

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## Outward Bound: Evening

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Costello and his mate hurried back along aft; leaning into the grey sleeting wind which lashed the long exposed stretch of the after-deck, and leaning from side to side to balance themselves to the ship's roll. The Marine gunlayer, at the end of his day-long vigil upon the 4.7 gun platform, watched them as they disappeared beneath the rim of his circular steel platform and plunged down into the crew's quarters.

They inhabited the rounded stern of the ship; sailors to starboard, firemen to port, and the gunners in a section which had been taken out of Number Five hold. The sailors' fo'c'sle into which Costello entered, blinking against the light, was like a kind of steel cave; crowded, cluttered, dimly-lit and smokily warm. Its only furniture was two tiers of bunks, two wooden lockers, and a long table so worn down by scrubbing that the grain appeared in high relief. Those seamen not on watch were seated about it and eating their tea; they glanced up with malicious amusement, and one of them asked "How'd you get on?"

Costello's hard red face broke into a savage grin. "We told the old bastard. Didn't we, Geordie?"

Geordie gave a disgruntled mutter of "Aye...s'pose so,"

and began to carve a hunk of bread from the loaf.

"Fat lot of good it did us, though. Prob'ly get logged for it to-morra."

"Ach - what's a logging?" sneered Costello. "Five shillings fine. Make yer laugh, wouldn't it?"

The man whom they called Old Stanley piped up with "Wouldn't ha' made you laugh when I first went to sea. Two quid a month was all we had in them days."

"Now don't you start giving us that stuff," jeered Costello. "I s'pose you'll tell us that you'd sooner be eating salt beef, too."

"Nice bit o' salt beef beats all this 'ere Liverpool haggis," chirped Old Stanley. "Something you c'n get your teeth into, that is,"

He stirred around amongst the food on his plate, searching for a bit of meat. A small, well-knit man with sparse, silky white hair, he had an air of intense self-reliance and independence, of caring for nothing and nobody; he had a springy cockiness which combined with the oddly reckless look in his faded old blue eyes to give the impression of a man grown old in body alone; as though his hair had whitened and his body shrivelled in a treacherous attempt to defeat the gay, cocky youth who lived within him.

Now as he ate his tea he listened to the others talking; one of them began to tell a rambling disconnected tale of some encounter with the police, and Old Stanley

suddenly asked in his clipped, jerky voice "Know what a p'liceman is? He's a bloke what's too lazy for honest work an' too scared to steal for a living."

"No, but - no, but - " stammered the man whom he had interrupted, thrown off the meandering track of his tale and still further confused by a whooping shriek of laughter from Wanker's Doom, the eighteen-year old ordinary seaman; a pimpled and vacuous youth who had gained his name from a reputed addiction to certain solitary practices.

"Chuck us the bread," grunted Costello, and the meal continued whilst the fo'c'sle and all that was in it rose and fell like a crazy elevator, swooped, paused, shuddered convulsively as the screw threshed for a moment almost clear of the water, and then dropped with a tremendous squattering thump as the bows lifted to another wave and the stern fell into the trough of the preceding one. "Crazy bitch!" snarled Costello, grabbing at the tin of jam; the oilskins along the bulkheads swung outwards like hanged seamen, and there was a heavy protesting groan from the rudder moving in its pintles.

In the firemen's fo'c'sle, they had already finished their tea, and Big Cyril was dealing out the cards for a hand of solo. The sticky, dog-eared cards flipped down before the other players; Paderooski the Pole watched them with his pale crazy eyes, glancing cunningly at the others and rubbing his knuckles on his hard round head

on which the hair sprouted in ragged tufts and tussocks.

The four men picked up their cards and began to play.

"Pass me."

"Solo."

"H'm...ha...I t'ink...yair-r-r...nein, pass me."

"I'll go the bundle," said Big Cyril. "Your come out, Paderooski."

The Bo'sun, looking for something to read, lounged into the fo'c'sle and stood behind the players, watching the big Pole as he frowned at his fan of cards. He selected one and advanced it timorously, but snatched it back again and substituted another which he slipped onto the table. The game progressed through periods of hard-breathing silence broken by howls of triumph or protest, whilst the waves clawed at the steel plates behind their heads and the screw maintained its churning thunder below their feet.

The wind which was now blowing west-north-west was taking the convoy on its starboard bow, but for those in the ship which was racing down over the curve of the world to intercept them it was the first time since leaving home that they had not had a head wind. It had been a dismal and apprehensive voyage from the moment that they had sailed from Kiel; they had gone up the Norwegian coast like a hunted man dodging in and out of doorways, and then struck off north and west; farther and farther north until the days became brief grey intervals between the endless

storming darkness of the nights.

There was no ease on board. The disasters of the Graf Spee and the Bismarck were still too fresh in men's minds; there were over a thousand men in the crew and none of them were under any illusions. The customary semi-hysterical acrimony with which German officers govern their men took on a yet sharper note; the petty officers used oaths, fists, and feet more freely than ever; the atmosphere in the jammed mess-decks was that of a tense resignation.

It did not improve as the days passed and brought nothing but the biting wind from the ice-fields, the grey savage sea through which the great ship plunged with a massive barbaric elegance; an enormous fighting machine upon which had been spent years of toil and millions of money and the most fine and intricate skill and cunning of the human mind, all perhaps to be destroyed in a few minutes of uproarious flame.

But Vice-Admiral Norbert Krefft, commanding the battleship Von Moltke, was subject to no such thoughts as these. There could be nothing less equivocal than his orders, nor the way in which they had been given to him; all that remained was to carry them out. His object was simply to destroy as much of the Allied merchant shipping as possible, to avoid an engagement with other warships, and to bring his command safely back to a French port.

A lean grey man with an intent cold stare, he stood gazing for hour after hour through the slitted armour-plating of the control tower; out at the wind-driven sleet and twisting snow-flurries and the dense shrieking thicknes with which the weather itself seemed to oppose them. The von Moltke had already turned southward, and already entered the Denmark Strait, when the message giving the convoy's position was received. For the first few minutes after reading it, Krefft was inclined to treat it as merely another instalment in the mass of information with which the High Command kept his radio and coding offices busy; information based upon intelligence reports which in their turn were based upon the sinuous activities of agents overseas, and could seldom offer anything substantial. It is believed, it is credibly reported, indications show - they all began with one or another of the threadbare phrases with which officials shield themselves from responsibility.

But this was something different, even though the wording of the last paragraph betrayed the usual unwillingness to commit itself entirely - 'with due regard to existing conditions you are urged to take advantage of this opportunity.' If they meant him to attack, he thought, why did they not say just that? Attack! Simple enough to say, God knows, but perhaps not so simple to explain away at one of those dreadful conferences ashore.

He pondered over the message for a long time, leaning over the large-scale chart of the North Atlantic and

seeing its blank white spaces, neatly sub-divided by the parallels of latitude and longitude, translated into the relentless eternity of sea. Finally he plotted the convoy's position at the time of the report, drew off the course-line, and then shifted the rulers to draw off the course which he must steer to intercept it.

He picked up the dividers and measured off the distance. Assuming the convoy to maintain the same course, he calculated that the soonest he could expect to sight it would be in the late afternoon of the day after next. He pursed his lips, clicking the dividers together and tapping them on the chart; they would be left with very little daylight, but then if all went well an hour, or even half-an-hour, would be sufficient for their needs.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## Outward Bound : Night

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The firemen's card game came to an end, the watch below turned in, and the ship plugged onwards into the spuming darkness in a silence which was of neither sleep nor wakefulness, but something between the two. Up on the bridge, Old Stanley spun the wheel between his hands so that the spokes made soft slapping sounds against his horny palms; his narrowed eyes were fixed upon the only dim glow of light on the blacked-out ship; that of the compass binnacle. He steered by a kind of instinct, knowing just when to bear down upon the helm so that the rudder pressed against the weight of sea; when to let it run again before the ship veered off her course.

Out on the bridge, the Third Mate and Raven stood side by side, staring into the darkness against which a breaking wave made an occasional smudge of light. Their knowledge alone told them of the presence of other ships, until a blur of deeper blackness loomed ahead or upon either hand. Then the Third Mate would call some order into the wheelhouse - "Port a little;" "Starboard two degrees;" or would whirl the handle of the engine-room telephone to demand a change of speed.

On every one of the ships nearby there were two like them, and one like the Fourth Engineer, who stood in solitary patience amidst the self-absorbed pounding of the

engines, and those who laboured in the flame-lit darkness of the stokehold or in the dusty glimmer of the bunker lights, with the coal sliding in small rattling avalanches every time the ship rolled. In every ship there were the men who worked or watched whilst the others slept; the waking and sleeping, men and ships, thrusting through the surging darkness in a trust and interdependence unspoken and complete.

The night passed as had so many more, and the day after it and then another night. The ships pushed onwards against the onset of wind and sea, through the grey ~~vista~~<sup>light</sup> of another day which brought nothing new to the vista of tumbling waves and ragged clouds and the ill-assorted mob of ships.

Since there were only two of them, Raven and Flack had to relieve each other at four-hourly intervals. Even though this paid them an extra five shillings a day, this was a source of endless annoyance to Flack; for Raven's part, he did not care. He still enjoyed the novelty of the ship's routine, and revolved a myriad questions within his mind until he could no longer resist addressing one of them to the navigating officer on watch with him.

Mr. Keadwell, the Chief Officer, always answered him with a kind of patient simplicity; the Third Mate would scoff some contemptuous reply, with, if possible, an obscene undertone; the Second Mate, Mungo Maclaren, would turn his formidable head and gaze at him from eyes which

contained an intense and brooding reflection. If he judged the question merited a reply, he would give some gruff explanation; if he did not, he would return a silent stare to the world of tumbling water.

That afternoon, Maclaren had been in a withdrawn mood; and it had seemed to Raven that the watch was dragging more than usual. One of the two gunners on the bridge with him was the one whom the others called Cecil; almost recovered from his sea-sickness, he was disposed to be talkative, and Raven chatted with him until Maclaren grunted without looking at them "Keep yer eyes ootboard an' yer tongues still in yer heids."

The young gunner flushed, pushed out his lips petulantly and whispered "Nasty old beast;" Raven grinned and drifted away to pick up the telescope. With the notion of passing a few minutes he focussed it upon one ship after another, seeing on one a tiny casual figure walking along the deck; upon another a man busily hanging out a string of washing. He moved the glass in a slow sweep around the horizon, along the rim which separated grey sky from grey sea, and at first he hardly noticed the tiny object which appeared in the centre of the lens. He would have passed by it had not some wordless message seemed to flick across the distance between them.

He steadied the glass on the object, unable to relate it to anything in his experience. A ship, it seemed, but what kind of ship? There was a tiny wisp of smoke twirling

away from it, a wisp which in its very insubstantiability seemed portentous; he screwed the tube of the glass in an effort to focus it better and held it firmly against a corner of the wheelhouse. The ship surged upwards upon a rising swell, and in that instant he saw it clearly.

"Christ," he whispered, and he turned round to look wildly at the Second Mate. For a moment, even as he was speaking, he saw everything calm, normal, quite unwarlike; Cecil leaning against the shield of his Hotchkiss gun and patting away a yawn; Maclaren with his hands in the pockets of his overcoat, and swaying easily to the scend of the ship; the background pattern of ships and sea and sky.

"There's a battleship over there," he said hoarsely, and Cecil and the Second Mate looked at him mildly and questioningly as though he had made some commonplace boring remark. Their expressions were changed in the next moment by the sudden urgent glasking of a siren; it came from a ship at the head of one of the columns and they all swung around to look at it. Two flags were jerking up into its halliards, and Raven laid his glass upon them almost automatically. "BG," he read, and the Second Mate repeated calmly and methodically "BG."

"Unknown battleship in sight," he translated from the code book, and then said "Let me have a look through that glass, young feller,"

Raven surrendered it, and then stood looking helplessly round the convoy. The commodore ship was flashing rapidly

at one of the escorts, but the light was not focussed towards him and he could not make out the words; the destroyer was already turning away and starting towards the horizon. Raven could see nothing of the battleship with his naked eye.

"I doubt it's only one of oer patrols," said Maclaren heavily, and slid the glass back into its rack. Raven looked at it longingly but for some reason could not bring himself to take it out again, and then Cecil demanded in a high jerky voice "But what if it's a G-German?"

Maclaren gave him a withering glance and turned away; the three of them stared at the destroyer hurrying towards the horizon, becoming smaller with every second, and then suddenly they saw the battleship again. They did not need the glass this time; it seemed to bob up from beneath the horizon in a tiny dark-grey triangle.

And then the destroyer seemed to check suddenly, turning back towards the convoy in a wild upflung flurry of spray. A huge clot of black smoke mushroomed out of its funnels, and across the wind-wild distance of the hurrying sea they could hear its siren whooping and see the signal light flashing with an urgency which Raven could feel lancing along his sinews.

"Signals!" shrieked Cecil, and Raven snatched the glass out of the rack and trained it on the commodore ship. Hoist after hoist was jerking up into her halliards; suddenly they seemed to come into focus, the colours

becoming sharp and clear so that he could read them off, feeling a kind of pride in himself that even in this moment he could read them and speak their meaning.

The Second Mate did not give him their interpretation, but in a moment he heard the sudden desperate clangour of the alarm-bells sounding throughout the ship. Maclaren was pressing his thumb on the button again and again, so that the hard harsh clamour assumed a fearful imperative urgency which tore at the nerves; Raven heard the feet pounding along the decks and the cries which were part fear and part resentment; apprehension mingling with a kind of startled exasperation at this sudden intrusion of the war into a peaceful afternoon.

All at once the ship which had been so calmly and steadily forging ahead seemed to be swarming with excited men, pulling on clothes and shrugging into life-jackets as they ran to their action stations, shouting excited queries at each other and receiving incoherent answers. The convoy itself seemed to be possessed of a similar excited indecision; some ships were already turning off their course, or even beginning to turn completely around.

The thin insistence of the engine-room telephone persisted like an echo of the alarm-bells, as the Captain hurried up to the bridge with the ladder trembling under his weight. "What is it?" he snapped at the Second Mate, who looked at him sardonically as though pleased at the news he had to tell, and said flatly "There's a Gairman

battleship over yonder."

"What's the Commodore say?"

"I put the signals in the log," said Maclaren, still with that air of having a kind of detached delight in the impending disaster, and the Captain pushed past him with a growl of fury. "1653. BP - Enemy battleship in sight. MR - Scatter. PQ - Make smoke. LO - Set wireless watches, he read in Maclaren's small legible hand, and shouted "Did you tell the gunners to make smoke?"

"I was waiting for you, sir," replied the Second Mate calmly, and Captain Macnamara cried in an outraged voice "Waiting? Are you out of yer head, man? Tell 'em now!"

He hurried out onto the bridge again, finding time to grunt "Get aft - yer no use up here," to Cecil and the other gunner. He snatched the telescope from the rack and trained it upon the battleship, and just as he brought it into focus he saw a sparkling orange flash against the grey bulk. An instant later he heard the long tearing a-a-a-a-a-ch of the shells plunging towards the convoy.

Instinctively, he ducked, but straightened almost immediately, and was in time to see half-a-dozen huge creaming spouts leap out of the water a hundred yards short of the convoy. He pursed his lips beneath his moustache, and with narrowed eyes looked for an opportunity to steer out of the mob of ships which was now turning in all directions. Many of them had dropped smoke-floats already, and the white smoke was pouring from

them in long rolling billows which clung close to the water not yet sufficiently dispersed by the wind to form a single obliterating bank. These scores of dense white streamers, together with the almost solid looking black smoke which the escorts were belching from their funnels as they raced to lay a protective screen before the convoy, combined with the scattering ships to give a bewildering air of unreality to the scene.

A-a-a-a-ch, went the shells again, and amongst the smoke and the confusion of ships the creaming white columns leapt once more, seeming to rise slowly and deliberately to a great height, to poise there for an instant as though in mocking regard of the chaos which they had caused, and then collapsing back upon themselves in foaming maelstroms upon the waves. But not all of the shells exploded so harmlessly in the sea; two of the ships lurched sideways before the recoil of a great eruption of orange flame and clotted yellowish-brown smoke, through which flew a blizzard of large and small fragments which swept ominously and darkly through the air before falling with countless tearing splashes. The stricken ships began to sink almost at once; one of them, struck fully amidships, had a huge tangled hole torn in her out of which poured steam and smoke in a dense tumbling profusion. Raven stood watching her in fascination, forgetting himself for a moment as she drifted past almost obliterated by the smoke around her, and with a kind of agonized sympathy he

saw a little boat slip out from under the smoke, jouncing on the waves and with the black sticks of oars stabbing jerkily at the water.

He could almost feel himself one with the frenziedly-rowing survivors, his back-muscles tensed and strained as though he himself were tugging at an oar, and he gave a great start as a hand gripped his arm. He swung around to see Flack staring at him with a quivering grin.

"Are you all right, lad?" asked his senior earnestly, and before he could answer continued "You stay here for a while - they might need you for any signalling. I'll be in the wireless room. Come and get the lifeboat sets if things get bad."

He turned and scuttled off, bending strangely at the knees and hunching up his shoulders as the harsh tearing screech of the shells ripped through the air again. The great projectiles were aimed so as to drop haphazard amongs the eddying bank of black, brown, and white smoke which was all the raider could now see of the target, but none of them found a mark. They were followed by a pause so long that Raven thought the attack must have ended, and with an almost clinical interest he observed that he was trembling violently. He clenched the bridge rail so that it should not be noticeable, and then fished out a cigarette which he managed to light after the first attempt.

"Hard-a-port," shouted the Captain suddenly, and the

bows swung slowly towards a gap in the hurrying mob of ships. For once unrebuked, the black smoke poured from her funnel as the firemen slung the coal into the furnace; sweating and cursing and hammering with their shovels on the bunker bulkheads for those within to deliver more coal to them. The ship's fabric vibrated as though she herself could feel the urgency of the moment; the engines pounding with a brisk stamping rhythm as the Chief Engineer opened her out as much as he dared and the Second bawled into the stokehold for "More steam! More steam!"

"More steam!" shrieked Paderooski back at him. "Whatta Jees Chrise you t'ink we doing yere - eatink our dinners maybe ?"

The long pause in the torrent of shells persisted, so that in the fading light and the artificial darkness of the smoke many men thought that they had escaped. There was one man, however, who could see that this respite was only the prelude to a new danger. This was the Senior Officer of the escort, who had caught a brief glimpse of the enemy as he dodged out of the smoke-screen for a look. He saw then that she was speeding to outflank the convoy; to get around the smoke-screen and pick off the ships before the light failed completely and while they were still clustered together.

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Nothing could stop the von Moltke but another battleship, and there was no Allied craft of that size nearer than Nova Scotia. Lieutenant-Commander Julian Fox, of the destroyer Chanticleer, knew this perfectly well. He also knew that within half-an-hour the raider would have cut off the escaping ships, and that even in the darkness she could use searchlights and star-shells to pick them off at her leisure. He made his decision almost without conscious thought; a tall and rather stooped man in the middle thirties, with a kindly mournful face, he gave his orders as rapidly and incisively as a gambler making his final throw. It was doubtful whether his torpedoes could sink the von Moltke, but he might at least cripple her until the fleet could catch up with her.

