Navy Boys Behind the Big Guns eBook

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A RUN TO ELMVALE

When Philip Morgan announced his approach by an unusually cheerful strain, Al Torrance was already behind the steering wheel of his father's car, with the engine purring smoothly.

"'Lo, Whistler," Al said. "Thought you had forgotten where we planned to go this morning. What made you so late?"

"'Lo, Torry. Never hit the hay till after one. Just talking. My jaws ache," Morgan broke off his whistling long enough to say.

"Sure it isn't whistling that's made your jaws ache?" queried his chum slyly. "Not having had much chance to pipe up while we were aboard ship, I guess you are making up for lost time."

"Talking, I tell you," returned Morgan. "Thought the girls never would let me stop. And father, too. Mother won't own up she's reconciled to my being in the Navy," and Whistler grinned suddenly. "But she listened to all I told them, too. She was just as eager to hear about it as Phoebe and Alice."

"Guess you made yourself out to be some tough garby," chuckled Torrance, using the term the seamen themselves employ to designate a sailor.

"Oh, I gave 'em an earful," Whistler agreed, and puckered his lips again.

"Come on and get in," ordered Torry impatiently. "Pa's got to use the car this afternoon. But he says we can have it to run over to Elmvale in, if we want."

"Where are Frenchy and Ikey?" Whistler broke off in his tune again to ask.

"Going to wait for us down on High Street—and Seven Knott, too."

"Did Hansie say he'd go?" cried the other sailor boy. "Bet he's sore as he can be because he's not with the *Colodia* and Lieutenant Lang."

"He'd never 've taken this furlough, he says, if his mother hadn't begged so hard. Did you ever see a garby so stuck on a gold stripe as Seven Knott is on Lieutenant Commander Lang?" said Torry, rather scornfully.

"I don't know. Mr. Lang has been a good friend to Hans Hertig. This is his second hitch under Mr. Lang," Whistler said.

"Wonder if we'll enlist a second time, too, Whistler."

“Bet you!” was the succinct reply.

The car started under Torry’s careful guidance, and they quickly whisked around the corner into the main street of Seacove, the small port in which the chums had been born and had lived all their lives until they had enlisted as seamen apprentices in the Navy not many months before.

They passed the little cottage in which Mrs. Hertig, Seven Knott’s mother, lived. Beyond that was the Donahue home, where Frenchy’s widowed mother lived with his younger brothers and sisters.

Then came the Rosenmeyer delicatessen shop, and there the car was pulled down by Torry, for there was a little group outside the shop, the center of which were three figures in blue.

“Look at those happy Jacks, will you?” ejaculated Torry in feigned disgust. “Got an audience, haven’t they? And even Seven Knott must be talking some, too. What do you know about that?”

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For the attitude of Seacove had changed mightily since these boys had joined the Navy early in 1917. War had been declared between the United States and Germany and her allies, the drafted men were being called to the training camps, and some had already gone “over there” and were fighting in the trenches of northern France.

Philip Morgan, Alfred Torrance, Michael Donahue, Ikey Rosenmeyer, and their mates on the destroyer *Colodia* had already aided in convoying a large number of troop ships across the Atlantic, had chased submarines and destroyed at least one of the enemy U-boats, and had hunted for and captured the German raider, *Graf von Posen*, which had among the other loot in her hold the treasure of the Borgias which had been purchased from an Italian nobleman by the four Navy boys’ very good friend, Mr. Alonzo Minnette.

The four friends, Morgan, Torrance, Donahue, and Ikey Rosenmeyer, the son of the proprietor of the village delicatessen store, had been given a furlough since landing at Norfolk with the captured raider, of the prize crew of which they had been members. Coming north to Seacove by train, they had met their shipmate, Hans Hertig, known aboard the *Colodia* as Seven Knott, who had likewise been given a furlough after leaving the naval hospital where he had been convalescing from a wound.

The *Colodia* was still at sea—or across the Atlantic—or somewhere. The young seamen who belonged to her crew did not know where. They awaited her return to port in order to rejoin her.

They had another iron in the fire, too; but that they did not talk about much, even among themselves. Mr. Minnette, who was their very good friend, and who worked now in a War Department office at Washington in a lay capacity, had told them he would try his best to get them aboard a new superdreadnaught that was just out of the yard and was being fitted for her maiden cruise.

A number of Naval Reserves would be put aboard this new huge ship; and the Seacove boys, with their experience in the training school at Saugarack and aboard the *Colodia*, surely would be of some use as temporary members of the dreadnaught’s crew.

The boys had written Mr. Minnette about Seven Knott, for he was eager to get back into harness, too. And Seven Knott had held the rank of boatswain’s mate aboard the *Colodia*.

Naturally the friends were all eager to get behind the big guns. Almost every boy who joins the Navy desires to become a gunner. Whistler and Al Torrance were particularly striving for that position, and they studied the text-books and took every opportunity offered them to gain knowledge in that branch of the service.

“Hi, fellows!” called Torry, having stopped the car. “Going to stand there gassing all day?”

The three figures in seaman's dress broke away from their admiring friends and approached the automobile. Frenchy Donahue was a little fellow with pink cheeks, bright eyes, and an Irish smile. Ikey Rosenmeyer was a shrewd looking lad who always had a fund of natural fun on tap. The older man, Hans Hertig, was round-faced and solemn looking, and seldom had much to say. He had had an adventurous experience both as a fisherman and naval seaman, and really attracted more attention in his home town than did the four boy chums.

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“Get in, fellows,” urged Torry. “We want to be sure to catch those chaps at Elmvale during the noon hour. They go home from the munition works for dinner, and we must talk with them then.”

Frenchy and Ikey and Seven Knott climbed into the tonneau and the car whizzed away, leaving the crowd of boys and girls, and a few adults, staring after them.

“By St. Patrick’s piper that played the last snake out of Ireland!” sighed Frenchy, ecstatically, “we never was of such importance since we was christened—hey, fellows?”

“Oi, oi!” murmured Ikey, wagging his head, “my papa don’t even suggest I should take out the orders to the customers no more. He does it himself, or he hires a feller to do it for him.

“Mind, now! Last night he closed the shop an hour early so’s to sit down with my mama and me and Aunt Eitel in the back room, after the kids was all in bed, and made me tell about all we’d done and seen. I tell you it’s great!”

“And before we began our hitch,” Al Torrance chuckled, as he expertly rounded a corner, “we were scarcely worth speaking to in Seacove. Now folks want to stop us on the street and tell us how much they think of us.”

“Gee!” exploded Frenchy, “I could eat candy and ice cream all day long if I’d let the kids spend money on me.”

“We’re sure some pumpkins,” drawled Whistler Morgan, dryly, sitting around in the front seat so he could talk with those in the rear. “I say, Hans!”

“Yep?” was Seven Knott’s reply.

“Do you really think we can get some of those fellows at Elmvale to go to the recruiting office and enlist?”

“Yep. You fellows can tell ’em. You can talk better’n I can.”

Seven Knott knew his shipboard duties thoroughly, and never was reprimanded for neglect of them. But since the four chums had known him well, the petty officer had been no conversationalist, that was sure.

“If this war was going to be won by talk, like some fellows in Congress seem to think,” Al Torrance once said, “Seven Knott wouldn’t have a chance. But it is roughnecks just like him that man the boats and shoot the guns that are going to show Kaiser Bill where he gets off—believe me!”

Elmvale was a factory town not more than six miles above Seacove. It was on the river, at the mouth of which was situated the little port in which were the homes of Whistler Morgan and his friends.

The biggest dam in the State, the Elmvale Dam, held back the waters of the river above the village; and below the dam were several big mills and factories that got their power from the use of the water.

On both sides of the stream, and around the cotton mills, the thread mills, and the munition factories, were built many little homes of the factory and mill hands. It had been pointed out by the local papers that these homes were in double peril at this time.

Guards were on watch night and day that ill-affected persons should not come into the district and blow up the munition factories. But there was a second and greater danger to the people of Elmvale.

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If anything should happen to the dam, if it should burst, the enormous quantity of water held in leash by the structure would pour over the village and cover half the houses to their chimney tops.

Two bridges crossed the river at Elmvale; one at the village proper and the other just below the dam itself and about half a mile from the first mill, Barron & Brothers' Thread Factory.

"Let's take the upper road," proposed Frenchy, as the car came within sight of the chimneys of the Elmvale mills. "We've plenty of time before the noon whistle blows. I haven't been up by the dam since before we all joined the Navy."

"Just as you fellows say," Al responded, and turned into a side road that soon brought them above the mills on the ridge overlooking the valley.

"I say, fellows," Whistler stopped whistling long enough to observe, "there's a slue of water behind that dam. S'pose she should let go all of a sudden?"

"I'd rather be up here than down there," Al said.

"Oi, oi!" croaked Ikey, "you said something."

"I wonder if they guard that dam as they say they do the munition factories," Frenchy put in.

Al turned the machine into the road that descended into the valley by a sharp incline. In sight of the bridge which crossed the river Whistler suddenly put his hand upon his chum's arm.

"Hold on, Torry," he said earnestly. "I bet that's one of the guards now. See that fellow in the bushes over there?"

"I see the man you mean!" Frenchy exclaimed, leaning over the back of the front seat of the automobile. "But he isn't in khaki. And he hasn't got a gun."

All the Navy boys in the automobile, even Seven Knott, saw the man to whom Whistler Morgan had first drawn attention. The man had his back to the road. He was standing upright with a pair of field glasses to his eyes. His interest seemed fixed on a point along the face of the dam just where a thin slice of water ran over the flashboard into the rocky bed of the river.

CHAPTER II

THE STRANGER

For the life of him Phil Morgan could not have told why he was so keenly interested in that stranger. He could not see the man's face; he did not presume it was anybody he had ever seen before; nor had he any reason to be suspicious of the man.

Nevertheless he felt a little thrill as he first caught sight of the stranger, and this feeling spurred his exclamation to Torry, which lead the others' attention to him.

After they had all seen the man, Phil added: "Pull her down. Let's see what he is up to."

Torrance stopped the automobile. His chum was their acknowledged leader in most things, and all the other Navy boys were used to obeying Phil Morgan's mandates without much question. As told in the former books of this series, Morgan was an observant and level-headed youth, and his friends might have followed a much more dangerous leader in both work and play.

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The four boys, at that time all under eighteen years of age, had begun their first enlistment in the Navy several months before the United States got into the war. They spent some months in the training camp at Saugarack, on the New England coast.

The Government commissioned new craft of all kinds as rapidly as they could be obtained, and was obliged to man some of them partly with youths who had not yet finished their preliminary training ashore.

Phil Morgan and his friends had made rapid progress in their studies and the drills, and they were lucky enough to be assigned to the same ship. This was the destroyer *Colodia*, one of the newest of her class, a fast ship of a thousand tons' burden. She made two cruises, both crammed full of excitement and adventure; and the story of these cruises is related in the first volume of the series, entitled "Navy Boys After the Submarines; Or, Protecting the Giant Convoy."

In this first narrative of their adventures in the United States Navy, Phil had a very thrilling experience. He fell overboard from his ship and was picked up by the German U-boat No. 812.

After the conclusion of the destroyer's second cruise the four chums from Seacove were enabled to spend a week at home. Returning to the port in which they had been instructed to join the *Colodia* the evening before she again was to sail, the four chums were held up by a burning railroad bridge, which had been set on fire by German agents.

It looked as though they would be unable to reach the *Colodia* on time. This event would be a very serious matter, for the naval authorities frown upon any tardiness of enlisted men in returning from shore leave. Besides, the boys particularly desired to be aboard the *Colodia* during her coming cruise.

The second volume of the series opened with this situation. The boys made the acquaintance of an influential man, Mr. Alonzo Minnette, who was likewise a passenger on the stalled train. And he made it possible for the four apprentice seamen to reach their ship in time.

In this second volume entitled: "Navy Boys Chasing a Sea Raider; Or, Landing a Million Dollar Prize," the four young members of the *Colodia's* crew, whose adventures we are following, had many thrilling experiences. In the end, the destroyer, by a ruse, captured the *Graf von Posen*, a noted sea raider, and Whistler and his chums are allowed to board her as part of the prize crew.

The boys were particularly interested in the cargo of the raider, for Mr. Minnette had promised them a thousand dollars to divide among them if they discovered aboard the raider the treasure of the Borgias, a collection of precious stones, that the captain of the

Graf von Posen had taken from an Italian merchant ship which had been captured and sunk by the Germans.

Naturally the Navy boys were interested in having others join the Navy; and Hans Hertig, whom they found at home visiting his mother, was particularly anxious to get some young men, who were working in Elmvale and who came of German stock like himself, to enlist and show their patriotism and love for the country of their birth.

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“Say! what do you suppose is the matter with that chap?” Frenchy demanded at last in his rather high, penetrating voice.

Instantly the man in the bushes turned and saw the automobile. Like a flash he settled down in his tracks and disappeared. One moment he was a plain figure standing out against the background of the dam; the next he was not there at all!

“By St. Patrick’s piper that played the last snake out of Ireland!” gasped Frenchy, “he ain’t there no more.”

“You poor fish!” ejaculated Al in disgust, “you scared him off with your squealing. Who do you suppose he was?”

“And what is he doing over there?” added Ikey Rosenmeyer.

“Funny thing,” observed Whistler. “Must be something important up on that dam he was looking at through his glasses.”

“Might as well drive on,” growled Al, punching the starter button again. “This Frenchman from Cork would spoil anything.”

“Aw—g’wan!” muttered the abashed Michael Donahue.

“Well, that chap was no guard, that is sure,” Whistler said.

They drove slowly on across the bridge. All of them searched the base of the dam—or as much of it as could be seen, for the fringe of trees and shrubs that masked it—but not a moving figure did they see. The water poured over the flashboard with a splashing murmur at that distance, and ran down under the bridge in a rocky bed. It was clear and cool looking. Below the factories the river water was of an entirely different color, and people in Seacove had begun to object to the filth from the Elmvale mills being dumped into the cove.

Al Torrance stopped the car at the side gate of the biggest munition works just as the noon whistle blew. Seven Knott got out and began to look about for his friends to whom he had tried to talk enlistment.

He soon spied two of them, and beckoned them near. Others followed. Whistler and his chums were introduced by the boatswain’s mate, who left the talking to the youths after he had introduced his friends.

In five minutes there was a very earnest enlistment meeting going on at the gate of the munition factory. Perhaps no harder place to gain recruits could have been selected. In the first instance, all the boys working here were earning big money. And there was, too, some excitement in the work. As one of them said:

“You Jackies haven’t anything on us. We don’t know but any moment we may be blown sky-high.”

“True for you,” put in Frenchy smartly. “But you don’t get any fun out of your danger. We do. And we get promotion and steadily increased pay and a chance to get up in the world.”

“Sure!” broke in Al. “Some day we’re all going to win gold stripes; aren’t we, fellows?”

His chums declared he was right. But one listener said doubtfully:

“You won’t ever win commissions if you get sunk or blown up, on one of those blamed old iron pots.”

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“Say!” put in Ikey Rosenmeyer hotly, “you fellows won’t get no advance in rating at all, and you may get blown up any time. We’ve got something to work for, we have!”

“We’ve got money to work for,” declared one of the munition workers.

“Oi, oi!” sneered Ikey. “What’s money yet?” A sneer which vastly amused his chums, for Ikey’s inborn love for the root of all evil was well known.

As the group stood talking, along came a man, walking briskly from the direction the Seacove boys had come in their automobile. Two or three of the munition workers spoke to the man, who was broad-shouldered, walked with a brisk military step, and was heavily bewhiskered.

Whistler stopped talking to a possible candidate for the blue uniform of the Navy, and looked after this stranger.

“Who is he?” he asked.

“That’s Blake. Works in our laboratory. Nice fellow,” was the reply.

“Oh! I didn’t know but he was one of the men guarding the dam,” Whistler murmured.

“Shucks! there aren’t any guards up there. There are soldiers here at the factories, though.”

“Is that so?” questioned Whistler. “Where’s he been, do you suppose?”

“Who? Blake?”

“That man,” said young Morgan grimly.

“Oh, he’s a bug on natural history, or the like. Always tapping rocks with a hammer, or hunting specimens, or botanizing. Great chap. Hasn’t been here in Elmvale long. But everybody likes him.”

Phil made no further comment aloud, but to himself he said:

“He wasn’t botanizing through that field-glass; or knocking specimens off of rocks. His interest was centered on the face of the dam. I wonder why?”

For the military looking man, called Blake, was the individual he and his friends had seen in the bushes as they drove along the Upper Road, and who had seemed desirous of being unobserved by the passers-by.

CHAPTER III

THE WATER WHEEL

Phil Morgan was no more suspicious by nature than his chums. Merely a thought had come into his mind that had not come into theirs; and he disliked to be annoyed by anything in the nature of an unsolved problem. He always wanted to know why.

In this particular case he wished to know why the man called Blake had tried to hide himself in the clump of bushes beside the Upper Road when the automobile load of boys had come along and caught him examining the face of the Elmvale Dam through a field-glass.

It was through a break in the trees that partly masked the dam the man had been looking, and Whistler knew that the spot in which he was interested must be directly beside the overflow of the dam—where the water splashed down into the rocky river bed.

Whistler did not lose interest in the attempt to inspire some of the factory workers to enlist in the Navy, and he worked just as hard as his mates all through the noon hour. But the puzzle connected with the man named Blake continued to peck at his mind like an insistent chick trying to get out of its shell.

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Hans Hertig's desire to get some of his old friends to enlist bore some fruit. Three men promised to go down to the enlistment bureau on Saturday afternoon, when they had a half holiday.

The Seacove party then wanted to go to a dining-room for dinner; but Whistler excused himself. He was hungry enough; but he "had other fish to fry," he whispered to Torrance.

"Come around by the Upper Road—same way we got here," directed Whistler. "I'll meet you at the bridge. Wait if I'm not there."

"What is the matter with you, Whistler?" demanded Al.

But although Morgan went away without making answer, he knew that his chum would do as he was asked, and bluff off the others when they asked questions, too.

Philip Morgan hurried past the factories and the few houses which lay in this direction. The land near the dam which had been built across the valley was so sterile that few people lived in this neighborhood.

Up on the ridges, on either side, were farms; but this was a wild piece of scrub at the foot of the dam. One could jump a rabbit in it, or get up a flock of quail at almost any time during the hunting season.

Like most boys of Seacove, as well as Elmvale, Whistler was familiar with this stretch of untamed ground and plunged into it with full knowledge of its tangled brier patches and rough quarries. He started diagonally for the dam, and in a brief time came to the edge of the shallow channel, which now carried the overflow of the huge reservoir behind the dam down to the cove.

As he followed this stream, he could not help thinking of the possibility of a break occurring in the high wall of masonry which loomed ahead of him. If there should be any undiscovered weakness in the wall! Or if an enemy should sink a charge of dynamite, or some other high explosive, at the base of the dam and blow a hole through it!

He did not see any one moving about the dam either above or below. He knew that on the ridge, level with the top of the barrier, lived a man they called the dam superintendent. He sometimes walked across the embankment, from end to end; a privilege forbidden to others.

But Whistler was quite sure that this dam superintendent seldom went to the foot of the wall, or examined the face of it for any break in the stonework. Of course, the dam had stood secure for so many years that it seemed improbable that it would fail in any part now.

But Whistler Morgan was not considering any leakage of the water through the masonry which might endanger the foundation of the dam. Such seepage must have shown itself long ago if the barrier had not been properly constructed.

It was of a sudden, unexpected, and treacherous blow-out that the young sailor was thinking. That man in the bushes, who had seemed so desirous of hiding from the passers-by and whose interest in the face of the dam had been so marked, puzzled Phil and excited his suspicions.

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Blake. And Blake was an English name! He looked about as much like an Englishman as he, Whistler, looked like Dinkelspiel!

“I have seen plenty of Britishers,” thought the young fellow, “and not one of them ever looked like this chemist, or whatever he is. And he’s a stranger—worked here only a month.

“He was not tapping rocks or getting botanical specimens over here when we fellows came along the Upper Road. His interest was in this dam—if it was at long distance. I wonder if we ought to report him to the marshal’s office.

“And get him, if he’s innocent of any wrongdoing, into hot water,” Whistler added, wagging his head. “Say! that won’t do. We fellows came near getting poor Seven Knott into trouble, thinking him a German spy,” he added, referring to an incident mentioned in “Navy Boys After the Submarines.”

Thus meditating he drew nearer to the place where the flashboard was down and the water poured into the rocky river bed. There were stepping stones here, so it was easy for an agile person to get across the stream.

A blue haze of spray rose from the foaming water on the rocks, and there sounded a pleasant murmur from the falling water. Birds darted in and out of this spray, fluttering their pinions in the bath thus provided.

On this side of the waterfall Whistler could discover nothing on the face of the dam nor along its foot that seemed in the least suspicious. The masonry was perfect.

He crossed the river bed, leaping from stone to stone, and stepped up so close to the falling water that the spray splashed him. It was somewhere about here, he thought, that the man, Blake, had focused his field-glass from the roadside.

There was absolutely nothing out of the way here that he could see. The brush was kept cleared out at the foot of the dam for a dozen feet or so; there seemed to be no cover here. Not a stone had been overturned along this cleared path.

The water splashed and bubbled at the foot of the fall. Did it seem to splash more vigorously just here at the edge of the pool, hidden by the spray in part, and partly by the overhang of a great rock on which Whistler stood?

The observant youth stooped, then knelt beside the stream. The rock was wet and his garments were fast becoming saturated. But he paid no attention to this.

There was something down there in the pool, at its edge, struggling beneath the surface. Not a fish, of course!

Suddenly he thrust in his hand, wetting his sleeve to the elbow. Quickly he made sure that his suspicion was correct. There was some kind of water wheel whirling down there.

He moved a flat stone which seemed to have lain for ages in its present position. Yet under that stone was the end of the wheel's axle with cogwheels rigged to pass on the power engendered by the wheel to some mechanical contrivance not yet placed.

Whistler returned the flat rock back to its former position, and moved slowly back from the place on hands and knees. Then he stood up and looked all around to see if he had been observed. Particularly did he look through the break in the trees toward the spot where Blake, the stranger, had stood when Whistler and his friends had first spied him.

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There was nobody in sight as far as the young fellow could see. He moved back into the shelter of a clump of brush. He heard an automobile chugging up from the village and believed Al and the others were approaching the bridge where he had asked his chum to wait for him.

But he lingered a bit. He was deeply moved by his discovery. This was no boy's plaything. The mechanism was the effort of a mature mind, perhaps the result of inventive genius of high quality.

Some inventor might be secretly experimenting with water power here; and if Whistler told of his discovery he might be doing the unknown a grave wrong.

Yet Blake's peculiar actions and the fact that the foot of the dam had been chosen for the experiment troubled the young fellow vastly.

There was nothing along the wall, as far as he could see, or upon its face, that excited Whistler's further suspicion. Just that little water wheel under the rock whirling and splashing by the power of the falling stream. It was perfectly innocent in itself; yet Philip Morgan had never been more excited and troubled in his life.

He went slowly back to the road and found the car waiting on the bridge. The other boys were loud in their demands as to what he had been doing, and Frenchy and Ikey did their best to pump information out of him.

"What for did you go up there to the dam yet?" demanded Ikey.

"Cat's fur, to make kittens' breeches," declared Whistler. "Because I couldn't get any dog fur. Now do you know?"

And this was all the satisfaction there was to be got out of their leader at this particular time.

CHAPTER IV

S. P. 888

The result of the boys' campaign for recruits to the Navy was very encouraging. They had been to places besides Elmvale; and several of their old friends in Seacove were getting into one branch or another of the service.

Many of the young men in the neighborhood, of course, were of draft age; but, being longshore bred, they naturally preferred salt water service. So they enlisted before the time came for them to answer the call of their several draft boards.

The interest of our four friends, and of Seven Knott even, was not entirely centered in this patriotic duty of urging others into the service. Their release from duty might end any day. Under ordinary circumstances the chum would have been assigned before this to some patrol vessel, or the like, until their own ship, the *Colodia*, made port.

Mr. Minnette, however, was trying to place them on the *Kennebunk*, the new superdreadnaught, for a short cruise. If he succeeded the friends might be obliged to pack their kits and leave home again at almost any hour. The *Kennebunk* was fitting out in a port not fifty miles from Seacove.

Meanwhile the chums were “having the time of their young sweet lives,” Al Torrance observed more than once. The home folks had never before considered these rather harum-scarum boys of so much importance as now that they were in the Navy and becoming real “Old Salts.” From Doctor Morgan down to Ikey’s youngest brother the relatives and friends of the quartette treated them with much consideration.

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To tell the truth it had not been patriotism that had carried Ikey Rosenmeyer and his friends into the Navy. At that time the United States was not in the war, and the four friends had thought little of the pros and cons of the world struggle.

They thought they had had enough school, and there was no steady and congenial work for them about Seacove. Entering the Navy had been a lark in the offing.

As soon as they had joined, they found that they had entered another school, and one much more severe and thorough than the Seacove High School. They were learning something pretty nearly all the time, both in the training school and aboard the *Colodia*. And there was much to learn.

However, Whistler and Al took the work more seriously than their younger mates. They were studying gunnery, and hoped to get into the gun crew of the *Kennebunk* for practice if they were fortunate enough to cruise on that ship. Just at present Frenchy and Ikey Rosenmeyer were more engaged in getting all the fun possible out of existence.

The thing that delighted the latter most was the way in which his father treated him. Mr. Rosenmeyer had been a stern parent, and had opposed Ikey's desire to enlist in the Navy. He always declared he needed the boy to help in the store and to take out orders. Ikey had got so that he fairly hated the store and its stock in trade. Pigs feet and sauerkraut and dill pickles were the bane of his life.

