rd November 1917, and I beg to recommend him for decoration in view of the following facts:—

On November 21st, 1917, the steamer *Makalaka*, homeward bound with corn, was shelled by a U-boat when near the Irish coast. The enemy was dealt with by a patrol in the vicinity, but the *Makalaka*, proceeding east at full speed in accordance with instructions, was thrown out of her reckoning by a damaged compass, and found herself at dusk on a lee shore off the Galway coast, with her shaft broken (a result of shell damage which had not been realised to be serious at the time it was incurred). Skipper Marsh, seeing her flares from his patrol to seaward, most gallantly closed her and took her in tow in a rising N.W. gale. In view of the probability of the attempt to tow failing, the crew of the *Makalaka* were taken aboard the tug, but the towing was continued through a full gale lasting twenty-four hours until the ship was out of danger. —I have the honour to be, sir, &c.

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The Post-Captain folded the letter carefully and placed it on his desk. The clerk retrieved it, and moved towards the door. The Captain turned, "What are you going to do with that, Collins?"

"I take it that it needs only the usual reply, sir—that this is not approved—with a reference to the regulation bearing on the case."

"Why not approved, Collins?"

The clerk was shocked, and his tone showed it. "Because that decoration is for gallant action in face of the enemy, and this case does not come within its scope. In any case the man will get salvage." [The Captain made an impatient gesture.] "If the Royal Humane Society care to—" he stopped, because the Captain had walked to the window, and, in obvious inattention to the speaker, was staring out across the wide Horse Guards and far beyond the fleecy clouds that drifted across the sky over the great sea of buildings that hemmed him in.

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Captain Ranson had gone on a journey—back through forty years of time, and across eighty-one degrees of longitude.

He ran up the gangway, straightened his helmet and dirk-belt, and approached the Commander, who, a tall dark-featured figure, was standing looking down on the boat as she rose and fell alongside to the gentle heave of the Indian Ocean—"Second cutter manned, sir."

The Commander turned and looked the boy over beneath his heavy eyebrows. "When are you going to set up a new port shroud?" he asked.

The Midshipman fingered the seam of his trousers, and looked carefully at the buttons on the Commander's tunic—"I thought, sir, that is, we've got a new shroud all fitted, but I thought—the coxswain said, sir—that the old one would do for to-day as the wind's nothing...." [Pg 308]

The barometric indications of the Commander's eyes showed threatening weather. He took the boy's arm in the grasp of a heavy hand and led him to the rail abreast the swinging mastheads of the boat.

"Now listen, young gentleman," he said. "What the coxswain said isn't evidence. It's *you* that command that boat, and *you* that will handle and command her. Don't talk to me again as if you were a schoolboy." The Midshipman shivered and squinted cautiously up to see if the storm-signals were still in evidence. The dark stern eyes were looking down at him in a way that made him feel as if he was some luckless worm that had unhappily bored its way up into the publicity of an aviary. The Commander moved his hand and turned the boy to face him. "Now, you remember this, young gentleman, only seamen come through gales safely—it's the fools that go to sea with [Pg 309]

rusty shrouds and weak rigging. And if you're to be a seaman you must never go to sea, even in a flat calm, unless your ship is ready for a gale of wind. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then don't forget it, or I'll have you beaten till you grow corns. Now shove off, and pull away three cables on the port bow, drop your anchor on the shoal, and fit that new shroud. Remain there till the ship has got under way, done her night-firing, and signalled you to carry on. You will then close and weigh the target moorings, having the target ready for hoisting when the ship comes back to you. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"What have you got on your anchor?"

"A hundred and twenty fathom, sir—of four-inch." "That is enough—there is thirty fathom on the shoal—Carry on!" [Pg 310]

The Midshipman ran down the gangway, and, jumping into the cutter, "Carried on." The Commander was an officer of whom the boat-midshipmen stood in awe, and they were always thankful when the ordeal of reporting a possibly unready boat to him as "ready" was over.