The look-outs on the von Moltke, seeing the Chanticleer burst through the smoke-bank and begin upon her long piercing charge towards them, yelled warningly into their telephones. On the armoured bridge of the battleship, the officers were jerked into a new activity. Admiral Krefft focused the destroyer in his glasses; she looked very small, hardly more than a dark angular shape above the white bow wave which curled away from her bows. An instant later the air shook to the sharp bellowing crack of the ship's secondary batteries, and the destroyer disappeared behind a foaming explosion of spray. It seemed to take a long time to clear,

and the Admiral made an impatient tut-tutting just before the destroyer emerged from behind it again; untouched apparently, and against that background of white churning water and still falling spray seeming to leap forward into a sudden ominous clarity, so that even her signal-mast was visible etched against it.

Very shortly she would be within torpedo distance; a matter of seconds only. Only a lifetime's discipline quenched the angry shout behind the Admiral's lips; he knew that nothing he could do now would affect the skill of his gunners or the efficiency of their control. Between the grey sea and the grey brooding sky, against the streaked rolling cloud of smoke which obscured the convoy, the destroyer plunged towards the battleship in a taut silence which seemed unaffected by the sound of wind and waves. It was a moment which had its own particular symbolism, of the fierce gallant assault in which the power of evil is so often devastated by a lesser strength, and in that moment the Admiral seemed to perceive the reason for his navy's history of defeat; the reason why the only victory which could be hoped for was in the twilit chaos of destruction.

The spray from the last salvo had not fallen before the guns shattered the air again; once more the destroyer vanished, but this time it was in a sudden flame-shot eruption of dark smoke. Again and again the batteries crashed out across the tumbling sea, the slim barrels of the guns seeming to move slowly, almost disdainfully, as their control

trained them on the target; their slickly-greased breech-blocks swung open and clicked shut again upon the slender venomous shells, transformed by the snapping blow of the striker into trapped colossal energy which flung the projectiles out of the muzzles towards that fire-glowing clump of smoke which grew and spread sluggishly over the water.

The guns-crews sweated as they worked; almost without thought, with little conscious motivation except that of following through the drill in which they had been trained for so long. When they were ordered to cease fire they straightened their backs, and some of them could see the remains of their target. The smoke rolled away, sullenly, unwillingly, before the wind, and there was nothing else; only a broad dirty patch of oil upon the waves, a few scattered anonymous fragments of which one or two still burned until they were extinguished by a breaking wave.

"So," muttered Admiral Krefft, and without pleasure turned his glasses back upon the smoke which hid the convoy. The von Moltke had all the time been following the course which he had ordered, and very soon now would be able to turn the edge of the screen. With an impassivity which he did not feel, the Admiral allowed his glasses to hang from their strap and paced slowly to and fro between the others at their station on the bridge. With one part of his mind, he could clearly see the Knight's Cross with Swords in Diamonds, could almost feel the handshake and the compelling hypnotic stare with

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which it would be bestowed upon him; with another, he depicted the messages which even at this moment must be clicking into Staff offices in Liverpool and Halifax, the ships and aircraft which waited and waited for an opportunity such as this, and the great friendless sea which lay between him and the haven of La Rochelle.

His brief reverie was interrupted by an exclamation from his Flag Lieutenant, followed instantly by a tinny excited crackle from one of the loudspeakers. A ship had appeared at the edge of the smoke-screen, appearing for a moment no more substantial than the heavy clinging vapour from which she had emerged; the Admiral could picture the flurry on her bridge as they saw the warship bearing down upon them, no more than a mile or so away. He saw her commence to swing around, in a desperate endeavour to regain the safety of the smoke, and almost without believing it he saw the orange flash from her poop and the ragged plume of spray which leapt out of the water not far short of the von Moltke.

Almost at once, he saw the flickering stab of the gun again, and then heard a clanging crash somewhere beneath him. A splinter slashed through the air with a terrible menacing scream, and then incredibly he saw a long slow curve of tracer bullets, glowing brightly in the dim light, rising from the ship and splashing into the sea nearby. "What!" he exclaimed with a kind of disbelieving exasperation. "Are they mad, these English? Firing at us with - "

He was interrupted by the abrupt gigantic detonation

of the forward eleven-inch guns, the four of them firing at once so that for a brief instant the ship seemed to check to their recoil. There was a definite pause; a moment of waiting during which the Admiral watched expectantly. "Good," he breathed, "very good," as he saw the target disappear behind a great angry welter of smoke. The next instant it blossomed into a tall solid-looking pillar of fire, which sank, rose again, and then fell back on itself to billow outwards with the smoke, filling it with a sullen roaring glow.

The oil-bunkers burning, thought the Admiral, and a sudden deep satisfaction welled up within him. This was his moment, his hour of power during which he could strike and strike again, unchecked and unopposed, and with each blow extract some repayment for the long bitter years. Let there be fire, and death, and the brief choking marriage of seamen with the sea - whatever followed could not rob him of this hour. He would teach them to fire at him with machine-guns, to defy his power with their flimsy courage, and as the battleship rounded the edge of the screen with her last victim smoking and guttering behind her, and all the scattered ships came into view, he snapped "All guns fire independently at suitable targets."

The convoy had not seen the sinking of the Chanticleer; had only heard the thudding of the guns beyond the smoke-screen and believed them to be futilely aimed at themselves. A brief uncertain optimism had pervaded the men on the

escaping ships, abruptly dissipated when they saw the fountain of fire which leapt from the most recent victim, and then a few minutes later saw the battleship appear again, a bulky ominous shape in the windy twilight.

Raven hurried into the wireless room, and when Flack swung around from the instruments to gape up at him he gasped "He's after us again - listen to that!"

It was the hoarse tearing screech of the shells once more, following and mingling with each other in a devilish discordance, with a kind of counterpoint provided by the whistling snarl of the smaller projectiles. The air shuddered to an irregular series of explosions, and Flack's face crumpled like a half-filled balloon. He gulped, and said "G-get a hold of those lifeboat sets, son. Take 'em down on the lower deck, 'n' put 'em in the first of the boats to get away."

Raven bent to drag the lifeboat transmitter and receiver out from beneath the desk. The transmitter was in the form of a large suitcase, weighing about fifty pounds; normally he found it hard to lift, but he pulled it out and hefted it without noticing its weight. He slung the receiver over his shoulder by its strap, and began to struggle out through the black-out curtains with his awkward burden. Just before he left, he asked over his shoulder "What about you?"

"I'll hang on a bit longer," answered Flack. "There's not much we can do, though. The escorts 'll have done all the signalling that's necessary."

Raven nodded and pushed out onto the bridge, where he halted for a moment appalled by what he saw. The cloudy steely blue of the dusk seemed to be illumined in every direction by great drifting bouquets of flame, from the ships which had been struck and which were burning as they sank. It was already too dark to see the battleship, and he glanced despairingly around at the flickering reflections of the flames upon the waves.

His eye was caught by a series of orange flashes in the distance, and he expected to hear the dreadful seeking note of the shells again. Instead, he was shocked by a sudden huge burst of sickly white radiance which burst out in the skies above him, followed by another and another and another until the whole ship seemed to be illumined by a stark phosphorescence, which gleamed off all exposed angles and surfaces and cast an intense black shadow in their shade.

"Coo - just take a look at that!" exclaimed a voice from above him, as wonderingly and curiously as though at a fireworks display. Raven felt himself commence to shrivel up inside, as though his soul were creeping into the most hidden recesses of his body, and he began to stumble down the bridge ladder with his clumsy load. He was almost thrown off his feet by the ship's roll, and felt a savage resentment. He felt that at least the ship and the sea might be quiet when he had so much else to worry about.

On the poop, the Marine gunner braced himself to the same roll. His eye was pressed to the soft rubber guard of the

gun-sight, while his left hand moved carefully on the elevating wheel and his right was curled about the trigger. More than a quarter-century of training and discipline was concentrated into his steady gazing through the sight, and seemed to emanate from him in taut invisible waves which kept the gun's crew poised for his command. He had not received any orders from the bridge, but hardly expected any; the derisive contempt with which he regarded the conduct of merchant ships was making him act on his own initiative. As he silently expressed it to himself, he was going to have a lash at 'em.

All at once he saw the distant flashes clearly through his sights; he made a rapid adjustment to his elevating wheel and sang out the range. The shell was fused, rammed into the breech, followed by the long brass cartridge; as the breech slammed shut on the obsolete quick-firer his hand clenched on the trigger. "Keep 'em going like pints at closing time!" he yelled as the empty cartridge clanged onto the deck, and a moment later clenched the trigger again.

## CHAPTER TEN

## A Pillar of Flame

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Raven's feet almost left the deck at the stunning detonation of the four point seven; with his ears ringing he looked about to see what had caused the noise. As it smacked against his ear-drums again, and he saw the sudden reddish-orange bloom erupt into the dusk, his heart leapt up with an amazed exultation. For the first time, he felt that they were doing something to defend themselves; each of the detonations which followed each other at rapid intervals seemed like hammer-blows struck at the enemy.

Recalling his duty, he commenced to lug the lifeboat sets along the deck again. He had reached the ladder up to the boat-deck, on which a good many of the crew were already engaged in clearing away the boats and making other preparations for abandoning ship (not without the frequent reference to female organs and sexual intercourse which accompany most maritime operations) when he suddenly remembered that he had left his 'panic bag' in his cabin.

This was a small canvas bag containing his personal papers, some cigarettes, sweets, and other odds and ends which he had judged might be useful in a lifeboat, and was similar to that put together by most members of the crew. He hesitated for a moment, then left the lifeboat sets at the foot of the ladder and dashed back to his cabin.

As soon as he began groping his way through the black-out

curtains, he heard a strange shuddering intake of breath. "What the - " he exclaimed, and groped for the switch; the light came on to the accompaniment of a whimpering cry.

Raven stared down at Cecil, crouched in the corner of the cabin with hands pressed over his face. "What the hell are you doing here ?" he asked. "You ought to be back on the poop with the others."

The gunner shook his head, burrowing his face deeper into the frail shelter of his hands. "Can't," he sobbed. "Can't do it...can't...can't...can't...can't..."

The detonation of the gun struck at the cabin door as though it had been hit with the flat of a shovel; it seemed to impel Raven forward to clutch at the youngster's shoulders. "Well, you can't stay here, you bloody fool," he snapped. "We might have to abandon ship at any minute - and anyway you'll get into trouble afterwards. Come on - snap out of it

Cecil shook his head again, twisting his body away from Raven's hands and seeking to push himself yet further back into the corner. "Can't," he blubbered. "It's too terrible. they didn't ought to've sent me..."

There seemed only one way to gain a firm hold upon him, and Raven took it. He twined his fingers into the dishevelled hair, and pulled sharply upwards, so that the young gunner came to his feet with a screeching cry. His face was swollen with tears, and he stood limply staring at Raven with his hands drooping and the tears and snot and spittle drooling down his face, his eyes appearing blind and

his slack lips blubbering out some unintelligible words.

Raven's half-disgusted pity was shot through with the hammering urgency driven home by each explosion of the gun. "You're coming outside," he grunted, seizing the lad and beginning to drag him towards the door. "I can't hang about here, and I'm darned sure that you're not."

Cecil seemed to collapse upon him like a puppet, boneless and inane; Raven was commencing to shake him with exasperation when the whole ship seemed to jolt immensely sideways, under the impact of a huge clanging roar. The mirror fastened to the bulkhead near their heads flew into pieces, flagellating them with splinters; the light went out and Cecil screamed like a dog disembowelled.

Through the thick teak of the cabin door, Raven could hear a fearful medley of sounds; screams, yells, steam hissing, feet pounding along the decks, the gurgle of water and the crackle of flame. He plunged through the black-out curtains towards the door, only to find himself entangled with Cecil's flailing arms and legs. The gunner was now as eager to get out as he had formerly been to stay inside, but somehow they both managed to scramble out onto the deck.

Raven checked and stared at the great tower of smoky flame which silhouetted the funnel, arising from somewhere aft; for a dazzled moment it seemed as though it was all the tumultuous uproar brought to life. Then he was almost knocked down by Mr. Keadwell, leaping down the bridge ladders and hurrying aft with great rubbery leaps of his

sea-boots. "All Hands! All Hands!" the Chief Officer was bawling in a kind of choked automatic roar. "All Hands! All Hands! Fire Stations! All Hands!"

Raven had no recollection of the fact that his own Fire Station was either in the wireless room or in charge of the lifeboat sets; he followed Mr. Keadwell's stocky, bouncing figure along the deck towards the flames. The men who had been clearing the boats away were now milling about in a confused group on the main deck; the deck water lines were open and spouting water everywhere, and he saw the Bo'sun frantically untangling a mass of canvas hose. Everything was thrown into frenzied clarity by the light of that great billowing torrent of upward-rushing flame which poured without ceasing from the poop, and he stood gazing uncertainly around him without knowing what to do.

He saw a man sitting on the hatch, carefully plucking shreds of clothing out the piece of raw meat which had been his shoulder; undisturbed by and as it were aloof from the tumult around him, he craned his head round to peer into the bloody mass, precisely probing and picking with two fingers as he drew out the shreds of burnt and bloody cloth. Suddenly he seemed to realise what had happened to him; he jerked his head up and gazed wildly around, as his mouth opened and began to pump out jets of meaningless sound.

Raven was about to go to help him when the Third Mate grabbed his shoulder, snarling "Be some bloody use, Sparky!"

Here - give us a hand with this!"

He thrust part of a leaking, throbbing hose into Raven's hands, and the two of them began to drag it aft; some pattern was now emerging from the confusion, and others were about them pushing towards the flames. The water from the hoses, which sparkled prettily in the leaping fiery light, at last penetrated the flames and was consumed by them. After a few moments the Third Mate grunted "It's about as much use as peeing on it."

"What happened?" asked Raven above the gale-like sound of the flames, and the Third Mate glanced back over his shoulder. His face was even dirtier than ever; a droplet of jam, from the afternoon tea which he had been enjoying when the alarm first sounded, still clung to the stubble about his lips and glistened jewel-like in the flames.

"What d'you think bloody happened?" he enquired savagely.

"I s'pose you were hiding in a corner somewhere?"

Raven's mouth opened in angry astonishment, but before he could say anything the other man went on "They hit us full on the stern. Must 've set off our ammunition too. All the gunners are amongst that lot, and it must be standing out like the bloody Eddystone. Cripes knows why they haven't hit us again."

This was a possibility which had not yet occurred to Raven; all at once he became aware that he was standing upon an insubstantial hull which surged and swayed to the hissing waves; that the hull was spectacularly aflame and

that it must be a perfect target for further torrents of high-explosive. "Maybe they think that we're not worth bothering about any longer," he shouted in a hopeful quaver, and the Third Mate yelled "Neither we will be if that burns out the steering gear and - "

He and his words were abruptly blotted out by several tons of foaming salt water, which arose out of the sea a dozen yards away, ascended almost to mast-head height, and cascaded down upon the stern of the Austrian Duke. A hideous booming clang resounded through the after-holds, and at the same moment as Raven was squashed down onto the deck by the water he felt it rise up and strike him. For a few moments he thought that he must be over the side; everything was watery darkness full of bruising objects, and when his hands encountered the cold hard roundness of a rail-stanchion he clamped onto it like an oyster to a rock.

Pulling himself upright, he blinked through smarting eyes into a strange greenish twilight; it took him several seconds to realise that it came from a star-shell drifting away astern, and that it was the only light remaining on the scene. A strange wallowing object groped around his feet, caught at his sodden trousers and pulled itself upright; the Third Mate blinked vacantly around. "Jee-zus," he rasped hoarsely. "D'you know what that was? It was another flamin' shell. Missed us by flamin' inches, it did, but it only put the flamin' fire out for us?"

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

## Damage Control

\*

Aboard the von Moltke, the vibration of the last salvo had died away some minutes before; since they had fired at that distant pillar of flame and seen it disappear, no further targets had presented themselves. After assessing the chances of doing further damage against the possibility of a relief force being on its way, Admiral Krefft had ordered that no more star-shells should be fired. Bursting several hundred feet in the air, they would have advertised his presence to enemy warships which might be far beyond the horizon.

In any case, we have done enough, he reflected coldly as the great ship prodded smoothly over the swells. We can give a definite report of so many ships having been sunk, of so many others known to have been damaged, of the convoy as a whole completely scattered and delayed. Too bad it was not an east-bound convoy, so that the fat hulls would have been pregnant with the tools of war, but one could not have everything.

For the first time since leaving Europe, an air of exhilaration simmered through the battleship; as they cleaned up the disorder of action, the crew sang and whistled at their work. Inside the ship, it was warm and secure; the crowded quarters took on a strange feel of cosiness. Outside, the winds whipped at the complex upperworks, whistled in the dirty barrels of the guns; against the long unbroken streamline of the hull, the icy swells arose and broke in vain.

And like a jaguar which slinks around its kill, the vessel swung across and through the remnants of the massacre. Now and again, outlined against a breaking wave, the look-outs saw a mass of wreckage tumbling on the swells; once they passed a lifeboat huddled full of shocked and silent men, and twice heard faint exhausted cries arising out of the dark. But the great ship passed on, and soon changed course and swung away to the south. The turbines whined into their maximum cruising speed, and the von Moltke faced the long beat down to the safety of St. Nazaire.

From this moment on, the hunter had become the hunted; the ships which still remained afloat had only to face their old enemy, the sea. And as soon as a grey sleet-dawn brought a measure of visibility, the men of the Austrian Duke began surveying the wreckage. It appeared that the shell had struck them to the starboard side of the poop, just under the rim of the gun-platform, and exploded upon impact.

The remains of the gun-platform, the gun, and the petty officers' quarters above which it had stood, were now so rusted and twisted with fire and explosion that they looked like a portion of a very old scrap-heap. Beneath them, a black and jagged hole like the crater of a small extinct volcano led down to the crew's quarters.

A conference of officers was now grouped about this hole, gazing down into it and listening to the comments of the Chief Engineer. The Captain, monolithic in oilskins and with beads of moisture on his moustache, Mr. Keadwell like a

worried grocer in his rubber boots, and the Second Mate maintaining an air of secret amused disdain, all listened to the Chief expounding his views.

"She won't answer," growled the Captain stubbornly, as the engineer paused in a flow of technical terms to which he had not paid the slightest attention. "Look at the wake - bloody ship's all over the ocean. There's something wrong with the steering engine, I tell ya."

"Of course, of course," replied the engineer impatiently. "We're lucky that we've got one at all. But I keep on telling you, Captain, we'll have a hell of a job clearing all that raffle away. We ought to have oxygen burners to cut down through that stuff."

The Captain sniffed loudly, and then wrinkled his nostrils at the reek of charred meat which he had drawn in. "Well, we haven't got one," he replied in tones like a wet deck mop. "So ye'd better think of something else."

The engineer raked stubby fingers through his hair, balancing himself to the sullen heave of the stern beneath his feet. "It's simple," said Mungo Maclaren unexpectedly, and they all turned to look at him.

"Oh aye - so it's simple, is it?" enquired the Captain with heavy sarcasm. "So what would you do, mister?"

"Disconnect the steering rods from the gears down to the engine, and then run cables from the after winches to the steering quadrant. Steer the ship with winches," explained the Second Mate. "I did it when I was - when I was on a

ship which had trouble with her steering engine."