Now that he was at home on leave, Mr. Rosenmeyer would not let Ikey help at all in the store. If a customer came in, the fat little storekeeper heaved himself up from his armchair and bade Ikey sit still.

"Nein! It iss not for you, Ikey. Don't bodder 'bout the store yet. We haf changed de stock around, anyvay, undt you could not find it, p'r'aps, vot de lady vants. Tell us again, Ikey, apout shootin' de camouflage off de German raider-poat, de *Graf von Posen*. Mebby-so de lady ain't heardt apout it yet. I didn't see it in de paper meinselluf."

So Ikey, thus urged, spun the most wonderful yarns regarding his adventures; and he was not obliged to "draw the long bow"; for the experiences of him and his three friends had been exciting indeed.

Mr. Rosenmeyer had become as thoroughly patriotic as he once had been pro-German. It was a great cross to him now that he could not learn to speak English properly. But German names he abhorred and German signs he would no longer allow in the store. He even put a newly-printed sign over the sauerkraut barrel which read: "Liberty Cabbage."

Into the store on a misty morning rolled Frenchy Donahue in his most pronounced Old Salt fashion. Frenchy had acquired such a sailorish roll to his walk, that Al Torrance hinted more than once that the Irish lad could not get to sleep at night now that he was ashore until his mother went out and threw several buckets of water against his bedroom window.

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“Hey, Ikey! what you think?” called Frenchy. “Channel bass are running. Whistler and Torry are going out in the *Sue Bridger*. What d’you know about that? Bridger’s let ’em have his cat for the day. Never was known to do such a thing before,” and Frenchy chuckled. “Oh, boy! aren’t we having things soft just now? Want to go fishing, Ikey?” Ikey favored his friend with a sly wink, but only said crisply:

“I don’t know about it. I was going to wash the store windows. Where are Whistler and Torry going?”

“As far as Blue Reef. They say the bass are schoolin’ out there.”

“They’d better be on the lookout for subs, as far out as the Reef,” Ikey said solemnly. “I don’t believe they’ve got this coast half patrolled. We don’t often see one of those chasers in the cove here.”

“Mebbe we’ll catch a submarine instead of bass,” remarked Frenchy.

“You petter go along mit your friends in dot catboat, Ikey,” said Mr. Rosenmeyer, who was listening with both ears and his eyes wide open. “If there iss one of them German submarines in dese waters idt shouldt be known yet. Ain’t that right?”

“Yes. We’d have to report it, Papa, to the naval authorities,” admitted Ikey seriously.

“Vell, you go right along den,” urged his father. “Nefer mindt yet de winders. I can get a winder washer easy.”

“Well, if you don’t mind, Papa,” said Ikey, with commendable hesitancy.

“Come along, Ikey,” urged Frenchy under his breath. “And be sure you bring along your submarine tackle—I mean your bass rod,” and he rolled out of the store, chuckling to himself.

“Undt take a lunch, Ikey!” cried Mr. Rosenmeyer after his son. “Ham, undt bologna, undt cheese, undt there’s some fine dill pickles——”

“Oh, my!” groaned his son. “No dill pickles.”

He joined Frenchy in a few minutes with a basket crammed with things to eat, as well as his fishing tackle. It was not far to Bridger’s float, off which the twenty-four-foot catboat, *Sue Bridger*, was moored.

Ikey remarked: “Sometimes I almost faint when I see the change in papa. He never wanted me to have a bit of fun before. He didn’t have no fun when he was a boy. He always worked. That is the German way, he says.

“But he don’t have any use for *any*thing German now—not even the way they bring up children.”

“Ain’t it a fact?” chuckled Frenchy. “Me mother makes the kids git up and give me the best chair when I come into the sitting room.

‘Git up out o’ that,
Ye impident brat!
An’ let Mr. M’Ginnis sit down.’

That’s the way she treats me. Me head’s gettin’ that swelled I couldn’t draw a watch cap down over me ears.”

The exhaust of the auxiliary engine of the catboat was spitting when Frenchy hailed their mates. Whistler was loosening the points of the big sail while Torry worked at the engine.

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“How’ll we get over there?” demanded Ikey. “There’s no boat here.”

Whistler Morgan, barefooted and with his sleeves rolled up, came aft and tossed Ikey the end of a coil of line.

“Draw her in to the float. I’ll pay out the mooring cable. What have you in that basket?”

“A litter of pups a neighbor wants him to drown,” answered Frenchy solemnly. “You fellows brought lunch enough for all, didn’t you?”

“Couldn’t get any at my house,” Al confessed. “The girl’s on a strike.”

There was no mother at the Torrance house, and sometimes the housekeeping there was “at sixes and sevens.”

“I was going to get some crackers and sardines,” confessed Whistler. “I had no idea we could get this boat when I left the house. But I can run up and get Alice to put us up a snack.”

Frenchy was carrying Ikey’s basket very carefully—indeed, lovingly. He allowed his mate to catch the line and draw the *Sue Bridger* in to the float alone.

They stepped aboard, and Al made a grab for the basket handle with his greasy hands. “Let’s see the pups,” he demanded suspiciously.

“Have a care! Have a care!” cried Whistler as the two struggled for possession of the basket. “What is in it, Ikey?”

“Oi, oi! Oi, oi!” moaned Ikey. “They will the basket haf overboard yet! Stop it! Stop it!”

It was Whistler who rescued the lunch basket with a firm hand. In the struggle Frenchy came near going overboard, but he fell into the bilge in the bottom of the boat instead.

“Wow!” he yelled. “Me clean pants! This old tub is leaking like a sieve, Whistler!”

Whistler and Al were peeping into the basket. Their delight was acclaimed at once.

“Good boy, Ikey!” declared Torry, smacking his lips. “You must have robbed the whole delicatessen shop.”

“You don’t know my papa,” declared Ikey with pride. “He would like to feed the whole American Navy—that’s the way he feels about it.”

“He’s all right,” agreed Torry. “Come on, now, fellows, let’s stir around. The best of the day will be gone soon. Don’t worry about your wet pants, Frenchy. Get up and pump

out the bilge. She hasn't been used for a fortnight, and of course some moisture has gathered."

"'Moisture?' Good-night!" growled the Irish lad, setting to work as he was told with the tin pump. "I bet I have to sit and do this all day while you fellows fish."

The engine was only for an emergency. Captain Bridger had told them that. Gasoline was expensive. So Whistler and Ikey got up the sail, it filled, and they cast off the moorings. The catboat began to edge her way out into the cove. There was no rain falling; but fog wreaths rolled in from the sea.

"Get your scare!" shouted Whistler as he ran back to take the tiller. "Toot away once in a while. We don't want to stub our toe against some other craft, and that before we get out of the cove."

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“A submarine, for instance?” chuckled Frenchy, soon becoming pacified. “Ikey’s father thinks maybe he might bag one while we’re out here.”

“I’d like to get a close-up view of one of those submarine chasers,” remarked Torry, finding the horn in the forward locker. He tooted it raucously, and then continued: “They say some of ’em can go like the wind.”

“Go right through a tub like this, if once we got in the way,” commented Whistler. “Mind you! faster than the *Colodia*—and that’s some speed.”

“Wow!” cried Frenchy. “Don’t believe anything on water ever does go faster than a torpedo boat destroyer.”

“Oh, yes, there are faster boats. How about a hydro?” Phil said, when Ikey broke in with an inquiry:

“Say! lemme ask you: Why do they call the *Colodia* and her sister ships ‘torpedo boat destroyers’? We don’t see many torpedo boats anyway. They are all old stuff.”

“That’s right,” Torry said. “What is the why-for? All naval craft are supposed to be destroyers anyway—I mean service craft.”

Morgan was the oracle on this occasion.

“Ikey is right. I’ve read that torpedo boats antedate the Spanish War. Their exclusive business was to run up close to an enemy battleship and deliver against it an automobile torpedo. These boats were great stuff in the beginning.

“Then they invented a craft as an antidote for the torpedo boat—the torpedo boat destroyer. Our Admiral Sims called this new vessel ’a tin box built around a mighty big engine.’”

“Wow! And he is right,” cried Frenchy Donahue. “That’s just what our *Colodia* is.”

“And these subchasers are still faster,” Torry observed. “They tell me they can make thirty-five, and better, an hour.”

“Oi, oi!” cried Ikey Rosenmeyer at this juncture. “Speak of the Old Harry and hear his wings, yet! What’s that off yonder?”

The *Sue Bridger* was now skimming out of the cove, and the fog was lifting. They got a sight of a patch of open sea across which a low, gray vessel was shooting like a shark after its prey.

“What a beaut!” shouted Torry.

“That’s one of the new chasers all right,” Whistler agreed. “Their base is at New London where the submarine base is.”

At that moment the sun broke through the murk overhead. Its rays shone brilliantly upon the patch of blue sea on which the submarine patrol boat steamed at such a rapid pace.

The sunbeams pricked out the letters and figures painted so big upon the side of the craft and the Navy boys repeated in chorus:

“S. P., Eighty-eighty-eight.”

CHAPTER V

THE STREAK ON THE WATER

The Navy boys arrived at the patch of shallow water over the Blue Reef at about noon. By that time the fog was pretty well dissipated, and they had a clear view of miles and miles of sea as well as of the coastline behind them and the narrow entrance to the cove.

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The submarine chaser was out of sight. No other craft appeared upon the open sea beyond the *Sue Bridger's* present anchorage. The boys threw out a little chum, and then dropped their hooks.

"First nibble!" whispered Torry. "Now watch me play him."

But the first few "nibbles" proved to be merely "hook-cleaners." The fish got the bait, and the boys had the exercise of swishing their lines in and out of the water.

Channel bass run to large sizes. Torry told about seeing one hung up on the dock at Seacove weighing sixty-four and a quarter pounds.

"That's all right," grumbled Frenchy, who had just lost a nibbler, "but a two-pound one will satisfy me. What would we do with a sixty-four-pound bass?"

"Keep it alive and teach it to draw a little red wagon," chuckled Ikey. "Oi, oi! That would be fine!"

"It would be as big as Dugan's goat. Don't know why it shouldn't be tackled up and made use of," Whistler agreed, dryly.

"Only they lack feet—Gee-whillikins! what's this?" burst forth Torry.

He certainly had a bite at last. His reel hummed and the fish started for the coast of Spain; or, at least, in that general direction.

He had to play the fish well to save his line, for the latter was neither a very heavy one, nor new. The bass ran stubbornly out to sea.

"That's a whale, Torry," Whistler declared, breaking off in a military tune to make the observation. "You should have harpooned it."

"I'm going to get him aboard here if I swamp the boat!" declared Torry with vigor.

The boys were so interested in his playing the fish for the next ten minutes that they did not cast a glance shoreward. Finally the bass was tired out, and Torry drew him in close to the boat. Whistler leaned over the side and, with a maul, tapped the bass on the head.

But when he got his hand in the gills of the fish they clamped down upon his fingers, and, in the struggle, he was almost hauled out of the boat.

"Hey! Help!" he bawled. "What are you fellows? Just passengers?"

Frenchy gave him a hand on one side and Ikey on the other; between them the trio hauled a ten-pound bass over the gunwale. Torry was dancing around in glee and shouting at the top of his voice.

“Hush!” commanded Whistler. “You’ll scare even the sharks and dogfish away.”

“Or you’ll dance through the rotten old bottom boards of the boat and we’ll have to walk ashore,” added Frenchy.

But it was a great catch, and the others could feel nothing but envy of Torry’s success. He had set a pace that none of them could equal; for after that there did not seem to be another bass of even two pounds’ weight in the whole ocean.

“Hey, fellows!” ejaculated Ikey suddenly. “Who’s this coming?”

“Somebody walking on the water, is it?” chuckled Frenchy.

“Aw, you needn’t be correcting my English,” responded Ikey. “There are no medals on you for being a purist.”

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“Wow, wow!” yelled Torry. “Listen to him sling language.”

“Hold on, fellows,” Whistler said, diving for the glass he never went to sea without. “That’s no smack.”

They all had turned to look at the approaching craft which Ikey had first sighted. It was a power boat and was running parallel with the coast in a southeasterly direction and inshore of the anchorage of the *Sue Bridger*.

She was about forty feet long and was showing some speed; but her hull looked battered, and there was nothing natty or yacht-like about her.

“No pleasure craft, that,” ventured Torry, as Phil trained his glasses on her. “She’s too slouchy.”

“She’s got speed, just the same,” observed Frenchy. “What’s her name, Phil?”

“Can’t make it out,” returned Morgan. Then immediately he uttered a surprised ejaculation.

“What’s up?” Torry asked him.

Whistler said nothing but he drew his chum up beside him and thrust the glass into his hand. “Look at that fellow,” he commanded.

“Which fellow?” asked Torry trying to focus the glass on the strange craft.

“The man forward. He’s looking this way. See! The man with the whiskers,” whispered Morgan.

“I see him,” returned Torry.

The other boys were giving more attention to their fishing again. Whistler was very much in earnest, and he spoke softly in his chum’s ear:

“You’ve seen him before. It’s the man we saw in the bushes up there by the Elmvale Dam the other day. Remember, Al?”

“Gee! Yes!” breathed Torry.

“They told me his name was Blake. He doesn’t look it,” said Whistler earnestly. “He looks more like a German than Hansie Hertig—and that’s enough!”

“Aw——”

“Of course, he can’t help that,” agreed Whistler before Torrance could voice objection. “But he is a stranger in Elmvale. He works at the munition factory. You’d think of course they’d be careful who they employ. But he wouldn’t be the first alien that has been employed in such a factory.”

“What are you driving at, Phil?” demanded his chum, much puzzled now.

“I found something up there near the dam that I didn’t tell you fellows about. And it is something that I think that man’s interested in. Now, what’s he out here for?”

“For a sail.”

“In that old tub that is full of oil casks and the like?”

“Whistler Morgan!” breathed Torry in amazement, “how do you know at this distance what kind of cargo that boat has?”

“Why, she fairly reeks of oil!” said Whistler confidently. “See that streak along the water in her wake—that purplish, reddish streak?”

“I see it!” admitted Torry in a moment.

“Nothing but oil would do that. She’s got leaky casks aboard. And where would an oil lighter be going out this way? Where is she coming from and where is she going? And what is that bewhiskered Blake doing aboard her? Tell me that, will you?”

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But the wondering and excited Torrance could not answer these questions.

CHAPTER VI

AN OLD FRIEND

Fishing rather palled upon both Whistler and Torry after sighting the other boat. The younger boys had not paid much attention to the passing of the craft which Whistler was confident was an oil lighter of some kind.

“You’re so plaguy suspicious, Whistler,” muttered Al Torrance, as they heaved up the anchor and the younger boys hoisted the big sail.

“For all you know, that Blake may be as harmless as a baby.”

“Sure,” agreed Morgan. “But what’s he doing out in that boat, and what is the boat itself doing out here? She’s headed off shore—and you saw she was loaded. The water almost lapped over her rail.”

“Well?”

“She surely isn’t headed for the other side of the Atlantic,” Whistler declared. “Yet she’s aiming straight out to sea right now. She isn’t following the coast any longer.”

It was a fact. Although the strange power launch was now at a great distance, it was plain she was leaving the land behind her. There was no land in that direction save the European coast.

“You believe she’s a supply ship for German subs?” asked Torry.

“Or taking out gasoline or oil to put aboard some Swedish or Norwegian ship that expects to give the cargo to the Germans at some rendezvous in the North Sea. That isn’t impossible, Torry.”

“Just the same I fancy you are hunting a mare’s nest,” his chum declared.

Torry—nor the other Navy boys—was not apt to call in question Whistler’s judgment. But on this occasion it seemed to him as though Morgan was shooting wild.

Frenchy Donahue and Ikey Rosenmeyer had caught several fish and were satisfied; but soon they began to notice that their companions had something on their minds besides the catch of channel bass.

“What’s bitin’ you fellows?” demanded Frenchy. “Had a spat?”

“I bet they’ve had a lover’s quarrel,” grinned Ikey. “Ain’t you going to speak to us, ever again, Torry?”

“Oh, my eye!” growled Torry.

But he and Whistler really had very little to say while the boat was running back into the cove. The wind was not so favorable, so it took a much longer time for the trip than it had to come out to the fishing grounds.

“But if we use a drop of his gas, old Cap Bridger will know it,” grumbled Frenchy. “Maybe we’ll have to row her in.”

A little flicker of breeze helped after a while, however; but it was just then, too, and after they had rounded one of the crab-claw capes that defended the cove from the ocean, that Ikey sang out:

“What’s this coming? Oi, oi! D’you see it, Whistler? It’s a streak of light!”

The other boys turned to look seaward. Rushing in from that watery world was a gray shape—narrow, low-decked, with slight upperworks and a single stack.

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“A chaser!” cried Torry, finding his voice and growing excited.

“She’s aiming right this way,” added Frenchy excitedly.

Phil Morgan had his glass out again, and his lips unpuckered and the tune he had been monotoning died.

“What do you make of her, Phil?” whispered Al Torrance.

“It is a sub patrol boat all right,” agreed their leader.

Ikey, who had the tiller at this juncture, got so excited watching the swiftly approaching craft that he pretty nearly swung the *Sue Bridger* in a circle.

“Look out, you chump!” yelled Torry. “Want to yank the stick out of her? If you haven’t a care Captain Bridger will get the price of a new catboat out of us.”

Whistler gave Torrance the glass and went aft himself to relieve Ikey at the helm.

“You’re a fine garby,” called Donahue to Rosenmeyer. “Lose your head mighty easy. That chaser isn’t chasing us.”

“How do you know she isn’t?” returned Ikey.

“She certainly is following us,” Whistler said. “But until she bespeaks our attention with her forward gun I guess we need not worry,” and he smiled grimly.

The boys watched the swiftly approaching boat. It came in through the narrows at top speed, circled around toward the docks, and passed the catboat at a distance.

“’S. P. 888’!” yelled Torry. “Look there!”

“I thought it was that same chaser we saw before,” Frenchy said.

“Wonder what she wants in here at Seacove?” Ikey asked.

Whistler had changed their course to bring the catboat nearer to the naval boat, which was slowing down. Torry leaped upon the low-decked cabin and began signaling by the semaphore code. In his blue uniform his body stood out clearly against the catboat’s sail, and he was at once observed by the crew of the S. P. 888.

“Whew! Look at that!” gasped Frenchy. “They are answering.”

Then he and Ikey began to spell out the word that the seaman on the deck of the chaser was signaling in the same code Torrance had used.

“M-O-R-G-A-N!”

“Oi, oi!” yelled Ikey. “They’re after you, Whistler!”

“What’s the next?” gasped Frenchy.

Another name was not long in coming.

“T-O-R-R-A-N-C-E!”

“They want you, too.”

“Look, they are calling somebody else.”

Quickly the Navy Boys spelt out the next name.

“D-O-N-A-H-U-E!”

“That’s me,” came in a groan from Frenchy.

“Maybe they don’t want me,” murmured Ikey.

“Don’t you fool yourself,” returned Whistler promptly. “We couldn’t do without you.”

“But they ain’t wigwaging no more, Whistler.”

“Maybe the sailor doin’ it got tired,” offered Torry.

“R-O-S-E-N-M-E-Y-E-R!” came the signal presently.

“See them coming, boys!”

“Some speed there!”

“He’s after us,” said Torry. “Whip up this old tub, Whistler. Let’s start the engine.”

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“Hold your horses,” advised Morgan. “He knows we are aboard. We’ll get there all right, give us time.”

The chaser was circling around, and finally headed toward them. The excited boys in the catboat saw Mr. MacMasters examining them through a glass. The S. P. 888 came to a stop near the usual mooring of the *Sue Bridger*. Captain Bridger put off in a dory from the float and began to scull out toward the Government boat.

“We’re going aboard!” cried Torry. “Say, Whistler! do you suppose he’s been sent for us? Shall we join up with the crew of that shark?”

“Oi, oi!” groaned Ikey. “No dreadnaught for us, then? What will my papa and mama say? I’ve been tellin’ ’em maybe I get to command a battleship this next cruise.”

“I had no idea Ensign MacMasters was in service again,” Whistler said. “But I am glad he is on this particular boat.”

“Why?” asked Torry, to whom he spoke in a low tone.

“I want to tell him about that oil boat,” returned Morgan, nodding his head.

In a few moments they dropped the sail and fended off from the chaser’s side, just as Captain Bridger reached the spot too.

“You want these four boys, Skipper?” demanded the old fisherman.

“That’s what I do,” said Ensign MacMasters. Then to the chums: “Come aboard, boys; I’ve news for you.”

“They been using my catboat,” said Captain Bridger. “All right, Phil Morgan. You can go aboard. I’ll take charge of the *Sue*. Got some right nice lookin’ bass, ain’t you?”

“But you won’t take charge of them!” Torry exclaimed. “I caught that big fellow, and I donate it to the officer’s mess of the S. P. Eight-eighty-eight, right now!”

The fisherman looked somewhat disappointed, for he was eager to make a penny. Whistler, however, gave him some of the smaller fish. The remainder were tossed to a grinning sailor upon the deck of the chaser.

“Come right aboard, boys,” Ensign MacMasters repeated. “I am glad to see you looking so chipper.”

He shook hands with them, in rotation, as they came over the side. But the chums did not forget to salute the officer. They lined up before him in a respectful attitude as Captain Bridger got aboard the catboat and shoved her away from the chaser’s side.

“I am only acting commander of this little knifeblade,” said Ensign MacMasters. “Junior Lieutenant Perkins has time off to attend to some private business, and I have been stuck aboard here for a few days. We’re patrolling this stretch of coast, and I ran in to see if I could pick up you boys. Do you know what is going to happen?”

“We’re going to lick the Germans!” exclaimed Frenchy.

The ensign laughed. “Smart boy,” he said. “You will go to the head of the class for that. But my information is new stuff. I am assigned to the *Kennebunk* and you four boys are to go with me.”

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“Hurray!” shouted Torry, unable to suppress his delight.

“That will sure please my papa,” declared Ikey, with a broad smile and twinkling eyes. “It sure will.”

“But how about the *Colodia*, sir?” asked Whistler anxiously.

“That’s right! Be faithful to your first love, Morgan,” laughed Ensign MacMasters. “I imagine they intend to send us all back to her in time. But—whisper!—the *Colodia* is across the pond. So I am told. There is something doing over there.”

“Crickey!” gasped Torry. “And we not in it!”

“It may not come off before we get across in this new battleship——”

“Whew!” shrilled Frenchy, forgetting himself. “Will the *Kennebunk* go across, too?”

“That’s telling,” said Ensign MacMasters. “You will have several days yet to get ready for the cruise, no matter how long it may be. Yes, Morgan? What do you want to say?” for he observed that Whistler was restless and wished to speak.

“I’ve something to report, sir,” Whistler declared.

“Yes?”

“We made an observation just now. Well, perhaps an hour and a half ago, sir.”

“What was it?” queried the ensign, with interest.

“A power boat passed us. She was not as long as this chaser and not very swift. She was steering into the sou’east, and she left a streak of oil in her wake. She was laden to the guards with oil casks, I believe.”

Ensign MacMasters made no comment for a moment; then he got the full significance of Whistler’s meaning and he briskly demanded:

“Sure her casks were filled, Morgan, and not empty?”

“She had a full cargo of something, sir,” said Whistler, nodding.

“And headed southeast?”

“Yes, sir.”

Mr. MacMasters wheeled to speak to his navigating officer. In thirty seconds the swift craft started.

“Hold on, Mr. MacMasters!” cried Torry. “We’ve got to get ashore somehow for supper, you know.”

The ensign smiled at him. “I am afraid you will have to remain aboard and help eat some of your own fish for supper. No time just now to put you boys on land.”

CHAPTER VII

FOG HAUNTED

The S. P. 888 was shaking throughout her structure before she came square with the exit of the cove. If a destroyer is “a tin box built around a mighty big engine,” the term even more nearly fits one of these chasers.

The four Navy boys from Seacove were amazed by the quickness with which she got under way and the brief time it took to tune her up to top-notch speed.

“She’s a hundred and ten feet long,” said Mr. MacMasters, “about as wide as a happy thought, and can make her thirty-five knots an hour without any particular effort.”

“No effort?” muttered Torry. “And it feels as though she was shaking herself to pieces!”

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“She’s faster than the *Colodia*,” observed Whistler, somewhat as though he felt pained by that fact. That any other craft should be a sweeter sailer than his beloved destroyer seemed to him almost a crime.

“She most certainly is,” agreed Ensign MacMasters. “She is some speed boat!”

“Why!” Frenchy cried, “she must be faster than the admiral’s hydroboat we saw at Newport.”

“No, no!” said the ensign. “Those hydroboats have got every other craft in the Navy beaten to a standstill. And about all they use ’em for is pleasure boats.”

“They’ll be dispatch carriers maybe?” suggested Whistler.

“What do they want of dispatch carriers in a day of wireless?” returned the ensign, and went about his duty of conning the S. P. 888 as she shot through the breach between the claw-like capes that defended the cove, and so straight out to sea in a southeasterly direction.

The “bone in her teeth,” as sailors call the white water under the ship’s bows, became a windrow of sea, foamed-streaked and agitated, parted by the knife-sharp bows, and rolling away on either hand. The S. P. 888 traveled so swiftly that at a distance “shark” really was the name for her.

She was not camouflaged, as were the hull and upperworks of many Navy vessels with which the four friends were familiar; but her dull coloring made her well nigh unobservable at a few miles’ distance when she lay at rest. When she was in action no amount of deceiving paint would hide her, because of the water she disturbed.

The motor boat Phil had suspected had more than an hour and half’s start. If she had kept straight ahead on the course she was going when last observed by the boys, she must now be twenty miles or more off shore.

