

# CAPTAIN FOSDYKE'S GOLD

*Percy F.  
Westerman*

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“A BLOOMIN’ GOLDEN QUID!”

Page 304

Frontispiece

# Captain Fosdyke's Gold

BY  
PERCY F. WESTERMAN

Author of "With Beatty off Jutland"  
"The Junior Cadet" &c.

*Illustrated by E. S. Hodgson*

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# CAPTAIN FOSDYKE'S GOLD

# CHAPTER I

## A Tough Proposition

“That *Lapwing* business will have to stand over for at least a couple of months, Wroxall,” declared Mr. Findon, Senior Partner of the firm of Findon & Rayse, Marine Salvage Contractors. “The sand-dredger will have to be sent to that job at Scarborough, and now the *Orisis* operations have come to us I’ll have to keep Wyatt and Strong entirely upon that work.”

“Very good, sir,” replied Rob Wroxall promptly, although he felt the disappointment keenly. When on the eve of being dispatched as second-in-charge of an interesting salvage job in the Cameroons—it was to be his first experience abroad—it came as a bit of a shock to be told that the salvage of the *Lapwing* was “off” for two months. Probably before that time elapsed another home-waters task would fall to his lot. Of absorbing interest though they might be, these coast-wise operations did not appeal to Rob Wroxall’s imagination nearly as much as those in foreign parts and in tropical waters particularly.

Imagination? One might be tempted to ask what imagination had to do with the practical side of a Submarine Salvage Company’s assistant engineer. Actually it has a great bearing upon the case, since in many instances the object to be salvaged is invisible and sometimes directly unapproachable, and here imagination plays a large part in the salvor’s plans, provided his surmises are sound and capable of being put to profitable use.

Rob Wroxall was a young man in the early twenties—tall, broad-shouldered, sound in wind and limb, and in all other respects physically fit to meet the strenuous demands that salvage operations make upon human physique. He had just completed his term of apprenticeship with Messrs. Findon & Rayse, Ltd., and had showed such promise that he had been offered a post as assistant engineer in that firm.

Findon & Rayse, Ltd., of London, Dundee, and Falmouth, was not an old-established firm. It had come into being only since the Great War, but

already its record of successes, together with a few “glorious” failures, had raised it to a position of repute in the marine salvage world.

Mr. Findon, the Senior Partner, was entirely a self-made man. He had commenced his career as a Greenwich School boy, leaving there to join the Royal Navy. Here he became a seaman-diver, petty officer, and then warrant officer. He came out of the Service with a pension, a war-bonus, a fairly substantial sum in respect of prize-money, and last but not least, a sound, practical knowledge of salvage work. Meeting with Mr. Rayse, who had been an Admiralty Civil Engineer, and who possessed considerable private means, he suggested the possibilities of salvage work so takingly that Mr. Rayse agreed to go into partnership with him.

They started operations in quite a small way, achieved several minor successes, invested the bulk of their gains in additional plant, and within seven years had turned their two-men concern into a limited liability company.

At the age of fifty-two Mr. Findon was still the active head of the firm, energetic as ever, and still prone to gamble on the chances of making a success out of a contract that most people would consider too dangerous to touch.

“You read the papers, I suppose?” continued Mr. Findon.

“Rather, sir,” replied Rob.

“Questions in the House?”

“Only the more important ones are reported in the paper I take. I read those.”

“H’m. D’ye remember a question raised by the Member for the Drake Division of Plymouth concerning complaints by Devonshire fishermen relating to damage done to their nets by some obstruction in Tor Bay?”

“That was six weeks ago,” observed Rob.

“Exactly—six weeks ago. Well, a naval party from Devonshire located the obstruction. It lies in twenty-three fathoms of water, three and three-tenths miles sou’east by east of Berry Head—magnetic bearing, that is. It’s something fairly big, but there are no records of any craft being ‘put down’ in that position during the War or of any wreck thereabouts since. The spot’s been buoyed, and now comes the job of lifting the wreck.”

“Seems a fairly tough proposition, sir,” remarked Wroxall. “Twenty-three fathoms, and, I should imagine, in the main Channel tidal stream. Why

do they want it lifted? Blowing up the wreck with guncotton seems the easier way.”