He was referring to the long rods which, on an old ship like the Austrian Duke, ran the length of the ship from the bridge to the stern, and through a system of simple gears conveyed the movements of the wheel to the steering engine. There, they opened and shut the valves which made the engine turn the rudder to port or starboard.

The four men gazed down at the steering quadrant, a massive piece of metal in shape like the quadrant of a circle, which acted as a counterpoise to the rudder. "We're lucky that wasn't twisted to billyo," sighed the Chief Engineer, and then said "But we could do it, all the same. We could have it fixed up in an hour or two."

"The men won't like it, having to have a couple of them on the winches all the time, and all their clothes lost in the fire," ventured Mr. Keadwell, and the Captain looked at him as though he wasn't hearing right. "Do 'em bloody good," he grunted, and then said "All right - do it that way. We'll have to stop while we change over, so make it snappy. Tell me when you're ready, Chief."

He turned away and paced deliberately back towards the bridge, his oilskins creaking like some stiff antique machinery. The three men looked after him and then glanced at each other, and the Second Mate's granitic features creased into an ironic smile. "Thank you for the idea, Mr. Maclaren," he told himself mockingly. "Come along to my cabin, and have a tot."

He touched his cap and answered himself. "Thank you, Captain; don't mind if I do," he said, and walked back amidships. The Chief Engineer and Chief Officer watched him for a moment, and then Mr. Keadwell shrugged. "Always said that bloody man was cracked," he remarked a trifle smugly, and walked away in search of the Bo'sun.

When the Bo'sun passed Mr. Keadwell's orders on to them, the crew reacted in the traditional manner of merchant seamen; by delivering themselves of a clattering cascade of curses. They were grouped to the leeward side of the galley at the time, gulping down their breakfast out of any odd pots and pannikins which came to hand; their presence outside made the Cook feel nervous, and he was maintaining a steady aria of obscenity on his own account.

Up to that moment, it had hardly occurred to them that they were homeless and destitute. After the events of the previous evening, they had been in no mood for sleeping anyway, and those who were not on watch had passed the hours roaming about like cats, dozing cat-like in corners which were sheltered from the wind, and scanning the darkness with constant apprehension. The only man who had slept soundly was the one who had been injured, after some rough surgery which had consisted mainly of half-a-pint of rum.

But now, at seven-thirty in the morning, with no further signs of the enemy to worry them and a meal inside them, they were in the mood to dally with a grievance. With the intention of being heard up on the bridge, Costello shouted

"Not a bloody stroke, boys! Where we gonna sleep that's what I want to know? Where we gonna eat, eh? Stuck out here like shags on a rock? Not on yer life!"

"I'll have the skipper's bunk!" piped up Wanker's Doom, and the Bo'sun surveyed them with the hard good-tempered smile of an animal-trainer. "Save yer growls for the shipping-office," he advised them. "You might find someone to listen to 'em there. Come on - let's get cracking."

Still moaning, they trailed after him; quite confident that their wants would be attended to in one way or another, they had an enjoyable cud of discontent to chew over while they were working. An hour or two later, Raven drifted aft to have a look at the damage; he himself was in a sullen mood, as the result of a tongue-lashing which Black had inflicted upon him for "Playing at being a bloody fireman, heck-heck-heck! You're supposed to be a wireless operator, not a ruddy fire-engine!"

He was in time to see the first trial of the jury steering-gear; as the starboard winch clattered, it tautened the cable running to one side of the quadrant, and the rudder swung slowly over. A similar effect occurred when the port winch was tried, and the Chief Engineer signified that all was ready to proceed. It was going to be an awkward business, but at least they would have reasonable control over the steering.

The Bo'sun drifted up to Raven, wiping his hands on a piece of waste. "Well, Sparky," he greeted him. "Lots of

fun for yer first v'y'ge, eh? I seen you on the hose last night." "Went to know? Where we gonna eat, eh? Stuck out here." He nodded and winked with approval, and Raven felt his heart expand with pleasure. "Nasty old mess up aft," Bones continued the Bo'sun. "Caw! Y'ought to've seen what was left o' them poor bleedin' gunners. Put it overboard with a shovel, I did. Mr. Keadwell said we ought to 'ave a burial service, but the Skipper said it'd be like preaching over one of Cookie's roasts of beef."

He cackled with reluctant respect, as his huge hands flicked a cigarette into existence out of an oil-stained Rizla and a hank of tobacco. "Tough ole bastard that one," he continued. "But hey - that young gunner was lucky, wasn't he?"

"Which one was that?" enquired Raven, but already knowing the answer; he hadn't thought about the gunner since they had both clawed their way out of his cabin, but now felt an urgent curiosity.

"Why, that young chap the others called Cecil," said the Bo'sun round his fag. "The Marine gunner had just sent him off with a message to the bridge, a few seconds before the shell hit us. Talk about bloody gilt-edged! All he got was a cut on the face."

Raven's mouth opened, but he said nothing. A few minutes later, he rambled back amidships; he noticed the Chief Steward standing in the midst of a group of voluble sailors and firemen, but passed on into his own cabin. With

thoughts of death and injury brooding in the back of his mind, he was shocked to discover first an upturned pair of feet and then a blanket-shrouded body lying on the padded locker which was dignified by the name of 'settee', but a gentle snore dispelled his fears. He turned back a corner of the blanket, and then laid violent hands upon the sleeping form. "What the hell are you doing in here again?" he demanded furiously, as Cecil blinked and spluttered into wakefulness. "Outside with you, my boy - quick-smart!"

The gunner hunched himself back into the corner of the settee, dragging the blanket protectively back around himself. "The Chief Steward said I was to share your cabin till we got to port," he mumbled. "He's trying to find places for everyone to sleep."

"Well, I dunno how you've got the flaming cheek!" exploded Raven. "And what about this yarn you've been telling everyone? I've got a good mind to -"

Cecil's large eyes regarded him mournfully, awaiting his verdict, but he found himself unable to do anything but wave his arms about and make meaningless noises. "You wouldn't tell anyone what really happened, would you?" Cecil ventured at last, and Raven hesitated. "I dunno -"

"Wouldn't do no good, would it?" the gunner asked softly, and then threw off the blanket and stood up to face him. He was wearing only a pair of underpants, and his body was white and smooth. "After all," he said, "if you start talking about it, people 'll wonder what you were doing in

your cabin, too. Best for us to forget about it, eh?"

Before Raven could reply, he remembered the Third Mate's contemptuous question: "I suppose you were hiding in a corner somewhere?" Cecil saw the uncertainty in his eyes, and pressed on "You wouldn't want to get me into bad trouble, would you? And after all, I could say...well, I could say that you were in here with me all the time..."

Raven's hand flew upwards, and the gunner flinched slightly but did not move. The two of them stared at each other for a moment, until Raven dropped his arm and muttered "You know you're talking bloody nonsense, but..."

Cecil waited for him to continue, motionless except for the sudden flicker of his tongue out over his full pink lips. " - well, I suppose you couldn't help yourself," said the Radio Officer reflectively. "I was scared too."

"'course you were!" said Cecil eagerly. "So was everybody with any sense. It's all right for people like that Third Mate, and the Bo'sun, and all that bunch - they're made for it, you might say. But you an' me - well, we're different, aren't we? I mean - well, we're made different."

He passed his hands down over the smooth and youthful contours of his chest, as though to demonstrate the difference; Raven said feebly "I didn't mean it like that -"

Cecil turned away, still talking eagerly, and began to pull on his clothes. "We'll get on all right, you just wait and see," he said confidently, and then with his voice muffled by the jersey which he was pulling over his head

continued "I'll go an' make us a cuppa tea - the steward said I could get all the things I wanted as soon as I was ready -."

## CHAPTER TWELVE

## From the New World

\*

Now, they had the ocean to themselves, and the Austrian Duke plodded somewhat erratically towards the North American. Only the Captain knew her destination, and it was several days before he condescended to grunt "We'll be altering course to-morrow, Mister. I'll have to take the independent routing for New York."

"New York?" said the Third Engineer when the news filtered down to him, and creased his rubbery face into a look of cunning recollection. "Ah knows a couple o' nice little nooks an' crannies as 'll pay for visiting again. None o' yer two-dollar touches, neither."

"New York!" snarled the Second Engineer, sawing savagely at his breakfast of half-cold, half-cooked liver. "Last place God ever made. Can't even get a decent glass of beer. Frozen spider-spit with a head on it, that's all it is."

He chewed disgustedly for a few moments, then pushed his plate away. "'bout time those Yanks were coming into the war, anyway," he opined. "They might be able to tackle some of these flamin' Jerries then. Seems to be more'n our flamin' Navy, can do, anyway."

Raven listened to them in silence, attempting to swallow the meal without tasting it. Shortly before he had listened to the Cook giving it as his considered

opinion that "The R'yle Navy is finished - FINISHED!" and pounding one greasy hand into the other for greater emphasis. He had been talking to the Chief Engineer and a couple of other men, whom he had seen standing outside his galley; Raven had drifted up to join them and heard the Cook's diatribe. The Chief Engineer had only given his ironical half-smile and stared out across the tumbling November waves, as though contrasting them unfavourably with the ordered rhythms of his <sup>engine</sup> ~~cabin~~-room; soon afterwards the breakfast bell had gone, but the Cook's words still simmered as uneasily in Raven's mind as his breakfast would shortly simmer amongst his gastric juices.

He had learned the meaning of fear, now. His mind had received the first crack through which the corrosion could seep; the constant apprehension which accompanied all men to sea. He understood why men did not care to take off their clothes; why they would tense at the sound of a banging door or of feet running along the deck, and could not relax until they had learned its reason; he understood at last that the true purpose of warfare is to hurt, terrify, destroy, and kill.

All the same he did not want to discuss this, and when Cecil persisted in recapitulating the events of that night he would only grunt or turn away, until the youth snapped pettishly "I don't see why you have to be so snooty, anyway. You've never told why you came diving into your cabin when the firing started ?"

Raven stared at him without understanding. They were both off watch, and there was nowhere for either of them to go except out on the wind-swept deck or in the stuffy little cabin. Makeshift accommodation had been fixed up for the crew in the tween-decks of No.3 hold, but as the sole surviving gunner Cecil was still permitted to share Raven's cabin.

He squirmed uneasily beneath his blankets as Raven gazed steadily at him, and then suddenly burst out "I can't help being afraid! I didn't ask to be here, did I? What right's anyone got to pick me up an' shove me on this dirty old ship to be drowned or - or something?"

He was silent for a moment, and then his blue eyes widened as though with a revelation. "Why - it's - it's crazy, don't you see? And they're doing it all over the world! There must be plenty of others like me - Germans an' Russians an' everything! What right's anyone got to drag us out of our jobs and make us fight each other?"

"Not much good complaining about it," muttered Raven. "It's happened, and that's all about it. All we can do is push on and hope for the best, I suppose."

"All right then, so don't look at me like that!" exclaimed Cecil shrilly, and humped himself round to face the bulkhead. Raven regarded his back for another second or two, shrugged, and got out his writing pad, to commence a picturesque account of the convoy action.

He was writing the last words of this letter (which would

reach his parents so heavily censored that it looked like paper lace) when the Austrian Duke steamed up the Hudson. For some time past he had been conscious of the hooting of tugs and the spasmodic rattle of the engine-room telegraph, but each time he ventured out into the icy wind there had been nothing to see but the flat, dismal shores of Longland Island. He concluded his letter, folded it into an envelope, and decided to take another look outside; the spectacle caused him to stand unconscious of the bustling preparations which were going on all around him.

He remained gazing at the soaring tawny towers, arising out of the pale mist which hovered over the lesser buildings, until it seemed almost as though he could hear them as well as see them; hear them like some majestic symphony of human aspirations.

"Coo, just look at 'em!" said a voice behind him, and Cecil came to hang over the rail at his side. "Who'd of ever thought that we'd be seeing New York, eh? I bet that we'll have some fun here, won't we?"

Raven grunted, unwilling to commit himself to that 'we.' Besides, the city had not yet presented itself as a place for having fun. It seemed as lofty and remote as the upper reaches of some great mountain range; a place to be approached with humility and awe.

"If only I hadn't lost my Number Ones in that fire," mourned Cecil beside him. "I dunno what I'll go ashore in. But we'll manage somehow, eh?"

However, it was not as easy as that. As soon as the ship was made fast, she was boarded by a number of large, solemn, green-uniformed members of the U.S. Immigration Service. They interviewed, finger-printed, photographed, and checked upon every member of the crew, and then left again with their brief-cases and orders that no one was to be allowed ashore until official passes were issued.

These did not arrive for two days, during which a gang of raucous swaggering shipwrights came aboard. To Raven, they all appeared to be made to the same pattern; tight-fitting jeans belted under ponderous bellies, flapping zippered jackets, long-billed caps perched upon Mediterranean curls, and stubbly jowls which quivered to their constant loud-mouthed exclamations. "Gees, lookit what them square-heads did to this old tub," they bade each other as they commenced to cut away the tattered chaos of steel, and the crew's expectations of a long easy lay in port melted as fast as the metal under their burners.

With a noisy belting energy they tore the wreckage apart, and laid the pieces aside to be lifted off by a floating crane. The gangs worked round the clock, with their burners casting haloes of lavender light amongst the rusted steel, and by the time the passes came aboard they were almost finished.

Most of the crew had no shore-going rig but the clothes they had worn during the action, plus various garments

which they had begged from the officers and engineers. All the same they took their passes eagerly, and before long a deputation waited upon the Chief Steward to know if their 'subs' were ready. He gazed at them blearily and stumbled up to see the Captain, returning with the news that "The Ole Man hasn't got the money yet. You'll hafta wait till to-morra."

They were outraged, but there was nothing they could do about it. After tea, they hung dismally around the galley, gazing resentfully at the jewelled towers which stood aloof in the distance; feeling the same restlessness, Raven paced slowly up and down outside his cabin, until a murmur of "Coming ashore?" made him swing around to see Cecil smiling at him.

He was dressed in blue serge trousers tucked into sea-boots, and a leather jacket which Raven identified as belonging to the galley-boy. He was hatless, and his fair curls glistened in the arc-lights; he had pulled the plaster off the cut on his cheek, and it made an angry seam on his smooth skin. "Come on," he said. "I borrowed a dollar off one of the shore gang."

"A dollar? That won't get us very far."

"Pay our subway fares, anyroad. Come on - we'll find our way around."

Raven frowned, hesitated, and then nodded assent. In a few minutes he was ready to go, and they walked down the gangway followed by the envious stares of the others. As

they walked through the vast echoing shed towards the gates, Cecil drew in a deep breath and said "God - it's good to be off that old wreck. I wouldn't care if I never saw it again."

He cast a sprightly glance at Raven, and said "But it's made all the difference sleeping with you, though!"

"What the hell d'you mean - sleeping with me?" demanded Raven, and Cecil tittered "Ow, I didn't mean it that way. I mean...well, it's so different to sleeping down the gunner's fo'c'sle, with all those - "

He checked himself, and after a moment said emptily "Mustn't speak ill of the dead, I s'pose."

They walked on in silence, and asked the gateman how to find a subway station. Raven was content to leave the arrangements to Cecil, who seemed to have developed an airy confidence, and he stared curiously at the dirty, echoing caverns of the subway, the big racketing coaches and the tired, slumping working-folk who travelled in them, seeming hardly fit denizens of the city in whose bowels they travelled.

Cecil nudged him as the train came to one of its periodic halts, and he noticed the sign 'Broadway' upon one of the pillars; they emerged into what seemed like another world, of a myriad neons, countless cars, and a multitude of strollers upon the great broad pavements. He felt dazzled and self-conscious as they joined with them, but Cecil paced along in his rubber boots and with his hands

tucked into his trouser flap as though he had lived there all his life.

In a tone as low as though he was afraid of being overheard by the passers-by, Raven asked "Where are you going?" and Cecil gave him a tolerant smile without replying. He began to look more closely at the cafes and bars which they were passing, as though he was looking for somewhere in particular, and Raven asked more impatiently "Where are you off to, anyway?"

"I dunno," said Cecil, with a chuckling note in his voice. "I guess I'll know it when I find it, that's all."

He made a sudden move down a side-street, and kept moving purposefully ahead until he came to the brilliantly-lit entrance to a small bar. "Now what the hell," said Raven, and then as Cecil pushed open the door he caught his arm and said "You can't go in there."

"Whyever not," asked Cecil coolly. "Our money's as good as their's, isn't it?"

He pushed open the door and walked in; Raven followed nervously without knowing what to expect. The sudden change in light bewildered him; it was subdued and welcoming, with the bottles behind the seemingly endless bar glittering with a self-contained sparkle.

With an easy sway of his hips and shoulders, Cecil strolled along gazing boldly into the faces of people standing or sitting at the bar; puzzled, warm with embarrassment, Raven followed until he came to a halt.

Until the bar-tender came for their orders, he lounged easily against the bar, staring with a kind of sly attention at a couple standing a little apart from the others. The girl, dark, slender, and rather tall, was talking earnestly and with a certain amount of gesticulation to her companion, who was a large man of a mature age. He held himself with the arrogance of a conscious personage, and his heavy sensual face held the fixed smile of an adult at a children's party.

"...that's where you come up against the lay-out problems," the girl informed him, and he nodded in careless agreement. His eyes, which hid in their pouches like bandits in ambush, made a sudden quick foray; he gazed at Raven, dismissed him, and then met the steady regard which Cecil was directing upon him.

A strange fleeting expression crossed his face, as though without warning he had received the password of a secret society; his eyes retreated into their ambush again as the bar-tender arrived and asked "What'll it be, boys ?"

"Oh - er - two half-pints of beer, if you please," said Cecil in a loud and exaggeratedly English accent, and the barman stared at him. "We don't serve no half-pints here, bud," he informed him. "You wanna bottle a' beer, or a glass a' beer ?"

Cecil made a curious helpless gesture, then turned upon Raven. "Oh, I'm sure I don't know," he exclaimed pettishly. "What do you say, Franky ?"

Raven stared at him in disgust, with a four-letter word trembling on his lips, when another voice broke in.

"Maybe I can help," it said in rich and easy tones. "You got any of that imported beer, Louie ? Bass, or Worthington?"

"Sure, Mr. Armentraut," the barman answered in serf-like tones, and the big man ordered "Well, dig it out for the boys."

His eyes crept out from ambush to reconnoitre Cecil, and he asked kindly "Unless you'd like something a little stronger, maybe ? You look as though you've been having a tough time."

Cecil flushed, and his gaze darted away and back again. "Well, that's most frightfully kind of you," he said in the same exaggerated accent. "To tell the truth, I've always longed to try that drink that you call a - ah - highball."

"Sure thing," said Mr. Armentraut. "Set 'em up for the boys, Louie."

He paid for them before Cecil could fumble for his money, and raised his glass. "What'll we drink to ?" he asked rhetorically. "A safe voyage, huh ?"

Raven sipped at his drink in time with the others, and caught the girl's eyes on him. "Is that an officer's suit ?" she asked, and the strange phrase in the unfamiliar accent left him without an answer for a moment. "It's a - er - an officer's uniform, yes," he replied, and her gaze moved slowly over him. After several seconds, her eyes met his,

and she became suddenly animated with confusion. "Gee, I'm sorry!" she exclaimed. "I didn't mean to stare that way."