The chaser, propelled by her powerful engines, could traverse that distance, and the oil boat’s additional miles, in less than two hours. If the pursued vessel did not change her course she could be easily overtaken before twilight.

Ensign MacMasters was too busy to talk further with the four chums; indeed it would not be conducive to discipline for the commissioned officer to give the apprentice seamen too much of his attention.

But Mr. MacMasters and the four Seacove boys had been through some warm incidents together; and there is always a particular bond between those who have been shoulder to shoulder in a good fight.

“Remember the rumpus we had, Mr. MacMasters and us fellows, when those Germans tried to recapture the *Graf von Posen*?” Ikey asked his mates.

“Are we likely to forget it?” retorted Al.

“What about it, Ikey?” asked Michael Donahue, complacently. “It was a lovely fight!”

“Do you s’pose the fellows on this oil tender we are chasin’ will fight?” asked Ikey.

“Not a chance. Here’s fifty men on this chaser. The Germans—if they are Germans—wouldn’t stand any show. There are only a few of them,” said Torry.

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“Including the black-whiskered chap Whistler tells about,” Frenchy said. “Hey, Whistler!”

“What is it?” asked the older lad seriously.

“D’you really think that power boat we saw is going out to meet a submarine?”

“Ask me an easier one,” said Morgan. “I can’t guess. But she might. We know very well that German submarines and German raiders, and even Germany itself, pass news back and forth by wireless. We can’t control the vibrations of the air—worse luck!”

“Now you’ve said something, boy!” agreed Torry.

“They read all the news that passes between our ships, too, unless it is in a secret code. And they pick everything they need to know about our ship movements out of the air.”

“Too bad wireless was ever invented, then,” grumbled Torry.

“Six of one and half a dozen of the other,” grinned Frenchy. “You bet our operators steal German messages.”

“It’s likely. You know that chap on the *Colodia* whom we all liked so well, the chief wireless operator, got lots of information that was supposed only to be picked up by German submarines.

“In this case,” added Whistler Morgan, “the sub may have wirelessed word for supplies. We don’t know how many alien enemies may be running wireless stations in the United States. The Secret Service men are unearthing them all the time.”

“Well,” sighed Ikey, “I only hope we’ll catch up with this oil tub we’re hunting just as she is unloading her cargo onto a sub. Then! Blooey! We’ll drop a depth bomb or two, and settle Mr. Submarine.”

“Just like *that*!” drawled Whistler. “It sounds easy. How many times did the *Colodia* chase a U-boat and lose it?”

“Crickey!” breathed Torry, “even the *Colodia* couldn’t travel like this shark.”

“Oh! you admit it, do you?” grinned Frenchy. “Well, we are going some!”

But there was an element working against the S. P. 888—an element which could not be controlled. No matter how speedy the oil boat might have been, the chaser could have overtaken her had she kept a straight course. That was understood.

But the farther they went the more certain it was that this new element was going to balk them. It was fog. The horizon was masked by it, and soon the damp feel of it was upon them.

Mr. MacMasters paced the deck anxiously. Not a smudge of smoke did he or the lookouts raise. But the growing fog cloud would soon have hidden anything of the kind, even if the oil boat had been near at hand.

“Fog-haunted, Morgan,” he said to Whistler, with disappointment. “We’ll run on for a while; but it is hopeless, I guess. You say you know one of the men aboard that power boat?”

Morgan told him what he knew of the bewhiskered man called Blake; and also of the little water wheel that was whirling under the waterfall at the Elmvale Dam, although really, it did not seem to him as though that little invention could have a serious connection with any alien-enemy activities.

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“I will report the whole thing,” Mr. MacMasters said. “But, of course, the Department receives similar and even less assured testimony every day, of suspiciously acting persons. The information furnished the Department has all to be sifted. There may be nothing wrong with this man Blake.”

“If he is working at the munition factory, how comes it that he is out here on an oil-laden boat?” demanded Whistler, with what he thought was shrewdness.

“Quite so. You boys are naval apprentices, but you were out fishing to-day,” returned Mr. MacMasters, grimly. “There is an explanation for everything, my boy.”

They ran on for another hour, but more slowly. They did not raise a craft of any kind, and Mr. MacMasters lost hope.

“I will put you boys ashore at Rivermouth,” he said. “You can go home by rail. I shall not be able to put in at Seacove again to-night. And Rivermouth is off yonder—within a few miles.”

Even in the fog the navigator found the harbor in question without difficulty. Just as they would have apprehended the presence of a submarine had one been near. There are very delicate and wonderful instruments aboard American naval vessels—instruments that may not be described at present—that enable the officers to apprehend the near approach of other vessels and their own nearness to the shore as well.

The S. P. 888 made her landfall correctly and slipped into Rivermouth Harbor like a ghost in the fog. There was a quantity of small shipping in the place, and Ensign MacMasters did not want to take any chances of collision. So he hailed a fishing smack and put the four friends from Seacove aboard of her.

“Good-bye, boys!” he said, as they went over the side into the smack. “We shall meet in a few days. You will get your notice by telegraph when to join the *Kennebunk*, and where. I shall be relieved from the command of this shark, and we’ll have a big cruise on the superdreadnaught, I have no doubt.”

He spoke prophetically, as it was proved later. But at this time neither Ensign MacMasters nor any of the four apprentice seamen imagined just how wonderful a cruise it would be.

As the fishing smack chugged away with her auxiliary engine toward the docks of the town, the S. P. 888 swung in a narrow circle and put out to sea so swiftly that in five minutes she was completely out of sight in the fog and almost out of sound as well.

The fishermen were curious about the boys and the business of the chaser in this locality; but the Navy boys had long since learned to say nothing that would circulate

information of any moment. “Keep your mouth closed” is an inflexible rule of the Navy; the yarns Ikey told his “papa” and his “mama” notwithstanding!

As they drifted in toward shore slowly, weaving their way among the moored craft, Whistler suddenly began to sniff the air and show excitement.

“What’s the matter?” demanded Torry, his closest chum. “You act like a hound dog on a hot scent.”

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“Or a colored gem’man smelling po’k chops on the frypan,” suggested Frenchy, chuckling.

“Say, Mister,” asked Whistler, turning to the skipper of the smack, “is there a tank ship in here?”

“An oil tanker? No! Nothing like it.”

“I smell it, too!” exclaimed Ikey suddenly.

“What you boys smell is the *Sarah Coville* that came in just ahead of us. She’s anchored here somewhere,” said the fisherman.

“What sort is she?” Whistler demanded. Then he described swiftly the oil tender he had marked that afternoon passing the Blue Reef fishing grounds.

“That’s her,” said the man. “She often slips in here. Don’t know who owns her now. Used to belong to the Texarcana Oil Company before the war. She’s only a lighter.”

“Is she laden?” asked Whistler.

“Didn’t look so to me,” was the reply.

Whistler Morgan said no more, and he warned his friends to have no further talk upon the matter. After they got ashore, however, all four were much excited by the incident.

“She was loaded to the Plimsoll mark when she passed us,” Torry said. “What could she have done with her cargo in so short a time?”

“I’d like to know,” agreed Whistler thoughtfully.

“We ought to tell somebody,” declared Frenchy.

“Let’s be sure we tell the right person,” Whistler advised. “Come on now and get some supper. We’ve an hour to wait for a train to Seacove.”

They marched up the main street of the port. The fog was not so thick inshore here. Just before they reached the restaurant they usually patronized when they were in the town, Whistler uttered an exclamation and held his friends back.

“See those two men going into Yancey’s Restaurant?” he queried.

“What about ’em?” Frenchy asked.

“The fellow ahead,” said Whistler Morgan deeply in earnest, “is that man Blake. The other I bet is the captain of the *Sarah Coville*.”

“Well,” asked Torry, after a moment, “what are you waiting for? Their eating at Yancey’s won’t stop us from going there too, will it?”

CHAPTER VIII

PUZZLED

Whistler Morgan’s three chums had by this time become somewhat interested in the bearded man, who called himself Blake and who worked in the laboratory of the Elmvale munition factory.

They were not at all as sure as Whistler seemed to be that the man was an alien enemy, and dangerous; for one reason they did not know all that Whistler had discovered up by the dam. It was only to Ensign MacMasters that their leader had told of the water wheel under the rock.

Frenchy began to grin when he saw how Whistler hesitated about entering the restaurant in Rivermouth.

“What’s the matter? You so mad with that fellow that you won’t eat at Yancey’s because he does?” he asked.

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“I’d like to get in there,” said Whistler, “without attracting his attention and that of the man with him. I know he’s the skipper of that oil boat.”

“How are you going to do that?” demanded Torry. “They’ll spot our blouses and caps in a minute.”

“That’s just it. Wish we didn’t have ’em on,” grumbled his friend.

“Good-*night*! We’d make a nice fumble, wouldn’t we, if we didn’t wear the uniform? What would it be—a month in the brig on hard tack and water?”

“Say!” murmured the eager Ikey Rosenmeyer, “there’s a side door. I’ll call Abe, the waiter, out there and tell him. If those fellows have gone into one of the booths——”

“Bully!” cried Torry. “Maybe he can sneak us into one next to ’em. How about it, Whistler?”

“Just the thing,” agreed Morgan, nodding his head emphatically.

Ikey ran down the alley beside the restaurant while his mates waited at the corner. The side door was not used save by the restaurant help; but Ikey insinuated himself in by that entrance and in half a minute poked his head out of the door again and beckoned furiously to the other boys.

“Oi, oi!” he chuckled in high feather, when they joined him. “We are in luck all right. Those fellows got a booth, and Abe is layin’ the table in the one next to it, this side, for us. Come on! They won’t see us.”

“If they take a look out of the curtains they will,” declared Torry.

“Have a care, now, about talking,” Whistler advised earnestly. “Say nothing about boats or the sea. No whispering, remember! Talk right out when you talk at all.”

“All right, me lud,” said Frenchy. “Anything else?”

“Yes,” said Whistler grimly. “This is a Dutch treat. Every fellow pays for his own eats. Last time we were in a restaurant you all wished the check on to me.”

At that his mates chuckled much. Each had excused himself and gone out “just for a minute,” and Whistler found himself, after waiting half an hour, expected by the waiter to pay the whole score.

The four got into the booth the waiter had prepared for them, and Whistler sat with his back against the partition dividing it from that in which Blake and his companion sat. Between the clatter of dishes, the waiter’s calls to the order man, and the talking of his

own friends, Whistler could not hear much at first. But he knew the two men whom he suspected were talking in English.

Of course they would not be unwise enough to speak in German. By this time the German language when spoken in public places was beginning to cause remark. Wise Germans, whether friendly or enemy aliens, were not using it.

One of the voices Whistler heard in the other booth, however, was distinctly German in its accent. This he was quite sure was the skipper of the oil tender. The other man used perfect English.

“They would not be likely to select a man too obviously German for a big part in any plot,” thought Whistler. “And that Blake looks like a suave, well educated fellow.”

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The latter man spoke low, too. The other had a bluff and coarse voice. He was a typical old sea-dog in his way. Only, a German sea-dog!

“Are you going back there yet?” Whistler heard him ask.

“For just one thing. You know what that is, Braun.”

“*Ach!* Yes.”

“My work is done there,” said the man, Blake, with pride in his voice. “Oh, it will be taken note of, don’t fear.”

“I bet you!” growled the other, in evident admiration. “Undt so she goes oop, yes? Boom!”

“Sh!” warned the other. “Never mind any talk about it.”

But the other was inclined to be voluble. Whistler thought the skipper of the oil tender, Braun, had been drinking. “And when alcohol is in the brain wit is very likely to move out,” he muttered.

“Grand work!” he ejaculated. “*Ach*, yes! Undt there will be more grand work when two-fifty is joined by the others.”

“Sh!” warned Blake again. “You talk too much, Braun. The wise man keeps a still tongue.”

Ordinarily Whistler Morgan would have found nothing in this overheard conversation to fan suspicion into a blaze. He quite realized this fact. But what he had seen at Elmvale, and the presence of Blake on the oil tender, led in his mind to but one conclusion.

Blake and his companion referred to the former’s work in Elmvale. And what was that work? Not merely the peaceful occupation of chemist in the laboratory of the munition factory. He was convinced that Blake referred to something entirely different when he said: “My work is done there.”

Nor was Blake merely an inventor, hiding away the actual working model of an invention until he could secure its patent, for instance. No, indeed!

Yet Morgan could not imagine what that water wheel was for. To what end could it have been placed under the rock on the edge of the overflow-stream from the Elmvale Dam?

Whistler had little to say himself during that meal at Yancey's. He heard nothing more from the next booth, for Blake seemed to manage the half drunken skipper of the *Sarah Coville* with better judgment. By and by the two men left the restaurant.

"Say! are we going to follow them?" asked the excited Frenchy.

"Aw, you poor fish!" scoffed Torry. "Where'd we follow them to? Back to that stinking oiler? And how would we follow them to sea? We haven't a boat."

"That's so," Frenchy admitted, crestfallen.

"No good to try to keep tabs on them," admitted Phil. "I hope Ensign MacMasters will pick up news of that boat again. Just think of his chaser coming right in here and not seeing the oiler in the fog. Tough luck!"

"Say!" queried Ikey, "what did you hear, Whistler?"

"Just about what you did," returned the older lad. "Nothing much."

"What are we going to do?" demanded Torry.

"Pay our bills and go to the train. It is almost time," said Whistler rather grumpily.

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And this they did. The train for Seacove came along in a few minutes. The boys got aboard. Ikey ran ahead down the aisle of the car and got into a seat by an open window. The first thing he did was to thrust his head out of the window and look back along the platform as the train started.

“Oi, oi!” he cried, under his breath. “Here he comes!”

“Here who comes?” demanded Al Torrance.

“The German spy,” declared Ikey.

“Hush up!” commanded Frenchy. “Want everybody to hear you?”

“What do you mean?” asked Whistler.

“That man,” said Ikey. “He got aboard. He went into the last car.”

“You don’t mean Blake?”

“That’s who I mean,” declared Ikey with conviction.

“Aw, he’s crazy,” scoffed Frenchy.

But Torry went back through the train after it was well under way and the conductor had taken their tickets. He peered through the glass in the door of the rear car.

He came back shaking his head and looking puzzled.

“He’s there all right,” he said to Whistler. “Bet he’s going to Elmvale instead of to sea again. What do you make of it?”

“Not a thing,” grumbled Whistler. “I wish I knew what to do.”

“Let’s have him pinched,” suggested the eager Frenchy.

“Not a chance! On what charge?” asked Torry. “Accuse him of being in disguise because he wears that beard?” and he chuckled.

But to Whistler Morgan’s mind it was no laughing matter. He was silent all the way to Seacove. Torry suggested that they stay on the train to Elmvale and see if Blake got off at that station.

“No,” his friend said decidedly, “we can’t do that. Our folks will be worried about us if we don’t report soon. Cap Bridger may have told around town that we went off on the submarine chaser, and perhaps our folks will think we’ve gone for good.”

So they alighted at their station and left the mysterious Blake aboard the train. Whistler hurried home to consult with his father. There was nobody else in whom he had so much confidence; at least, nobody within reach.

In this case, however, his father was not within reach. Dr. Morgan had been called away to see a patient in the country. It was a call that might keep him away from home all night. Whistler was greatly disappointed.

He went down town again and hunted up Torry. He found his friend getting into his father's car in front of the garage.

"I was just coming over to get you," Torry said. "D'you know, Whistler, I feel just as nervous as a cat?"

"I guess that's what is the matter with me," Morgan confessed. "I'm bothering my head about that fellow Blake."

"Me, too. Say! let's run over there."

"To Elmvale?"

"Yep. Pa's gone away——"

"So has my father," admitted Whistler.

"Well, neither of them can advise us, then," said Torry, practically. "How about talking with somebody in Elmvale? The manager of the munition works, for instance?"

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“That’s so! Mr. Santley. Say! let’s ’phone him and see if he is at home.”

“But you can’t say anything over the telephone about Blake, or about us fellows thinking he is up to something wrong.”

“We’ll make an appointment with the manager,” said Whistler, running into the Torrance house.

He knew where the telephone was, the girl at central quickly gave him the connection. A man answered the call.

“Is this Mr. Santley?” Whistler asked.

“It is. Who are you?”

Morgan told him who he was and asked if he could see the manager if he drove right over to Elmvale in his friend’s car.

“What for?”

“It has something to do with a man named Blake in the employ of the factory,” said Whistler plainly. “But I can say nothing more about it over the ’phone.”

“’Blake’?” repeated the voice at the other end, and Whistler thought there was a startled note in it. “What about him?”

“I can only tell you when I see you.”

“Come on, then!” exclaimed the man. “I shall wait here for you at my office.”

Whistler ran out of the house. Al was already at the steering wheel of the car.

“What did he say?” he shouted.

“For us to come over,” Whistler replied. “And somehow, Torry, I feel we ought to hurry.”

“You said it!” agreed the other and turned on the power.

CHAPTER IX

JUST TOO LATE

“Shall we stop and pick up the other fellows?” demanded Al as the heavy car shot up the road toward High Street. They had to cross the railroad tracks to get into the Elmvale road.

“Stop for nothing!” exclaimed Phil Morgan. “I feel that we can’t delay a minute.”

But as it chanced Michael Donahue was standing at the open door of the Rosenmeyer delicatessen shop as the Torrance car wheeled around the corner into Seacove’s main street. Dusky as it now was, the Irish lad recognized the car and the two boys on the front seat.

“Hi, Ikey!” he yelled to his chum, back in the store. “See who’s joy-riding! And they never said a word about it.”

Ikey ran out in a hurry.

“Stingy! Stingy!” he cried, almost getting into the path of the automobile.

Torry had been obliged to slow down to turn the corner; so it was easy for the reckless Frenchy and Ikey to jump upon the running board of the car.

“Tumble in, kids!” exclaimed Torry, out of the corner of his mouth, for he had to keep his eyes ahead for traffic. “We’re in a hurry.”

“I—should—think—you—were!” gasped out Frenchy, as the car jounced over the railroad tracks by the station. “I almost swallowed my gum.”

“Who’s sick?” demanded Ikey.

“Nobody. Sit down,” adjured Whistler. “We’re going to Elmvale.”

“Wow, wow!” yelled Frenchy. “What for?”

“We don’t know till we get there,” declared Torry suddenly grinning.

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Torry increased the speed the very next moment. There were not many constables around Seacove, and the first five miles of the road to Elmvale was perfectly straight. The amber lamps of the car gave a good light ahead, and Torry was really a safe driver.

But he seemed reckless on this evening. Inspired by the same feeling that impressed Whistler Morgan, he felt that they could not get to Elmvale too quickly.

During the journey the older boys vouchsafed no explanation to the younger pair save that they had made an engagement with Mr. Santley at the munition factory over the telephone. In fact, they had no idea what they would do, or what they would say to Mr. Santley.

The car roared on, the dogs barked behind them, and finally they came to the slope leading down into Elmvale. Lights were already twinkling in the valley. But the mills were closed, and even the munition factory seemed deserted.

This time they did not take the Upper Road, but drove through the center of the little hamlet. The stores were open and there were lights in most of the cottages of the workmen. There were lively parties in all the long, barrack-like boarding houses. The town was wide awake.

Torry brought the car to an abrupt stop before the brick office building of the munition works. The place had been a mill before the war. The long, many-windowed buildings behind the offices covered a good deal of ground. There was a high stockade fence about the whole plant. An armed guard stood at the main door when Whistler ran up the steps. The other boys chose to wait in the car for him.

“I want to see Mr. Santley,” Whistler said to the guard in khaki.

“The manager? I don’t know whether he is here at this hour or not.”

“I see lights in the offices yonder. And I have made an appointment with him.”

At that moment the bolts of the big door were shoved back and a man looked out. Whistler Morgan did not know the manager of the munition works by sight; but the guard at once said:

“Here’s a boy to see you, Mr. Santley.”

“What is your name, young man?” asked the manager, eying the boy with interest.

Whistler told him.

“Dr. Morgan’s son, from Seacove? Come in,” and Whistler was ushered inside and the heavy door was again barricaded.

“We have to keep locked up here like a fortress at night,” said Mr. Santley. “Come in and let me hear what you have to say, young man. What do you know about Mr. Blake?”

“Did you know he had been out at sea on an oil tender to-day?” blurted out Whistler. “She was chased by a submarine chaser, but the tender escaped in the fog. Afterward she came into Rivermouth Harbor without her cargo.”

“What’s this? What’s this?” demanded Mr. Santley. “Why, that has nothing to do with the factory.”

They were in his private office. He stood with his hand upon Whistler’s shoulder and asked the boy sternly:

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“What have you to tell me about Mr. Blake, anyway? I don’t want to hear a lot of inconsequential gossip. I am worried about the man.”

“Yes, sir. So am I,” declared Whistler very earnestly. “I’ve been worried about him ever since the other day when we fellows were over here trying to get some of the boys to enlist in the Navy.”

“Ah, were you one of that crowd?” asked Mr. Santley.

“Yes, sir; and coming over here we saw that man Blake——”

He went on to tell the manager of the munition factory about how his suspicions were aroused and about the water wheel he had found at the foot of the dam, ending with a detailed account of the affair of the oil tender.

Mr. Santley’s face expressed nothing but lively curiosity.

“And to-day you saw him on a boat that you think is a feeder for German submarines?” muttered the manager. “It is whispered that they are off this coast.”

“We overheard this Blake and a man who I’m sure is captain of that oil boat talking in a restaurant to-night. They mentioned two-fifty which I believe is the number of the submarine off this coast. They spoke as though more were expected. The Germans are going to make a big drive on our shipping over here.”

“You may be right, boy,” agreed Mr. Santley. “That man Blake—well, he doesn’t seem to be in Elmvale now.”

“He came back on this evening’s train,” declared Whistler.

“Are you sure? I have been waiting for him to show up here,” cried Mr. Santley. “To tell the truth, young man, I have discovered some things here that I want him to explain. For one thing, I have picked up a letter in his locker which is addressed to him, it is evident, but not by the name of Blake. It is written in German and I want it explained.”

“Oh, Mr. Santley!” cried Whistler, “I believe there is something wrong. He told that Captain Braun, of the *Sarah Coville*, that his work was finished here. He was only returning for a particular thing to Elmvale.”

“But he hasn’t come here!” exclaimed Mr. Santley. “And he has some private property in the office.”

“Maybe he isn’t coming here,” breathed the boy. “Maybe he is only going up to the dam!”

“To the dam?”

“That water-wheel business! It perplexes me,” explained Whistler Morgan.

“We’ll go up there and take a look!” exclaimed Mr. Santley, grabbing his hat and banging down the roll top of his desk and locking it. “You’ve got me all stirred up now, boy.”

They hurried out of the office. Mr. Santley spoke in a low voice to the armed guard on the front steps.

“If Blake comes here, hold him till I return,” he said. “Do you understand? *Hold him*—-even if you have to knock him down and sit on him.”

“All right, sir,” said the man, nodding grimly.

Mr. Santley started down the steps after the excited Whistler, who was already getting into the automobile, the engine of which was still running. At that instant the night was as peaceful as could be. The valley below the high dam lay quietly under the light of the stars, and a pale moon was just rising above the treetops.

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Then, with a shock which electrified the atmosphere and seemed to make heaven and earth tremble, a burst of flame rose at the foot of the dam, not more than half a mile away!

The glare of it blinded them; the reverberating explosion that followed almost immediately well nigh stunned them. It was Ikey, standing in the tonneau of the car, and pointing a trembling arm toward the dimly distinguished wall of masonry, whose voice was first heard:

“Look! Look! The dam’s broke!”

A balloon-shaped cloud of smoke had risen above the wall of masonry. Beneath it the dam crumbled, dissolved, and poured away into the bed of the river like the changing picture in a kaleidoscope.

CHAPTER X

AHEAD OF THE FLOOD

Each one in the little group at the main entrance to the munition factory had cried out—-no doubt of that! Indeed, Torry said afterward that he forgot to shut his mouth until his jaws were positively stiff.

Their fright did not deprive them of action, however; everybody immediately did something.

Inside the door, in the hall, hung the bell rope. The bell swung in the cupola on the roof of the office building. The guard dropped his rifle and sprang to seize this rope. He slipped his foot in the loop and began to toll the bell as hard as he could.

“I’ll get Central and tell them what’s up!” gasped Mr. Santley, and turned to run back into his office to spread the news of the catastrophe by telephone.

Whistler plunged into the car, yelling to Torry:

“Turn around! Turn around! Down the valley road to warn ’em! Get a move on, boy!”

His chum was already starting the car. It wheeled perilously in a sharp curve, and with honking horn hurtled down the road which followed the course of the river.

Without doubt the wall of the dam had been burst through by the explosion. The immense mass of waiter held in leash would immediately pour through the opening. The valley would be flooded!

As the car plunged across the main street of Elmvale people were running out of their houses and out of the stores, shrieking that the dam had burst. They began to stream away toward the higher ground, stopping for none of their possessions. If they saved their lives they would be fortunate.

Torry speeded up the car until she vibrated like a motor boat—like the submarine chaser, No. 888! They whirled along the half-lit road, the horn sounding its raucous warning, and the boys shrieking themselves hoarse.

People came to their doors and windows The flying Navy boys pointed behind them, repeating:

“The flood! The flood!”

The roar of the bursting dam was now in the ears of all the awakened people of the valley. In three great explosions the weakened wall burst, and the water roared through.

Spouting through the wrecked masonry, the boys could see it spread below the barrier, half as high as the dam itself. It would sweep the narrow valley clean of every small structure and of every living thing that could not get out of its path.