The last shot kicked up a yellow fountain of spray in the glare of the searchlight, and ricocheted, humming, over the target and on towards Malaya. A rocket sailed up from the distant ship—the searchlight flickered out a couple of Morse signs and went out, and in the velvety darkness of a tropic night the hands went forward in the cutter to weigh the anchor, the process of "shortening-in" having been accomplished a full hour ago. As the Midshipman stood up to superintend the operation, he saw a queer white line spreading and brightening along the horizon to the westward. A dash of rain struck his face, and a little gust of wind moaned past him. The crew looked up from their work to wonder, and in a matter of seconds the squall was on them. The wet hawser slipped and raced out, the hands jumping aft to get clear of the leaping turns as the cutter swung and drew hard on her anchor to the pressure of a tremendous wind. The white line rushed down on them, and showed as a turmoil of frothing sea, beaten flat by the wind into a sheet of phosphorescence veiled by low-flying spray. For a few minutes they crouched and endured the sudden cold and wet, then a yaw of the boat sent the bowmen forward with suspicion in their minds. "Up and down, sir—anchor's aweigh," came the report, in a voice that started as a roar, but reached the Midshipman aft as a faint high wail. The Midshipman faced round to leeward, and thought hard. He had been anchored on the only possible shoal, and once driven off that there was no holding-ground till he should reach the edge of the surf off Trincomalee, twenty miles away—all between being chartered as "Five hundred and no bottom." He called to the coxswain and clawed his way forward, picking up men by name as he passed them. They hove up their anchor, secured mainsail, awning, and mainmast in a dreadful tangle of rope and canvas to the anchor-ring—hitched an outlying corner of the tangle to a bight far up the hawser, and threw all over the bows. The cutter steadied head to wind, and the hands moved aft to raise the bow and protect themselves against the steady driving of the spray. [Pg 311]

The Midshipman lay across the backboard, staring out to the port-quarter. Through the white haze he could see, at regular intervals, a quick-flashing gleam of yellow light. He knew what it was, and it did not comfort him. It was all he could see of the twenty-thousand candlepower of Foul Point Light, and although it was not getting much clearer it was certainly "drawing" from aft forward. He had the rough lie of the coast in his head, and he was just realising two things—first, that in spite of the sea anchor he was being blown to leeward and ashore at an incredible rate; and second, that if he could not round Foul Point across the wind, he was going to be food for the big surf-sharks before the morning. [Pg 312]

He roused the crew again, and set them to the oars. Before half the oars were out he had realised the futility of the effort, and was trying to get them back without further damage. He corrected his error with the loss of four oars and several feet of the cutter's gunwale—broken off when the wind tore the long ash oars away. As he remembered later, it was at this point that Foul Point Light began to show clearly through the spray, and that his coxswain began to sing an interminable hymn in the stern-sheets, and that the dark-faced Celtic stroke-oar, a man who had the reputation of being the worst character in all the ship, took over the helpless coxswain's duty. The Midshipman was staring fascinated at the swinging beam of light that was beating on them from the sand-spit broad on the quarter, when the stroke-oar's voice in his ear changed him from a boy to an officer—"What'll you do now, sir?" [Pg 313]

The question was answered on the instant—"All hands, up masts and sails. Close-reef both, and pass the hawser aft. Lash out now, lads, and get down to it."

That twenty-minute evolution, by the light of a hurricane-lamp, was a nightmare. The mainsail and mainmast were all snarled up in miscellaneous turns of roping. The hawser was wet and cold, and seemed fifty times its original length, but the work was done. He had felt that no shroud, however new, would stand the strain he was going to put on the masts, and though the men cursed and swore at the delay and toil involved, he got what he wanted from them. One at a [Pg 314]

time the masts were hove up and clamped in position against the half-solid wind—the hawser, cut to length, clove-hitched round each masthead, and frapped clear round the cutter, with the whole hove taut with "Spanish Windlasses," till his clumsy hemp shrouds were braced to the strain. Then he braced himself by a glance at the light, swinging well over their heads now that they were close enough in to feel the first lift and heave of the outer surf, and yelled an order. The foresail rose, clattered furiously a moment against the mast, and then filled with a bang. "*Set mainsail!*" The cutter heeled over till her lee gunwale dipped—the masts bent and creaked, and the old boat went tearing into the wind on the best and last sail of her varied life. The Midshipman and the stroke-oar clung to the long tiller that was curved like a fishing-rod under the strain. There were no gusts or variations in the wind: it beat solidly against the canvas, heeling the cutter to the verge of capsizing, and driving her through the water at steamer speed. The leeway was extraordinarily great—the boat going sideways almost as fast as she went ahead; but that leeway saved her from going over. They cut through the outer surf off the point, the boat leaking from the sprung keel to the opened seams where the frapping hawser-turns bit into her thin sides—the crew baling furiously to keep their minds from the expectation of a great crash that would tell of a mast tearing its heel up and out through the weather side. It lasted for barely half an hour, but the arm-weary Midshipman felt as if it had been a four-hour watch. As the light drew aft, he eased his sheets and swung up the channel, still at racing speed, but safely bound for harbour. His memories in after years of the next few hours were vague and clouded by sleep. He remembered the sun rising as they drew in towards the silent white-walled dockyard; the *swish* of sand under the keel as he ran her hard up the boat-camber beach, and nothing more, till he woke to see the dreaded Commander—a tall white-clad figure—standing over him, looking with keen appraising eyes at the mass of hawser-turns that swathed boat and masts, and at the bodies of the snoring crew that lay on the hot sand around her.