Suddenly Raven became aware that the person facing him was an incontrovertible young female. The miasma of embarrassment which had hung about him since they entered the bar was swept away by a sharp electrifying sensation which prickled over his skin and made his muscles feel taut and alive.

"That's quite all right," he said robustly, and took another sip of his highball. "Do you often come here, Mrs. Armentraut?"

Her eyes widened, and her lips parted in an expression which was half-amusement, half-dismay. "I'm not Mrs. Armentraut," she said in a low giggling voice, and with a cautious glance at the broad back which was now turned towards her. "My name's Stevenson - Kennet Stevenson. Most people call me Kenny."

She swirled the ice-cubes round in her glass, looking speculatively at Raven. "Mr. Armentraut's my boss," she said. "We've been working late, so he told me that he'd buy me a drink and some dinner. Sure wish he'd hurry up with it, too. I'm starved."

"You're his secretary, I suppose?" asked Raven, and she shook her head. "Nope. I'm a copywriter in his agency, and we've been working on a new campaign."

She went on telling him about her work in advertising,

and he listened dreamily to her plangent Kansas accent, full of unfamiliar stresses and intonations. He felt as though he were absorbing her through all his senses, and it was a shock when Armentraut turned suddenly to interrupt them with "Say, Kenny! You oughta hear what this young feller's been telling me about their trip across! They were in that convoy that was attacked - remember reading about it?"

His manner was startlingly changed. He seemed to have become eager and forthcoming; his eyes sparkled and his heavy face was jovial. He looked at Kenny and Raven as though he was their own age, and clapped his hand down on Raven's shoulder. "Why, from what his buddy tells me, this young man oughta be getting a medal!"

"Oh, rubbish!" burst out Raven, and cast a malevolent glance towards Cecil. Several bystanders had heard Armentraut's remarks, and had turned to stare at the quartet; an elderly man with a long vulture's neck came bobbing forward and said "Par'n me, folks, but I couldn't help overhearing. Sounds like these boys 've seen a little action, huh?"

"I'll say!" boomed Armentraut, and waved towards Cecil. "Go on, kid - you tell 'em. Everyone oughta hear this!"

Cecil gazed modestly down into his glass, and then raised his head with a convincing hesitation. In a low voice, he began to speak, and after a few moments Raven commenced to sweat with vicarious embarrassment. Cecil's tale of the convoy action was a small masterpiece; it was

all quite true, and yet without once mentioning himself he somehow managed to convey that he had played a leading part in it. With his back against the bar, in his costume of leather jacket and sea-boots and with his scarred face and golden curls, he was a poetic picture of the triumph of good over evil; when he had finished speaking there was a long silence, until Vulture-neck stepped solemnly forward and proclaimed "Son, I'm gonna shake you by the hand! And I want you to know that we're with you all the way!"

Raven became conscious that Kenny had slipped her arm through his, and was looking about her with an air of modestly possessive triumph. It was a pleasant feeling, and yet at the same time he wanted to wipe his moist face; he couldn't look at Cecil, and was barely conscious of Armentraut announcing "And now, folks, you'll have to excuse us. I'm going to give these boys a real good dinner, and I guess you'll say they've earned it!"

He began to lead the way out of the bar; as the other three turned to follow him, Raven caught Cecil's eye for a moment. It held an expression of pure triumph; he looked at Raven as much as to say "See? I told you a dollar would get us all we need!"

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

## Love and Money

\*

Armentraut took them to his apartment, which was near the summit of a colossal cliff-like building; two Filipino servants scurried to carry out his orders for dinner, and Raven perched uneasily beside Kenny on the edge of a sofa four yards long. He held a long icy glass in his hand, fronded with mint-leaves and trickling with moisture, whilst Armentraut lay back in an armchair and explained how America would shortly win the war. Cecil sat and watched him with a kind of silent adoration, occasionally sipping at his own glass, but a little later Armentraut stood up and exclaimed "Hey, I just can't stand to see you sitting there in those old clothes. Come along with me for a minute, and see if I can't find you something."

He waved his hand at Raven and Kenny, saying "Enjoy yourselves, kids," whilst Cecil padded meekly after him. Kenny relaxed with a long admiring sigh, looking about her at the opulent room. "Gee...what a place! And I don't suppose I'd ever 've been invited up here if I hadn't met you boys."

She transferred her admiration to Raven. "What you must've been through," she murmured. "I'd like to have you tell me all about it yourself."

Suddenly Raven's baptism of fire seemed to have become a mockery. Up to that moment he had thought about it with

mingled pride, revulsion, and relief, content to know that he had at last experienced war and had come through it no worse than the others; now he could only move uneasily on the couch and give a surly grunt into his drink. Kenny let her hand stay lightly on his knee for a moment, saying "I guess I know how you feel," and then after a thoughtful sip at her drink murmuring "I'm not too happy about your buddy, though..."

Raven glanced sharply at her, feeling that she must somehow have guessed the truth; their eyes met and he asked "What d'you mean?"

Kenny flushed a little, saying awkwardly "Well, Mr. Armentraut's got kind of a - a reputation, you know...of course, I wouldn't say anything. Prob'ly it's only hearsay, anyway...you know that kind of jealous gossip that gets around? He's a mighty successful man. But what with your buddy being so good-looking and all..."

She peeped sideways at Raven as though to see how he was taking it, burying her face in the fronded rim of her glass; he gave a coarsely laughing exclamation of "Don't you worry about him! He can take care of himself...when he's ashore, anyway."

Her eyebrows lifted, but before she could say anything the other two came back into the room. Cecil advanced towards Raven with a beaming smile, demonstrating the pale blue pyjamas and the heavy silk dressing gown in which Armentraut had arrayed him. "Like them?" he asked

coquettishly. "Isn't it lucky that Mr. Armentraut had something my size ?"

"Now, son, I told you to call me Otto," said Armentraut in injured tones, and then glanced towards the Filipino who had moved silently into the room. "Dinner's ready, huh ? All right, folks - let's eat."

Cecil chattered gaily throughout the meal, comparing the savour and richness of the food with their meals aboard ship, but Armentraut seemed to become more and more abstracted. His eyes had retreated once more into their lairs, from which they peered calculatingly at Kenny and Raven, and no sooner had the last cups and glasses been cleared away than he stood up with an artificial laugh. "Say, I've just had an idea!" he said. "Franky, why don't you take Miss Stevenson home and then come back and pick up Arthur ? She's got a long day ahead of her to-morrow - haven't you, Miss Stevenson ?"

He looked at Kenny in a way which did not allow any answer, and then pulled out a bill-fold. "I know you guys are short till you get paid, so here's a little for car-fare," he said, and tucked a folded note into Raven's breast-pocket. "I'll have the boy call you a cab, and it'll be waiting for you downstairs."

Almost before they knew what was happening, the two of them found themselves dropping swiftly downwards in the lift; Kenny glanced at Raven's angry face, and then laughed merrily. "Don't take it to heart," she said. "We

didn't want to stay with them, anyway."

"I don't want his dirty money," fumed Raven, and plucked the bill out of his pocket. It was for twenty dollars, and Kenny caught his hand as she thought that he was going to toss it away. "Ah-ah," she cautioned. "I never pay my own way home!"

He grinned reluctantly as they walked out into the waiting cab; the drinks he had taken emboldened him to slip an arm around her as it drove away. She leaned back against him without protest; they looked at each other, with their faces strangely lit by the myriad flicker of the neons, and smiled with a kind of contented expectancy.

In a street of quiet old buildings which stood in the shadow of the skyscrapers like toadstools under trees, she led him up two flights of stairs to her apartment. "I was darned lucky to find this place," she told him, turning on lights to reveal the small snug rooms with their loaded bookcases and well-used furniture. "It costs the mint to live up to New York, and I sure couldn't stick a rooming-house."

She made brisk tidying-up movements, disappeared for a moment and came back without her coat and hat, and said "I'll make us a drink - or maybe you'd sooner have coffee? And then I want to hear all about it over again. Gee, it makes the war come real close, meeting someone like you. What'll it be, huh? A drink, or coffee?"

"Coffee, please," he answered, and she said "Coming

right up." He dropped into an arm-chair, and began glancing through a bulky volume entitled "How to Write Advertising that Sells."

"I bet you were glad to step on land again," she sang out cheerfully from her little kitchenette, and he answered her with a grunt. By this time, he did not want to talk about it; Cecil's performance had dragged a snail-like smear across the whole experience. When she returned with the coffee, she perched on the arm of his chair and commenced a busy chatter on the details which she had already heard, asking him questions to which he replied so baldly that she finally dried up, and they sat on in awkward silence. The ringing of the telephone bell made them both start, and she took off to answer it like a sprinter from his mark.

"Hallo," she said. "Oh, Mr. Armentraut...ye-es... oh, he's fine...I guess so...yeah...okay, I'll tell him... yes, sir...okay...g'night..."

She replaced the instrument and looked at him with eyebrows raised. "That was the boss," she said. "Says he'll take care of taking your buddy back to the ship, and you're to take a taxi back with what's left of his money. Okay?"

He nodded, standing up, and she gazed at him uncertainly. "You want to go right now?" she said, moving towards him, and then "But I guess you must be tired."

She was near to him now, and he stood paralysed with

embarrassed desire. To him, she was a woman of experience, separated from him by far more than three or four years of age; the way she looked at him invited something, but he could not be sure what it was.

Suddenly he made an abrupt and clumsy movement towards her, bumping into her and putting his arms around her at the same time; she stiffened, and then relaxed with a smiling exclamation. "Why, Franky," she said, as he tried to push his lips against hers; she seemed half-amused and half-uncertain, but all at once she not only accepted his kiss but returned it with a sudden thrusting vehemence. For a long moment she pushed herself against him, and then as suddenly pushed herself away; he looked at her giddily and she gave a shaky laugh.

"It must be the uniform, I guess," she told him. "Now you really do have to go."

"Shall I - shall I see you again?" he asked, and they exchanged a long seeking glance before she nodded gravely. "Sure - why not? Here - give me a ring at the office."

She found a business card and handed it to him, and then unlatched the door. "Now then, sailor, on your way," she told him cheerily. "Before you get me a bad name with the neighbours."

The door closed behind him, he stumbled down the stairs, and after wandering around for a little while managed to find a cab. He returned to the ship with his thoughts as luridly confused as the neons which flashed by the

taxi windows, and found that the metallic uproar of the shipwrights was still going on; the ship appeared incredibly littered and dirty, and a bunch of men brewing tea in the galley hailed him in to tell of his experiences.

"Did you get yer end in, Sparky?" leered the Third Engineer, and guffawed as Raven flushed. "It's the uniform as does it every time," he told the others, and the Bo'syn poured a mahogany-coloured stream into his cracked pint-pot. "We'll all need bloody uniforms if the skipper doesn't come across with some cabbage," he grumbled. "We can't stick on this old hooker every night."

"The old bazztard 'ud better have ut to-morra," opined Costello grimly. "Or there'll be one sailor less in the bloody packet."

"You won't get far in New York, sonny," the Third Engineer told him wisely, and Costello's hard red face set into a sneer. "Don't you bother your arse about that," he replied. "There's plenty places I know where to go."

He sipped from his mug, set it down on the fat-spattered stove, and took half a cigarette from inside his cap. "Matter o' that, there won't be any call for it," he muttered after a moment's brooding contemplation. "If he don't come across with ut to-morra, we'll find a way to make 'im."

Old Stanley, peering learnedly over a copy of the 'Herald-Tribune,' chirped "There's no justice for a sailor-man, b'y. They can do anything to you but put you in the family way."

The semi-serious argument rambled on, and Raven drifted out of the galley, stood for a few moments yawning and shivering out on the littered deck, and then went to his cabin and turned in. He slept heavily, half-awakening at some time in the small hours when Cecil crept into the cabin; when he opened his eyes at seven-thirty, the gunner was already sitting up amongst a turmoil of grubby blankets. He looked as fresh and alert as though he had slept for twelve hours, but his eyes slid guiltily away from Raven's.

He had turned in dressed in nothing but his underpants; he stretched out his arms with a voluptuous movement, and looked at himself with appreciation. Still without looking at Raven, he said with a kind of chuckling challenge "I told you I'd see us right, didn't I? New York's not so very different from London, after all."

Rubbing shaving cream into his face, Raven could see the smooth white shoulder reflected in the mirror. "Little ponce," he grunted, and Cecil chuckled again. "Wrong word, honey," he commented. "Your education's been neglected."

He gave a simpering shrug, and then murmured "Gee, but Otto's a wonderful man. He says he can do a lot for me, too."

"Such as what?" asked Raven. "Get you a medal for saving the ship, I s'pose?"

"Now, now, don't be sarky," answered Cecil gaily.

"Just for example, he's going to give me a try-out as a photographer's model. He says that all the advertising agencies use a lot of photographer's models, and after the war he'll - "

"The war's not over yet," Raven interrupted savagely. "Neither's this voyage."

For an instant, a strange expression passed over Cecil's face; like that of a man who sees a ghost but knows how it may be exorcised. Raven took no more notice of him, but huddled on his clothes and left the cabin; as the door slammed, Cecil stuck out his tongue and made a horrible grimace.

After breakfast, Flack told Raven off to service the batteries; standing over him as he manipulated the hydrometer, topped up the cells and greased the terminals, he cross-examined his junior on what he termed his 'night's drift'. Hating him fiercely, Raven was waiting for the time when he could nip ashore and ring up Kenny at her office; when dinner-time came he gulped down the soggy food without tasting it, hurried out of the saloon, barely noticed Captain Macnamara as he passed him on the gangway, and ran through the echoing warehouse in search of a telephone.

As the dialling tone burred in his ear, he gripped the instrument in a sudden cold panic of apprehension. What if last night had been only a dull stitch in the bright tapestry of her days? What if she had almost forgotten him already?

The phone clicked in his ear, and her voice spoke in such a

businesslike way that his tongue went dry. "Is that you, Kenny?" he croaked, and she said at once "Why, hal-lo! Gee, I've been wondering all morning if you'd call!"

The sun came out and shone within his clouded mind; a gentle sweat burst out all over him and a sort of poetry quivered along his tongue. But all he said was "H-have you? I've been busy, you know, and -"

"Oh, I guess you have," she said soothingly. "I'll bet you've got a heck of a lot to do, getting that old ship in order again."

The single stripe on his arm assumed a new radiance, and he said confidently "I won't be on duty to-night, though. D'you think we could - er - well, sort of get together, so to speak?"

"Waal...that depends on what you mean by 'get together,'" she chuckled, and he grinned like an anxious dog. "Okay," she said in a different tone. "Why don't you meet me around six-thirty? You know where Madison Avenue is?"

She gave him the directions, and he walked hazily back to the ship. He had mounted the gangway and taken several steps towards his cabin before he realised that something was amiss, and he slowed his pace to tread hesitantly into the mob of men which was hanging about amidships. All the crew seemed to be there, standing around with their arms folded against the cutting breeze from the river, and with a peculiar hang-dog defiance about their expressions.

The Bo'sun was sitting on the hatch a little apart

from the others, watching them from under the brim of his felt hat with the two brass grommets let in for air holes, and Raven moved up beside him to ask what was going on.

"They want their dough," he said with a sardonic grin.

"They saw the Ole Man come aboard after dinner, and they want to know where the cash is."

## Modes of Persuasion

\*

At that moment, Costello was standing in the Chief Steward's doorway, telling him to go and summons the Captain. The Chief Steward, who had been engaged upon sketching in the pubic hairs on a photograph of a winsome but depilated nude, stared up at him with his tongue still projecting from one side of his mouth. "But I can't do that," he protested. "The ole bazzard's still having his dinner."

"Are you going?" Costello asked quietly, and the Steward shrugged, tucked his nude under a stores-list, and trudged up the stairs to the Captain's quarters. Costello went back out on deck, staring at the others with the hard contempt of a leader who distrusts his material, and Wanker's Doom giggled nervously. "Did you get it?" he asked, and Costello swung a half-playful punch past the lad's ear. "In the bag," he growled.

Raven stood uncertainly beside the Bo'sun, feeling himself out of place and yet unwilling to push his way through the crowd to go to his cabin. A voice amongst the shipwrights working aft gave vent to a stream of curses, followed by a resounding clang of metal, and at the same moment the figure of the Captain loomed in the semi-darkness of the doorway into the officers' accommodation. He came into the doorway, standing just behind the door-sill, and gazed silently out

at the waiting crew.

For a long moment they gazed just as silently back at him, and two or three of them cast sideways glances at Costello. But the man who stepped forward was Big Cyril the fireman, raising his hand towards his broken-peaked cap. "Afternoon, Captain," he said pleasantly, and the Captain stared back at him without response.

"We was just wondering what you was doing about our money, essetra," continued Big Cyril in the same pleasant tone. "We've been in port a two-three days now, an' the lads are wanting a run ashore."

The Captain said nothing. His eyes remained fixed upon Big Cyril, surveying him like a stern father who is not yet roused to wrath, and then glanced briefly at the expectant crew. "Is that all?" he said at last, and Big Cyril shuffled his coal-dust clotted boots. "Why, no," he said. "We're still wondering about our clo'es. We've only got what we stand up in, and it's getting pretty cold. We understood we'd get a special grant from the Gov'ment, or the like o' that."

The Captain tugged at his moustache, as though deciding whether this statement deserved an answer. Finally he replied "I've been fixing it up with the Ministry of War Transport. There'll be a ship-chandler coming aboard, and he'll take your orders up to a hundred and sixty dollars a head. That's the maximum you're allowed in compensation. I'm not going to give it to you in money, or you'd piss it

up against a wall."

"And what about our money, Cap'm ?" enquired Big Cyril, and the Captain answered "Anyone that's got it in the ship can have five dollars. That's the most I'll allow."

A passing tug-boat hooted tauntingly, and Big Cyril shuffled his boots again. The Captain did not give him a further chance to speak. Drawing a ponderous gold watch from the waistcoat of his blue shore-going suit, he glanced at it and grunted "Two minutes past one. Time you were all turned to."

He raise his head and swept his stern far-seeing glance over the crew, and they stared back at him with serf-like resentment. None of them had the resolution to utter the words which stumbled around in their minds, and he gave a dismissing nod. "That's all," he said, and began to turn back into the alleyway.

"That is NOT all!" shouted a voice, and he looked back with narrowed eyes. "Och, it's you again, is it ?" he asked with an almost humorous intonation, and Costello answered "Yes, it's me again, and I've got a few things to say to yah."

"And I'm not disposed to listen to 'em," snapped the Captain, and turned his back completely. Costello hesitated for a second, and then charged through the crew to the doorway. His clutching hand just brushed the old man's shoulder, and the Captain swung around with a sharp cry of "That'll do now - I'm warning you!"

"What sort of a way's this to treat a crew ?" shouted

Costello. "What sort of a cut will you be gettin' outa them shiphandler's bills ? I demand to see the Consul!"

"Get back aft where you belong!"

"There's no bloody aft to get back to, you silly old squirt!"

"That's enough! I'm warning you for the last time!"

"Stuff yer warnings! Will yah listen to reason for a change ?"

The two men glared at each other, and Costello pushed his face forward to shout "We'll not be having that shiphandler's junk for the worth of our money! We know the way it is! Sell us a one-dollar shirt for three dollars; one for you an' two for him! Be honest for once in yer rotten life, ye belly-robber! Give us our money!"