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Half a mile was small leeway; the flood would pour down upon the village and the mills in two or three minutes. But the Navy boys in the big car were flying over the road at a forty-mile-an-hour pace.

They could have easily escaped to the high ground on one side or the other of the valley. There were many small farms down this river road, however, and although the valley widened a good deal before the outskirts of Seacove were reached, the flood might do a deal of damage in the lower town unless the people there were warned.

At least, the automobile and its occupants made noise enough as they flew along to arouse most people along the way to the menacing peril. The explosion followed by the bursting of the dam had, in any case, shaken the valley to the very sea itself.

They saw men, women and children run screaming from their houses and mount through the fields toward the hilltops. Behind, the roar of the waters was like a high wind. In a moment all the lights in Elmvale went out.

“The powerhouse has gone!” shrieked Frenchy, when he saw this.

“And everything else, I guess!” quavered Ikey, clinging to the back of the automobile seat and hoarse from shouting.

Dim as the light from the stars and the moon was, they could see the front of the wave of released water. When it struck the big mill buildings at Elmvale the foamy water sprang up in geysers.

Several of the big buildings went down under the impact of the flood. The smaller hovels were swept off their foundations. Those people who had not escaped from the middle of the village must be overcome by the sweep of the flood.

Below the Main Street bridge in Elmvale, the channel of the river was much wider than above the bridge. It was navigable for small vessels, too, from Seacove to that point.

Schooners and barges moored to the docks below the bridge were cast up on the crest of the flood, their hawsers snapped like packthread, and they were whirled away, some to be cast later far back from the established bank of the stream.

It was tidewater below the bridge, and fortunately it was low tide. The channel of the river, therefore, could take the greater bulk of the flood, and the valley widening so quickly, the depth of the outflow of the dam was much decreased directly below the wrecked hamlet.

The rushing automobile was two-thirds of the way to Seacove in five minutes. Then the advance wave of the flood caught them.

They saw the saplings along the bank of the stream bend and snap under the force of the water. Some were uprooted. Chicken houses and other small structures were snatched from their places and flung wildly along with the charging water.

With a roar and a cloud of spray the water surged around the automobile on the road. Running, as the car was, at top speed, the flood picked it up and drove it forward even more swiftly for several rods.

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“Shut her off! Shut her off!” yelled Frenchy excitedly.

But Torry was wiser than that. The water flattened out, and the whirling wheels bit into the road again. They did not skid, and the car remained upright. For the next half mile they ran through more than a foot of water; but it was plain the danger was over.

Near the river bank the water flooded the first floors of the houses in the suburbs of Seacove; but there was little other damage done at this distance from the dam.

As the water subsided from about them, however, Torry turned the machine around and headed up the road again.

“Yes, we’ll go back,” Whistler agreed. “Drive slowly, Torry. Maybe we can help somebody. I’m afraid there were some people who did not get away in time.”

They found enough to do, it was true, all that night. After getting back to the outskirts of Elmvale they could not drive the machine over the slime and mud in the roadway. There were deep washouts, too; and in some places the wreck of light buildings barred the way.

The Navy boys had done good service in warning the endangered people along one side of the river. Mr. Santley had done much more in sending the news of the broken dam broadcast by telephone. The girl at Central had stuck to her post while the water rose to the second floor of the telephone building, where the switchboard was situated.

Whistler and his three chums were carrying children to the high ground where it was dry, and packing bedding and blankets up to the “shipwrecked mess-mates,” as Frenchy called them, until dawn.

When the sun crept up and showed the wreckage in the valley, and particularly about Elmvale, it was enough to make one heartsick. The lower floors of all mills, and of the munition factory, were wrecked. Some of the buildings had fallen down.

Much machinery was destroyed. It would take months to repair the damage done to property by the flood. And there was a death list of twelve. That was the hardest to bear and the saddest result of the catastrophe.

Until the ruins around Elmvale were searched and the last body brought to light, little was said about the cause of the disaster. But the following evening Whistler and his chums were called to the office of the sheriff of the county to tell what they knew about the stranger, Blake, who had disappeared just before the dam burst.

He had been seen getting off the train at Elmvale that evening. But he had disappeared immediately after. He had not returned to the munition factory, where the manager, Mr.

Santley, was waiting for him; nor had he been observed at all after leaving the railroad station.

Later it was proved that he had obtained his position at the factory by the aid of forged credentials. It was believed that he was rather a famous German inventor who had been living in the United States for some years. He had an almost uncanny knowledge of mechanics, as well as of chemistry.

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The ingenious little water wheel Whistler had seen at the foot of the dam had probably furnished power for some machine that had been fixed on the face of the dam with a charge of dynamite. This invention had been rigged to explode the dynamite after a certain length of time—time enough, without doubt, to enable the inventor to get well away from the vicinity of the dam.

“If Linder is his name,” Whistler said, when the boys were afterward talking it over among themselves, “I hope I’ll see him again some time. He was never blown up with the dam, that is sure.”

“You don’t think he was ’hoist with his own petard, then?” suggested Torry.

“Hear the high-brow!” sniffed Frenchy.

“Oi, oi!” cried Ikey. “He means was he blown up, too? I bet not!”

“I ought to have told somebody about him before,” sighed Whistler. “I had a feeling he wasn’t using his real name.”

“Say! why should you worry? That Mr. Santley didn’t think anything wrong of him until he found the letter in German in Blake’s locker. And we did set Mr. MacMasters and the S. P. Eight-eighty-eight after him and the oil boat, didn’t we?”

“By the way,” Whistler suddenly observed, drawing an official looking letter from his pocket. “Did I tell you I got this?”

“No,” said Torry. “What is it?”

“Hurray!” yelled Frenchy, the quick-witted. “It’s our assignment to the *Kennebunk*, I bet you!”

“Is that right, Whistler?” asked Torry.

“That’s what it is,” admitted Morgan. “We’re to report, however, to Mr. MacMasters at Rivermouth day after to-morrow. But our ultimate destination is the *Kennebunk*, superdreadnaught, just built and fitted out for her first cruise. You know, she was only christened a month ago.”

Even the Elmvale disaster and the mystery regarding the German spy, Franz Linder, were at once ousted from the minds of the Navy boys. Their first cruise in a superdreadnaught was of much greater importance.

CHAPTER XI

UNEXPECTED PERIL

The four apprentice seamen went down to Rivermouth in great spirits. The home folks were not actually glad to see them go, but they were a little relieved; for the chums had managed to keep things very lively about Seacove during their shore leave.

The terrible disaster at Elmvale, however, had sobered the four friends a good bit at the last. Seven Knott had gone away before it happened, so he had had no part in their later adventures. They were not even sure that he had gone to join the crew of the *Kennebunk*, the new superdreadnaught to which they were assigned for a brief cruise.

They had heard nothing from Ensign MacMasters, so the Navy boys did not know when or how they were to meet him; but they went to Rivermouth on the early train and had plenty of time to look about the port and see all of the shipping in the harbor.

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One craft they did not see. The oil tender, *Sarah Coville*, was not here, and, on making some inquiries of the dock loungers, the boys learned that she had not been seen at Rivermouth since the night they had come in off the submarine chaser in the fog.

Rivermouth was fast becoming a base for patrol boats and submarines, it seemed, although New London and Groton, across the harbor from New London, were really the headquarters for all such craft along the North Atlantic seaboard.

“Maybe we can spy the Three Eights,” Torry said, referring to the submarine chaser in which they had pursued the *Sarah Coville* a few days before. “Mr. MacMasters must have been relieved of the command of her before this, don’t you think?”

“Don’t know,” Whistler rejoined, breaking off in his whistling briefly.

“But where is he?” queried the anxious Frenchy.

“Don’t worry,” Whistler said. “He’ll be here.”

“Oi, oi! If he don’t come,” said Ikey, “we’re marooned, eh?”

“That’ll be fierce!” growled Frenchy Donahue. “I’ve got just fifty-five cents left, and one of the nickels is punched. I can see my finish if he doesn’t show up to-day.”

The chums soon discovered that they were not the only boys from the Navy in town. By ones and twos other bluejackets made their appearance on the water-front. But there was not even a petty officer assigned to the port to meet them.

The four friends from Seacove learned that every enlisted man and apprentice they talked with was assigned to the *Kennebunk*, and immediately all fraternized.

At noon time the bluejackets marched up town in a body to Yancey’s and flocked into that eating place like a swarm of hungry locusts. Abe, the waiter, was just about swamped, and Ikey and Frenchy volunteered to help him serve the vociferous crew. Yancey’s other customers were very much out of it for the time being.

They were a noisy crowd, but perfectly good-natured; and with the freehandedness characteristic of the sailor ashore, bought the best Yancey could provide. The restaurant proprietor had no complaint to make.

In the midst of the jollification a hush began to spread over the room. It began at the tables near the main entrance of the restaurant; then the men began to get briskly to their feet. With automatic precision they came to attention, saluting the officer who had entered with that jerky little downward gesture of the forearm typical of the bluejacket.

Ikey, starting from the order window with a tray load of food, nearly dropped the whole thing on the floor in trying to salute.

“Ensign MacMasters!” hissed Torry for the benefit of the boys near, who did not know the officer.

And over Ensign MacMasters’ shoulder glowed the moon-like face of Seven Knott.

“Keep your seats, men,” said the ensign quietly, returning the salute in general. “You have half an hour to finish before we march to the dock. I take it you are all assigned to my present command?”

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He nodded to Seven Knott. Then he took a chair at an empty table and ordered coffee, while the boatswain's mate went around among the other tables making a list of the men's names and their former billets.

Under the eyes of a commissioned officer the boys behaved with much more decorum; but it was still a jolly party that finally lined up on the sidewalk outside Yancey's, prepared to march to the dock.

Ensign MacMasters sought out Whistler Morgan to speak to personally:

"I shall expect you to keep the younger boys straight, Morgan. We're going to be in crowded quarters aboard the patrol boat. Mr. Junior Lieutenant Perkins has come back to his command and we are only guests aboard," and Ensign MacMasters laughed.

"We are about to have a taste of rough weather outside, too, I fancy. But our instructions are to make the port where the *Kennebunk* lies before the morning tide."

"Has the submarine patrol boat, Eight-hundred-eighty-eight, come into the harbor, sir?"

"I have just been relieved of her command. I am assigned to take you chaps on her to the battleship. I understand that we shall have a three months' cruise in the *Kennebunk* before we are returned to the *Colodia*," said the ensign.

Whistler's eyes sparkled. "Then some of us will have a chance of handling the big guns, sir?"

"That is the object, I believe. That, and the fact that the full complement of the battleship's crew cannot be at once made up. There will be changes made in the crew of the *Colodia* when she returns from her European cruise. If you youngsters do well on the *Kennebunk* some of you may soon be gunners' mates. The present cruise of the *Kennebunk* is mainly for practice work."

"Oh, sir! won't we see any active service in her?" cried Whistler.

Mr. MacMasters looked very mysterious. "You must not ask too many questions. I am telling you, Morgan, what is generally known about the orders under which the superdreadnaught sails. But we may see plenty of real work At least, we need not suppose that the *Kennebunk* will run away from any enemy submarine that may appear along this coast."

"Do you believe there are German subs over here again, sir?"

"It is my private opinion that at least one is here and more are coming," declared Ensign MacMasters. "And there is a supply boat for them lying somewhere off our coast, too.

We ran down that *Sarah Coville* yesterday, by the way, with another cargo of oil aboard. Her captain and crew will surely be interned."

Mr. MacMasters had no more time to talk with Phil Morgan then. The men being ready, the march to the dock was made, Seven Knott bringing up the rear to see that there were no loiterers.

"See that narrow streak!" ejaculated one fellow, when they came to the dock where the chaser was moored. "Oh, boy! got your sea legs with you?"

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The slate-colored S. P. 888 looked to be no friend to a landsman, especially with the sea as it was just then. Beyond the craft the harbor was tossing in innumerable whitecaps, while through the breach between the capes the Atlantic itself could be seen to be in ugly mood.

They got aboard; and as soon as the moorings were cast off the newcomers were welcomed in friendly fashion, by the regular crew of the chaser, to most of whom Whistler Morgan and his three friends were already known.

“Hey, garby! where d’you sleep on this hooker?” demanded one of the strangers, hoarsely and behind the sharp of his hand, of a member of the chaser’s crew. “Or do you go ashore at nights?”

“If we can’t get ashore for the watch below,” was the perfectly serious reply, “every man gets a hook to hang on.”

“You mean to hang his hammock on?”

“No such luck! There isn’t room for hammocks on one of these chasers. Why, even the officer commanding has to sleep on a hammock slung out over the stern in pleasant weather.”

“Good-night!” gasped Al Torrance. “Where does he sleep when it isn’t pleasant?”

“He doesn’t sleep at all—or anybody else, as you’ll probably find out to-night, garby,” was the reply.

There was bound to be a deal of joking of this nature; but it was all good-natured. The crew of the chaser were of course just as proud of their craft as the crew of the battleship is of their sea-home. They ignored the inconveniences of the S. P. 888 and dilated upon her speed and what they hoped to do in her. She was even better than a destroyer for getting right on top of a submarine and sinking that rat of the sea with depth bombs.

The latter—metal cylinders weighing more than a hundred pounds each—were lashed in their stations at the bow and at the stern of the chaser. They were rigged to be dropped overboard a little differently from the method pursued upon the destroyers.

As the chaser shot across the harbor the strangers aboard remarked in wonder at the way in which she picked up speed. Within a couple of cable lengths from the shore she was going like a streak of light.

It was evident that the S. P. 888 was fully prepared for rough weather. Not only the depth bombs, but everything else on her decks were lashed. Passing between the

capes, she plunged into a regular smother of rough water, and at once the decks were drenched from stem to stern.

“What do you know about this?” demanded Al Torrance of Morgan. “A fellow wants to hang on to a handline like grim death to be sure to keep inboard. Hope they won’t pipe us to quarters while this keeps up.”

There seemed to be, however, no prospect of the sea’s abating; and the commander of the chaser had a considerable distance to go before morning, so he urged the engineer to increase rather than diminish the speed.

With no regard to the comfort of her crew, the craft plowed along on her way to the port where the *Kennebunk* awaited them. Naval vessels cannot wait on weather signals. “Orders are orders.”

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The forward deck was comparatively dry; but the after part of the vessel was in a continual smother of spume and broken water. Now and then a wave would charge and break over her, drowning everything and everybody aft of the engines.

These waves seemed racing to overtake and smother the chaser. The tons of water discharged upon her decks would have sunk a less buoyant craft. All she did was to squatter under the weight of the water like a duck, her propellers never missing a stroke!

Whistler Morgan and his chums did not remain below through this run. No, indeed! The hardiest stomach would feel squeamish at such times in quarters like those of the crew of the S. P. 888.

At least the Navy boys got fresh air on deck if they were battered around a bit. They were supplied with slickers, and they had been wet many a time before.

Frenchy Donahue raised his shrill voice in the old dirge: “Aren’t you glad you’re a Navy man? Oh, mother!” and had not intoned the first lachrymose verse through to the end before Ikey Rosenmeyer interrupted with a shout:

“Look there! She’s broke loose! Hey, fellers! don’t you see it?”

They were hanging to a lubber line near the quarterdeck, which on the chaser was a part of the after deck having imaginary boundaries only, established by order of the chaser’s commander.

The depth bomb lashed there was the object to which Ikey called his mates’ attention. A line had snapped, and the heavy cylinder rolled slowly across the deck.

Suddenly the vessel heaved to starboard, and with a quick snap the bomb rolled in the other direction, crashing against the port rail in a way which made Whistler Morgan cry out in warning:

“Have a care, fellows! If the safety pin isn’t firmly inserted in that bomb, and drops out, she may blow off.”

“Great glory!” muttered Torry, “where will we be then?”

“It’s pretty sure if she explodes we’ll never join the *Kennebunk’s* crew,” was his chum’s grim answer.

CHAPTER XII

COURAGE

The four friends from Seacove were not the only members of the ship's company that saw the depth bomb break loose from its fastenings. The second in command of the submarine chaser, Ensign Filson, and two seamen on lookout were on duty aft.

"Stop that thing!" shouted the ensign.

He was young and inexperienced, and he did not start for the rolling cylinder himself. Had it been Ensign MacMasters, Phil Morgan and his friends knew that he would have jumped for the bomb as he shouted the order.

The two lookouts were not supposed to leave their positions at such a call; but it was a direct command. They turned from their posts at the rail where they were scanning the sea on either hand just as the depth bomb made its second plunge across the deck.

It crashed into the port rail and then, as the chaser jerked her tail in the heavy cross seas like a saucy catbird, the dangerous cylinder dashed to starboard again.

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“Stop it!” cried Mr. Filson for the second time; and just then *the safety pin dropped out*!

The first lookout had almost clutched the plunging cylinder as it passed him on its backward roll.

“Ware the bomb!” shouted his mate, and both of them leaped away from the vicinity of the peril.

Nor were they to be blamed. With the pin out it was to be expected that the big bomb would immediately explode. It banged against the rail, then charged across the deck again. Every time it collided with an obstacle the spectators expected it to blow up and burst the after part of the ship asunder.

To the credit of Ensign Filson be it said that he did not fall back from his post on the quarter. Nor did he directly order, now that he thought of it, any particular man to try to hold the plunging bomb. It was work for a volunteer—a man who was willing to take his life in his hands.

There is a quality of courage that is higher than that which takes men into battle along with their fellows. The companionship of others in the charge breeds courage in many weak souls.

But to start alone on a dangerous mission, the lone man in an almost hopeless cause, calls for a steadiness of courage that few can rise to.

The four young fellows clinging together behind Mr. Filson were shot with fear, as they might very well be. At any second the bomb was likely to explode, and they were so near that they could not possibly escape the full force of the blast.

Even if the chaser herself escaped complete destruction, they could not dodge the effect of the explosion; but like the ensign they would not retreat.

These bombs are timed to explode at about an eighty-foot depth. A very few seconds would bring about the catastrophe. Every man on the deck of the S. P. 888 felt that.

Suddenly, along the deck charged a sturdy figure—a human battering ram. The other men were knocked aside. One of the lookouts was toppled over by the newcomer, falling flat upon his back and was shot by the next plunge of the craft into the scuppers amidships.

“Hi! Hi! Seven Knott!” yelled Al Torrance.

“Good old *Colodia*! Go to it!” joined in the excited Frenchy.

Philip Morgan was already crouching for a leap. Seven Knott passed him and threw himself upon the unleashed peril that rolled about the deck.

He grasped the cylinder as he fell, but it was snatched out of his arms by the next plunge of the vessel. Seven Knott got to his knees and sought to seize the bomb again when it charged back across the deck.

The thing seemed actually to evade him; and swinging at an unexpected angle as Seven Knott threw himself desperately forward, the heavy cylinder banged the boatswain's mate on the head.

The man was knocked down by the blow. He suddenly straightened out and then relaxed, at full length, upon the sliding deck. Like an inanimate lump his body followed the runaway bomb, but more slowly, to the lower rail.

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Again the deck heaved upon that side, and the cylinder roared across it. It missed the unconscious petty officer. At that instant Whistler Morgan made his leap.

He had taken time to study the angle at which the bomb was rolling; he fell upon and grappled it as though it were a football.

“Oh! Oh! *Colodia!*” yelled his three mates in wild excitement. “Hurray!”

“Well done, *Colodia*!” echoed a voice behind them, and Ensign MacMasters appeared from the after hatchway, with the commanding officer of the S. P. 888 in his wake.

Some of the chaser’s crew were now approaching the scene from forward. Ensign Filson leaped for the safety pin that had been jerked out of the depth bomb just as Phil Morgan, on his knees, set the bomb up on its flat end.

“Good boy, Whistler!” shrieked Torry.

Ensign Filson reached the spot and slipped the plug into place. Between them they held the bomb upright on its flat end until the seamen could pass a line around it.

The dangerous thing had yet to be held right there until Lieutenant Perkins ordered the submarine chaser headed up into the sea. Then the bomb could be removed to a place of safety.

The whole affair had occupied seconds, that is all. But all felt as though an hour had passed!

“Good boy, Morgan!” declared Ensign MacMasters, his face shining with approval. “Is the mate hurt badly?”

The petty officer was still unconscious. They picked him up to carry him below. Then the whole crowd began to cheer, and the officers did not forbid it. Even Lieutenant Perkins wrung Phil Morgan’s hand as he stood abashed in the center of the congratulatory group on the quarter deck.

“I’d be proud to have you as one of my own crew, Morgan,” said the commander of the submarine chaser. “Ensign MacMasters is to be congratulated that he takes aboard the *Kennebunk* such an altogether admirable young man. You will hear from this, Master Morgan. You deserve the Medal of Honor and whatever other honor and special emolument it is in the power of the Secretary of the Navy to award.”

He turned to MacMasters: “And your boatswain’s mate deserves mention, too. That he did not succeed in doing what this young man accomplished, was not for lack of courage to attempt it. They are both men that the Navy may be proud of. With a will, men!” and he led in another cheer.

“Oi, oi, Whistler!” whispered Ikey when the greatly abashed Morgan went forward, “you’ll be an admiral next. If you beat me to it, what will my papa and mama say?”

CHAPTER XIII

THE KENNEBUNK SAILS

Put back upon her course, the S. P. 888 was soon beating her way through the cross-seas—“bucking the briny” the boys called it—toward the port from which the *Kennebunk* was to sail in the morning.

It was a wild night. The peril through which the ship’s company had just passed, and from which Philip Morgan had been able to save them, made the threatening aspects of sea and air seem small indeed. Let the wind shriek through the wire stays and the waves roar and burst about and over the submarine chaser as they listed, none of these dangers equaled that of the depth charge which had run amuck.

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Seven Knott was brought to his senses in a short time, and, after staring about a bit, murmured:

“Well, I didn’t get it, did I?”

“Not your fault, my man,” declared Ensign MacMasters cheerfully. “Wait till Lieutenant Commander Lang, of the *Colodia*, hears about it. You have done well, Hertig. He will be proud of you.”

At that the petty officer smiled, for he was inordinately fond of the commander of the destroyer.

Mr. MacMasters made it plain to the boatswain’s mate that apprentice seaman Morgan had saved him, as well as the rest of the ship’s company, from disaster, and Hansie Hertig grinned broadly.

“That Whistler—he can do something besides make tunes with his mouth, eh?” he observed.

Most of the crew of the submarine chaser, as well as the members of the squad going aboard the *Kennebunk*, personally congratulated Whistler on his courage and quick action.

“This is an awfully small boat, Torry,” he complained to his chum. “There isn’t any place for a fellow to get away by himself. There are too many folks here.”

He did not take kindly to so much approbation. He felt that Lieutenant Perkins had already said enough.

Although Whistler and his mates had no duties to perform on the S. P. 888, they did not turn in that night at all. To tell the truth the chaser was making an awfully rough passage of it, and although they were inured to the discomforts of their beloved *Colodia* in stormy weather, this was even worse.

They kept out of the way of the watch on duty, but remained for the most part on deck, as they were free to do. The watchlights on the shore, those in the lighthouses and the lamps in certain seaside hamlets, gave them their position from time to time. They were aware long before daylight that they were drawing near to the harbor mouth of the port where the superdreadnaught lay.

It was blowing a whole gale (in nautical language, sixty-five miles or more an hour) and as the submarine chaser was meeting the seas on a slant, it might almost as well have been a hurricane. As Frenchy said:

“The smaller the boat, the bigger the wind seems. And a ‘happy thought’ like this chaser will kick up like a frisky colt in a dead calm, I do believe. By St. Patrick’s piper that played the last snake out of Ireland! I’ll be a week gittin’ over this pitchin’. What d’you say, Mister Torrance, acushla?”

“Don’t blather me!” growled Torry.

“Hast thou a feeling that all is not well in the daypartment av the intayrior?” teased the Irish lad, who would joke at all times and upon the most serious subjects.

“Torry does look a bit green about the gills,” put in Whistler.

“Serves him right for eatin’ crab-meat salad there at Yancey’s,” declared Ikey Rosenmeyer. “That’s nice chow to go to sea on, yet.”

“I don’t have to ask you what to eat,” said Torry gruffly.

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“Oi, oi! That’s right,” agreed Ikey. “Just the same I could tell you lots better than that.”

The boys had sampled the cook’s coffee, but not much else, since embarking on the S. P. 888. It was true that the pitching of the chaser was not conducive to a ravenous appetite.

“If Uncle kept all his bluejackets on these submarine chasers,” said Whistler, “he’d save money on grub. I wonder these fellows,” referring to the crew of the S. P. 888, “manage to keep up with their rations.”

The little craft swerved at last and took the waves directly astern as she ran shoreward. The mouth of the harbor opened up to her, and in the gray light, as the chaser shot in between the headlands, almost smothered in foam, the men and boys on her deck sighted through the haze the towering hull of the great battleship.

“There she is!” gasped Frenchy. “My! isn’t she a monster?”

“She’s a regular leviathan,” agreed Whistler.

Even Torry forgot his discomfort and showed enthusiasm. “She’s the biggest thing I ever saw afloat,” he said. “Listen, fellows!”

Two strokes of a silvery bell rang out from some ship asleep in the morning mist. It was five o’clock. From the decks of the battleship sounded the bugles of the boatswain’s mates, piping reveille and “all hands.”

“Gee!” groaned Frenchy, “reg’lar duty again, fellows.”

“Don’t croak,” advised Whistler. “It’s what we signed on for, isn’t it?”

The chaser, now riding an even keel in the more quiet waters of the harbor, swept at slower speed to the side of the towering hull of the *Kennebunk*. A sentinel at the starboard ladder, which was lowered, hailed sharply. A moment later a deck officer came to the side.

“S. P. Eight Hundred and Eighty-eight, ahoy!” he said.