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The Clerk fidgeted. He had been kept waiting for a matter of seconds, and he did not like it. The Captain turned to face him, and, to the surprised eyes of the Clerk, seemed to have changed suddenly into a young man—alert, quick, and decisive. "*No, Collins,*" said a strange voice; "*the man *did* act in the face of the enemy, and I will endorse the recommendation.*" He turned his eyes again to the window, but saw only the yellow gravel, the houses, and the smoke; the fetters of Routine seemed to clank warningly in his ears. "Yes," he said, "I have no reason to suppose the U-boat had not followed the steamer, or that she was not present all the time."

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A MOST UNTRUE STORY.

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The War was only in its first childhood and patrol work was still amusing, having not yet become a monotonous and unexciting business. The submarine was due to start back from patrol that night, and was just loafing along at twenty odd feet depth waiting for dark. The Captain was on watch at the periscope, swinging the instrument round from time to time to take a general survey of the horizon, but for the most part confining his scrutiny to the island to leeward. The island showed up clearly—the light of the setting sun flashing back from the windows of the buildings that looked out over the Bight. As the Captain took one of his all-round glances, he checked suddenly and concentrated his gaze to one point of the compass. A man who leaned against a pump six feet away—a man who had seemed to all appearance to be on the verge of sleep—opened his eyes, straightened up, and stood alertly watching the brown hands that held the periscope training handles. The signal seemed to be telepathically passed on, as in a few seconds there were six or eight pairs of eyes watching the observer, who still peered at the unknown sight which no one else in the boat could see. Then the Captain moved his head back from the eye-piece, smiled (and at the smile six of the watchers reverted to their oil-stained reading matter), and called to the First-Lieutenant, who was at the moment engaged with an Engine-room Artificer in a mumbled inquest over a broken air-valve spindle. As the First-Lieutenant approached, the Captain stepped to one side and indicated the eye-piece by a nod. His subordinate took his place, and for a full half-minute remained slowly swivelling the great instrument through four points and back again. When he raised his head he was scowling and sullen.

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"Well?" said the Captain. "A good few there, eh?"

"*Lord!*" The First-Lieutenant's voice indicated the deepest disgust. "Thousands and thousands—and we can't get a shot at 'em!"

"Well, there's over a thousand, anyway. I've seen at least that lot of teal in the last couple of minutes."

"*Teal!* Why, sir, I can see mallard now for the next half mile, and I could swear there'll be geese among them too."

"Here, let me look. Yes, by gum, and not one's getting up either." They let the periscope get to a

few feet off before they paddle away.... He swivelled slowly round the circle, then looked up at the First-Lieutenant. "There's fog coming on. I can see the banks coming," he said. He looked again through the periscope and intently studied the windows on the island some three miles away. The First-Lieutenant watched his face, and saw it slowly break into the smile of a schoolboy meditating mischief. The First-Lieutenant began to smile slightly also. The Captain looked up.

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"I can't help the island," he said. "War's hell, anyway. Give me a rifle and stand by for surface." There was a clatter and the sound of quick-passing orders; the boat's bow tilted up, and to the sound of roaring air she broke surface fairly in the middle of the great colony of swimming wildfowl. The hatch fell back with a clang, and a rush of cold air beat on the excited faces of the men below the conning-tower. Immediately there came the *Crack-crack-rack* of magazine-fire from the bridge above, and the descendants of bowmen who had risked mutilation and death to steal the Conqueror's deer forgot their discipline and began to mount the ladder that led to the sunlight and a clear view.

The Captain turned to shout a helm order below and swore at the packed heads that filled the hatch-rim. "... and you come up, Number One, and lend a hand to pick up. I've got one—missed him on the water at a hundred and got him in the air as he rose! There he is—jump forr'd and grab him—dammit, he's off (*crack-crack*).... No, that's stopped him" (*bang*—the report came from the vicinity of the Captain's knee). "What the—confound you, man—what the deuce are you doing? Unload that pistol and take it away...."