"I'll have you in court for this! Will ye stop your - "

"No I will not! An' what's this about only five dollars a man ? I've got six quid coming to me this minnut, an' that's more'n twenty dollars in anyone's language! We've been on this rotten old bucket for - "

"I don't care if you've been on it for a year! It's up to me to decide how much money you're getting, an' that's the law!"

"Bad luck to the law! That was all right for them old windjammer days you was dragged up in, but there's a war on now! We've been through plenty to get across here, an' I'm tellin' yah we mean to have our rights!"

For a bewildered instant the Captain felt that he could

hear the sound of the sea; the rage and roar of it seemed to be mounting in his ears as he stepped forward to push Costello back onto the deck. He glimpsed the avid faces of the crew watching the scene as Costello stood squarely before him, and heard as though through a gale of wind the words "Don't you lay yer hands on me, mister, or you'll be getting more'n you bargained for!"

Captain Macnamara opened his mouth to reply, but found that the words were blocked in his throat. For a wild dizzying moment it seemed to him that he had gone back almost fifty years; that he was himself a young sailor again, struggling for a hand-hold in the rigging of a ship which swooped insanely down between the greybeards of Cape Horn. The tumult of the sea roared ever louder in his ears; the deck rose and fell beneath him and he raised both hands with their fingers clawing and clutching for a non-existent spar. "Hold...fast..." he croaked, and toppled forward onto the deck.

Costello stepped backwards with an oddly graceful movement, standing poised on the balls of his feet like a matador staring down at the expiring bull. The Bo'sun, who up till then had remained sitting on the hatch and watching events with the air of a critic at a first night, jumped up and shouldered his way forward, reaching the Captain just as Mr. Keadwell came bustling out of the accommodation.

"Now then, now then, what's going on here?" he demanded fussily; the Captain gave a dreadful slobbering moan and

flapped his hand against the grimy deck-plates. Mr. Keadwell made a tutting noise and knelt down beside him, and then glanced up at the faces which were pressing themselves gapingly closer. "Here, you, Bo'sun, and you two - give me a hand to get him in his bunk," he ordered, and then saw the Chief Steward peering out of the pantry door. "Steward, get hold of a doctor - quick," he said. "The Old Man's taken bad. Stroke, I shouldn't wonder; my old auntie looked just like this when she went down. All right, lads - get a hold of him. Steady does it - that's the way..."

They wrangled the sagging bulky body up into the Captain's quarters, and after a while a sour-faced doctor with rimless eyeglasses and a little black moustache came picking his way up the gangway. His examination was brief, and as the grey chill of the afternoon turned into snow the crew watched the Captain being carried down into an ambulance. "That's the last we'll see of him," grunted the Bo'sun to the Carpenter, an elderly flat-faced Finn, and the latter answered "Ya - you never get no good out o' dem hospiddles. What yeou reckon now? Old Keadie be Captain, maybe?"

"Maybe," said the Bo'sun, and a sailor beside him asked "What about our money, Bose? You reckon the Chief Officer'll dish out anything?"

The Bo'sun wiped a snowflake off his hand. "I dunno," he said thoughtfully, and then "No harm in asking, is there?"

He tramped ruminatively amidships, finding as he had

expected that the Chief Officer and Chief Steward had returned to the Captain's quarters. He stood in the open doorway, pulling off his hat and staring at them without speaking, until Mr. Keadwell glanced up over his glasses and asked "What is it, Bo'sun ?"

Then, with a cautious smile, he nodded towards the tarnished stripes on the Chief Officer's sleeves. "I reckon you'll have to be putting up another one soon," he said slyly.

"Eh ? Another one ? What d'you mean ?" asked Mr. Keadwell, and then gave an embarrassed grin. "Oh no," he said. "It's a bit too soon to be thinking of that yet."

The Chief Steward looked at the Bo'sun , and then said with hoarse eagerness "Don't you worry about that, Mister. They won't be bringin' that old - old gentleman back agin."

Mr. Keadwell stared at them, and then cast a long appraising glance around the cabin. It was twice the size of his own cluttered little box, and had a sleeping-cabin and private bathroom attached. "H'm," he said, and then with a half-wistful intonation "Never been in command yet. I was in line for it once just before the Depression, but then...."

He shrugged, and the Chief Steward drew in his breath sympathetically. "You need a tot, I reckon," he said. "You'll have plenty of worries now, and this is only the start of 'em."

He bustled about finding a bottle and glass, and the

Bo'sun's nostrils quivered slightly at the aroma of good Scotch. "Go on - get that down yer," the Chief Steward urged Mr. Keadwell. "Do you a power o' good."

The Chief Officer pushed back the spectacles which were slipping down his nose, and looked doubtfully at the glass. Pleasant visions were shimmering in the background of his mind; of an increased allotment for his family back in Bootle, and a ship run as he wanted it; of all night in his bunk, and other perquisites galore...

He sipped cautiously, took off his cap, and laid it on the green baize table-cloth. "Excuse me bothering you just yet, Captain," said the Bo'sun in wooing tones, and he glanced up sharply. But both men were looking at him seriously, and he inclined his head in a manner which said that he was making a tentative acceptance of the title.

"...but the men are wondering if they could have a few bob to go on with," the Bo'sun continued. "Captain Macnamara was going to give them something, but..."

Mr. Keadwell sipped again, and frowned. The advance of money to crews in port was a perpetual bone of contention. According to the Merchant Shipping Act, the Captain was not obliged to advance them anything against their pay-off, but no crew-member could ever see why he shouldn't have every penny which was due to him.

"Well..." he said warily, and the Bo'sun eyed him like a burglar faced with an unusual lock. "The lads have had a rough time, Cap'm," he offered. "Pretty hard luck on 'em if they have to wait till things are straightened out again."

"Aye, an' it's Friday night, too," said the Steward portentously, as though that made a powerful difference. But Mr. Keadwell said nothing; only sipped and sipped again, with a deep frown curdling on his broad honest face. The pleasant visions had vanished like a mirage; instead, he was seeing the uncharted reefs which could wreck any Master's career.

The silence lengthened, until at last the Bo'sun eased his hat back onto his head and muttered "Oh well...s'pose it can't be helped."

He turned to go, but Mr. Keadwell said "Wait a minute. I s'pose they'd all have ten dollars coming to 'em?"

"Oh sure!" exclaimed the Chief Steward with a loud false heartiness. "There'd be no trouble about that!"

"All right then. I'll give 'em ten dollars each, and they can have more later if they've got it coming to them."

He drained his glass, and said in a hunted way "Can't do better than that, can I? I've got to have a chance to look at the accounts."

The Chief Steward raised his hand as though he was about to slap Mr. Keadwell on the back, but decided to scratch his ear instead. "I'll give you an 'and to sort it out," he said warmly. "'ve you got the keys to the safe, mister?"

The Bo'sun dismissed himself, hurried down the stairs and out onto the deck, and grabbed hold of the first man he encountered. "Ten dollars each," he snapped. "Pass the word to hurry along, before the old bleeder changes his mind!"

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN (15)

## A Night's Drift

★

"...and so I suppose old Keadwell's the Captain now," concluded Raven, and Kenny looked at him over her coffee-cup. "You sure have fun on that old ship of yours," she commented. "All that fuss over a measly five dollars. I guess we'd better take care of your pocket while you're in port."

"I've got enough," he said indignantly, and she reached her hand across to him with a smile. "I know, honey," she said. "I just mean that you can have a good time in N'York without spending a heap of money."

She noticed his sudden change of expression, and followed his gaze down towards her hand. "Why," he said slowly, "I never noticed that before. I didn't know you were married."

Her smile twisted, and she said with forced insouciance "Gee, but men are slow to catch on. That's about the first thing any woman notices about another one. But married's not the word, honey. It just didn't take."

"You mean - "

"Yep. I guess he found that someone else's bed was softer than mine."

The cynical expression caused him to flush awkwardly, and her smile softened again. Collecting her bag and gloves, she glanced around the restaurant and said "Anyway, let's start saving your money. We've got a party to go to to-night, and it won't cost us a cent. Two of our people 've got themselves

engaged, and it's open house."

He followed her out of the restaurant and along the snow-drifting street to a subway station, since she refused to allow him a taxi. The clattering ride, and another walk, brought them to a street of apartment houses; Kenny rapped on a door which was flung open by a bulbous man with a beard. "Come in, folks, come right in," he bawled. "And what's this you've brought with you? A sailor? Just what we needed to give us some local colour!"

Raven walked beside Kenny into a room full of highly-articulate men and women, standing, sitting, or lying on the floors and furniture. As far as he knew, Raven never met the people for whom the party was being given; someone pushed a drink into his hand, someone else sat down beside him, and Kenny seemed to disappear amongst the whirls and eddies of people. "British, aincher?" said a twanging voice in his ear, and he glanced round to see a man with a remarkably sharp face peering into his own. It was something like a paper dart; all point and profile.

Raven nodded, and Dart-Face twanged: "I've gotta theory about this war that you fellers are fighting over there. You're still fighting the Napoleonic Wars, see?"

He sighted at Raven along the point of the dart, as though preparing to launch it at any signs of disagreement, but when Raven only looked back at him over the rim of his glass he continued "Yes, sir, I've given it a lotta thought. Ever hear what Bismarck said in 1854? Well, sir, he said - "

The twanging voice plucked on, and Raven sipped his drink and looked for Kenny. Once he caught sight of her with her head thrown back, laughing at something to her by a sly little dwarf of a man, and he felt a fierce twinge of jealousy. But his attention was distracted by the problems of a young woman who was attempting to keep her bosom within her peasant blouse with one hand, hold a drink in the other, and simultaneously ward off the approaches of a dignified gentleman with a moist and earnest eye. When he looked again, Kenny had gone, and he let his gaze drift aimlessly over the grimacing faces and gesticulating hands. Someone filled his glass again, and as he drank he felt a brief wonder that this could be going on whilst the great frenzied ocean lay at the river's mouth.

" - and so a'course they came to 1914," twanged the remorseless voice in his ear, and then it and all the other voices came to a slurring halt. "Judas," said Dart-Face. "It's the Great White Father himself."

The crowd parted like waves before a liner, and Raven saw Armentraut pacing slowly forward with Cecil a step or so behind. He moved with downcast eyes and a kind of grave-simper fixed upon his face, like the sultan's favourite appearing before the court; Armentraut led the way to a couch standing against the wall, and the four people upon it scattered like chickens before a fox.

"Who th' hell is that piece of velvet-tail that he's got with him?" muttered Dart-Face, and Raven held out his glass

for a refill. "Some little ponce, I s'pose," he said with deep satisfaction, and swigged at the musty-tasting Bourbon.

"Waal, as I was saying," recommenced Dart-Face, and Raven pleasantly "Stop talking crap. This is supposed to be a party."

Dart-Face shot him a startled look, and then said "Gee, you talk real American. Let's whoop it up, kid."

He promptly grasped a bottle from a wandering guest, topped up their glasses, and in a few minutes raised his voice in a jews-harp rendition of "Maisie was Queen of the Cat-House, but she wouldn't Wear Lace on her Drawers."

"Say, that was all right," said Raven experimentally, and Dart-Face said "You're okay too, kiddo. First time I knew the English were human."

Someone began tickling Raven's neck, and he peered around to see Kenny. "See your buddy over there?" she enquired, and he answered "Don't call him my - hic - buddy. Thish my buddy."

"Darn tootin'," said Dart-Face. "Let's try a couple choruses of 'My Ole Baby's Belly's Gettin' Bigger Every Day.'"

"Why, Mr. Krag," said Kenny in shocked tones, and Dart-Face said "Hi there, Mrs. Whosit. Why don't you loosen up a little? Haven't you met my British buddy here?"

He raised his voice again, and Kenny slid down onto the couch beside Raven. "Sure you're okay on that stuff?" she asked as he clipped his arm around her, and he answered "Sure I'm sure. Why don't you looshen up a li'l, baby?"

The lights seemed to fuse together in a myriad flashing rainbows, and then to drift slowly apart again. With a strange cold corner of his mind, he saw the rolling clouds of smoke which billowed over the sea....the staggering lurch of a stricken ship as it poised for the last plunge.

The vision passed, and he clutched tightly at the reassuring warmth of Kenny as she half-lay against him. Some great philosophical revelation seemed to be trembling just beyond his grasp; a key to the whole mystery of life which could hold such torments and such ecstasies. With inward-looking eyes, he held out his glass again.

Meanwhile, the officers and crew of the Austrian Duke were having their first run ashore, and around midnight they began to return aboard. First came the Carpenter, who came shuffling up the gangway laden with two heavy shopping baskets, like a faithful suburban husband returning home. The only difference was that the baskets were full of cold canned beer.

Next came the Donkeyman, a tiny wizened fellow like a worn-out old jockey, who wavered in and out of the dockside lights carrying on a venomous whispered argument with himself. He was overtaken and passed by a bellow of roistering voices emanating from the Third Mate, Chief Steward, and Third Engineer, who lurched, stumbled, and cursed an erratic path towards the foot of the gangway.

When all was quiet again, the Fourth Engineer came strolling along with one hand caressing his moustache, as he pondered

his chances with the waitress who had served him in an all-night restaurant. Before he reached his cabin, a long straggling group of sailors and firemen commenced tacking towards the ship, one or two of them pausing to vomit up the despised Yankee beer before they faced the long climb aboard.

One by one they returned, to be met with envious and ironical remarks from those who kept the watch aboard. Mr. Keadwell peered out of his cabin at the sound of crashing utensils from the galley, and the yell of "Who called the Cook a bastard?" answered by a chorus of "Who called the bastard a cook?"

He stood there for a few contemplative moments in his old flannel dressing-gown, wondering whether to interfere. There was another crash, and he shrugged, turning back into his cabin. They've had a hard time, he thought, and then as he was drifting off to sleep he heard measured steps pacing down the alleyway, a fumbling at the Second Mate's door, and a few seconds later the protesting squawk of bunk-springs as Mungo Maclaren collapsed fully-dressed onto his bed. Funny chap, ruminated Mr. Keadwell as sleep swirled around him like a Grand Banks fog; same in every port, goes ashore by himself, comes marching back as solemn as a parson...you'd never think he'd taken a drop and yet he's...wonder what there is behind him...prob'ly just like me except...

In the Chief Engineer's cabin, the Second Engineer tipped up the remains of a bottle of whisky for which they had sent ashore, voting it too cold to be worth the bother of

dressing up. So they had enjoyed an interesting technical discussion on the demerits of motor-ships, the idiocy of deck-officers, and the superiority of Liverpool over Glasgow as a ship-building community. "Awww," yawned the Second. "Wonder how much longer these flamin' Yanks 'll be fixing us up ?"

"Not more'n a few days at this rate," said the Chief Engineer round his pipe. "And then I s'pose they'll start pushing cargo into us."

"Any idea where we're going ?"

"Not a clue. Wouldn't be home for Christmas, anyway. Here it is December the fifth already."

The Chief poked a match-stick round in the charred bowl of his pipe, and continued philosophically "Soon be another year. Nineteen forty-two, eh ? Wonder what that'll bring us ?"

"One thing you can be bloody certain of, it won't bring the Yanks into the war," said Peterson. "I'll just have a look down below before I turn in."

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN (16)

## All Hatches Working

\*

Raven awoke with a start, his eyes seeking for a reference point amongst the dimly lit details of the little room. A soft hand laid upon his side brought recollection surging back, and he turned over to draw Kenny tightly against him. "Oh God, I do love you," he said in a protesting moan, and she smuggled against him with a sleepy giggle. "Not love, just imagination," she told him, and then shivered deliciously as he passed his hand along her smooth flanks. "Is that imagination?" he enquired, and she crooned "No, expectation...

A little later she pressed her tousled head into the warm curve of his shoulder, and mumbled "How much longer 're you going to stay off that old ship of yours? Won't they be looking for you?"

"I've only been adrift one day," he told her. "Or one day and two nights. And it was Saturday yesterday, anyway. I don't suppose that they even missed me."

She yawned, saying "I reckon you'd better go back to-day, anyway. I've got to do my laundry."

"I'll help you," he said hopefully, and she answered "Give yourself a break, honey. We'll have plenty more time. How's about putting the coffee on?"

Unwillingly, he crept out of bed, and then began to enjoy the domesticity of making coffee and toast, and taking it back to the bedroom to share with her. He still hoped that

she might relent, and managed to stall off his expulsion until lunch-time, but after that she shooed him out of the apartment. Once out in the cold world, his confidence began to evaporate, but in the event his return was met with far less surprise, recrimination, and raillery than he had expected. That was because the day was Sunday, the date was December 7th, and the ship had just heard of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Roused out of their Sunday afternoon sleep, groups of tousled men stood hugging themselves against the cold and predicting innumerable disasters; they had no eyes for Raven, who listened briefly to the news and then slipped into his cabin.

A few minutes later he came out again, feeling that he ought to report himself to Flack. He climbed the bridge ladders and walked softly along to his senior's door, hesitating as he heard voices through the black-out curtains and then knocking softly.

There was no answer and no break in the voices, and so he parted the curtains and stepped inside. Flack's eyes goggled at him over a tilted tumbler, Mungo Maclaren paused in the act of pouring himself another shot of Old Grand-Dad, and the third man gave him a sideways wag of the head. "So you finally condescended to come back, did you?" spluttered Flack, and gestured with his emptied glass. "Whadda you think of him, hey?" he demanded of the others. "Goes ashore for two days without so much as a kiss-me-arse, and then walks in on us grinning like the Prodigy Son!"

"Good luck to um," grunted Maclaren, and squinted carefully at the water which he was trickling into his glass. Raven heard the batteries cluck and gurgle in the wireless room next door, and remembered guiltily that he had been supposed to watch their charging. He hoped that they had not been on charge ever since he went ashore.

"Well, y' might as well siddown an' have a drink, now that you did get back," said Flack unwillingly, and rummaged about on top of his wash-stand until he found a crusted tooth-glass. After a cursory rinse, he slopped an inch of whisky into it and handed it to Raven. "You prob'ly need a heart-starter," he said kindly, and then introduced the third man. "Chief Sparks off the Russian Duke," he said. "Just got in yesterday."

Raven nodded a nervous acknowledgement, and sipped cautiously at his whisky. "And she's even worse than this old waggon, if possible," said the newcomer. "Crowd's not so bad, though - all excepting the Chief Officer."

"Boozer, is he?" enquired Flack virtuously, and the other man said "Christ, no. Might be a bit better if he did take a drink. He's one o' these high-powered efficiency merchants.- chases the crew from hell to breakfast. Tempest, his name is, and by crikey he lives up to it."

"I know um," rumbled the Second Mate unexpectedly. "He was on this ship. Third Mate then. Had the cheek to tell me I didn't keep the charts in order."

He took a long swallow, and stared at the bulkhead through eyes cobwebbed with red veins. "Owner's nephew or

something," he commented, and Flack said gloomily "Ah - it's not what you know, but who you know, heck-heck-heck."

The three of them rambled on about men who held down jobs to which they weren't entitled, whilst Raven pecked at his unwanted drink and finally muttered " 'scuse me...gotta write some letters..."