“Lieutenant Perkins in command,” said that officer, standing in his storm coat and boots on the wet deck. “With squad of seamen under Ensign MacMasters for the *Kennebunk*.”

“Send them aboard, Lieutenant, if you please. We trip anchors in half an hour. The tide is just at the turn.”

Mr. MacMasters was already lining up his men, and Seven Knott, with a bandage on his head, was looking for stragglers. Some of the chaser's crew shook hands with the boys assigned to the superdreadnaught before they went up her side.

"Good luck! If you get a chance, smash a Fritzie battleship for me!" were some of the wishes that followed Whistler Morgan and his companions aboard the superdreadnaught.

The boys from Seacove and their companions reported to the chief master-at-arms, while Mr. MacMasters made his report to the executive officer.

At first glance it was plainly to be seen by the newcomers that the superdreadnaught had a full crew. Their squad made complete her complement of men. She was ready to put to sea.

Hammocks were already piped up and the smoking lamp was lit. The cooks of the watch were serving coffee, and the newly arrived party had their share, and grateful they were. Their experience aboard the submarine patrol boat had been most chilling and uncomfortable.

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Immediately, the call for hauling over hammock cloths and stopping them down was sounded. “Pipe sweepers” was the next command, and the decks were thoroughly swept while the deck washers removed their shoes and socks.

“Wet down decks!” and the washers sprang for the coils of hose attached to the fire hydrants. Every part of the decks was flushed with clean sea water and swabs, or deck-mops, were used where necessary.

All this was a familiar routine to Whistler Morgan and his mates. Later they would be assigned to their places in the watches and to their posts at all deck drills.

At the execution of morning orders at three bells, or half-past five, the decks were cleared of all loiterers and the order passed to break away the anchors. The steam gear was already in action. The derrick had hoisted aboard the running steamer before the chaser had arrived with the boys from Seacove and their companions, and it was now stowed in her proper berth amidships. There was no other craft outboard, even the captain’s gig having been stowed preparatory to going to sea.

Feathery smoke was rising from the funnels of the ship when Whistler and his chums had come aboard. Now great gray masses of oily smoke ballooned upward, drifting away to leeward before the gale. As soon as the anchors were tripped the bows of the great ship swung seaward. She began to forge ahead.

The *Kennebunk* was a huge craft, indeed, being of thirty-two thousand tons’ displacement. She carried twelve 12 and 14-inch guns in her turrets on the center line, while her torpedo battery of 5 and 6-inch guns numbered twenty. The “all-big-gun” feature of our big battleships began with the construction of the dreadnaught *Delaware*, in 1906.

The *Kennebunk* was heavily armored on the waterline and barbettes. She likewise had 5 to 8-inch armor along in wake of the berth-deck and armored broadside gun positions.

She had two steel cage masts and cofferdams along the unarmored portion of her waterline to protect the ship from being flooded if pierced by a shell between wind and water.

All machinery necessary to the superdreadnaught while in action was installed below the armored deck and behind the thick belt of armor at the waterline. Her system of water-tight compartments was perfect, and she had a complete double bottom.

In addition to her offensive machinery, she had several underwater torpedo tubes. Although she was supposed to be too heavy for great speed, her coal carrying capacity was enormous, and she could travel on the power of her oil engines alone in a pinch.

Altogether, the *Kennebunk* was the very latest result of battleship construction, and was preeminently a “first line ship.”

But she had yet to prove herself.

Her brief trial cruise had shown her to be safe and that she could be handled by the minimum of men allowed on such a ship. Now with a full crew and direct orders for a month or more ahead, she was going to sea to make her initial record as a sea-fighter for Uncle Sam.

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Her commander's report would be made daily by wireless to Washington, and the working out of the new superdreadnaught would be watched by experts with the keenest anxiety.

There were several points regarding the *Kennebunk's* construction different from any craft that had ever been built for similar work before; and if these matters did not prove satisfactory there would be bitter criticism of the board in charge. This was no time, Congress would say, for the trial of "new frills." The country was at war, and it was believed that all our first line ships would soon be called into action. Germany was believed to be in such desperate straits that it was thought she would venture to send her fleet to sea after three and a half years of hiding in the Kiel Canal.

High hopes and some doubt went with the *Kennebunk* as she steamed out of the harbor and into the storm. Not alone were her officers and crew anxious to find out what she could do. The rulers of the United States Navy were deeply concerned as well.

CHAPTER XIV

AN UNEXPECTED TARGET

At quarters for muster and inspection that day the four Navy boys from Seacove were given their numbers and drill placements. These were, of course, not permanent assignments. Changes would quickly be made after the capabilities of the boys were established. Especially would this be so in assignments of duty relating to the ship when in action.

The four friends had Mr. MacMasters to say a good word for them. Their record, too, aboard the *Colodia* and with the prize crew on the captured German raider would be taken into consideration when permanent appointments were made upon the *Kennebunk*.

Hans Hertig immediately took his rightful position as boatswain's mate. His rating was assured. But, after all, the apprentice seamen must prove themselves before the officers of the superdreadnaught were likely to give them much consideration.

The act of particular courage that had brought Whistler Morgan into prominence on the submarine chaser the night before would scarcely be taken public notice of by Captain Trevor of the *Kennebunk* until it was mentioned in orders from Washington. Ensign MacMasters, however, liked the boy too well not to take the first opportunity offered him to relate the happening on the S. P. 888 at officers' mess. After this it of course quickly reached the captain's ears.

Whistler and Torry immediately put in their claim for gunnery work. They had studied faithfully and had had considerable training with the secondary battery of the *Colodia*.

“Of course, these huge guns of the *Kennebunk* mean something else again,” declared Ikey. “You fellers have been playin’ with popguns yet. If you get in a turret gun crew you’ve got to show ’em.”

“We’ll do just that little thing,” answered Torry rather boastfully.

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There was not likely to be practice with the big guns until the weather changed. The *Kennebunk* roared on through the storm for all of that day; but her hull was so huge that she scarcely rolled while she remained under steam.

Most target shooting is arranged for ordinarily fair weather. Not often have battles at sea been fought in a storm. Besides, the *Kennebunk* must run off the coast, beyond the approved steamship lines, to a point where she could be joined by a naval vessel dragging the target.

There were lectures on gunnery that day to the gun captains, and the boys off duty who were interested in the subject might listen to this instruction. Phil Morgan and Torrance availed themselves of the privilege.

The two younger chums, Michael Donahue and Ikey Rosenmeyer, were not, it must be confessed, so well employed. During this first day aboard the *Kennebunk* there was bred between these youths a scheme which certainly would not have met with the approval of the executive officer.

In their quarters aboard the destroyer *Colodia* they would not have been able to stow the junk they now secured away from the watchful eyes of the master-at-arms. In the destroyer their ditty boxes had to hide any private property the boys wanted to stow away.

But a man could lose himself in the various decks of the superdreadnaught. Even the officers' quarters were forward with the crew's, the ship was so huge. There were unused rooms and compartments for which Ikey and Frenchy did not know the names, or their uses.

In one of these unoccupied compartments the two found a lot of lumber and rubbish amid which were some joints of two-inch galvanized pipe the plumbers and pipe fitters had left when the ship was being furnished.

"Gee, Ikey!" murmured the agile-minded Irish lad, "I've got an idea."

"I bet you," returned Ikey. "You always have ideas. But is this one worth anything?"

"Listen here!" and Frenchy, with dancing eyes, whispered into his friend's ear the details of the new-born scheme.

"Oi, oi!" cried Ikey. "It is an idea, sure enough. But it is trouble you are looking for."

"Not a bit of it. We needn't tell anybody—not even Whistler or Al. Gee! it will be great."

“Mebbe the old man won’t say so.” He was referring to Captain Trevor, but in no disrespectful way. “Old Man” is rather a term of admiration and affection applied to the commander of a ship.

“Lots he’ll be botherin’ about what we do,” sniffed Frenchy.

Ikey was already enamored of his friend’s plan. His objections were very weak.

“Ah, g’wan!” reiterated Frenchy. “You won’t get into the brig for it, that’s sure. I’ll do it alone. Only see that you keep your mouth shut about it, if you won’t help.”

But Ikey had no intention of seeing his friend have all the fun of the thing. He stopped objecting, and thereafter gave his hearty assistance in the plot.

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At odd times during that day and the next the two rigged a weighted platform into which could be fixed upright lengths of the two-inch pipe they had found.

Rigged to suit them at last, the two boys took their appliance to pieces again and hid the parts away until a to-be-determined time. They were planning to have a joke upon the whole ship's company; but they were forced to wait for the appropriate moment in which to spring the surprise.

The third morning out revealed a clearing sky and subsiding waves; and the regular ship's routine at sea was taken up.

"Officers' call" was sounded five minutes before the "assembly" bugle call at 9:15. At the later call men of the various divisions fall in smartly at double time for muster in the respective parts of the ship. The men are inspected at this time regarding the condition of their clothing, length of hair, personal cleanliness, and whether or not they are carefully shaved.

This last requirement troubled the four friends from Seacove but little, save that Whistler and Torry occasionally wore a little fuzz on their cheeks, which Frenchy declared they lathered surreptitiously with cream, then let the ship's cat lick it off.

"If they had a real ship's cat on this iron pot," retorted Torry, "I know who would most frequently have the attention of that. You need the cat-o'-nine-tails right now, Frenchy."

"Gee! ain't he bloodthirsty and savage?" whispered Michael, who dearly loved to tease.

The petty officers who personally inspected the men at this morning review reported to the division officer, who in turn reported to the executive officer of the ship, who is always the navigating officer.

After the reports the physical drill, or setting-up exercises, is the order. These calisthenics are similar to that drill in the army.

It was on this third day that the boys were assigned to the watches and to their divisions for the cruise. The ship's company is divided into port and starboard watches, each watch being organized into divisions. Each turret is manned by a division, numbered in rotation, beginning with Number One from forward aft. To the delight of Philip Morgan and Al Torrance they were both assigned to Number Two division, and would be members of the crew of a big gun in the second turret.

The broadside batteries were partly manned by marines, of whom there were a large number aboard the *Kennebunk*. These "soldiers of the sea" had always interested Whistler and his friends.

For convenience in making out station bills and the like, each man of a division has a number assigned him by which he is known. Whistler and Torry were given respectively Numbers 2111 and 2112. These numbers showed that they were Numbers 11 and 12 of the first section of the second division—the first figure for division, the second for section, and the remainder the personal number of the man in his section.

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The watches, meaning the length of time into which the twenty-four hours aboard ship is divided, are arranged on a naval vessel as in all maritime affairs.

The first watch is from 8:00 P. M. till midnight. The mid-watch, or “graveyard watch,” is from midnight till 4:00 A. M.; the morning watch from 4:00 till 8:00 A. M.; the forenoon watch from 8:00 A. M. till mid-day; the afternoon watch from noon till 4:00 P. M.; and the dog-watches, each of which is but two hours long, are from 4:00 till 6:00 P. M. and from 6:00 till 8 P. M.

The Seacove boys were already well trained in the general duties that fell to their share, even though they had never cruised upon a superdreadnaught. Now they had the special duties of looking after the guns in the turret to which they were attached. Gun drill would hereafter occupy a part of their time each forenoon.

As the weather cleared the lookouts all over the ship kept sharper watch than they had before for any moving object on the sea. They had seen the smoke of steamships and the sails of other vessels during the storm, but had not spoken a single craft since leaving port.

The *Kennebunk* frequently received and sent wireless messages; but the messages were evidently unimportant for they caused no flurry of excitement. The Seacove boys were expecting some news of submarines, or the capture of the “mother ship,” which they believed was cruising off the coast to supply German U-boats with fuel. But no news of this kind came to their ears.

The big battleship was now nearing the point where they could expect to meet the auxiliary naval vessel towing the target.

“Pretty soft! Pretty soft!” said one chap in Whistler’s gun crew disgustedly. “Pretty soft for us! We fellows going out to target practice, while those battleships already on the other side of this periscope pond may be fighting the Fritzies off Heligoland.”

“We’ll get a chance at a sub maybe,” said another more hopefully.

“No such luck,” growled the first speaker. “We’ll just about get shot at with a torpedo from one of those pirates. We’d never have the good luck to plant a shell in a U-boat where it would do the most good. No, sir!”

There was so much that was new for the four boys from Seacove to learn aboard the superdreadnaught that they did not worry much about getting into immediate action. Target practice with the big guns would spell excitement enough for the time being, they thought.

Meanwhile Michael Donahue and Ikey Rosenmeyer were having a secret all to themselves that kept them breaking out in “the giggles” at unseasonable times, so that

the master-at-arms gave them two reprimands within the twenty-four hours. Another would be likely to put their names on the report—an incident that was always to be regretted.

The battleship was steaming through a flattening sea at half speed. Word had been passed from one of the masthead lookouts that smoke was sighted. The executive officer said it was probably the auxiliary ship with the target in tow. The report brought almost everybody who was free to the open decks.

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But Frenchy and Ikey showed an unexplained lack of interest in this incident. They remained below and, seizing their chance unobserved, slipped into the spare compartment on the lower deck in which the lumber was stowed.

Just abaft this compartment was an ash-chute. As the sea was now calm, the ash-hoist had been at work that morning and the trap-door of the chute had not been relocked. This door kicked open outboard, giving vent upon the sea, the opening being about ten feet above the waterline of the *Kennebunk*.

The two chums were deeply engaged in the compartment for some time while the crew and officers on deck watched the approach of the target boat. The course of that and the battleship would bring the two within speaking distance in an hour or less.

Suddenly Ikey croaked a warning: "Hist! What's that, Frenchy?"

"What's what?" puffed his friend, just then very much engaged in fastening together two joints of pipe. "Don't try to scare a fellow. Nobody's coming."

"Listen!" commanded Ikey.

Michael sat back on his heels, cocking his head to listen. It was no footstep outside the compartment slide. It was not that kind of sound at all. And it was faint—so faint indeed that perhaps the noises of the storm since they had left port had quite smothered the queer sound.

"A clock?" Frenchy suggested.

"Funny sounding clock," whispered Ikey Rosenmeyer. "And where can it be?"

"Tick-*tock*! Tick-*tock*! Tick-*tock*!" The emphasis upon the second division of the sound was unmistakable. It did not seem like any clock the boys had ever heard.

"That's never a ship's chronometer, you know, that," declared Frenchy.

"What is it, then?" was his chum's worried demand.

"Oh, bother! Don't care what it is," returned Frenchy. "Give us a hand here, Ike. Want me to do all the work alone, do you?"

Frenchy was really getting cross. There are plenty of noises of one kind or another about a ship. One more noise he did not think mattered.

But Ikey continued to raise his head now and then to listen to the "tick-tock" sound. It puzzled him, and he determined to tell Whistler about it.

Their work was completed at length, and Frenchy crept out into the passage to look about. There was nobody in this part of the ship save themselves.

The two mischievous youths tugged the result of their labor out to the ash-chute. The time was propitious. The battleship and the auxiliary were approaching each other and signals were being exchanged. Captain Trevor was on the quarterdeck and word was passed that target practice would immediately begin. In a moment Frenchy and Ikey darted out on deck and joined their mates without being observed by the master-at-arms. Whistler and Al Torrance were already hovering about their stations. If the guns of Number Two turret got a chance, they hoped to have a hand in the manipulation of them.

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Suddenly there came a hail from the masthead:

“Q’deck-ahoy-sir!”

The boy up there ran his cry altogether in his excitement. The navigating officer replied.

“Submarine astern, sir! Can see the periscope bobbing, sir!” was the statement that changed the entire atmosphere of the battleship from that of mere curiosity and interest to the wildest excitement.

CHAPTER XV

THE BIG GUN SPEAKS

The thing the lookout had spied bobbing in the sea was not exactly in the wake of the battleship, for those who rushed to the port rail could see it quite well. It wabbled about in a most eccentric way, as though the submarine attached to it had risen just as the *Kennebunk* passed and had received the full force of her swell.

“Jingo! that’s a funny lookin’ periscope,” drawled one second-class seaman, a new recruit, craning his long neck to see over the heads of the group which Frenchy and Ikey had joined.

“What did you think they’d look like?” demanded another.

“Something like a smokestack with a curlycue on the end of it,” was the reply.

Frenchy and Ikey were giggling immeasurably. The former said: “Isa Bopp couldn’t beat that, could he?”

“Oi, oi!” sighed Ikey ecstatically. “A periscope like a smokestack!”

But more than this new recruit aboard the *Kennebunk* began to doubt the validity of the bobbing thing in the water astern. The big battleship was being swerved to bring the port broadside to bear upon the now distant object. The bugle rang for stations. The sudden activity of the whole ship’s company was inspiring.

Of a sudden there came a hail from the other masthead where two lookouts stood in the cage with glasses.

“On deck, sir! Submarine just awash on the starboard quarter, sir!”

The cry was in truth a startling one. Whistler and Torry, who had sprung with their mates to the guns of the second turret, were on the starboard side. A second submarine? Why, it seemed the ship was being surrounded by these wasps of the sea.

A sharp whistle sounded in the turret. The officer in charge sprang to the tube.

“Ready for deflection and range? Stand by!” was the order.

“Aye, aye, sir!” responded the turret captain.

Ammunition boxes appeared as though by magic and were broken open. Plugs were swung back and the gun bores were examined. The starboard gun was quickly charged. Whistler and Torry both worked on her. They stood back, the gunner standing with his finger on the button of the trigger.

“That submarine’s going down!” gasped one watcher. “We’ll lose her.”

The next moment the executive officer’s report for deflection and range came through the tube. Then: “Are you on?”

“On, sir!”

“Fire!”

It seemed that almost instantaneously with the roar and recoil of the huge gun the shell burst beside the sinking submarine. The explosion was terrific; the whole hull of the undersea boat heaved up, exposing its length for a few seconds. Then the sea-shark sank, going down like a shot.

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“A hit! A hit!” yelled the men in turret two.

A cheer burst from the throats of the whole ship’s company. Those who had not seen it, realized that the first gun fired in earnest by the *Kennebunk* had reached its target.

“The old ship’s bound to have good luck!” shouted a boatswain. “This is only the beginning! We’ll sweep the seas of every Hun!”

The officers did not try to quell the cheering. The satisfaction and pride of all was something too fine to be quenched.

The battleship swerved again and ran across the track of the sunken U-boat. Bubbling up from the depths were blobs of black oil which lazily spread and broke upon the sea’s surface.

The German submarine was done for. Her crew were buried with her at the bottom of the sea. The cheering ceased when this fact was realized.

“The poor square-heads!” muttered one fellow near Frenchy and Ikey Rosenmeyer. “They couldn’t help it, I s’pose. They say they are driven into the subs. Aren’t no volunteers called for.”

“Where’s that other sub?” demanded another. “Has she sunk, too?”

Frenchy and Ikey began to grin again. One of the boatswains said: “I bet that warn’t no submarine ship at all. She’s a joke. There! We’re going to circle around and hunt her up.”

“Do you think the Fritzies set something afloat to fool us?” demanded another man in surprise. “They’re cute rascals, aren’t they?”

“Not very cute just now,” returned somebody, dryly. “They’re food for the fishes.”

“Just the same, if we’d got our attention completely fixed upon this here floating joker, the real sub might have sneaked up within range and sent us a lover’s note in the shape of a torpedo.”

Frenchy and Ikey began to look at each other with some worriment of countenance. Later it was reported that the first “periscope” could not be found. The two mischief-makers were greatly relieved.

“Say! that wasn’t any joke,” Ikey whispered to the Irish lad. “Oi, oi! S’pose they had grappled for it and brought it aboard and found “*Kennebunk*” stamped on those iron belayin’ pins we used for weights?”

“Don’t say a word!” urged Frenchy.

“You bet I won’t!” agreed Ikey. “Not even to Whistler and Al. We come pretty near putting our foot in it that time, Frenchy.”

The Irish lad agreed warmly: “By St. Patrick’s piper that played the last snake out of Ireland!” he reiterated, “no more practical jokes, Ikey. This is a lesson. And say!”

“What is it?”

“I left my knife down there in that room. I’ve got to go down after it before it’s found and the master-at-arms asks questions.”

“All right. I’ll go down and watch out for you,” declared the loyal Ikey.

The target ship was being signaled again and she was coming back. At the first alarm of a submarine in the vicinity she had started coastward.

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The wireless was snapping. Messages were being sent out announcing the sinking of the U-boat and warning other craft, especially merchant vessels, of the possibility of other undersea boats being in the vicinity.

It was proved, at least, that the Germans had sent more submarines to this side of the ocean. The visit of the *Deutschland* and of U-53 to America before the United States got into the war, had been in the nature of a warning as to what the Hun could really do. Now perhaps a squadron of U-boats was to be sent across to prey upon American shipping or to shell helpless seaboard towns.

The two younger Seacove boys, who had come so near committing a huge piece of folly by their small practical joke, slipped down to the lower deck again to recover Frenchy's knife. If it should be found by the master-at-arms, or was handed to him, it would go into the lucky bag; and then Frenchy would have to explain how he lost it in that unused compartment of the ship if he wished to get back the knife again.

Just as they got to the passage abaft the compartment in question, Ikey uttered a warning "hist!" and drew Frenchy back. Somebody was coming out of the room in which they built the dummy that had so fooled the ship's company.

"Who is it?" gasped Michael.

"Oi, oi!" murmured Ikey, peering again, "It's Seven Knott."

"Shucks! I'm not afraid of him," said Frenchy stepping forth into the passage. The next moment he cried out: "What's the matter, Hansie?"

The petty officer was plainly frightened. He turned with rolling eyes and a pasty countenance to the two boys.

"What you seen?" demanded Ikey, likewise disturbed by the petty officer's appearance.

"No—nothin'," murmured the frightened Seven Knott. "But—but it's a ghost."

"What's a ghost?" demanded the boys together, and although they did not believe in ghosts, they could not help being shaken a bit by Seven Knott's earnestness.

"It's what I heard," whispered the older man, still trembling.

"Oi, oi!" exclaimed Ikey Rosenmeyer suddenly. "Was it a clock ticking?"

"That's it! That's what it sounded like. But there's no clock there," the boatswain's mate said. "I couldn't find anything. It's all about you—in the air! I tell you it's a ghost, a ghost-clock. 'The death watch.' They say you hear it on board a ship when she's

doomed to sink. Something bad is going to happen to the *Kennebunk*," finished Seven Knott earnestly.

"Crickey!" cried Frenchy under his breath. "Something bad just happened to that German U-boat. Maybe this death watch you talk about was counting out the submarine, not the battleship."

But Hertig was not to be easily pacified. He was superstitious anyway. He believed that he could not be drowned himself, for instance, because he had been born with a caul over his face.

Frenchy went into the room, presumably to listen for the "tick-tock" sound; but actually to find his knife. He came out with the latter in his pocket; but he also showed a rather pale face and he had not much to say until Seven Knott went away.

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The latter crept away, plainly in great trouble of spirit. Ikey asked his chum:

“Did you hear it again?”

“Ye-es,” admitted Frenchy. “It does sound queer. What do you suppose it can be?”

“Don’t know. Let’s tell Whistler,” said Ikey, who had a deal of confidence in Morgan.

“That’s all right. But don’t tell him anything about our being in that room before. Remember, Ikey, we don’t know a livin’ thing about that first periscope the lookouts spied.”

“Sure I won’t tell,” agreed the other. “It wasn’t such a good joke after all, was it, Frenchy?”

And Frenchy agreed with a solemn nod of his head.

CHAPTER XVI

AN ACCIDENT

The *Kennebunk* shook throughout her structure at that moment and Ikey darted for the between-decks ladder.

“Another submarine!” he shouted. “Oi, oi!”

“Hold on!” drawled Frenchy. “Nothing like it. There goes another. They are at practice. The target’s in range.”

The four Seacove boys had seen something of gun practice on the destroyer *Colodia*; but the secondary batteries of the smaller vessel made no such racket as did the big guns of the *Kennebunk*.

The discharge of a turret gun aboard the superdreadnaught was an important matter, and a costly one as well. The gun crews practiced all the movements save the actual discharge of the guns every day. To burn up several hundred pounds of powder and fire away the expensive projectiles in rehearsal was a serious matter.

The gun crew that had made a clean hit on the submarine with its first shell, had already shown what value practice shooting was. The high standard of the gunnery in our Navy pays for all it costs.

These gunners had practiced at the schools and on other vessels before being assigned to the superdreadnaught. No matter how much good powder and shot had

already been flung away in training that particular crew of Turret Number Two, the sinking of the German submarine had paid for it all.

Whistler and Torry did not, of course, actually fire the gun. The gun captain did that. But the exact team work of the crew had much to do with the score of the gun in target practice; and the two friends did their work commendably.

There was a sharp lookout kept during target practice for other submarines. The disappearance of the first periscope which had been hailed from the masthead was the cause of much discussion. It was generally believed that this first submarine had wisely made off when its sister ship was so promptly sunk by the battleship.

Frenchy and Ikey almost burst from their desire to tell what they knew about the mystery. But they did not dare.

It had been a lesson which the two mischief-loving boys would not easily forget. While the whole ship's company was watching the imitation periscope Frenchy and Ikey had slipped overboard through the ash-chute, the real submarine might have torpedoed the *Kennebunk*.

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The score of each gun crew was transmitted to Washington by favor of the auxiliary steamer which towed the target, and she disappeared coastward just at sunset. The superdreadnaught was under orders to proceed on a southerly course, and parallel with the coast, for some considerable distance. She was doing outside patrol duty on this, her first real cruise.

Men and officers were first of all expected to get used to each other and to the ship. This familiarity could only come about through drills and practice work in every branch. The men must have confidence in their officers, and the officers know their men thoroughly before the commander could feel that he had a smoothly working ship's company.