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Seven thousand yards away on the island a watcher lowered his glasses and reached for the button of the alarm bell. In two seconds the island was awake, and down in the lower battery men rushed to their stations. With clatter and turmoil the big guns were cleared away and the observing officer roared the order to "Stand by" into the telephone mouthpiece.

"What is it, Schultz? Can you see? Ach! she is going to bombard—the little swine of a boat. Give me the telescope. Ach, Gott! are they not reported ready, fool?" The Major was excited and bristling.

"Ready now—all but number six."

"At six thousand five hundred metres—all guns—Gott strafe der schmutzige ... he has dived!..."

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The First-Lieutenant sprang up the outer ladder of the conning-tower, the bleeding spoil clutched in his hand. The Captain turned to look astern and became aware of the fact that the gallery, as represented by the bridge and rails, was tenanted by an enthusiastic and interested selection of his crew. "What the devil—is this a cinema or my ship? Don't you know your orders yet? Every man-jack of you...." He herded them below to the tune of a voluble hymn of hate, and followed the last of the grinning culprits down. As the boat levelled off at her previous diving depth, he swung the periscope round to search the horizon again to seaward. A moment later "Diving stations," and to the hydroplane men, "Take her on down."

The First-Lieutenant left the luckless mallard on the table and elbowed his way aft again through the cluster of men closing up to their stations. Reaching the control position, he looked inquiringly at the Captain, who, having lowered the periscope, was leaning with folded arms against a group of valves abreast it.

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"Thick fog coming down. Going to bottom till dark now. Have a look at the soundings, will you—or tell Henley to let me know."

The First-Lieutenant moved back to speak to another officer, who was already bending over the chart-table. The Captain turned his head to watch the gauge beside him, the needle of which was slowly creeping upwards and around the circle. As it moved the gentle rolling of the boat that had been noticeable before ceased, and she steadied until she gave the idea of being high and dry in some silent dock. The officer, generally known as "Pilot," or—to his intimates and contemporaries—as "Rasputin" (a name, it should be explained, which had no possible application to him, except for the fact that he wore a beard), appeared at the Captain's side with a folded chart in his hand.

"We should touch at ninety by the gauge, sir," he said. "We must be about four miles from the land now."

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The Captain nodded. "Yes, it may be a little more, though. Have the crew got a sweep on this?"

"No, sir. This is an extra dive, and they haven't had time to get one up. D'you want to bet on under or over ninety, sir?"

"I do not. I won last night's sweep, and lost it to you in side-bets, and I'm not taking any more."

Stop the motors!"

The gauge had reached the eighty-foot mark, and the boat under the influence of her headway was still driving the needle slowly round. At ninety feet the Captain looked at the Pilot, smiled, and started the motors again. Hardly had he given the order when the needle checked, rose a little, and then crept back to ninety-five. "*Stop the motors!* I've lost a chance there, Pilot—'Wish I'd had a bet on that.'"

He stood watching the gauge a moment longer, and then turned to walk to the Wardroom.

"Pipe down—usual sentries only," he ordered. "Tell my servant to get me some washing water."

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He threw the curtain aside, and joined the two officers who stood looking solemnly at the mallard, which lay on a gory newspaper in the centre of the table. For a moment there was silence.

"Well," said the Captain cheerfully, "it's not as smashed as it might be. It'll do for a pie tomorrow."

"'Mm,'" said the First-Lieutenant, "'Keeper at home used to call rabbits that looked like that 'ferrets' food.'"

"Not a bit of it," rejoined the Captain; "if we mash him in a pie he'll be all right."

There was another pause while the First-Lieutenant tucked an extra fold of newspaper beneath the corpse—then, after a quick glance and nudge for the Pilot's benefit, he spoke in a detached and dispassionate voice.

"Of course, it was poaching."

The Captain's brown face began to slowly take on the colour of the gore on the table—then he exploded—

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"What d'you mean? ... *poaching*—it's below high-water mark, isn't it?"

"Well, sir—we don't know the rules in this country, and we were pretty well in their waters."

"But it's offshore. Why shouldn't I shoot their duck? It's not preserved, either. *Poaching!* I never poached anything—not since I was at school anyway." He scowled at the duck and the officers impartially. The officers clutched each other by the arms, then the Pilot walked hastily to a low-set bunk and buried his head in the pillow. The Captain changed his frown for a smile as the situation dawned on him, then, snatching the parallel rulers from the chart-table he began to belabour the most accessible portion of his gurgling subordinate's anatomy.

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Transcriber's Note

- Obvious punctuation and spelling errors repaired.
- "Compass card" and "compass-card" retained as printed.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK H.M.S. ---- ***

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