They hardly looked at him as he made his escape, and he stood outside for a moment taking a long breath of the icy air. The darkening clouds of the winter afternoon hung overhead as soggily self-pitying as his own sudden gloom; he looked out over dirty grey ship, dirty grey river, dirty grey corrugated iron of the warehouse roof, but pictured only the polished creamy gloss upon taut-fashioned skin. "Kenny," he muttered to himself, and then with an abrupt laugh at his own dramatisation he ran whistling down the ladders to his cabin.

Time passed quickly in port. Within a few more days, the work on the crew's quarters was completed; the ship moved to a loading berth at the Brooklyn Terminal, and the hatch-boards thundered onto the decks as the holds were opened up. The new berth meant that Raven had to travel further to reach Kenny's apartment, but he soon became familiar with the subway system which led him towards her. His life settled into a routine which he knew must come to an end, but which had too strong a sweetness to allow him to picture that end. Days, nights, dreams, day-dreams, were all filled with Kenny; he wove her so intensely into the pictured fabric of his future that he was unable to foresee a life without her.

"When shall we be married?" he asked her one night as he lay half beside her and half over her, engrossed in the yet uncloyed sweetness of love-talk and love-play; she turned her head aside with a taunting smile, and murmured "Too many complications. Where'd we live? In England? Or are you going to skip that old ship of yours altogether? Might as well, for all the time you spend aboard her. Doesn't that boss of yours ever make you work?"

"I'm serious," he protested, and she reached her arms up with a languorous movement, drawing his head down and yielding her lips to his, kissing him with skilfully thrusting tongue. "Take advice from a fool," she told him half-earnestly. "Make the most of what you've got while you've got it, and to hell with the future."

He was pondering this scene as he stood with one foot on the hatch-coaming, watching another tray of cargo drop down into the hold. It consisted of cases of tinned milk, another of the myriad items which they were loading; their manifest of cargo was like a shopping list for modern war.

The winches clattered, checked in obedience to a whistled signal, clattered and checked again. The wire rope which hung taut from the derrick suddenly slackened as the tray reached the bottom, and the waiting stevedores grabbed the cases to pile onto the great symmetrical mass of cargo which they were building up from the bottom of the hold.

Minute by minute, hour by hour, day and night, the work continued. To Raven, the slow settling of the ship in the water was like an hour-glass which silently bled away the

moments of his ecstasy. Each time he returned to the ship, the cargo would be piled a little higher in the holds, the winches would still be pounding out their brutal thundering rhythm, the stevedores and winchmen would be working with that disciplined frenzy which is uniquely American. One day, and one day soon, that cargo would reach the top of the hatch, and then there would be nothing ahead but the sea.

Standing watching the men at work, he was unconscious of Cecil's approach until the young gunner spoke to him. Since the words were the same question which he was asking himself, they were doubly unwelcome; he turned his head briefly, glanced at the smooth face which was pushed anxiously and enquiringly close to his own, and looked away again.

"I said: How much longer do you think they'll be?" called Cecil above the tumult of the winches, and Raven grunted "How the hell should I know?"

"Oh, all right, no need to be narky about it," said Cecil petulantly, and offered a pack of Lucky Strike.

"Smoke? Go ahead - I've got plenty."

Raven shook his head; Cecil shrugged and stuck a cigarette in his mouth. They were silent for a moment, and then the gunner asked "How are you getting on with the girl-friend?"

"None of your business," grunted Raven, and Cecil smirked "Maybe it is."

"What d'you mean by that?" demanded Raven, swinging around to face him, and Cecil blew out a cloud of smoke.

"Oh, nothing," he said airily. "I might be able to do her a bit of good, that's all."

"What the hell kind of good can a little rat like you do for her?"

"Nasty," reproved Cecil. "After all, if it hadn't been for me you wouldn't even 've met her. Would you, now?"

Raven didn't care to answer that, and affected to resume his study of the loading operations. "I've only got to say the word to Mr. Armentraut, and he'll take good care of her," the smirking voice continued. "He thinks the world of me now. I can't put a foot wrong."

Raven answered with intent to wound. "When's the new gun's crew coming along? 'bout time they got here, isn't it? I can just imagine some big hairy-arsed petty-officer shaking you up. Make the best of it, sonny. Your honeymoon's nearly over."

"Ah, but perhaps I won't even be here," replied Cecil, but when Raven turned to look at him again he put a hand over his mouth with an affected gesture. "What d'you mean by that?" asked Raven, but Cecil only shook his head with his big eyes showing above his hand. "Ah, that's telling," he mumbled.

"Out of the way, ratbags!" shouted a loud coarse voice, and the Third Mate shouldered past carrying a cargo-cluster in each hand. The battered metal hoods of the lights clanked against the hatch coaming as he fired a parting shot about bloody useless passengers, and Cecil flounced away.

"At least I might be somewhere where I don't have to put up with that sort of thing," he called over his shoulder to Raven.

The assistant steward came out of the pantry and added to the din by swinging the dinner bell; after a moment Raven went in to eat a meal which their stay in port had not improved. The Third Engineer was in good form that day, telling of his adventures with a Second Avenue hooker, and Raven sat on listening to him until the Third Mate came in. "...so I give 'er the money, see, an' she stuck it away in 'er bag. But she weren't too clever about where she put 'er bag down. First time she turned 'er back, I were in an' out of it like a prize cockerel. Cheapest little bit I ever 'ad."

He gazed around triumphantly at the half-believing smiles, and the Third Mate packed beef, parsnip, and potato onto his fork. Carefully topping it off with a dab of gravy, he shoved this load into his mouth and mumbled "Not as cheap as Sparky gets his, I'll bet."

The Third Engineer gave him a questioning leer, and the other man swallowed noisily and gestured with his fork. "What about it, Sparky? Does it cost you anything, or do you get paid for it?"

Raven smiled tightly, without answering, and the Third Mate commenced to assemble another load on his fork. His flat round face assumed a thoughtful malice, and he continued "Where's she live, Sparky?"

"Who're you talking about?" enquired Raven, and the other looked at him in pretended surprise. "Why, who 'd yer think? That little bit o' stuff that you go snipping off to see every night."

"Aye, that's reet," interjected the Third Engineer. He anticipated a little sexual innuendo, and his mind slipped into a well-worn groove. "I saw you slipping aboard at two o'clock yes'dy morning. That sort of thing's no good for a growing lad, y' know. Must get yer sleep, or you'll be getting dark rings under yer eyes."

"That isn't what's giving 'im dark rings under his eyes," said the Third Mate wittily. "He's got one o' them real long-bodied New York girls. You know - suck 'em in and blow 'em out in bubbles."

The Third Engineer emitted a loud guffaw, which was checked abruptly when Raven reached across the table, took the Third Mate's plate by the edge, and flipped the contents up into that officer's face. "Hey, that's no way to do," he protested, as the Third Mate jumped up with his face a dripping mask of gravy. "Now just calm down, you boys!"

"Calm down be beggared!" roared the Third Mate. "You - you - hey, come on, we'll settle this on deck! I've been just waiting for a chance to have a crack at you!"

Raven jumped up to follow him out of the saloon, but they collided in the doorway. The Third Mate caught him a short painful punch in the belly, and he responded by jerking up his elbow and catching the other sharply under the nose,

which promptly began to bleed. "Not bloody fair!" howled the Third Mate. "I'll kill you for that, you little bleeder!"

He attempted to lock his arm around Raven's neck, and they wrestled their way down the passage to the outer doorway. The weather-sill and the black-out curtains presented complications here, and they grunted and panted against each other whilst the Third Engineer shouted "Nah then, Queensberry rules! You'll do yerselves a mis-cheef if you fight like that!"

"You bet I'll do 'im a mischief," grunted the Third Mate, but Raven had now got behind him and was pinioning his arms. Half-laughing and half-crying, he impelled the Third Mate forward with a resounding slam against the bulkhead, and the Chief Steward poked an astonished head out of the pantry to shout "Jesus! Bloody Sparky's bloody killing the bloody Third Mate!"

However, it was Raven's turn to suffer as the Third Mate propelled himself backwards with equal force, crushing Raven between himself and the opposite bulkhead. Raven decided that more space was desirable, and at the cost of a couple of savage kicks on the shins he manage to turn the Third Mate round and shove him through the doorway. They tripped on the high weather-sill and toppled forwards, but their fall was somewhat broken by another man who was making purposefully into the doorway at that moment.

"What the flaming hell are you up to, silly idiots?"

The Leading Seaman raised a ginger eyebrow. "One o' them, is he?" he enquired, and Raven gave him a brief account of affairs. "Oh well, suits me," said the naval man. "I was afraid I'd got aboard one o' them dirty old tramps, but it looks as though he's going to clean 'er up a bit."

"Why - haven't you sailed on a ship like this before?" asked Raven, and he made a great contemptuous sound of "Nahhhh!"

Whipping off his cap, discovering a fag-end tucked away within it, lighting it, replacing his cap, and blowing out a cloud of smoke, all as it seemed in one well-trained movement, he commented "I been most o' my time on good ships since I been attached to the Merchant Navy. Good 'igh-class cargo ships, clean an' fast an' comfortable.2

He drew a final whiff on his tab-end and dropped it overside, looking about him with a cheerful disdain. "These old waggons are the slums of the sea," he said. "Proper torpedo-meat, they are. Makes you feel ashamed of yerself when you see 'em flying the Red Ensign."

"There seem to be plenty of them about, anyway," answered Raven. He felt a strange loyalty arising for the despised vessel, and for the moment overlooked all her defects. "They do as good a job as the next one, I s'pose."

"Do a good job for the flippin' shipowners, you mean," said the ginger gunner. "Never mind the poor sods that 've got to sail in 'em. 'couse, it doesn't worry me anyway. I'm a long-service man - been in the Navy since before the war.

I'm laughing now that I'm in this job, so it doesn't worry me what I have to sail in."

He waved a casual salute and swaggered off to find the Captain, saying "Ta-ta for now." Raven didn't see him again until a couple of days later, when he was marching along the deck very closely behind Cecil, grinning ferociously and talking in a rapid undertone. The new gun's crew was being kept busy, since the day after they arrived a floating crane had hoisted aboard a new 4-inch high and low angle gun and four new 20 mm. automatic cannon.

Raven found that his melancholy at the thought of leaving Kenny was becoming tinged with a strange eagerness to go. In fact, the whole crew had become suddenly sick of the shore. They had spent all their money, and Captain Tempest had resolutely refused to allow them any more, but that was only the most obvious reason for this feeling. They had been gripped by the seaman's odd hunger to be on the move, if only because it would bring them closer to the end of the voyage.

The stevedores seemed to work at an ever-increasing tempo, and when Raven returned aboard one early morning he was at once shocked and guiltily exhilarated to see that one of the hatches was completed and battened down, with the tarpaulins already stretched smoothly across the hatch-boards. It was as though a coffin-lid had been closed upon a portion of his life

When he walked with Kenny these days, it was through streets that were gay and flashing with the immediate promise of Christmas, with all the extra glitter of impending festival in a country which has the natural decoration of snow. But this year, there was a strangely doomed feeling about the celebrations. The crowds in the streets and bars and department stores all knew that this Christmas was the last this side of bloody sacrifice, and the news from every front was bad.

The shadow of parting densened between them, and she still refused to answer the question which he asked with such urgent monotony. He asked her again on one of those last evenings, and she gave him a veiled look over the rim of her glass. They were sitting in a quiet little bar which they favoured; one of New York's myriad bars which with their subdued lights and cosy booths and dreamy recorded music make a perfect setting for city lovers.

With sudden resolution, she said, "Franky, I don't want you to talk about marrying me any more. Not this time. If you come back to N'York again, and I - well, if we both feel the same - then maybe we can talk about it. Okay?"

The strangely metallic tone of her voice seemed to penetrate to him with more decision than anything which she had said before. With a swiftness-quenched flare of realisation, he knew that she was past her first delight in him; it was an effort to smile as he nodded and said "But you won't mind

me writing about it, will you?"

She hesitated, and a brief brilliant picture went across her mind of his face floating just beneath the surface of the sea; of his arms and legs which had clutched her against his smooth body wavering to the wash and surge of the waves. "If you want to," she said quietly, and then putting her hand on his and smiling into his eyes she murmured "But don't waste too much time on me, Franky. Life's too short to spend on too much remembering..."

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

## A Pier-Head Jump

\*

Yet memories were perhaps the best thing that she gave him. If it had not been for her, he would probably have seen no more of New York than the average seafarer. Because of her, he could look back upon countless aspects of the soaring triumphant city, as well as on a myriad poignant recollection of his first love affair.

When through his memory the traffic streamed along Fifth Avenue, and the exquisite women groomed like racehorses and arrogant as boyars stepped along the pavements outside Tiffany, he saw with most clarity the swift swing of her walk as she hurried towards him out of the five o'clock crowds. The songs of those days all evoked the picture of her face as they sat endlessly talking; across restaurant tables, upon the couch in her little apartment, in subways and on ferries. When his shipmates' conversation returned to its endless talk of women, he could see one woman alone; the curved white supple limbs, the close breathing warmth of the sleeper beside him in the humming light-and-shadow of a city night, the constant new discoveries when passion itself is new, the tear which slid through closed reluctant lids when the parting came at last.

As the last slings of cargo came aboard, and the Bo'sun chivvied his crew around on clearing up the decks, he was far from the time when he would be able to look back with

a smile. He hung wretchedly about the gangway, without even any work to do which might divert his mind, and exchanged banalities with the U.S. Coast Guard who was posted on watch. "They tell me youse guys are going out East - Singapore or somewheres," the Coast Guard said, and Raven shrugged despondently. "God knows," he said dully. He had heard so many rumours about their destination that he now disbelieved them all.

"Yeah, the boss stevedore told me in confidence," the Coast Guard continued, feeding himself a strip of chewing gum. He chomped upon it until he had obtained a satisfactory consistency, and remarked complacently "Youse can have it for me. I don't wanna be shot up by no Japs."

"Hey, Sparky, you seen young Boyle ?" asked a voice in Raven's ear, and he turned to see Ginger the gunner gazing at him anxiously. "Young who ?" he asked, and the gunner answered "You know - the little twerp that was aboard here when we came."

"Oh - you mean Cecil ?"

"Dunno about that, but where is he ? He's been adrift for two nights now, and I been mug enough to keep it dark. They reckon we're sailing in a couple of hours, an' I'll hatt tell the Old Man. I might do me hook if he cuts up nasty."

"How d'you mean - 'do your hook ?'" asked Raven, and Ginger held out his sleeve with the Leading Seaman's badge embroidered upon it. "You know - lose me killick," he explained. "If the Old Man reports me for letting a man overstay his leave, they'll bash me down to A.B. again."

A worried frown added yet another complication to Ginger's untidy features. "The Bo'sun reckoned you went ashore with him wunst, so I thought you might have a clue. Has he got a bit o' stuff or somethink?"

"Not exactly," said Raven slowly, and Ginger looked at him with a kind of threatening appeal. "Don't hold out on me," he said. "I'll go an' get him if it's not too far. The coppers'll have 'im, else."

Rave hesitated, thinking what the gunner might do and say if he knew the truth. There would be no subtlety about Ginger's reaction; Cecil would be spared nothing.

"I'll go and get him myself," he said. "Just wait till I get my coat and scarf."

Ginger watched him anxiously as he returned to the gangway. "Don't take too long," he said. "They've got a tug alongside already."

He pushed two or three crumpled notes into Raven's hand, and gave him a clumsy pat on the shoulder. "Get a taxi back, if you have to," he told him. "I'll see that we don't go without you."

Raven hurried down the gangway, and scampered amongst the fork-lift trucks which were still wheeling and grinding about the almost empty warehouse. As he hurried through the gate he remembered with brief astonishment the enormous mounds of cargo which were there when they arrived, and which had already been stowed into their holds. A good prize for a U-boat.

The icy air of the streets crept up his sleeves and trouser-legs as he stood looking about for a taxi, but it was several minutes before one appeared. "Can't take you, buddy," said the driver when he gave the address. "We got gas an' rubber rationing now. Don't ya know there's a war on? Ya'd best take the subway."

He was luckier at the other end, but even then he had to guide the driver from his recollection of where Armentraut's apartment building was situated. He made several frustrating false moves, and the driver was becoming impatient before he finally recognised the imposing facade. Forty-five minutes had gone before he went up in the lift, but at last he found himself standing before the smug, sleek door which was opened to him by the Filipino servant. "Nobody home," he said. "You come back later, hey?"

Raven pushed past him and stared about the great living-room; ornate, spacious, and unreal as a picture in a glossy magazine, it offered no clues for his questing eyes.

Twittering with fury, the Filipino clawed at him with monkey hands and then scampered for the telephone; Raven opened one door after another, hurried down a corridor, looked into a bathroom all black tiles and pink marble, and then found Cecil cowering beside the bed in the huge master bedroom.

"Clothes on, quick!" snapped Raven. "Up and out of it! We're sailing in an hour!"

"Not me, not me, not me!" wailed Cecil insanely. "What's it got to do with you? None of your business...I'm all

right here...you leave me alone..."

Raven strode towards him and caught him by one smooth arm, trying to drag him to his feet, but he sagged back to the carpet with a whimpering protest. "Get up, you bloody little fool!" hissed Raven. "You can't get out of it now. They'll only catch you if you stay here, and then you'll spend the rest of the war in jail."

"Don't care, don't care, sooner do that than go back to sea," blubbered Cecil. "It's nothing to do with you...you're not my boss..."

"Come on...where's your uniform?" snarled Raven, and the gunner screamed defiantly "Burnt it - and I'd like to burn you up too! I'm not going back and you can't make me!"

Raven glanced at his watch, and then hefted Cecil to his feet by hooking his hands under his armpits. "You're - coming - back - with me - now!" he panted. "I don't give a damn about you, but you'll be getting other people into trouble. Get some bloody clothes on! Here - this'll do - and this - "

Cecil jumped up and clawed at him; with a feeling of savage pleasure, Raven slapped him brutally across the face. "There, that'll teach you not to tell a lot of bloody lies about what a great big hero you are," he snapped. "I covered up for you once, but not again."

He pushed and dragged Cecil's shaking body into the flimsy clothes which Armentraut had bought for him, and then shouldered him towards the door just as the Filipino rushed

in shrieking "Mr. Armentraut coming...wait one minute...  
Mr. Armentraut coming..."

Cecil baulked at that, but Raven shoved him along and out of the apartment. The lift attendant watched with mouth open as he took them down, and Raven was poised for another battle getting him out of the lift, but the youngster shambling ahead like a zombie.

He was galvanised back to life by the sight of Armentraut hurrying into the foyer, and flew forward to grasp at his protector. "Otto," he sobbed. "Otto..."

Armentraut took in the situation with a single glance at Raven and at the lift-man standing in his open door, and his face closed like a safe. "What seems to be the trouble?" he asked without expression, and Raven burst out in a high jerky voice "You'll be in trouble if you keep this kid away from his ship, you dirty big..."

He could not think of the appropriate word, but glared inarticulately at Armentraut; the big man answered smoothly "You've got it all wrong, sonny. I've never kept him from going back. He must 've got the wrong idea, that's all. Maybe he didn't know that his leave was over, hah?"

He disengaged himself, ungently, from Cecil's clutching grasp, and with a sideways look at the lift-man said with horrid amiability "Been hitting the hooch again, have you? C'm on, stand up straight. Get back aboard and sleep it off, why don't you? Drop in and see me next time you hit New York. I'm always glad to put one of you guys up for a night

or two."