The excitement caused by the first blow struck at the enemy and the successful target practice that followed would not soon wear off. And both incidents helped the morale of the crew.

Almost every enlisted man showed delight in his face. Only Hans Hertig displayed a woful countenance. The solemnity of the boatswain's mate attracted even Ensign MacMasters' attention.

"What's the matter with you, Hans?" he demanded of the petty officer.

It was difficult to get any explanation out of Seven Knott; but finally the tale of the ghostly "clock" on the lower deck was blurted out by the superstitious petty officer.

"What do you mean, a ghost?" growled the ensign. "Don't let me hear of your repeating such nonsense, Hertig. Let me tell you it will interfere with your advance in rating if you do circulate the story. I'll take the matter up with Captain Trevor if I hear anything more about it."

But it was impossible to stop the circulation of such a story on shipboard. Rumor flies from deck to deck on wings. A hint of the strange noise below decks made others besides Seven Knott investigate. Many declared they heard the "tick-tock" sound.

There never was a crew at sea yet in which some of its members were not superstitious. Seven Knott was not the only one troubled by the ghostly clock. Stories of haunted ships became common among certain groups of seamen and marines during the hours off duty.

To most of the boys and enlisted men it was all a huge joke; nevertheless there were enough of the crew really superstitious for the tale of the clock-ticking sound to interfere with the general morale of the ship's company.

The chief master-at-arms finally made what he deemed a thorough investigation of the report. But it was evident that he had made up his mind to counteract the influence of the strange sound upon the men by denying its existence.

This, of course, did no good at all. The men, or, at least, some of them, could hear the "tick-*tock*! tick-*tock*! tick-*tock*!" for themselves. Those who wandered into the room where the lumber was stowed were strongly impressed by the unexplained sounds. By and by the men as a rule fought shy of entering that part of the ship.

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When Whistler was told by Frenchy and Ikey that they had first heard the “ghost-clock” after the subsiding of the storm, he declared it to be nonsense, pure and simple.

“Don’t you fellows forget the scare we all got aboard the *Graf von Posen* over that old lead coffin in her hold? I should think you would know better than to circulate such yarns about the ship,” he declared in some heat.

“We didn’t say a word about it,” Frenchy denied. “Only to you and Torry. Seven Knott started the row, not us.”

“And he ought to be keelhauled for it,” growled Torry.

Nothing would satisfy Frenchy and Ikey, however, until Phil and Al went down with them to listen to the strange sound themselves. It was there, all right. When their ears became used to the steady thumping of the engines, they were able to distinguish the clock-like noise.

“It’s some trick,” declared Torrance, with conviction. “Sure you chaps haven’t started a joke on us?”

“No joke!” denied Ikey.

“We’ve sworn off practical jokes,” joined in Frenchy earnestly.

“Huh! what’s the matter with you?” sniffed Torry suspiciously. “Why this eleventh-hour conversion?”

But the two smaller fellows refused to be “drawn.” They merely reiterated that they knew nothing about the cause of the ghostly sound. The four overhauled all the stowed tackle and lumber in the compartment, but found nothing but a locked carpenter’s chest that was too heavy to move. And the noise did not seem to come from that.

“It’s in the air—it’s all about us,” declared Whistler seriously. “I doubt if the source of the noise is in this room at all; it is somewhere near and by some freak of acoustics the sound is heard more plainly in this place.”

“You can try to explain it as you will,” returned Torry. “It’s mighty mysterious.”

“‘Mysterious’ is no name for it,” said Frenchy. “It’ll be more than that before all’s said and done. By St. Patrick’s piper that played the last snake out of Ireland! some of these garbies are getting blue around the gills already.”

“Laugh at them,” commanded Whistler. “We’re Americans. We ought not to have a superstitious bone in our bodies.”

“Arrah!” grunted Frenchy. “I don’t know rightly that it’s me bones that are superstitious. But that ‘tick-tock’ gives me the creeps, just the same.”

In a week the bulk of the *Kennebunk’s* crew were keeping strictly away from the compartment on the lower deck from which came the strange sound. In addition, a run of small accidents broke out which seemed to the minds of many of the crew to assure that the ship was doomed to bad luck.

“The ship is haunted,” continued to be whispered from division to division. The sternness of the petty officers could not halt the spreading feeling.

“How about our very first gun sinking a submarine?” demanded Philip Morgan of one group.

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“Oh, that was just a chance,” was the reply.

“Hump!” said Whistler with disgust. “I have an idea the old *Kennebunk* is going to be blessed with similar chances.”

There followed, however, a really serious accident. A pipe in the boiler room burst, and several men were scalded, one so badly that the ship’s surgeons declared he must be transported to a shore hospital as soon as possible.

The operation of skin grafting could not be performed successfully on shipboard, and nothing else would save the unfortunate victim of the accident from having a terribly disfigured face.

Many of the man’s shipmates would gladly have aided by giving patches of healthy skin for the benefit of the patient; but the operation was too delicate to be undertaken on the battleship, and the healing of the unfortunate man would be too tedious.

After communicating with the Navy Department by wireless, Captain Trevor decided to send the steam runner into Hampton Roads with the injured man, while the battleship continued her southerly course in compliance with her orders.

The steam-screw tender of the *Kennebunk* was a good sized craft and perfectly seaworthy. They were too far from shore to trust a motor boat; and to use one of the big whaleboats under sail would take too long.

The derrick swung the big boat overside, and she was lowered into the sea as lightly as though she were a featherweight. Meanwhile Ensign MacMasters was assigned to her command and he had the privilege of picking his crew to suit himself.

The steamer mounted a gun forward and one aft. To the delight of Phil and Al, the ensign chose them as members of the gun crews.

Immediately Frenchy and Ikey clamored to be taken, too. Ensign MacMasters without doubt displayed favoritism at this time. He acquiesced in the desires of the two younger boys from Seacove.

“I suppose you would pine away and refuse your chow if you were separated from Morgan and Torrance,” the ensign said laughingly. “Get your hammock-rolls and go aboard. I’ll fix it with the executive officer.”

So, when the steamer started from the towering side of the battleship, the four Navy boys were members of her crew, and likely to experience a variety of adventures.

CHAPTER XVII

BLOWN UP

The change from the huge *Kennebunk* to the comparatively tiny steamer was great indeed; and for the first few hours of the run shoreward the boys were afraid they would be ill. There was a heavy swell on, and the tender rode up the hill of each roller, and slid down the other side, dizzily.

They were two hundred miles off shore and three hundred from Hampton Roads. The time occupied in the journey could not be much less than three days and two nights. She was much slower than the motor boats; but she sailed much more safely, and the injured man could be made more comfortable on deck under the awning.

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The poor fellow complained a good deal about having had his voyage cut short.

“No chance for me to get a crack at the Huns,” he repeated again and again.

The boys from Seacove tried to comfort him. Ensign MacMasters told him that he had done his share, even if his fate was not so brilliant as that of men shot down in battle.

“I wouldn’t mind being shot for my country,” said the poor fellow. “But I hate like a dog to be boiled for it! There ain’t nothing heroic in this, Ensign.”

The cruise of the steamer was not unattended with peril. They were confident that German U-boats were beginning to infest the sea bordering on the Atlantic coast of the United States. One might pop up at any time and take a shot at the tender.

A sharp lookout was kept, and the gun crews scarcely slept. Every sail or streamer of smoke created excitement on board.

But the first night passed in safety and the day broke charmingly. The steamer was kept at top speed. Everything was going smoothly when, about midforenoon, they sighted a strange vessel hull down and somewhat to the northeast of their course.

It was rather hazy, and the strange craft was at some distance. Her course was not one to bring her very near that of the battleship’s steamer.

She did not appear to be more than two hundred feet long, and the concurrence of opinion was that she was some small tramp freight boat and was laden heavily. She had a high bow, rail all around, and, as far as could be seen, she flew no flag at all.

“Some old tub taking a chance with a rich cargo,” suggested the warrant officer, as Ensign MacMasters’ second in command. “Why, at the present time, freight rates are so high and wages so much advanced, that shipowners can find skippers and crews willing to take regular sieves to sea!”

“She looks peculiar,” Mr. MacMasters said. “If it wasn’t for Grant, here, being in such pain, poor fellow, I’d throw a shell at her and hold her up. But we’ve got our orders to hasten to the Roads and return again to the *Kennebunk* as soon as possible.”

Therefore the strange craft was allowed to pass unchallenged. Later they had reason to believe that they had made a small mistake regarding the unknown vessel, yet they had made no mistake in allowing her to go unmolested.

In time they raised the Capes of Virginia, and a few hours later steamed into the dock at Fortress Monroe. Grant, the injured fireman from the *Kennebunk*, was taken ashore and sent to the marine hospital.

Ensign MacMasters had his full orders from the commander of the battleship; but he had a wireless message relayed to the *Kennebunk* stating his arrival. The wireless instrument aboard the steamer was of too narrow a radius to reach the superdreadnaught in her present position.

Orders were soon repeated for the auxiliary craft to make for the battleship again, and laying the course for Ensign MacMasters to follow. There were storm signals flying; but the steamer was to keep near the shore until she got around Hatteras. It was presumed that she would find the *Kennebunk* within a week at the most, and the tender was well provisioned and took on extra fuel at the dock.

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She went to sea without the boys having had an hour of shore leave; but they did not mind that. The fun of running on the steamer was all right; but they were getting eager now to return to the superdreadnaught.

They ran out between the Capes into what the warrant officer called “a Liverpool particular,” meaning a fog almost thick enough to cut with a cheese-knife.

Every once in a while the nose of a steel-gray ship, small or large, poked through the mist, and her growling siren warned the smaller craft to get out of the way.

These patrol boats were very plentiful off the Virginia Capes at that time. A mine-laying enemy submarine would have small chance getting into Hampton Roads.

But that such a craft was in the vicinity the crew of the *Kennebunk’s* tender learned was the fact within a few hours. Their course was southerly, and almost in sight of the coast in clear weather. But they broke out of the fog bank the next morning to see dead ahead two boats, each pulled by four pair of oars, wearily approaching the course of the coastwise steamships.

“I smell a U-boat about!” declared Ensign MacMasters, when he had directed the steamer’s course to be changed to run down to the row-boats.

He was right. The boats contained the crew of the schooner *Hattie May*, out of Baltimore, which had been shelled and sunk twenty-four hours before by a German undersea craft.

And the report of the wearied crew included a description of the submarine. She was camouflaged by a high bow and a rail all around, as well as by a canvas smokestack to make her look like a tramp freighter.

“The craft we raised going into the Roads!” ejaculated the warrant officer. “It’s her, for a penny!”

“No argument,” growled Ensign MacMasters. “We fell down that time. Although we might have had our hands full if we had tackled her with our two small guns.”

It seemed that the disguised undersea boat mounted four guns on her deck, but she was a slow sailer. She had moved up close to the schooner before showing her teeth.

Then she dropped two shells near the *Hattie May* to show the skipper that she had the range of his schooner. He had to surrender, and the U-boat moved up and gave him and his crew ten minutes to get into the boats. Then they sank the *Hattie May* by hanging bombs over her sides and exploding them simultaneously by an electric arrangement.

The skipper of the schooner was taken aboard the U-boat and said he was shown all over the ship. The German captain seemed to be inordinately proud of his craft and what she could do.

“She’s got torpedoes, but she don’t use ’em because they are expensive,” said the skipper. “They are saved for a last resort. But she is a mine layer, for I saw two wells and saw the mines, too. She has been out five weeks and is numbered U-Two Hundred Fifty.”

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“Two hundred fifty!” gasped Whistler to his chums, who were hanging over the rail to listen to this report. “What do you know about that?”

“That’s the very number that man Blake used in the restaurant, talking with the skipper of the oil tender, wasn’t it?” asked Frenchy of the quick memory.

“You mean Franz Linder, the German spy!” ejaculated Torry, with emphasis. “He spoke of this very sub.”

“You bet!” agreed Ikey.

The steamer’s wireless operator was sending out an S O S call and a destroyer quickly answered. The steamer remained by the two boats from the sunken schooner until the fast-flying naval vessel appeared in the west.

After that the boys on the steamer kept their eyes open for sight of the camouflaged U-boat. As the boat picked up speed again and kept to her course. Whistler Morgan and his mates discussed the matter with much excitement.

“Do you s’pose Mr. MacMasters will let us shell the Hun?” demanded Frenchy eagerly.

“She’ll more likely shell us,” declared Torry, inclined to be pessimistic.

“I bet we can run away from her,” cried Ikey Rosenmeyer.

“Say! this tender is no sub chaser. In a race with the S. P. 888, for instance, she wouldn’t have a chance.”

“Aw, well,” Frenchy broke in, “that U-boat will not have a speed of over fourteen knots on the surface. We can do better than that.”

“But if she sneaks up on us as that other one did on the *Kennebunk*,” Whistler observed, “we might easily be potted.”

“Right-o!” declared Torry. “Whichever way you put it, I don’t want to see that U-boat till we’re aboard the *Kennebunk* again—if ever.”

After leaving the crew of the *Hattie May* to be picked up by the destroyer, the tender continued to run parallel with the coast. Land was seldom wholly out of sight, for Mr. MacMasters had orders as to his course, expecting to meet the superdreadnaught on that vessel’s return from the south.

The fog in which they had run out from the Capes was the forerunner of a storm which increased as the day advanced. The gale was behind them, however, so there was no fear of the tender being cast ashore.

The sea around Cape Hatteras is notoriously rough in a gale, and the outlook was not promising when they sighted Hatteras Light that evening. Seaworthy as the steamer was, she pitched terrifically in the seas that threatened now to overwhelm her.

There was a pale and watery moon that evening, with wind-driven clouds scurrying across its face and quenching its light every few minutes. The steamer pitched so that her propeller was frequently entirely out of the sea.

Phil Morgan, in his watch on deck, thought the situation was as nasty as any he had experienced since joining the Navy. With every hatch and door battened to keep the seas from flooding her, they ran on, making scarcely five knots an hour. Now and then they were completely overwhelmed with the seas; and always the craft plunged and kicked as though she actually had to fight for supremacy with each wave.

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As the bitter night crept on they wore around the Cape, and then, when it seemed safe to do so, Ensign MacMasters ordered the helm shifted and they edged farther in toward the land.

In time the out-thrust of the coast partly sheltered them and the steamer ran into more quiet waters. But the gale still held, and from the same quarter.

They sighted only smacks and other small fry, including some few coastwise steamers whose routes hugged the land. Surely they might expect safety from submarines so far inshore, for this coast is treacherous.

Another day and night passed. The wireless operator had thus far failed to raise the *Kennebunk*, although he called every hour.

Mr. MacMasters and the warrant officer studied the chart anxiously. There were shallow waters hereabout, and although the steamer demanded little depth, there were bights between the reefs that were dangerous.

At daybreak of the fourth day out they were in the track of Charleston craft and quite near to a string of islands. There was plenty of water between the two outer islands. The passage was, indeed, a popular channel for both steam and sailing vessels.

The *Kennebunk's* tender was half way through this gut when suddenly, and without warning, it seemed as though the bow of the craft hit squarely upon a rock.

She stopped with an awful shock, seemed to rebound, and then the forward part rose on a wave that shot it into the air. The explosion that followed was muffled; but the sea about the doomed craft fairly boiled.

"We're sinking! All hands on deck!" shouted the warrant officer.

The boatswain's mate piped his shrillest. Those below swarmed upon the already settling deck. It was plain at once that the steamer had but a few moments to live.

"A mine!" declared Ensign MacMasters. "That is what did it! That Hun mine-sower has been this way!"

The men and boys went to quarters coolly. They had been drilling every day on the steamer just as though they were aboard the *Kennebunk*.

There was both a liferaft and a tight yawl aboard. These were got over into the comparatively quiet sea, water and an emergency ration-cask put aboard each, and Mr. MacMasters brought his instruments and papers, taking his place in the stern of the boat. The latter had a small engine, and there was a hawser with which she might tow the raft.

Meanwhile the wireless operator had been calling for help. He got a reply from a land station, but none from any sister naval ship. However, they were so near land that it did not seem that this mattered.

“Let her go, boy!” shouted the ensign to the operator. “Come on! She’s going down.”

They pulled away just in time, and got the little engine to kicking as the wrecked auxiliary craft of the *Kennebunk* sank stern foremost under the sea. As she went down her bows rose out of the water and the castaways saw the great wound torn in two of her water-tight compartments by the mine.

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CHAPTER XVIII

MORE TROUBLE

Philip Morgan and Al Torrance both were in the yawl, and were assigned to pull oars if the engine went dead from any cause. The two younger Seacove boys were taken by the warrant officer, Mr. Mudge, aboard the buoyant raft.

“Well, old man,” muttered Torry in his mate’s ear, “this is a new experience. We’ve never been shipwrecked before.”

Ikey on the raft was bewailing the loss of some of his duffle. “Oi, oi! And a nice new black silk neckerchief, too! Oi, oi! All for the fishes yet.”

Mr. MacMasters laughed, and did not order the boys to cease talking as a sterner officer might have done.

“We may as well take it cheerfully,” he said. “I’m thankful there’s nobody lost. And there can be no blame attached to any of us because of the loss of the boat.”

“Ah, that’s all right,” grumbled the warrant officer on the raft. “But think of those miserable Huns, sneaking away in here and dropping a mine in a channel where nothing but small craft dare sail.”

“Excursion steamers from Charleston use this channel,” Mr. MacMasters said. “I know it to be a fact.”

“Ah! That’s the Hun of it,” repeated the second. “To sink a craft having aboard a lot of innocent and helpless folk out on a pleasure excursion would be just his delight.”

First of all the two officers had looked over their charts and decided on the course to pursue. Charleston was not the nearest port.

The barometer was falling again and there was every promise of more bad weather. It was decided to make for a small town behind the islands, and instead of continuing through the channel where the *Kennebunk’s* auxiliary steamer had been mined, it seemed better to take advantage of the tide and run back to the open sea.

There they proposed to skirt along the outer beaches of the islands until they reached another passage marked on the charts as being the entrance to the sheltered harbor of the port in question. The distance was about ten miles.

There was no danger from reefs in this direction, and if they had to beach the boat and the raft the shores of the islands would seem to offer safe landings. They were yet to learn different.

Yet the decision was wise as far as the two officers could be expected to know without a special knowledge of the conditions. What mainly they failed to apprehend was the swiftness with which the new storm was approaching.

The little yawl chugged away cheerfully and drew the life raft out of the channel. No other craft had been in sight when the *Kennebunk's* auxiliary steamer was blown up, and therefore none had come to their assistance.

The local fishermen and navigators of small craft appreciated the coming of this second storm on the heels of the first. It would probably pounce upon the coast with suddenness, so the fishing boats had already run for cover.

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The yawl and raft got out into the open sea safely, and Mr. MacMasters steered for the harbor in which they expected to take refuge.

The first island was long and narrow—a mere windrow of rock and sand breaking the force of the sea. The huge combers coursing up its strand broke twenty feet high and offered nothing but utter destruction to any small craft that attempted a landing.

“That is no welcome coast,” Mr. MacMasters said. “I wonder if we shouldn’t have gone behind the islands after all, in spite of the reefs.”

But it was too late to change their plans now. The first strait that opened between the islands was a mass of white water.

The raft was clumsy, and the yawl could make but slow headway. Suddenly the wind fell; but with its falling the sea began to rise.

“What does it look like to you, Mr. Mudge?” Ensign MacMasters asked the officer on the raft.

“More trouble. The wind’s going to spring on us from a new quarter,” was the reply. “See yonder!”

Away to the northwest a cloud seemed rolling upon the very surface of the sea it was so low. At its foot, at least, the sea sprang up in a foamy line to meet the pallid cloud. There was a moaning in the air, but distant.

“That’s going to hit us hard!” cried Mr. MacMasters. “It’s more than an ordinary gale.”

“That’s what it is, sir,” admitted Mudge.

“Wish we were ashore!” shouted the ensign.

“Any chance, that you see?”

They were off the coast of the second island now. That was heavily wooded and the shore was more broken. But it seemed as inhospitable as that of the one of wider beach.

The newly risen gale was yet a long way from them, the low moaning of the tempest seemed distant.

The swell beneath the yawl’s keel suddenly heaved into a gigantic wave upon the summit of which the boat was lifted like a chip in a mill-stream.

Some of the crew shouted aloud, in both amazement and fear. The propeller raced madly; then the engine stopped—dead.

“Out oars! Look alive, men!” was the ensign’s command.

The clumsy raft tugged at the end of her hawse. The yawl went over the top of the wave and began to coast dizzily down the descent.

The rope which held it to its tow cut through the swell. It tautened—it snapped!

The loose end whipped the length of the yawl viciously and threw two of the crew flat into the boat’s bottom.

The oars were out. Ensign MacMasters yelled an order to pull. Philip Morgan and Al Torrance found themselves throwing their entire strength against the oars.

The raft rose staggeringly upon the huge wave behind the boat. Mr. Mudge had a steering oar out; but the raft wabbled on the summit of the swell as though drunken. They saw the castaways upon the raft cowering helplessly.

Then like a shot the white wave rode down upon them with the pallid storm-cloud overhead. The yawl was headed into the gale and the oarsmen pulled like mad.

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Mr. MacMasters yelled at them. They did their very best. The sleet whipped their shoulders like a thousand-lashed knout. The darkness of the tempest shut down upon them and the raft was instantly lost to sight.

“Frenchy! Ikey!” Whistler Morgan gasped, and Torry heard him.

But they could do nothing to aid their chums. Duty in any case held them to their work. They pulled with the very last ounce of strength they possessed.

The yawl’s head was kept to the wind and sea; but it was doubtful if she made any progress.

“Pull, men! Pull!” shouted the ensign again and again.

He inspired them, and perhaps their straining at the oars did keep the yawl from overturning at that time. Yet such ultimate fate for it seemed unavoidable. The wind and sea lashed it so furiously that Whistler told himself he would not have been surprised if the boat and crew were driven completely under the surface.

He had seen a good bit of bad weather before this; but nothing like what they suffered at this time. The warring elements fairly bruised their bodies. Sometimes the boys felt themselves pounded so viciously between the shoulders that they could scarcely draw their breaths.

Now and then, above the tumult of the tempest, the ensign’s voice encouraged them. Whistler, sitting three yards away, could not see the officer at all.

Then, with the unexpectedness that is the greatest danger of these off-shore gales, the wind changed once more. It snapped around in a moment to due west. The cross seas lashed the yawl impetuously.

Whistler heard an oar snap. The man behind him fell upon his back in the bottom of the yawl. His broken oar entangled with Whistler’s, and the latter lost stroke.

There was a yell from the ensign. Whistler heard Al Torrance shriek. The next moment the yawl rolled completely over, and he was struggling in the sea and in the pitchy darkness underneath the overturned boat!

CHAPTER XIX

COINCIDENCE

Whistler kept cool in his mind. As far as his body went, that was icy.

He knew that, after all, he was personally in less danger than those who had been thrown far from the boat. He could hear nothing of what went on outside; the rolling and plunging of the overturned yawl continued.

Where had Torry gone? And the ensign, and the other members of the yawl's crew? Once Whistler had spent a long time in the sea, drifting about on a hatchcover; having been saved from that perilous adventure, he was not likely easily to give up hope now.

There was air enough under the overturned yawl, and he knew her water-tight compartments would keep her afloat indefinitely. But there might be work for him to do outside.

He might help the other members of the shipwrecked crew. Therefore he filled his lungs with air and dived under the side of the yawl.

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Just as he came out into the open sea he collided with another person coming down. They seized each others' hands and rose to the surface.

It was Torry! When they popped up and expelled the air from their lungs and blinked the water from their eyes, each boy instantly recognized the other.

"Crickey!" coughed Torrance. "I thought we'd lost you."

"Are you all right?" demanded Morgan.

"Just as all right as a fellow can be when he—he can't walk ashore," chattered Torry.

"Here's the yawl!" cried Whistler. "Where's Mr. MacMasters? And Rosy and Slim? And the others?"

But when his eyes were well cleared of the water he beheld the entire crew of the yawl, including Ensign MacMasters, perched along the yawl's keel like a string of very much bedrabbled crows on a rail fence.

Strangely enough the gale seemed to have lulled for the time. Having done its worst to them, it gave the unfortunate castaways a breathing spell.

With the aid of their mates, Whistler Morgan and Torry were able to reach the keel of the overturned boat. There they perched, too, and, chattering in the cold wind, tried to look about them.

Where was the raft? This question, first and foremost in Whistler's mind, troubled him intensely. It was impossible to see far across the tossing sea; but he was sure that the life raft was nowhere within the range of their vision.

"Poor Frenchy and Ikey!" groaned Whistler.

"That raft can't sink," urged Torry in his ear.

"But they could easily be torn off it by the waves."

"Don't look at it in that way. They may be better off than we are," returned his chum.

"What's that yonder?" shouted Slim suddenly.

"Land!" Mr. MacMasters cried.

"And a lot of good that'll do us," growled Slim. "We'll be dumped ashore, maybe, like a ton of trap-rock."

The sodden boat was drifting steadily toward the island. The surf thundered against its ramparts most threateningly. But the outlook did not seem so serious as that upon the other island they had passed.

Ensign MacMasters, after some fishing, secured the loose end of the broken hawser. With the help of those nearest to him he hauled this out of the water. Then, by his advice, they all lashed themselves to the long rope with their belts or neckerchiefs.

“No matter what happens, we want to hang together,” he declared. “No one man can fight this sea alone.”

His cheerfulness and optimism raised their spirits. At least they hung on to their insecure refuge with much ardor, and not uncheerfully waited to be cast upon the strand.