He was groping for his bill-fold, and with this familiar weapon in his hand he took complete command. Jerking his head at the lift man, he pushed several notes into his hand as he ran forward. "Get a cab for these boys," he ordered. "I'll run myself up to the apartment. Anyone wants to be taken up, tell 'em that I'm engaged."

He looked at the money which the lift-attendant held, and the man said "Yes sir, Mr. Armentraut. C'm on, kids, let's hit the street."

Armentraut paced smoothly across the foyer and into the lift, and in a second or two the door moved silently shut. Cecil gaped at its blank surface as Raven urged him forward, and the lift-man made as though to offer him one of the notes which he held. "I guess you'll need this for the taxi," he said hesitantly, and Raven answered "Get stuffed."

They found a cab outside, and Cecil slumped into one corner with his eyes closed. He said in a bewildered voice "I'll never forgive Otto for this," and Raven answered kindly "It's better this way. You'd only 've got yourself into a lot of trouble."

He looked at his watch again, silently urging the taxi driver to make better time through the clotted traffic, and continued in a voice which was an unconscious imitation of his own father being kind but firm: "Besides, think of your parents. They wouldn't like it if you went to jail."

"My parents!" said Cecil in a scalding tone, and slid

back into the sullen quicksands of his thoughts. They travelled the rest of the way in silence, and when they reached the loading pier Raven crammed the fare into the driver's hands and hustled Cecil through towards the gangway. With a sinking heart he saw a group of men standing at the head of it; the Bo'sun and a couple of men waiting to haul it in, Ginger the gunner, Mr. Keadwell, and the Captain.

"What sort of god-damned caper is this?" the rasping voice demanded before he had set foot upon the planks, and Cecil checked abruptly. Raven dug him in the back, muttering "Go on - he can't eat you," and the young gunner faltered the remaining few yards as though they were the steps to the gallows.

The ship was loaded so deeply that the gangway was almost horizontal, and the Captain stood barring the way aboard. "What's the god-damned idea of holding up MY ship?" he yelled at them, and as he made a dramatic gesture Raven noticed the bright new gold of the fourth ring sewn on his sleeve. "Tugs waiting - pilot aboard - and I've got to hang about waiting for two snotty-nosed little spit-bags that should 've been drowned at birth!"

The little man bounced on his toes, glaring at them as they stood awkwardly poised on the narrow planks. The Bo'sun winked at Raven over his shoulder, and Mr. Keadwell made a nervous adjustment to his battered old cap. "All right," barked the Captain. "If you want to play silly buggers, I

can play silly buggers too. But remember this - THE CAPTAIN ALWAYS WINS!"

He bounced on his toes again, opening his eyes very wide. "There'll be no shore leave and no money for the pair of you for the rest of the trip, not if we're out ten bloody years!" he yapped. "And furthermore I'm reporting the pair of you to your respective establishments ashore. All-right-carry-on-Mr.-Keadwell."

He swung around and pattered off towards the bridge, and Cecil shrank back from the lunging approach of Ginger.

"Come on, bastard-face," grunted the Leading Seaman. "You 'n' me's got things to talk about."

Raven walked aboard past the Bo'sun, who asked "How's your respective establishment?" as he bent to loose the gangway lashings. Mr. Keadwell nodded and sighed, and muttered "We'll be better off when we get out to sea. Never get anything but trouble in port."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Big Shake-up



Costello's normally red face was almost purple with cold, and his big chapped fingers looked like bad bananas as he clumsily smacked his paintbrush against the bulkhead. "Painting ship at sea in this weather," he snarled at Old Stanley. "He must be bloody mad."

Old Stanley continued his chirpy whistling, wielding his brush with the same tempo. "It's his ship till the owners gets it back again," he commented. "He can paint it sky-blue pink if he's a fancy that way."

Wanker's Doom punctuated this statement with his usual cretinous cackle, and the three of them continued slapping grey paint onto the portion which they had already scraped and red-lead. Chips of old paint lying about their feet were like miniature strata telling the history of the ship; the white of peacetime overlaid with grey sandwiched in between red lead.

The grey paint which they were now applying, as executants of the Captain's order transmitted through Mr. Keadwell and the Bo'sun that "The god-damned ship wants smartening up; she looks like a floating brothel," was almost exactly the same shade as the calm grey seas through which they were steaming. On their starboard hand was the flat coastline of New Jersey, looking stark and abandoned under the frigid winter sky; they were sailing down to their convoy rendezvous

at Hampton Roads, off the U.S. Naval Base at Norfolk, Virginia.

Costello had just stuck his paint-brush back into the pot, and begun to fumble for a cigarette with his half-frozen fingers, when the three seamen were shocked into activity by the clangorous command of the alarm bells. Spouting curses like a broken sewer, they grabbed up their life-jackets and tin hats and ran to their action stations, conscious that Captain Tempest was only too anxious to catch any stragglers.

That officer stood on the bridge with his thumb pressed against the alarm button, listening to the pounding of feet along iron decks. Releasing the button, he studied his watch for exactly thirty seconds, and the moment he dropped his arm the gun-platform telephone rang. "Bridge!" he snapped into it, and the telephone rating's voice said nervously "Four-inch gun's crew closed up, sir."

"Right," he said, and turned to hurry out of the wheel-house. He collided with the Third Mate coming up the ladder, blinking his afternoon's sleep out of his eyes and fumbling with the tapes of his life-jacket, barked "You're five seconds late - get to your station!" and bounded down the ladders to the main deck.

Within the next two minutes, he had made a complete round of every action station on the ship. On the boat-deck, he reprimanded two men who had left their neatly-packaged survival-suits in their bunks. In one of the gun pits, he tore into the gunners for not having taken off the rubber

"French letter" which protected the gun's rifling from spray. On the gun-platform aft, he made a careful survey of the gun's crew as they posed like a waxworks group at their positions; the loading number with a shell ready for the breech, the gunlayer with his eye pressed against the telescope, and so on. Unable to find any fault, he scampered back to the bridge and rang the "All Clear."

The crew dispersed with mutinous threats and whines, some back to work and others to their off-duty relaxations. "Getting so a man needn't bother to take his friggin' boots off," whimpered the Cook to the Chief Steward. "Four friggin' action station drills since we left New York, and never when you're expectin' of 'em. Me nerves won't stand it, I tell ya."

These unexpected drills were regarded as a totally unwarranted intrusion into the rights of seamen, but after the first two drills no one was game to make any protest. On those occasions, Captain Tempest had made it clear that he was in earnest. "You won't get any warning when you're attacked, and you won't get any warning from me," he had yelled at the group of shivering sleepy seamen who had protested at being startled out of their watch below. "What's the use of these Saturday afternoon drills when you're all expecting 'em? I'm going to keep you busy as whores when the fleet's in, till I'm satisfied with you."

When they steamed up the Chesapeake a day and a half later, and dropped anchor amongst the fleet of cargo ships

which was already assembled and waiting for convoy, he ordered a full-scale boat drill. The boats were to be actually lowered into the water, fully manned, loaded with all survival equipment, cast off, and rowed once around the ship.

Raven's part in this was to load the lifeboat radios into the boats, and when the bell went he staggered down the ladders from the bridge, lugged the radios up onto the boat-deck, and stood waiting his chance.

The port boat was already being lowered, with the davits springing and bobbing under its weight and the taut ropes creaking like wood as they were slowly paid off round the bollards. A line of men from all departments of the ship was straining back upon each rope as though they were fighting a tug-o'-war with invisible opponents; as anchor-man on one of the ropes, the Bo'sun uttered the strange cries which have replaced sea-chanties. "See-ho! See-hi! Down a bit aft! ah-ha! Ee-hum! Easy forrard! Ah-hum! Ah-ho! So she goes! See-hum! See-hi...!"

Jerking and groaning as the bar-tight ropes crept through the blocks, the boat slowly disappeared below the level of the boat-deck. Glancing over the grey waters of the anchorage to the other grey ships which were anchored there, Raven saw that the nearest of them was lined with interested spectators. "Is she sinking under yer, mates?" came a faint mocking hail across the water, and the Bo'sun bellowed back "We're get'n out an' letting the rats take over!"

The boat took the water with a squattering splash, the rope ladders were tipped over and unrolled themselves with a

clattering of rungs, and the crew began to swarm down them towards the boat. With the heavy lifeboat sets to lower down, Raven was the last to take to the ladder; he had just lowered himself over the side when a wild chorus of yells, curses and contradictory orders made him bob his head up again. He could see the crew of the other boat milling about the deck, but a sharp hail from his own boat made him keep on going down. "Something wrong with the starboard boat, I think," he panted when he had gingerly squeezed himself into the packed mass of men, and the Bo'sun grunted "Left the bloody plug out, for a dollar."

"Leggo the falls - cast off the painter," ordered Mr. Keadwell from the tiller. "Fend her off, you men on the starb'd side! Unship the oars! Look slippy now - this tide'll have us down to Cape Henry if we let 'er drift."

The clumsy oars were disentangled from the legs and torsos which were resting upon them, and loudly compared to various orifices and organs of the human body as they were fitted into the rowlocks. A few flakes of snow drifted down upon the boat's crew as they made an awkward attempt at rowing, some dabbing the blades into the water, others plunging them deep, others cackling with furious mirth as they missed their stroke altogether and toppled back on the thwarts. "Give way together now," said Mr. Keadwell patiently. "Dear me, how'd you ever do in a seaway? You've got to keep time. Now - in. Out. In. Out. That's the idea. Take your time from stroke. In. Out. Keep it up, lads; nicely, now."

"Mind my muckin' neck!" yowled one of the rowers as a clumsily-wielded oar caught him in the back; perched on one of the thwarts, Raven also wondered how the boat's crew would do in a tumultuous Atlantic seaway. Only about half the crew had room to row, and most of them were obviously making their first attempt; they were hampered by the other bodies pressed closely about them and by the gear which was stowed in the boat, and there was no feeling that anyone except Mr. Keadwell and the Bo'sun knew what they were doing. "Dis sailor's yob, not fireman's yob!" squealed Paderooski as he tugged at his oar, and the Cook panted "The man's a bleedun' maniac, that's what 'e is - a bleedun' maniac. I'll see the Union when we get back, see if I don't."

Laden with almost thirty men, with iron tanks containing biscuits and other provisions, water breakers, sea anchor, mast, sails, rigging, the radio sets, bundles of oilskin-wrapped clothing, and a miscellany of small tools and other items designed to sustain the shipwrecked mariner, the boat crawled along like some obese sea-monster which propelled itself by frail and uncertain legs. "I did two weeks in one of these bloody things," remarked the Chief Engineer. "And every minute of it sitting on a bolt-head. Most of the crew were in one boat, and I couldn't get anyone to change places. I've still got the mark on my tail."

Raven gave him a respectful glance, and then looked upwards as they passed round the bows. He could just make out the embossed words Austrian Duke - Cardiff, under their

wartime grey, before the tide caught them and they were swept down the starboard side. Above their heads they heard the Captain squawking "Get the bloody falls onto the ~~the~~ winches, I tell you, or I'll log every god-damned man that's here," and then had a fleeting sight of what had happened to the starboard boat. One of the falls had jammed in the blocks, and the other had been let go too quickly, so that the boat was hanging suspended at an acute angle with its stern submerged. "Sounds like a prostitute's picnic - everyone getting rooted," guffawed the Bo'sun as they were carried past.

The snow was beginning to fall more heavily now, and Mr. Keadwell said "Put your backs into it, lads - get her round the stern and back to the falls, or we'll be here all night."

As they strained their cumbersome craft back to the empty falls, a motor-launch came pushing its moustache towards them across the darkening tide. They had just managed to hook on the blocks, and the first men were swarming up the ladders, when it took a sweep alongside them and a voice yelled "Tell your skipper there's a convoy conference to-morra morning. We'll pick up him and the radio-man at oh-nine-hundred."

"Aye-aye," acknowledged Mr. Keadwell, and the Third Engineer exclaimed "Hey, it's Christmas Eve tomorrow! That means we'll be sailing on Christmas Day!"

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

## Orders and Errors

★

Carrying a brand-new briefcase, Captain Tempest was duly taken ashore to the Naval Base, with Flack shivering beside him inside his old raincoat. They returned at noon, and the Captain sent down word to Mr. Keadwell that he wanted all the crew mustered amidships at one o'clock. He had continued Captain Macnamara's habit of eating his meals in his cabin, so that the saloon was free to discuss this order with many gloomy, ribald, or fantastic interpretations. "That means Russia, see if it don't," predicted the Third Engineer, and Mungo Maclaren glanced up from his plate long enough to grumble "Ach, the wee man was always over-fond of the sound o' his own voice. Likely he'll jist tell us we're no' to drink anything on Christmas Day."

"You're all wrong," said Flack with satisfaction, but would not say any more than that he was not authorised to impart any information. "Always supposing that you have any to impart, of course," said the Chief Engineer with heavy irony, and Flack tucked in his chin with a look of spinterish outrage.

When Mr. Keadwell reported to the Captain that the crew was mustered, he came bouncing out of his accommodation onto the lower bridge, and stood for a moment with his hands on his hips and staring down at them.

"I know that you all think I'm a bastard," he barked, and

a sudden mad squall of laughter rose from the men who were looking up at him. "Oh no, Captin," protested a sarcastic voice, and another one cried "You must 'a' been reading our letters!"

Captain Tempest waited until it died down, frowning at them until they were shuffling uneasily. "But I don't care!" he continued. "I don't like this ship nor anything about it, and I'm going to change everything. I've made a start already, but it is only a start."

He wagged his finger at them, saying "We're sailing at four a.m. to-morrow morning, Christmas Day, for Singapore. Things are tough out there, and they're going to get tougher. For your sakes, and my sake, and the sake of the ship, and most important of all for the sake of the CARGO, you're going to be kept on your toes."

Pausing dramatically, he swept his gaze over them as though in search of one particular face, and then barked "Gunner!"

"Sir!"

Ginger jumped forward, delivering what he afterwards described as a 'very tiddley salute.' Captain Tempest said "You'll exercise your full gun's crews every day, both armed service and merchant service ratings. All gun's crews will stand-to at dawn and dusk. If I catch any man who's not keeping a good look-out at any time on any watch, he's for the high jump. Understood?"

"Sir!"

Ginger saluted again, and the Captain shouted "Third Officer!"

The Third Mate gave a startled look around, and then raised a hand like a shy schoolboy who wants to leave the room. "You'll see that all boats are in tip-top condition. You have my authority to use any ratings you need to help you, whether they're from the deck, engine-room, catering department, or gun's crew. Understood?"

The Third Mate gave an embarrassed grin, and Captain Tempest continued "As for the rest of you, I can warn you now that we'll have a full action-stations drill at least once a day, without notice. I don't care what you think about it. I'm doing it to keep you on your toes all the time. Maybe you'll be inconvenienced, but it's a lot more inconvenient when you're dead. That's all."

He swung around and disappeared back into his accommodation, leaving everyone gaping up at the spot where he had been. There was a moment's silence, and then an incredulous voice said "He can do all that. What's 'e think we are - a shower o' cattle or somethink?"

"The Union, boys, the Union," bellowed the Cook, "They'll sort 'im out. Just wait till pay-off day, that's all. We'll put 'im through the mincer. Make a note of it. Keep it all in your 'eads."

He rubbed his meaty hands together, and the Bo'sun looked at him as though he was an unpleasant morsel in one of his own stews. "Save yer time, Doctor," he drawled. "Safety of

the ship, see ? The skipper's entitled to do anything he likes for that. Look at yer Articles, an' you'll see it all down in black an' white."

The whipping wind prevented the argument from continuing much longer, and as the crowd broke up Flack beckoned Raven to follow him up to the wireless room. In his usual disgusted manner, he explained that of the fifty-four ships assembled for convoy, by far the greater number were bound for the U.K. Only eight of them, including the Austrian Duke, were destined for other ports, and these were to be diverted towards Gibraltar when the convoy reached Longitude 40°. These were to link up with a convoy bound from England to Singapore via Cape Town.

The executive order for the convoy's departure was to be given by radio. If the Naval Staff decided that conditions were satisfactory, the code-word BRIGHT would be transmitted on 500 kilocycles. If there was any reason for the convoy to be delayed, the code-word BLIND would be used instead.

"So you'll have to be called at three forty-five," said Flack. "Hop up here an' set watch on 500 kc/s, and if you hear the word BRIGHT then tell the mate on watch. He'll pass it on to the skipper, and bob's yer uncle."

"Taking us out in the dark, are they ?" asked Raven, and Flack said "Aye. Looks like being a nice dirty old morning for it, too, the way it's blowing up. But that's none of our worry. Just see that you've got those 'phones on before four o'clock, an' don't wake me up while yer doing it."

The Chief Engineer and the deck officers having been likewise instructed that the actual sailing of the convoy depended upon orders from ashore, it was not long before the whole ship knew of it. With an eye on the weather, which was now sending snow-squalls whirling out of the darkening northern sky, the crew felt that they had a sporting chance of Christmas at anchor after all. "It'll still be black dark at four in the morning," argued Costello with the Chief Steward. He had just brought back the sailor's mess-traps to the galley after tea, and stood warming his bottom against the banked-up fire. "Stands to reason they won't take us out if it's like this."

The Chief Steward, who had been discussing the crew's Christmas dinner with the Cook, gave a knowing sniff. "The bloody Yanks 'll do anything," he replied. "Be just like them to push the convoy out anyway, just to show how good they are."

"Ah, and on a Christmas Day an' all," broke in the Cook. "Proper lot of 'eathens, they are. All they think about's their gah-dam Thanksgiving."

"Fat lot we got to give thanks for anyroad," mourned the Chief Steward. "Proper hell-ship this one's going to be."

Costello yawned, seeing that he was not going to provoke anything interesting in the way of an altercation. "Oh well, I'm for me bunk," he said. "I've got the twelve-to-four this passage. That's gonna be fun, too - up there with old Maclaren."

And at midnight, he fumbled his way up onto the bridge.

There was no blackout in port on this side of the Atlantic, but there were no lights on except the ship's riding-lights and a faint blue light in the chart-room. The rest of the ship, except for the engine-room watch, was asleep, and the Third Mate brushed by Costello with a grunted "Stand-by man's already gone down. Mr. Maclaren 'll be up in a minute. G'night..."

His sea-boots thumped softly away down the ladders, and Costello was alone. Anchor-watches were technically kept by one officer and three seamen, but ~~they~~ <sup>the gailors</sup> took in turns to stand by on the bridge and spent the rest of the watch dozing in the galley or on the engine-room gratings.

Costello paced up and down for a few minutes, huddling himself up against the seeking wind and looking morosely out at the riding-lights of the other ships. After a while he began to wonder what was holding up the Second Mate, stepped into the chart-room to see that it was half-past twelve, and muttered to himself "Silly bastards couldn't 've woken 'im up properly. Just like that Third Mate to go down before his relief was up here. I'd better - "

He checked, listening to a confused sound from the lower bridge. Hurrying outside again, he was just in time to meet the Second Mate as he heaved himself up onto the bridge, stumbling over the last step and almost going to his knees.

"Don't wake the skipper!" hissed Costello urgently, and Maclaren gave a cracked laugh. "It's you, me boyo, is ut?" he demanded. "I didn't think you'd be scared of a wee

fella of his stamp."

"Not a matter of being scared," murmured Costello with a grin to himself, "But what's the use of 'im breaking up the party?"

Wonder where he keeps it? he was thinking; I could just do with a good slug on a night like this. "Why 'n't you come in the chart-room - have a lay-down on the settee?" he asked kindly. "No sense in you standing around out here. I'll give you a shake if I see anything."

Maclaren placed a hand on his shoulder, leaning on him heavily. "D'you know, I believe ye're right," he said portentously. "I'm feeling a wee thing under the weather..."

He moved forward like a blind man, and shuffled through into the chart-room. Costello's brain teemed like a wasp's nest with malicious thoughts as he moved in beside the Second Mate, and watched him first sit and then stretch himself out on the settee.

"Call me an old has-been, would he?" rumbled the Second Mate with his eyes closed. "I was a shipmaster before he could feed himself...aye, and real ships, too..."

He gave a gargling snore, said loudly and clearly "Call me when you see the pilot-boat, Mr. Methuen," and then his head flopped over onto his shoulder as though he had been cut down from a gallows.

Out for the count, ruminated Costello, and after watching him for a few minutes just to make sure he crept down the ladders and into the officers' alleyway. The Second Mate's

door was ajar, and the cabin was softly lit by the shaded bunk-light; Costello went straight to the bunk, looked under the pillow, and found one empty bottle and one three-quarters full. "Can he stow it away!" he whispered, and then glanced round as though someone might have heard him.

He hesitated for some time after this, staring at the bottle in his hand as though hypnotised by its amber glow. A gentle noise made him start, but it was only the door-curtain moving in a draught, and he muttered "Ach - to hell with ut!"

Jerking out the cork, he took the first long swallow. The amber glow transferred itself to his insides, and he sat down on the settee and gazed calculatingly at what remained. I haven't got the old man's stomach, he reckoned; there's just about enough.

As he took the second swallow, he thought: One of the other lads 'll be around before long. They'll cover up for me, especially if there's a sup left in the bottle. Might as well make myself comfortable...

Lying stretched on the galley bench, Wanker's Doom shifted uncomfortably, opened one eye and looked at the clock. Seven bells, he thought blearily. Wonder why no one called me for stand-by ?

But the galley was warm, and the folded life-jacket under his head gave a modicum of comfort. His eyes closed again.

In the fo'c'sle, the other stand-by man had his head on the table, near the now cold mug of tea which he had poured out for Costello at one o'clock. His gentle snore was repeated by

one of the sleepers in the bunks around him.

At four o'clock, the Second Engineer descended to the engine-room. Normally, one of the firemen would have gone up to the galley to make his tea, but Big Cyril decided that the deck was too cold at this hour of a winter's morning. He took a shovelful of red-hot coals out of one of the fires, and boiled his hook-pot on that. Taking the hot water into the engine room to pour on the condensed milk and tea-leaves in the bottom of the engineer's mug, he asked "Are we off then, Second?"

"Doesn't look like it," the Second Engineer replied. He took the tattered beret off his naked skull, and wiped it contemplatively over his face. "Merry Christmas," he said grudgingly, and Big Cyril chuckled. "It might be yet," he said, and dodged back into the stoke-hold.

The Second replaced his beret, blew into his mug to disperse the floating tea-leaves, and sucked up a mouthful. Bloody fools, he thought about no one in particular, and then glanced at the telephone to the bridge. No, let them call me if they've anything to say...

Silent except for the occasional clank of a shovel drifting up from the stoke-hold, and the steady pulsing of the dynamo in the engine room, the Austrian Duke lay dark and still at her anchorage as the other ships of the convoy came to life. Their anchor chains rumbled up through the hawse-pipes, engine-telegraphs clanged, steam hissed and engines started their long steady beat. Some of them passed quite near the Austrian Duke, so that their wakes lapped and rippled along her sea-

bitten sides, but none of the sounds they made were enough to waken the sleepers aboard, or to penetrate to the watch in the engine-room.

The Second Engineer idled around his silent machinery, dwarfed by the huge dark-gleaming structures which stood all around him, and at last began upon a small project of his own; a table-lamp made out of solid brass which was destined to grace his Wallasey villa. He was so engrossed in this that he didn't notice the assistant steward's failure to bring him tea and toast at six-thirty, and his file grizzled away at the brass until almost seven.

He bent to blow away some filings, and then straightened with a puzzled frown. Through the great white-painted steel walls which curved up into the shadows on either side, down the ventilators and through the closed skylights and doors, a strange sound was penetrating; a noise like the distant bellowing of a mechanical giant.

"AHOY, AUSTRIAN DUKE!" roared the loud-hailer on the approaching patrol-boat. "WHY AREN'T YOU FOLLOWING THE CONVOY ? REPORT YOUR DELAY, PLEASE!"

The Second heard the muffled thunder of the patrol-boat's screws approaching, beating through the water which reached far above his head, and then heard the enormous voice again. Still frowning, he paced towards the telephone and rang the bridge.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

## No Rum for Christmas

\*

Captain Tempest, stretched rigidly out in his bunk and sleeping with short vigorous snores, opened one eye. " - YOUR DELAY, PLEASE!" he heard overwhelmingly, and the glasses in his bathroom tingled with the vibration. He jerked upright, snapping on his bunk light and staring unbelievably at his watch. Is it night, or morning? he demanded of himself, and then the great voice sent him out of his bunk in a single leap.

Barefooted and in orange pyjamas, he bounded out onto the lower bridge; through the dim icy light of dawn he saw the stark outline of the patrol-boat bearing down on his ship, and seemed to shrivel before the simultaneous blast of the northerly wind and the huge shock of sound. "Holy Suffering Jeeeeeesus!" he screamed, and took the bridge ladder in two great skips; a glance into the chart-room showed him the Second Mate corpse-like upon the settee, and then the engine-room telephone rang. "Get those god-damned engines turning over!" he shrieked into it without waiting to hear who was calling; slamming it back on the hook he pattered to the alarm button and leaned his thumb against it.

Anyone who had not been wakened by the loud-hailer was sent pelting out on deck by the clamouring alarm-bells; taking advantage of their last night in a safe haven, most men had taken their clothes off to turn in, and they came scurrying along the decks still hopping into their trousers, dragging

on jerseys, and shrugging on life-jackets. Most of them were uncertain whether the ship was sinking at her moorings or whether this was just another action drill; fearful of the sea on the one hand and Captain Tempest's wrath on the other, they tumbled up to their action stations.

The bridge telephone rang again, and when Captain Tempest snatched it to his ear a feeble voice gasped "Four-inch gun's crew closed up, sir." It paused, and then asked "How many seconds this time, please sir?"

Captain Tempest threw the instrument against the bulkhead and leapt out onto the bridge, hugging his pyjama jacket around him with arms that were almost paralysed with cold. The bitter wind thrashed tears out of his eyes, and he pawed them away like an infuriated child to see the groups of men assembled on the boat-deck. "Oh you silly goddamned useless lot of bastards!" he ~~shrieked~~<sup>shrieked</sup> at them through chattering teeth. "Get forrard! Get the anchor up! A man to the wheel! Why in the name of the great harlot of Jerusalem do I have to suffer this?"

Horrified, the crew stared across at the little figure in its orange pyjamas dancing a frenzied jig on the bridge, and then saw it in an access of fury pick up a fire-bucket from the rack and cast it over onto the deck below. It struck with a satisfying crash, and he followed it with several more. "STEWARD!" came a shrieking bellow then. "Bring my clothes up onto the bridge! MR. KEADWELL! Get that christly anchor up!"

A familiar vibration pulsing up through his bare toes made

him cast a look overside. With incredulous eyes he realised that the ship was moving with the anchor still down, and that the engines were going ahead; rushing back into the wheel-house he seized the engine-room telegraph and whirled it backwards and forwards a number of times, returning the indicator to Stop. From that he leapt to the telephone again, whizzed the call-handle round, and as soon as he got an answer yelled "Who the hell told you to start the engines?"

"You did!" shouted the Second Engineer. "You said 'Get those engines turning over!'"

"Well don't get those god-damned engines turning over till you hear the telegraph next time!"

"Well make up your bloody mind then!"

"Don't talk like that! This is the Captain speaking!"

"Merry Christmas!" bawled the Second Engineer, and both telephones clashed back onto their hooks. When the Captain turned round again he saw Wanker's Doom cringing behind the wheel and the Third Mate standing as far out on the wing of the bridge as he could get, but by this time he was too cold to say anything. "Tea," he chattered to the Chief Steward, who came up with his clothes; by the time he had dragged them on over his pyjamas, and taken a few gulps at a mug of tea made as he liked it, with plenty of condensed milk and sugar, he was beginning to sort out the calamity in his mind.

The slow grumbling of the windlass had been going on as a background to this thoughts, and when the Third Mate timorously

drew his attention to the fact that the anchor was aweigh he snapped "Slow Ahead!"

As the telegraphs gave their whirling clangour he cast a surreptitious glance at the patrol boat which was still standing by. She steamed along beside them as they gathered way, and the light was strong enough now for him to make out the white caps of the Coastguard officers on her bridge. Imagining the comments which they might be making, he clenched his fists in his pockets, then strode to the telegraph and rang Full Ahead. "Keep her as she goes for a moment," he said to Wanker's Doom, and to the Third Mate he shouted "Here - give us a hand."

The Third Mate scurried to obey, following the Captain into the chart-room where Mungo Maclaren still lay upon the settee. "Grab his other leg," grunted the Captain, taking hold of one of them, and commenced to pull.

"But - "

"Do as you're bloody told!"

The Second Mate came off the settee with a sodden thump, and his eyes slitted open for an instant. As the two men dragged him through the wheelhouse his head gave a single protesting turn, and then his face was obscured as the skirts of his coat were pulled up over it.

"Sir, you can't!" protested the Third Mate as he saw what the Captain intended to do. "You'll kill 'im!"

"That's the last thing I'm bloody worried about," panted the Captain as he strove to drag the body nearer to the top of the ladder. "I'd like to kill the whole god-damned lot

of you."

"Not me," replied the Third Mate in a shuddering tone.

"I won't be mixed up in it."

Without his help, Captain Tempest couldn't shove the body down the ladder as he had intended; if the Second Mate had landed head first, he would doubtless have broken his neck. The Third Mate received a single venomous look, and then the Captain turned away. "Get some men and take him somewhere," he snarled. "Make sure that I don't see him again."

No one slept during the watch below that morning. After lengthy discussion of the circumstances, in which Costello took no part, a wary cheerfulness began to show like a gleam of light through the clouds. Before midday, cackles of laughter commenced to be heard; the whole affair was passing into the traditions of the voyage, and would be gossiped over, mimicked, boasted about, and finally stowed away into individual collections of yarns, with which to entertain shipmates on vessels and voyages yet far in the future.

In the smoke-fogged warmth of the fo'c'sle and the gunners' quarters, which were already beginning to heave and roll, a certain amount of Christmas spirit was beginning to show itself. This lasted until eleven-thirty, when the men who would go on watch at noon went to collect their Christmas dinners. They departed whistling, and returned subdued, showing their mates the kits in which reposed several slices of cold corned beef and a handful of ship's biscuits. On the galley door, a typewritten notice had been attached which

read as follows:

In order to bring home my disapproval of this morning's lack of seamanship and good order, the following measures are to be taken:

1. There will be no Christmas dinner for the officers or crew of this ship.
2. There will be no Christmas issue of rum or other spirits.
3. M.Maclaren is relieved from all duties aboard this ship.

BY ORDER,

William Tempest, Master.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

## The Eastward Haul

★

For the second time the Third Mate was being disappointed in his expectation of stepping into the Second Mate's berth. After Captain Macnamara was taken ashore, he had been confident of promotion, and had been bold enough to ask for it. "Wait a day or so," Mr. Keadwell had bidden him cautiously, and during that period Captain Tempest had come aboard.

When Mr. Maclaren was relieved from his duties, the Third Mate's hopes had risen again. But nothing had come of them. Three days had gone by, and Captain Tempest had made no mention of it. In fact, he had shown very clearly that he did not trust any of them to keep a watch. He had hardly left the bridge at all. He dozed on the chart-room settee, had his meals brought up there, and made jack-in-the-box appearances into the wheel-house at any hour of the day or night.

The Third Mate was warned of one of these eruptions by hearing his voice snapping at the helmsman. "Watch your steering, now! Don't let her fall off so much!"

"Aye, aye sir."

There was just time for the Third Mate to pull himself upright from his huddled position in the wing of the bridge before the Captain stepped outside. "Seen anything yet?"

"N-no sir. Not a thing."

"Not very likely to, either - slouching in a corner like a sack of turds. Yes, I saw you! Keep on the move, man! Keep your eyes skinned!"

The lid of the binocular box flew open with a snap as the Captain pulled out the glasses, and climbed up to the space atop the wheelhouse known as the 'Monkey Island'. Bracing himself against the binnacle, he made a long steady sweep of the horizon. There was nothing to be seen; nothing but the long seething battalions of waves which drove endlessly down out of the north; the white-veined tumult of the ocean. There was no scrap of wind-torn smoke, no sky-pricking assembly of masts, no straggler which might act as a milestone to the convoy. Their chances of catching up with it diminished with every hour.

Captain Tempest let the binoculars hang around his neck, and gazed acidly down upon the water which sloshed about the decks. Another wave ran swiftly along the port side, arched its long supple grey-green neck, and casually flicked its crest over the bulwarks. A couple of tons of water surged about the decks, until the ship's roll clanked open the scupper ports and let it out again. Within a few moments, the whole process was repeated again.

Everything was streaming; running with perpetually driven spray and gritty with salt. Ever since they cleared Cape Henry they had been assaulted by this same northerly gale, and the days had passed in sordid discomfort. The decks were constantly awash, everything was battened down, the wind bellowed dismally about the funnel and upperworks as the ship plugged stolidly through the massive wind-flogged waves. Every now

and again, as though the ocean were gathering its strength, a colossal foaming eruption would cascade over the bulwarks, raging completely across the hatches to spill itself over the lee side, charging through an unwarily opened door, washing like a savage brook along alleyways and into cabins. The Cook wore sea-boots as he slithered about his galley, so weary of cursing that he worked in morose silence; down in the engine-room, the greasers clambered warily about the caged monster which they attended.

Chumm-bom-bom! Chumm-bom-bom! Chumm-bom-bom! reiterated the reciprocating engines as they continued their treadmill progress upon the voyage; the great shining thrust-rods swung up and down upon the enormous cams, plunging them down into the pits and heaving them smoothly up again. Seventy-eight times a minute the propeller shaft revolved, almost a hundred feet of steel two feet in diameter; when a seaman went to read the log whose spinner jumped like a hooked fish amongst the waves, he could hear the constant thud-thud-thud of the screw beneath the surface, the occasional thrashing tumult as one of its blades was heaved clear, the straining protest of the rudder groaning upon its pintles.

There was a sense of dogged endurance about the ship and its engines; this was the test for which they had been designed and built those twenty years before. Though she was old and slow, she seemed to have the virtues of a veteran; the wary battle-worn knowledge which enabled her to meet yet another tussle with the sea. And, as with all ships,

it was impossible not to think of her as a living entity. Though she had been conceived in a drawing-office, brought to life in the clamorous womb of a shipyard, and delivered by the gnarled hands of the men who had knocked away her launching-chocks, she had somewhere in the process found a soul.

Eventually she won her contest with the waves, as she had won so many before, and plugged her way through the storm to a longitude where blue-gleaming swells rocked down towards the doldrums. Coming on deck one morning after keeping the four-to-eight watch, Raven was dazzled by an unaccustomed sun; a couple of days later men were working on deck without their jerseys, and lines of washing fluttered in the breeze.

They were almost five hundred miles to the south of the route which they had taken on their outward passage, and were making a little more southing every day. Studying the chart, Captain Tempest realised that they would soon arrive at the dispersal-point for the Singapore-bound section of the convoy, and redoubled his own and his crew's efforts to see something of it.

They were in vain. The Austrian Duke made her solitary way across the swells, rolling in regular rhythm to their rise and fall, and Captain Tempest paced her bridge with a sullen fury at his failure. Even allowing for the delay caused by the storm, he knew that he must have made as much easting as the convoy. A single ship was always faster; she could make her own speed, instead of being restricted by the convoy. Something must have gone wrong; some alteration of course must have been

ordered of which he knew nothing, and the idiots ashore had either neglected to send him a message or had forgotten all about him. At this very moment when he strained his eyes through the binoculars, the convoy might be just over the horizon, but no sign of it ever appeared and no word ever came for him. It almost seemed as though they had given him up for lost.

But Captain Tempest was not the only man who was scanning that area of ocean through binoculars. Aboard the submarine U~~M~~ 284, there were four look-outs to every watch who spent their whole time gazing out across the surging dark-blue swells which came glittering down towards them, raising the wide-bellied craft upon their sleek backs as they made down towards the south. On one of these rhythmic elevations above the normal level of the sea, the lenses and prisms of one look-out's binoculars tightened their grasp upon the light-rays, and drew a tiny object near enough for him to perceive. He spoke to the officer on watch, who bent to the speaking-tube and said "Captain to the bridge, please."

A few moments later, Ober-leutnant Freiherr August von Muffling eased his angular body up through the hatch. He listened to the report, accepted the glasses which were handed to him, and for a long time gazed through them in the direction indicated.

Eventually he climbed up the periscope casing, and held himself with one arm crooked around it whilst he continued to stare. Several minutes passed without any sound but the constant thudding of the Diesel exhausts and the washing of the sea

through the hull-casing, and then he murmured "So..."

He lowered himself back to the deck and drew a cigarette-case from his pocket, but omitted to light the cigarette which he placed between his narrow lips. His mind was busy calculating a number of chances, but at the moment the chance of being observed did not worry him. A cargo vessel which was so hard for him to see, even allowing for the difference in elevation, would find it almost impossible to pick up a submarine.

Since the moment he had heard that Ober-Leutnant Wolfgang Lowke had been injured in an air-raid whilst returning from leave, and that he would be taking the ship to sea with immediate promotion, he had enjoyed exceptionally good luck. It had been a protracted patrol, one of the first to the Caribbean area and the coast of the United States, and he had found good hunting in waters which were still unused to war.

Only two things were wrong. He had fired all his torpedoes, and he was running low on fuel. In these latitudes, which were well south of the normal convoy routes, he had not expected to meet anything so soon; his worries would start in the dangerous waters closer to Europe. For that reason, it was vital to keep the maximum possible reserve.

Checking the course, he decided that his present course-line would intersect that of the cargo-ship in a few hours at the same speed. But, of course, he could not maintain that speed; otherwise he might be observed before he was within range. If he submerged, then his speed would drop so much that the ship could escape him. It would be impossible to watch her through the periscope at that distance.

The attack should be at dawn, he decided, which at this time of the year and in this latitude would mean shortly before seven. That would be the hour most likely to catch a merchant ship unawares, with most of her crew still sleeping and her look-outs becoming tired. His tactics until that moment were fairly simple; close as near as he dared before sunset, get a little ahead during the night, submerge at the first glimmer of dawn, and be prepared to strike as soon as the target was defined. As he began to give his orders, he knew that it would be a long night.