A great swell suddenly caught the yawl and drove it shoreward. Mr. MacMasters uttered a warning shout and waved his hand in a gesture of command. They all cast loose from the keel, and the boat was carried high upon the breast of the breaker.

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Still fastened together by the rope, the castaways were tumbled over and over in the surf. The yawl was east upon the strand with dreadful force and if they had continued to cling to it their chances of being seriously injured would have been great indeed.

Lightly the men and boys lashed to the rope were tossed by the surf—rolling over and over, but still clinging to each other and to the hawser. Mr. MacMasters at one end and Whistler Morgan at the other managed to obtain a footing on the sand despite the undertow.

They threw themselves upon the beach and clung “tooth and toenail” when the breaker receded. Slim was completely exhausted; but before another comber rolled in those who were strong managed to drag the weaker ones out of the reach of the undertow.

There was only a fitful light on sea and shore. The castaways lay in a panting group, looking at each other dripping with brine, and very miserable.

“Begorra!” exclaimed Irish Jemmy at last, “I broke me poipe. Lend me a cigareet, will you, Rosy?”

Rosy gravely reached into his blouse and brought forth a little package filled with tobacco pulp.

“You’re welcome, Jemmy,” he said gravely. “Help yourself.”

“Begorra!” growled the Irishman, “ye might have kept thim dry.”

“That’s a good word!” exclaimed Mr. MacMasters, briskly, struggling to rise. “We all need to get dry. I have matches in a bottle in my pocket, and the bottle didn’t get broken. Come on and find some dry wood. We’ll have a fire. We may have to camp out here till morning.”

“Oh, Mr. MacMasters!” urged Whistler, who was loosening himself likewise from the rope. “Let us look for the fellows who were on the raft first.”

“Shout for them,” advised the ensign. “But don’t worry if they do not answer at once. This is a big piece of land, this island.”

Whistler and Torry shouted loudly; but after fifteen minutes they were hoarse, and the wind seemed to blow their voices back into their teeth.

“Save your breath to cool your porridge,” advised Jemmy. “You’re wastin’ it. If ye shout from now till doomsday ye won’t bring them back if they’re drowned. And if they are all right we’ll find them safe and sound.”

That was sensible; but it did not make Phil and Al any the less anxious regarding Frenchy and Ikey. The younger lads had always been in their care, and the situation looked serious.

Whistler and Torry knew they were expected to help gather wood, and so they gave up shouting and followed Rosy and the others toward the forest. The whole island, as far as they had seen, was forest-covered.

There had been a heavy fall of rain that day, and to find dry fuel was not an easy task. While they were thus engaged the two boys came upon an opening in the trees. In the dusk it seemed that the opening was the beginning of a well-tramped path, leading inland.

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Whistler called to Mr. MacMasters to show him this sign of human occupancy of their refuge. Before the ensign arrived at the spot Torry made a second discovery.

“Look who’s here!” called the boy in a low voice. “Here’s a Man Friday, sure enough!”

There was a light approaching through the forest path. It was a torch, and before long the wavering brand revealed a strange figure—no Man Friday but, as Whistler whispered, a Woman Friday!

She was a peculiar looking being, indeed, dressed in a single loose flowing garment, which covered her from neck to ankles. She was barefooted and bareheaded, her iron-gray hair tossed about her weather-beaten face in wild elflocks.

Her eyes were as brilliant as coals. Either she was not right in her mind or she assumed that manner. At first she merely glowered at the two boys and the Navy officer, and said nothing in reply to the latter’s queries.

Her hands and fingers were gnarled from hard work. She looked as tough as bale wire, to quote Torry.

When she finally spoke her voice was as deep and coarse as a man’s. She said:

“You-uns was blowed up in yon channel. And you lost your boat, ain’t you?”

“Crickey!” gasped Torry to Whistler. “She’s a German—a German with a southern accent! What do you know about that?”

Meanwhile Mr. MacMasters was interrogating her to some purpose.

“Have you seen others of our party?” he asked. “There were fourteen men and boys on a raft.”

“Ain’t seen no stranger befo’ to-day, but you-uns,” she declared. Her eyes seemed as lidless as a snake’s. They did not blink at all.

“Then how did you know that our steamer was blown up?” the ensign queried.

“Old Mag knows a heap other folks don’t know,” croaked the woman.

The rest of the party came up and heard this statement. Jemmy gave her one look and crossed his fingers.

“She’s a witch, and the banshees do her bidding,” he whispered hoarsely.

“Well,” said Mr. MacMasters, much puzzled, “is there any place where we can get dry—-and get some food?”

“I’ll take you all to my cabin,” she said. “That’s what I come for.”

She turned around abruptly and strode back along the path. There seemed nothing for the castaways to do but to follow her. But they certainly did discuss the queer woman in whispers while they kept on her trail.

“She’s a witch sure enough,” repeated Jemmy. “Sure you kin see that easy from the cut of her jib. The ensign had better have no doin’s with her. Maybe she’ll charm the whole of us with her evil eye.”

The island was half a mile or more across. It was almost dark by the time the party of castaways with their strange leader came out upon the other shore.

Here the sound between the islands and the mainland was mist-enshrouded, and it was evident that a nasty night had shut down. Whistler and Torry were terribly anxious about their friends who had been on the life raft.

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However, they could not start off alone to hunt for Michael Donahue and Ikey Rosenmeyer. They were just as much under Mr. MacMasters' orders ashore as they were at sea.

They had confidence in the ensign's judgment, too. They believed he would make a search for the rest of their party just as soon as it was practicable.

The cabin to which the woman led them was a large log hut of only one room, but with a number of bunks, built in two tiers, along the walls. At one end was an open hearth and chimney and arrangements for cooking. A long table and some rough-hewn benches were in the middle of the open space.

It was more like a barracks than a home; and from the ancient and fishy smell about the place, the party from the battleship was sure that it had not long since housed fishermen and their nets.

Mr. MacMasters and most of the others turned in at once for a nap; but Whistler Morgan was much too anxious to sleep. The old woman who called herself "Mag" went to work at once to prepare a meal, and the boy offered to help her.

He peeled the vegetables and cut corn from the cob for a sort of Brunswick stew which she prepared. Mag put into it a rabbit, a pair of squirrels and a guinea fowl, the neck of which she wrung and then skinned and cleaned in a most skilful manner.

While she was thus engaged she talked to Whistler. The boy noted, as his chum had, that she arranged her spoken sentences much as Germans do who are not well drilled in English. Yet she had the southern drawl and accent.

"I know whar yo' boys come from," she advanced almost at once. "Yo' are from the *Kennebunk* battleship—and she's a fur ways from here."

"You have seen the rest of our crowd, then!" cried Whistler earnestly, "haven't you, Missus?"

"No, no!" the old hag said, wagging her head. "Old Mag sees strange sights and knows more'n most folks. Oh, yes! Your little steamboat was blowed up by a big bomb in yon channel."

"It was blown up by a Hun mine," declared Whistler bitterly.

The old woman's eyes flashed at him threateningly. "What yo' mean by 'Hun'? Them that put that bomb there is just as good as yo' folks. I ain't got no use fo' Yankees yet."

"You don't call yourself a Southerner, do you?" asked the boy curiously.

“What am I then?”

“You’re German. At least, your folks were,” Whistler declared with conviction.

The woman scowled at him and said nothing more. When Whistler had finished helping her he moved his chair back from the fireplace, for the heat from the live coals was intense. He saw a scrap of torn paper upon the earth floor, near his foot.

His suspicions had been aroused now and he covered the paper with his foot until he could get a chance to pick it up without the old woman observing him. Having secured it he moved still farther back to the table. There was a smoky hanging-lamp over the board which gave him light enough to see by. Secretly he examined the torn paper.

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It seemed to be part of a letter, and was closely written on both sides of the scrap. On one side was the beginning of the missive, and after a minute Whistler realized that it was written in German script.

At the head of the letter was a line that not alone amazed, but startled the boy. Coincidence often has a long arm, and in this case the adage proved true. The letter was addressed to

"*Herr Franz Linder.*"

CHAPTER XX

THE WITCH'S WARNING

Whistler had been assured when he attended the session in the sheriff's office at home, before joining the crew of the *Kennebunk*, that the enemy alien named Franz Linder, who was supposed to have blown up the Elmvale dam, was an influential member of that band of spies that were doing so much harm in the United States.

It was surprising to find this scrap of a letter addressed to the spy in this island cabin off the coast of North Carolina. Yet it smacked of no improbability.

Whistler had heard the spy tell the skipper of the oil carrier, the *Sarah Coville*, that his work was done in that vicinity. Linder, or Blake as he was known at Elmvale, had naturally got well away from the neighborhood of the dam after it was blown up.

That he was on this island at the present time was not so likely; but that he had been here, and in this cabin, was very possible. Perhaps had the castaways from the wrecked yawl arrived a few hours before at the cabin of Mag they might have seen the German spy.

The old woman who tried to make Whistler believe she possessed second sight, or some gift quite as uncanny, was in league with or had some knowledge of Franz Linder. The boy was confident on this point.

She was of German descent at least, and she showed bitterness toward "the Yankees." However, she proved herself to be a hospitable hostess. It was her southern, not her Teutonic, training probably that led to this.

Whistler could not read German, and he did not know that any member of his party could do so. Nevertheless, he crumpled the bit of paper in his hand and thrust it into his pocket, biding his time until he could show it to Mr. MacMasters.

It was ten o'clock before the stew was ready to be dished up. The aroma of it awakened the hungry men.

"This must be heaven, for it smells like mother's cooking!" declared Slim. "Oh, yum, yum! Oh, boy!"

"The old lady ain't no angel," put in Jemmy; "but she sure can cook."

"And angels can't, I guess," added Torrance, grinning.

"Say, boy!" grinned Rosy, "didn't you ever eat angel cake?"

Whistler found his chance to speak to Mr. MacMasters when the others crowded around the table. Mag put the steaming kettle of stew in the middle of the bare board and ladled it out into brown earthen bowls.

"See what I found on the floor here, Mr. MacMasters," Whistler said quietly, and thrusting the paper into the ensign's hand. "Don't let the old woman see it, sir."

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Mr. MacMasters was cautious. He held the paper under the edge of the table and saw almost instantly what the communication was and to whom it was addressed.

“That’s the name of that spy you boys say blew up the Elmvale dam, and was out on that oil tender we chased in the submarine patrol boat, isn’t it?” whispered the ensign. “I declare! Did you find it here?”

“Yes, sir. You see, the edge of the paper is browned. The whole letter was probably thrown into the fire on the hearth and this piece failed to be destroyed.”

“You’ve hit it right, I fancy,” agreed the officer. “Something queer about this old woman and about this place.”

“She knows we are from the *Kennebunk*, too. How should she know so much if she wasn’t in with the spies?”

“And she knew too much about the steamer being mined in the channel over there,” muttered Mr. MacMasters.

“It looks as if we were watched by the spies and that she is in cahoots with them,” Whistler suggested.

“Humph! Maybe. You can’t read this letter, I suppose, Morgan?”

“No, sir. None of us boys read German. Not even Ikey, although he understands the language quick enough when it is spoken. And poor Ikey isn’t here!”

“Don’t worry about that,” advised Mr. MacMasters. Then: “I do not think any of the men can translate German. Of course there is probably nothing on this paper of present moment to us.

“What we should do first is to find the rest of our crowd and get off this island. The *Kennebunk* will be coming back up the coast and we’ll miss her altogether.”

“I hope the other boys are safe,” sighed Whistler anxiously.

“I hope they have as good a refuge and are treated as kindly as we are. But we can’t make a search of the island in the dark. Besides, they may not have landed on this island at all. There are other beaches quite as hospitable as this one proved, I have no doubt.”

Whistler and Torry helped the old woman clear up and wash the bowls and spoons after supper. She sat in the chimney corner and puffed away slowly at a short-stemmed and very black pipe.

The seamen were rather afraid of Mag, Jemmy especially. He carefully crossed his fingers whenever she chanced to glance in his direction.

Mr. MacMasters went outside to assure himself that nothing could be done toward searching for the rest of the crew of the auxiliary steamer before daybreak. It was as dark as Erebus without, and the gale still blew strongly off shore.

The ensign politely asked the strange old woman what arrangements they should make for the night.

“We don’t wish to turn you out of your bed, you know, Ma’am,” he said.

She waved him away, the pipe in her hand. “Tumble into yo’ bunks,” she ordered. “Old Mag doesn’t sleep—hasn’t slept for more years than you-uns are bo’n already. That is why she knows more than others—yes! The spirits of the night come and whisper to her while she stays awake.”

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“Arrah! D’ye hear that now?” whispered Irish Jemmy hoarsely. “’Tis as much as our lives are worth to stay here.”

Superstitious as he was, Jemmy was afraid to leave the cabin alone. Most of the castaways were glad to retire to the berths again and, blessed with full stomachs, it was not a great while before they fell asleep.

The two Seacove boys finished helping the old woman.

“You are a pair of good boys,” she said after looking at them for some time and muttering to herself the while. “Why don’t you run away? I’ll get you off the island yet, befo’ that officer man wakes up.”

“Why, Mother! we don’t want to run away,” Torry told her, laughing. “We belong to one of the Navy’s crack superdreadnaughts.”

“Aye, I know. The *Kennebunk*,” said Mag, nodding gloomily.

“Sure,” Torry rejoined. “We want to see some fighting.”

“’Tis not fighting you-uns’ll see,” croaked the woman. “Old Mag tells you, and she knows. Yo’ fine, big ship will go down in the midst of the seas and her crew with her. Better yo’ luck if it happens befo’ yo’ git back to her already.”

“You don’t mean that?” Whistler cried.

“I’m a-tellin’ yo’ so,” said the queer old woman. “Old Mag knows mo’ than other folks. Oh, yes! She’ll sink. Better yo’ boys stay ashore.”

“What do you know about ’the witch’s warning’?” whispered Torry to Whistler. “She thinks she’s got second sight. Knows more than anybody else. She’s like one of the Seven Sutherland Sisters—she prophesies.”

“Shucks!” chuckled Whistler in the same cautious tone, “they weren’t prophetesses; they sold hair restorer.”

But to himself Whistler muttered:

“Maybe she does know more than we do. But how does she know it? There’s something awfully queer about this whole business.”

CHAPTER XXI

THE EXPLANATION

Although Whistler was quite sure “Old Mag,” as she called herself, possessed no powers of divination, he knew she did have certain knowledge that he considered she had no moral right to have.

Here she was, an ignorant old creature living on a well nigh uninhabited island off an isolated coast, with some mysterious means of information upon subjects that she should know nothing about.

She claimed not to have seen the other party of castaways; yet she knew at once that Mr. MacMasters and his companions were from a craft that had been blown up miles away from her cabin, and completely out of sight and hearing of this island.

Whistler did not believe any fishing boat, or other craft, had brought this information to Mag. There had been no vessel in sight when the *Kennebunk’s* tender was blown up by the floating mine.

The scrap of a letter addressed to “Herr Franz Linder” he had found in the cabin connected the old crone, in Whistler’s mind, with the German spy system. She was of Teutonic extraction herself.

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Clearly the old woman was trying to befool her visitors. She probably possessed some local celebrity as a witch or wise woman.

Whistler, however, was not ready to believe her any wiser than her neighbors.

He thought out the matter back to the time the auxiliary steamer was blown up in the channel between the islands. The wireless operator sent out S O S messages till the very last. Small as the radius of the instrument was, a station along the adjacent coast would surely pick up the cry for help.

It was an important thought, but he had no time that evening to mention it to Mr. MacMasters. He and Torry shared one of the wide and fishy smelling bunks together, and they did not wake up until it was broad daylight.

There was a heavy smell of rank, boiling coffee in the air. Bacon was sizzling over the fire and a huge corn pone was baking on a plank before the coals. Mag did not propose to starve her guests, that was sure.

The sun had burst through the clouds and the gale had ceased. The surf still thundered upon the outer shores of the island; but the sound, upon which the cabin fronted, was smooth and sparkling. It was a pretty view from the cabin door.

And almost at once, when Whistler and his chum ran out of the cabin to look about, they saw a number of familiar figures approaching along the rock-strewn shore. These newcomers were as shabby and bedraggled as themselves, and it was easy to identify them.

“Here they come!” yelled Torry, and rushed toward the approaching party.

Whistler was not behind him; but when they reached the refugees they discovered that Mr. MacMasters was already with them. The ensign had been up since before dawn and had searched out Mr. Mudge and his companions at the other end of the island.

“Oi, oi!” wailed Ikey Rosenmeyer, meeting the older boys. “Such a time! I swallowed enough salt water to make me a pickled herring yet!” Ikey could not get away from memories of the delicatessen shop.

“By St. Patrick’s piper that played the last snake out of Ireland!” was Frenchy Donahue’s complaint, “it was holdin’ a wake over you two fellers, we was, all the night long.”

“Where did you put in the night, anyway?” asked Whistler.

“Say! we didn’t have no more home than a rabbit,” cried Ikey.

“After we got ashore,” began Frenchy, when Torry interrupted to ask:

“How did you do that? Give us the particulars.”

“Why, when you fellers went off and left us without sayin’ ’by your leave,’ even——”

“What’s that?” growled Whistler. “You know that hawser snapped.”

“Just the same you parted company from us mighty brusk,” grinned Frenchy. “We drifted in with the tide. Mr. Mudge took a line ashore—Oh, boy! he’s some swimmer. So we followed him along the line, hand over hand——”

“And head under water,” grunted Ikey. “Oi, oi!”

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“Aw, Ike would kick if you was hangin’ him,” scoffed Frenchy, “unless you tied his feet. We all got out of the water safe, and that’s enough. The wind and the rain beat us so that we went up into the woods for shelter. And then we found a clearing and in it a cabin.”

“Ah-ha!” ejaculated Whistler. “Another cabin like this one?”

“Not on your life!” said Frenchy.

“No,” added Ikey. “Nothing like it.”

“It was a little cabin without any windows, and the door was padlocked.
We couldn’t get into it; but we camped there in the clearing all night.
I’m as soggy right now as a sponge.”

“There was a flagstaff sticking out of the roof of the cabin,” Ikey observed. “And somebody must have thought a deal of whatever’s in the shack, by the size of the padlock on the door.”

There was a call to breakfast from the cabin just then. Whistler slipped aside and caught Mr. MacMasters’ attention.

“Something mysterious, Morgan?” asked the ensign, observing Whistler’s expression of countenance.

The young fellow briefly related what the old woman had said to him and Torry the night before, and then told the officer of the suspicions that her words had aroused in his mind.

In addition, he told Mr. MacMasters what Frenchy and Ikey had said about the locked cabin in the woods. Whistler put great stress upon this matter.

“Why, I did not see the cabin myself, although Mudge mentioned it,” said the ensign. “I met them marching out of the woods up along the shore yonder.”

“Can’t we find that cabin and have a look at it?” urged Whistler earnestly.

“But we can’t get into it.”

“No, sir. But we can see it. I have an idea.”

“I presume you have, Morgan,” returned the ensign, smiling grimly. “And I have a glimmer of an idea myself.”

When the men trooped in to breakfast the officer and Whistler Morgan stole away. The old woman was too busy just then to notice their absence.

In half an hour they found the place where the warrant officer and his companions had broken through the jungle. They retraced their course and soon came to the clearing in the wood.

It was a secret place, indeed. The cabin was ten feet square, built of heavy logs, and as Whistler had been told, had no window openings. The door of heavy planks was fastened by a huge hasp held in place by the padlock mentioned so particularly by Ikey Rosenmeyer.

“I guess we can’t get into it without tools,” said the ensign.

“I don’t suppose so, sir. But see that pole on top of the cabin? That had the upperworks of a wireless attached to it, I’m sure. The bolts are still up there. It is no flagpole.”

“Right again, Morgan,” agreed Mr. MacMasters.

“And that piece of a letter to Linder,” the boy eagerly reminded him. “Don’t you think with me, sir, that the old woman is linked up with the German spy system?”

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“It seems reasonable. At least, I shall make a report as soon as we get away from the island. And the old woman should be watched, too.”

“Indeed she should!” cried Whistler. “What do you suppose she meant, Mr. MacMasters, about our *Kennebunk* being sunk?”

“The speech was fathered by the wish, perhaps.”

“But she seemed so certain—so assured,” murmured Whistler.

He was not satisfied by this explanation of Mr. MacMasters, and was silent all the way back to Mag’s cabin. They came in sight of the place just as the men poured out of the cabin in great excitement.

“What do you suppose is the matter with them now?” demanded the ensign.

But he spied the cause of the excitement as soon as Whistler did. Crossing the sound was a swift revenue cutter, and one of the seamen, under direction from Mr. Mudge, leaped upon a bowlder and began to signal, semaphore fashion.

The signals were returned and the cutter swung in shoreward and soon dropped a boat for the castaways. The shipwrecked seamen from the *Kennebunk* swarmed down to the strand.

Mr. MacMasters whispered to Whistler that they would have their breakfast aboard the Coast Guard boat. Then he went to the scowling old woman who, after all, had been a most hospitable hostess. Some of the sailors had given her money in small sums; but the ensign forced her to accept an amount that he thought generous payment for what she had done for them, and Mag seemed to agree.

“Yo’ Yankees air free-handed already,” she drawled. “But that won’t save you, Mr. Officer, from the trouble that’s heaped up for you-uns.”

“What is the nature of this trouble?” asked the ensign curiously.

“Death an’ destruction,” said the old woman. “Death and destruction. Yo’ fine big ship, the *Kennebunk* ship, will be blowed sky-high. It’s a comin’! Mark Old Mag’s prophecy, Mr. Officer.”

“We shall all have to go on and do our duty just the same, Mag,” said Mr. MacMasters, seriously. “And if a sailor does his duty, he’s done his all. The rest is in God’s hands.”

“Don’t blaspheme, Mr. Yankee!” warned the old woman. “The Lawd ain’t studyin’ ‘bout he’pin’ you-uns none. He’s on the other side already.”

The boat from the cutter had to return a second time before all the castaways were transferred to the revenue vessel. Whistler went in the last boat with Ensign MacMasters.

When they were on the cutter's deck the young fellow heard Mr. MacMasters ask at once about the character of the old woman, and of any other people who might belong on the island.

"They're under suspicion," the commander of the cutter said briefly. "The Department has its eye on them. On that old woman, too."

Mr. MacMasters asked if anything was known about the small cabin back in the forest. The revenue officer listened eagerly.

"Ah-ha! That is something of moment, Ensign. I shall surely be glad to hear all about that. But we must be brisk. Do you know that your Captain Trevor is combing the sea and the coast with wireless messages for you?"

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“He must have heard that we lost our steamer.”

“That was relayed last night to the *Kennebunk*, I believe. The Huns are sowing many mines in these waters. There is a flock of U-boat chasers and destroyers out after the German submarines.

“But there is something else of moment in the wind,” added the revenue officer. “The *Kennebunk*,” he added, mysteriously, “will not be long in these waters.”

“No?”

“It is expected that there will be a great naval movement on the other side. The report of the *Kennebunk’s* manoeuvres, and her gun record, is said to be so good that she may be sent across.”

Whistler, standing by, could scarcely suppress a cry of delight.

“What do you think of that, Morgan?” the ensign cried. Then to the revenue officer: “After this cruise, I suppose you mean, sir?”

“She may be sent on the jump—and within a few hours. I have orders to take you to sea at once and find the *Kennebunk*. Our operator is sending out feeler messages for the battleship right now.”

“Then you will do nothing toward looking into this nest of trouble-makers on the island —if there is such—immediately?”

“Not until we return.”

“And then,” said Mr. MacMasters seriously, “if you do stir up these snakes, look for a fellow named Franz Linder. He is wanted in Elmvale, up there in New England, for blowing up a dam, destroying munition factories and drowning twelve innocent people. We’ll be glad, Morgan here, and I, to hear about the capture of that scoundrel.”

CHAPTER XXII

THE RACE

The revenue cutter was a speedy craft, and by midforenoon she was far outside the string of islands near which the crew of the *Kennebunk’s* steamer under Ensign MacMasters had experienced so many adventures.

The wireless operator picked up the superdreadnaught at last. She was two hundred miles away, and when she gave her course to the cutter the boys noticed that it occasioned a deal of excitement upon the quarterdeck.

Unless the message is spread on the notice-board by the door of the wireless room, the members of the crew of any vessel are not likely to know what is going on in the air. The operator, like the usual telegraph operator, is bound to secrecy.

“There’s something up besides the blue peter, just as sure as you’re a foot high, Whistler,” Al Torrance declared eagerly. “I’d give a punched nickel to know just what it is.”

Having nothing to occupy their time on the cutter, the four Navy boys naturally gave their attention to rumor and gossip. They believed the *Kennebunk* was no longer headed up the coast; but where she was going was a question.

“Crickey!” groaned Al, “if she gets into any muss without our being aboard, I’ll be a sore one.”

“They wouldn’t be so mean,” wailed Ikey, “as to have a fight without us being in it. Oi, oi! Oi, oi!”

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“Nothing but subs to fight over here, kid, if any,” the older boy said. “Stop your keening.”

“Say, how do we know where the big fight will be pulled off?” demanded Frenchy excitedly.

“What big fight?” queried Whistler, unpuckering his lips.

“The one they’ve been talking about for months. You know, everybody’s said the Huns would come out some time. They’re bound to give us a chance at their Navy.”

“Aw, they won’t! Will they, Whistler?” asked Ikey.

“I don’t really believe so myself,” Torry said, shaking his head. “No such luck.”

“I believe the *Kennebunk* has got new orders,” Whistler rejoined thoughtfully. “Whether or not they are for her to sail for the other side, I don’t know. I heard a hint about it when we came aboard the cutter.”

“Crickey! Let ’em hit it up, then,” urged Torry. “If this little old tub doesn’t go fast enough I’ll jump overboard and swim!”

“Oi, oi! Not me!” objected Ikey Rosenmeyer. “I’ve soaked in enough salt water. I don’t feel as though I should really need a bath again before I get to be twenty-one yet.”

“Tough on your messmates, Ikey,” observed Whistler. “Do think better of such a rash decision.”

The four boys from Seacove were not alone in being anxious regarding the *Kennebunk* and their chance of overtaking her. Every man of the crew of the wrecked auxiliary steamer desired to get aboard the superdreadnaught if there was to be any fresh excitement.

Whistler’s chums urged him to waylay Ensign MacMasters for information.

“G’wan, Whistler!” begged Frenchy. “You and him’s just like brothers. Ask him if the old *Kennebunk* is running away from us, or if it’s all bunk?” and he grinned at his pun.

“Of course she’s not running away,” Whistler returned.

“Just the same this cutter is sprinting like all get out,” put in Torry. “Be a good fellow, Whistler. Ask Mr. MacMasters what it means.”

His chum did not feel that he could do this. There is, after all, a gulf between the quarterdeck and the forecastle. But Whistler put himself in the ensign’s way and, saluting smartly, asked a question:

“Beg pardon, sir! Did you find anybody aboard who could translate that torn letter I picked up in the old witch’s cabin?”

“That letter addressed to Franz Linder? No, Morgan; there is nobody aboard the cutter who is familiar with German. But the moment we reach the *Kennebunk* I will put it into Captain Trevor’s hands—never fear.”

“Shall we really catch the battleship, sir?” asked Whistler eagerly.

“We’ve got to, Morgan;” declared Mr. MacMasters. “As you boys say, ‘there is something doing’ and we must be in it.”

“But the battleship has changed her course, has she not, sir?”

“She has received new orders; but we will meet her on this course, I have no doubt. Cheer up, my boy,” and the ensign laughed. “You may yet help work the big guns in a real battle.”

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So it was actually a race. The cutter must reach a certain point in the open ocean to meet the superdreadnaught; if they missed her, in all probability the party from the *Kennebunk* would have to be returned to port and be assigned to some other duty for the time being.

“Oi, oi!” groaned Ikey when he heard Whistler’s report. “I never did have any luck. If they had delicatessen shops on board ships, I’d be made to police the pickle barrels yet.”

The day did not pass without some additional excitement. The cutter passed and signaled several Government vessels; but toward evening the lookout picked up the smoke of a small destroyer ahead which, within the next half hour, acted very strangely, indeed.

She seemed to be steaming in circles, and as the cutter raced nearer those circles narrowed. Then her guns began to pop.

The cutter’s crew and their guests became much excited. Surely the gun crews of the destroyer were not at target practice. Yet they seemed to have found a target in the middle of that circle the destroyer was furrowing through the sea.

At last they saw an answering shot fired from the midst of the circle. The destroyer was traveling at top speed and her own guns continued to keep up a wicked cannonading of the central object.

“A Hun submarine!” shouted somebody. “They’re circling it, and they are going to get it, too!”

“If it is a submarine why doesn’t she sink?” demanded Torry the sceptical.

“I see why,” Whistler said. “If the U-boat goes down the destroyer will dart in and drag depth bombs. Then—good-*night*!”

“Wow, wow!” cried Frenchy. “She’s so fast she can cut circles around the U-boat, eh?”

“Sure as you live!” said Torry. “My! that’s a pretty fight. If that destroyer was the old *Colodia*, and we were only aboard of her! What fun!”

The destroyer was narrowing her circles; the U-boat was in a pocket, and unless the Hun put a lucky shell into the destroyer’s engines, she seemed doomed to capture or destruction.

The cutter raced nearer. Her course would take her directly into the circle of battle unless her helm was changed.

CHAPTER XXIII

UNDER SPECIAL ORDERS

It was like bombarding a whale with bomb lances. One after another the shells from the destroyer's guns shrieked over the sea to fall around the more sluggishly manoeuvring U-boat.

The captain of the submarine handled his craft with skill; but his gunners were poor marksmen. They kept both the U-boat's deckguns smoking; but the shots went wild.

Torpedoes could not be used against the destroyer, for the latter was steaming too swiftly. Around and around she went, and each time she finished a lap the circle had narrowed.

The spectators on the revenue cutter were highly interested. They climbed upon the upperworks and cheered and yelled in their excitement. At last a shell from the destroyer dropped fairly upon the deck of the U-boat, just abaft the conning tower.

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The submarine rocked, dipped, and seemed about to sink. The helm of the destroyer was changed instantly and she shot straight for her quarry.

“She’ll sink her! She’s going down!” yelled Al Torrance, clinging to a stay beside Whistler, as the cutter bobbed through the rather choppy seas.

But the Germans had no desire for a glorious death. Up went the white flag, and the men on her deck put up their hands, signifying that they had surrendered. Probably they were already crying “*Kamerad!*”

The destroyer did not even drop a boat to send aboard a crew. She steamed right up beside the submarine, put out a ladder for her captain, and then sent a hawser aboard for the German crew to fasten. She would tow her prize to port without risking any of her own crew aboard the wabbly undersea boat.

When the cutter drew near, her ship’s company cheered and jeered the bluejackets on the destroyer with good-natured enthusiasm. The destroyer was then steaming away with the U-boat in tow.

“Something’s fouled your patent log!” yelled one seaman aboard the cutter.

“Hey, there, garby!” shouted another. “What’s that the cat brought in?”

The crew of the destroyer, evidently mightily swelled with pride, refused to reply to these scoffing remarks.

As long as the twilight held the cutter steamed into the east and south. By dark the destroyer and her tow were out of sight. The cutter began to burn occasional lights. Then the wireless chattered again.

“Hurrah, boys!” whispered Whistler to his three mates. “I believe the *Kennebunk* is near.”

Nor was he mistaken in this supposition. The night was dark, the stars were overcast, merely a fitful light played upon the surface of the sea.

The horizon ahead was quite indistinguishable from the water itself. But at last a faint glowing point appeared upon it. Ensign MacMasters and the commander of the cutter showed excitement as they watched this spot through their night glasses.

“Is it a star?” asked Frenchy.

“A star your grandmother!” snorted Torry. “That’s a ship.”

“A big steamship under forced draft,” added Whistler. “And I believe it is the *Kennebunk*.”

It was the glow above her smokestacks that they saw. Within half an hour the fact that a huge steam craft was storming across the cutter’s course could not be doubted.

Mr. MacMasters gave some sharp orders to his men. The latter had nothing with them but the water-shrunk garments they stood in; so it took but a moment for Mr. Mudge to line them up properly along the rail.

The great battleship began to slow down when the cutter was at least three miles from her. Otherwise she would have passed, and the revenue craft would have been a long time catching up.

The cutter was run in to the side of the towering hull of the superdreadnaught. The port ladder was down. A number of the watch on deck were strung along the rail, and the officers did not forbid their cheering the members of the wrecked tender’s crew.

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“Welcome home again, Mr. MacMasters!” was the greeting of the officer of the watch as the ensign led his party up the ladder.

“And mighty glad we are to get here,” declared Ensign MacMasters.

The boys and men scrambled aboard and bade good-bye cheerfully though gratefully to the cutter’s crew. The latter craft turned on her heel and shot away toward the distant coast.

Already the huge battleship was under way again. She was running with few lights. And where she was running was a question that even the members of the crew the boys put the question to could not answer.

It was generally known that Captain Trevor had received orders by wireless that had changed the plan of the cruise entirely. Instead of running back up the Atlantic coast, they had put to sea.

It was the next day before the *Kennebunk’s* company in general knew that she was bound first for the Azores. That meant a European cruise, without a doubt. All the “old timers” were agreed upon that.

It was finally rumored about the ship that the report of the *Kennebunk’s* cruise to the southward, and the score of her gun crews at target practice, together with her good luck in sinking a German submarine with the first shot ever fired from her guns, had so impressed the Department that she was to join the European squadron under Admiral Sims at once.

“There’s a chance for you boys to see some real action,” declared one of the masters-at-arms. “If the Hun comes out of Kiel, we’ll be there to say ‘How-do!’ to him.”

The boys who had been absent from the battleship for so long found, however, that the spiritual atmosphere of the crew was not much changed. There were still a lot of “croakers” as Torry called them.

“They are ghost-ridden, as sure as you’re born, Whistler,” Torry declared. “Somebody has heard that clock ticking again. It doesn’t seem to be at work all the time. Just now and then. ‘The death watch’ they call it.”

“Stop it!” ordered Whistler. “The less said the soonest mended about such things aboard ship. We boys don’t believe such foolishness, do we?”

“How about the old witch’s prophecy?” asked Torry wickedly. “Suppose we should tell these garbies about them?”

“Don’t you dare!” cried Whistler.

That very morning, after sick call, he was ordered to appear before Captain Trevor in the commander's office, and there found assembled Ensign MacMasters and several of the other officers of the ship with the commander.

"Morgan," said Captain Trevor, "let me hear about your finding of this paper Mr. MacMasters has brought to our attention. There seems to be something of moment in it in reference to the *Kennebunk*."

Ensign MacMasters put a translation of the torn letter into the young fellow's hand. The letter had been so mutilated that it was impossible; to make any exact translation of it. But here were extracts that stood out plainly:

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> "_. . . success of your water-wheel bomb. Congratulations._
>
> "_. . . from Headquarters an order to_ . . .
>
> "_. . . If it equals your former . . ._
>
> "_. . . clockwork arrangement that may raise your name as an inventor to the nth power. The Ken—— . . ._
>
> "_. . . shall hear of her destruction at the time appointed._
>
> "_. . . for the German Fatherland._"

"I am told that you, Morgan, have some knowledge of the dastardly work of this spy, Franz Linder. Is it so?" asked Captain Trevor suggestively.

"Oh, sir!" cried the young fellow, in excitement, "I believe I know what is referred to here by Linder's correspondent, as 'the water-wheel bomb.' That is what he blew up the Elmvale dam with!"

"Do you think, from what the woman on the island said, that there is some plot afoot against the *Kennebunk*?" went on the commander.

"It's referred to right here!" declared the excited Whistler. "This 'clockwork' thing. Oh, Mr. MacMasters!" he added, turning abruptly to the ensign. "You know some of the crew, before we left to carry poor Grant to the hospital, were bothering about a sound they had heard on the lower deck? Remember Seven Knott's ghost?"

"Right!" declared the ensign. "I had forgotten it, Captain Trevor," he added. "Something about a clock ticking."

"I have heard it myself," Whistler said eagerly. "And the boys say they have been hearing it, off and on, while we were gone."

"Do you two mean to intimate that there is a time bomb, or some such infernal machine, aboard this ship?" demanded Captain Trevor, in contemptuous amazement.

"Look at this, sir," urged Whistler so earnestly that he forgot his station. "'_. . . clockwork arrangement that may raise your name as an inventor to the nth power._' That certainly means something. And that noise below does sound something like a clock."

“It seems ridiculous,” stated the commander of the *Kennebunk*. “And yet we must not refuse to believe that the secret agents of Germany are at work in the most impossible places. If they could sink this great, new vessel in mid-ocean! Mr. Smith,” to his first lieutenant, “have that part of the ship searched. Find out what causes the sound which has been heard before you make your report. We’ll investigate this matter to the very bottom.”

CHAPTER XXIV

TICK-TOCK! TICK-TOCK!

The superdreadnaught was so huge a ship, and the divisions of the crew were so busily engaged in drills and other work, that few, indeed, knew that the “ghost of the *Kennebunk*” was being investigated by the officers.

The ship was storming along her course through the sea at a pace which fairly made her structure shake. Had one been able to be out upon the sea on another ship and watch her pass, her speed would have been impressive, indeed.

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Routine work went on, and the bulk of the ship's company knew nothing about that little party of searchers at work deep down in the ship. Whistler was one of those assigned to find the cause of the "tick-tock" noise, and it was he who finally suggested the spot where the mechanism which caused the sound might be found.

The party had searched the lumber room and the compartments on both sides, that above, and the one directly beneath the room in question. Nothing was discovered save that the sound seemed clearer in the lumber room than elsewhere.

Overhauling the stuff stowed there did no good. They seemed no nearer to the sound. And as the latter was not continuous it was the more puzzling.

"Don't you think we ought to open that chest, sir?" asked Whistler of the warrant officer who had immediate charge of the work.

"It doesn't seem to come from that box," objected the man.

"It doesn't seem to come from anywhere exactly," Whistler said. "It is sort of ventriloquial. One time it seems to be from one direction, then from another. But that chest hasn't been open——"

"Whose is it?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Who does know?" the warrant officer asked.

But nobody seemed able to answer that query. The searchers gathered about the chest that had been pulled out of the heap of rubbish. It was ironbound and made of heavy planking.

"It gets me!" murmured the officer.

Just then the sound started again: "Tick-*tock*! Tick-*tock*! Tick-*tock*!"

"It don't come from that box!" declared one man.

Whistler stooped and put his hand on the cover. "Wait!" he said suddenly. "Just feel this, sir."

"What do you feel?"

"There is vibration here. And it isn't the vibration of the ship's engines, either."

The warrant officer rested his hand upon the chest. He looked more puzzled than ever.

“Get something and break the lock!” he commanded.

“Wait a minute, sir!” cried Whistler. “If there should be some infernal machine in that box we must take care in opening it. Maybe the carpenter can pick the lock.”

“Good idea,” agreed the officer.

The carpenter’s mate was sent for. He came with a bunch of spare keys and a pick-lock. The latter had to be used skilfully before the lock of the chest was sprung.

Then the warrant officer suddenly experienced an accession of caution. He refused to have the cover of the chest lifted until the chest itself was carried carefully out upon the open deck.

No sound came from the chest now, if that had been the locality of the tick-tock noise. The vibration could be felt just the same.

The men were ordered to stand back and the warrant officer courageously lifted the lid of the chest. Nothing happened.

There was an empty tray in the top of the odd chest. That, too, was cautiously lifted out.

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There came suddenly a faint buzzing from the interior that startled everybody near. Then followed the ticking sound, which lasted at least a full minute.

The warrant officer jerked away a layer of pasteboard that hid what was under the tray. Several grim cylinders lay side by side in the chest's bottom. They were connected by wires with a mechanism that hummed like the purring of a well-piled motor.

"Clockwork!" exclaimed the carpenter's mate, bending over the chest. "That's what she is. Ah! It reverses itself. See that spring—winding tighter and tighter? Why, it's almost perpetual motion! Some inventor that fellow!"

"What fellow?" growled the warrant officer.

"Whoever built this."

"Can you stop it without exploding those cylinders?"

"Great Scott! Do you s'pose that's dynamite under there?"

"Or T N T."

The petty officer thrust an iron bar suddenly into the heart of the complicated machine. Something snapped. The mechanism stopped.

"Great heavens, man!" gasped the warrant officer, "suppose you had set it off?"

"No. Couldn't be done till the spring here was wound up to the top-notch. This machine was arranged to run for weeks. Some ingenious arrangement, take it from me!"

The discovery and destruction of the infernal machine, and a big one at that, relieved the tension of feeling aboard the warship. As Frenchy Donahue remarked:

"It's bad enough to have a banshee *tick-tocking* around the place; but that tidy little bunch of cylinders would have made a lot more noise if they had been exploded."

But the matter was serious. The captain took the opportunity to lecture the entire ship's company regarding foolish rumors and gossip.

"If there is anything strange comes under your notice, report it properly," he said. "Don't camouflage it with a lot of superstitious nonsense so that the officer you report to must disbelieve the yarn. There never was a strange occurrence yet that could not be explained."

"How does he explain Jonah being swallowed by the whale?" whispered Frenchy.

“He doesn’t have to explain it,” retorted Torry. “If you don’t believe a whale can swallow a man, jump down the throat of the next one you see.”

As a whole, the crew of the *Kennebunk* were not inclined to consider the incident of the infernal machine carelessly. A serious impression was made upon them all.

But the mysterious prospect of what was ahead of them shortly smothered the matter of the peril escaped. There might be greater perils ahead.

The superdreadnaught halted but for an hour at a port of the Azores. This was to send mail ashore. Then she picked up speed again and traveled north.

She passed convoys of merchant vessels guarded by French, British and American destroyers. The *Kennebunk* exchanged signals with several cruisers of the United States Navy as well.

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Drill at the guns went on daily. Once they spied and shelled a German submarine, but she escaped. This incident greatly enraged the crew of the gun that missed her. It was not the gun to the crew of which Whistler and Torry belonged.

“Can’t expect to get the Hun every time,” was the soothing remark of one of the division captains.

“Why not?” asked somebody else. “That’s what we are here for, isn’t it? I don’t believe Uncle Sam wants excuses.”

The standard the men set themselves in our Navy is higher than their officers require.

The boys from Seacove, as well as Hans Hertig and Mr. MacMasters, kept a sharp lookout for their beloved *Colodia*. But they were fated not to meet the destroyer until the great event which had brought the superdreadnaught into European waters.

The *Kennebunk* steamed into a certain roadstead one evening where lay more huge battleships, cruisers and smaller armored vessels than Whistler and his mates had ever seen before. They flew the flags of three nations, and they were prepared to move *en masse* upon the enemy at the briefest notice.

CHAPTER XXV

IN THE THICK OF THE FIGHT

The methods of strategy by which the German Navy, or a large part of it, was tolled out of its impregnable hiding place the Navy boys did not learn till long afterwards. But Phil, at least, half realized that the German High Command believed that the way to shelling the British coast by her great naval guns was at last opened.

The Allied fleet moved on a certain day and at a certain hour, and with the open sea as its destination. It was a calm and utterly peaceful sea through which the *Kennebunk* sailed with her sister ships.

The high bow of the superdreadnaught crashed through the seething waters. Her lookouts traced the course of each tiny blot upon the distant sea-line.

Suddenly, out of the north, appeared a scout cruiser, her funnels vomiting volumes of dense smoke that flattened down oilily upon the sea in her wake. Her stern guns spat viciously at some craft of low visibility which followed her.

Immediately everybody aboard the *Kennebunk* forgot the other ships of the squadron. The enemy was in sight, and the work would be cut out for every man aboard the superdreadnaught.

The cruiser came leaping toward the fleet, her signal flags fluttering messages. A gun boomed on the flagship. Bugles shrilled from every deck of the *Kennebunk*.

Messages were wigwagged from ship to ship. But aboard the *Kennebunk* there was just one order that interested every one.

“Clear decks for action!”

The divisions responded to the notes of the bugle with a snappiness that delighted the officers on the bridge. As they had gone through the manoeuvres a thousand times in practice, so now they faced the enemy with the same precision.

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Ventilators, life-lines, parts of the superstructure and deck woodwork came down and were stowed in their proper place. Boats dropped from their davits, were hurriedly lashed together, their plugs pulled, and left to sink, riding attached to sea anchors formed of their own spars and oars. “Cleared for action!” when reported to the commander meant exactly that! Not a superfluous object in the way of the activities of a fighting crew.

“Battle stations!”

The four friends from Seacove knew exactly where they were to be all through the battle—if they lived. Whistler knew that he was to stand in the corridor of the handling-room for Turret Number Two, until he was called to relieve some wounded or exhausted member of his gun crew. His immediate order was to “stand by.”

Every other individual aboard the *Kennebunk* had his station, from the firemen shoveling tons of coal into the fiery maws of the furnaces to keep the indicator needles of the steam-gages at a certain figure, to the range-finders high up in the fighting-tops, bending over their apparatus.

In the turrets the officers fitted telephone receivers to their heads. The gunners, literally “stripped for action” to their waists, their glistening, supple bodies as alert as panthers, crouched over the enormous guns.

Up from the sea appeared the great fighting machines of the enemy. They could not run away this time. Inveigled into range of the Allied ships, the Hun must fight at last!

A word spoken into a telephone from the conning tower to one of the fighting tops! Then, an instant later, to Turret Number One! A roar that shook the ship and seemed to shake the very heavens, while the flash of the fourteen-inch rifle blinded for a second the spectators!

A cheer rose from all parts of the ship, even before the tops signaled a hit. After that the men fought the ship in silence.

Alone in the corridor, Whistler Morgan felt that it would be easier to be on active duty in this time of stress. Yet he had been taught that his station was quite as important as that of any other man or boy aboard.

Through the half open door of the handling room he heard other men loading powder bags and shells upon the electric ammunition hoist that led to the turret above.

Suddenly the whole ship staggered. A deafening explosion, different from that of the guns, shocked him. An enemy shell had burst aboard the *Kennebunk*!

“Relief!”

Whistler sprang through the corridor and up to the gun deck. Was the call for him?

He stopped to look at a perspiring gun crew. They worked the gun with the precision of automatons. Wherever the shell had burst it had not interfered with the firing of the huge guns of Number Two Turret.

Another enemy shell burst inboard of the *Kennebunk*. There was a hail of bits of steel and flying wreckage. Whistler stood squarely on his feet and began to breathe again.

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If he was afraid he did not know it!

One of his mates fell back from position. It was not Torry, as Whistler immediately saw. The man's shoulder dripped blood from a raking wound. Had it been Torry, Phil knew he would still have stepped forward, just as he was doing, and have calmly taken the place of the wounded man.

"Keep it up, boys!" grinned the wounded one. "I'll be back soon's the doc gives this the once over."

The work went on. Shell, powder, breech! Ready all! A moment while the captain's finger trembled on the trigger button. Then the hiss of air as the breech swung open, yawning for another charge.

The thousand-pound shell, hurtling through the smoke-filled air, found the vitals of the *Kennebunk's* immediate enemy. It scarcely shocked Whistler when he peered out to see that vast mountain of steel burst open amidships. She sank in seconds, and the *Kennebunk* steamed on to attack a second monster of the deep.

The battle continued. Moments seemed longer than minutes; minutes dragged by like hours. The wonder of it all was that so much damage could be done in so short a time.

Ships that had cost months of labor to build settled and disappeared beneath the surface in a few minutes. And their crews? Best not talk about them.

History will relate in detail and with exactness, the story of this fight. The superdreadnaught, so shortly off the ways, endured her baptism of fire, coming through the battle scarred but victorious. Alone she sank two of the enemy.

Her own casualty list was small. But it was some hours after the battle before Philip Morgan made sure that his three friends were safe. Repairs and other necessary work took up the attention of the crew until long past nightfall, although the battle itself had lasted just under two hours.

Then Phil found Al first, for they had fought in the same turret. They went to look for the younger boys, and came across an agile little chap with his head done up in bandages, working with a deck-washing crew aft of Turret Number Three, which had been wrecked by a Hun shell.

"It's Ikey!" shouted Torry. "What's the matter with your head, Ikey?"

"Don't say a word," said Ikey, shaking his bandaged head. "The doc used all the gauze he had left aboard after binding those up that was really hurt."

"But you've got some kind of a wound, haven't you?" demanded Whistler.

“Oi, oi! I ought to have, eh? But it’s only that boil I had coming on the back of my neck. You remember? Somehow the head got knocked off of it and it was bleeding. So the doc grabbed me and bandaged me like this,” he added in a much disgusted tone.

It was Michael Donahue who proudly showed himself later with his arm in a sling. He had actually got a piece of shell through the flesh below his elbow. The others were inclined to scorn his wound as they did Ikey’s boil.

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“That’ll do for you fellers,” said Frenchy proudly. “By St. Patrick’s piper that played the last snake out of Ireland! I’ve shed me blood for Uncle Sam! That is something you garbies haven’t done. And, oh, goodness! Ain’t I hungry—just!”

* * * * *

Because of the repairs necessary to the *Kennebunk* she was ordered home; but to the delight of the four Navy boys they, with Hertig and Mr. MacMasters, were not to go with her.

The *Colodia* was now one of the destroyer fleet chasing German submarines in the Bay of Biscay. They were ordered to meet the destroyer at a certain English port and would rejoin their old comrades and continue their training under Lieutenant Commander Lang.

Much as they disliked leaving their comrades on the superdreadnaught, active service, and of a new kind, was ahead of them, as will be related in the next volume of this “Navy Boys Series.”

“We can’t kick,” declared Torry. “We got into the Navy to work, not to loaf. We’ve seen a good deal of service, and of several different kinds. But there is always something new to learn.”

“Sure!” agreed Ikey. “I’ve wrote my papa and mama that although I ain’t an admiral yet, I’ll be something or other before I get home.”

“True for you!” exclaimed Frenchy. “But just what you’ll be is hard telling, Ikey. Even that old witch of the island couldn’t foretell your finish, I bet.”

“That reminds me,” said Whistler. “Mr. MacMasters told me he read in an American paper that he just got hold of that they have arrested Franz Linder, the spy. He will be tried for blowing up the Elmvale dam. And I guess we had something to do to getting evidence that will convict him. The ensign says we will have to give our testimony about the infernal machine before Captain Trevor before the superdreadnaught leaves this port for home.”

“Say!” said Torry with energy, “hasn’t this been a great old cruise?”

And his three mates emphatically agreed.

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Transcriber's Notes:

Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

Page 47, “swifty” changed to “swiftly” (the swiftly approaching)

Page 62, “swifty” changed to “swiftly” (he described swiftly)

Page 93, “saluate” changed to “salute” (trying to salute)

Page 131, “U-Boat” changed to “U-boat” to conform to rest of text

Page 144, “agan” changed to “again” (again and again)

Page 151, “overwhelmn” changed to “overwhelm” (threatened to overwhelm)

Page 156, “sharts” changed to “charts” (marked on the charts)

Page 157, “finshing” changed to “fishing” (so the fishing boats)

Page 191, “Frency” changed to “Frenchy” (demanded Frenchy excitedly)