“The easier way isn’t always the best way,” declared the Senior Partner. “If it were just a case of blowing up a submerged rock, for instance—as the Yanks did in New York Harbour—it would be the best way. But in this case it’s little use blowing up the hull of a sunken ship and leaving chunks of jagged metal on the sea-bed. The trawler-men would be no better off. Their nets would be fouled just the same. That’s why the Admiralty want that wreck raised. The Navy isn’t going to tackle the job. For one thing, it isn’t in their line, and Government work is too costly in comparison with results. So the Admiralty invited tenders. We put in for it at a cut price and got the job. One condition is that the firm whose tender is accepted retains all salvaged material, so it’s a toss up whether Findon & Rayse gain or lose over the transaction. We’re calculating on a dead weight in water of 1500 tons, working on the assumption that the wreck is about 200 feet in length. If it’s more we look like losing, unless the cargo is worth anything. Now the point is this: I’m sending you in sole charge of the job.”

Rob felt surprised—and looked it. He hardly expected at this early stage of his career to be given the responsibility of a task of this description.

“You can do it,” continued Mr. Findon. “If I weren’t sure you could I’m dashed if I’d risk chucking good money away. I’m sending the *Gleaner* and two lighters from Falmouth. Captain Condor will be under your orders, but—mark you, this is very important—he’s responsible for navigation and seamanship. If, for instance, he thinks that weather conditions are not favourable, you are to accept his decision and temporarily abandon operations. I’d back Captain Condor against all the weather experts of the Meteorological Office put together! So that’s that! You’d better go through these papers and then you’ll see where you are. And you know where to find the Admiralty charts. See me at four o’clock, and I’ll go over your suggestions.”

Gathering up the bulky docket, Rob went out of the Chief’s private office hardly able to realize his good fortune.

But was it good fortune? He hoped so. He had had a fair amount of experience, working under qualified instructors. He had been entrusted with minor operations in connexion with various salvage jobs. When a perplexing point had presented itself he had had others above him to apply to for advice and assistance. Now, apparently, the heavy mantle of responsibility rested almost entirely upon his youthful shoulders.

Going to his own room, which was as quiet as the rumble of London traffic permitted, Rob settled down to a steady perusal of the documents dealing with the unidentified wreckage off Berry Head. It was not long before he began to realize that it was a decidedly tough proposition.

The wreck lay, as Mr. Findon had said, in twenty-three fathoms—or nearly 140 feet. That, of course, was at low water, ordinary spring tides. At high tide that depth would be increased by from twelve to fifteen feet. According to the chart the bottom consisted of sand and mud, and there was a tidal current *at the surface* of from one and a half to two knots.

As he proceeded with his task the magnitude of it grew steadily. He tried to visualize the wreck—its shape, size, weight, and character unknown—lying perhaps three parts buried in mud and sand and swept by fierce submarine currents. The fishermen's report of lost gear sounded ominous. Was there a diver courageous enough to descend 140 feet, to grope in the black muddy water with only the relatively feeble rays of an electric lamp to aid him; and to risk almost certain death by getting entangled in those meshes of lost nets; or to chance his life-line and air-tube getting foul of one or more of the many obstructions forming part of the wreck?

For the safety of the divers and their attendants, for the success or failure of the operations, he, Rob Wroxall, was to be held responsible. It was of little use pleading stress of weather, faulty gear, or recklessness on the part of the subordinates in mitigation of any failure on his part. The sole responsibility was his.

And yet the task was not of his seeking. He had been ordered by his employers to undertake it—pit his experience, his skill, and his reputation against various forces of nature; and the bone of contention was merely a wreck, in water too deep to form an obstruction or peril to navigation. Merely because it caused the loss of some hundreds of pounds' worth of fishing-gear it had to be removed—even at the imminent risk of human life.

"It's up to me to see the job through," declared Rob practically. "Now, how do I go about it?"

For the next two hours he was kept busily employed in making calculations with reference to the gear required, studying local conditions according to information given on the chart, in conjunction with Admiralty tide-tables. Gradually from a mass of intricate data he evolved his plan of action, weighed the pros and cons, and finally put his report into writing.

Punctually at four he presented himself at his Chief's private office, and submitted the results of his investigations.

"Take a chair," invited Mr. Findon, and for the next half-hour not another word was spoken.

Seemingly oblivious of the young assistant engineer's presence the Senior Partner scanned the neatly-written sheets. At intervals he would refer to some technical work or glance at a chart to verify various statements in Wroxall's document. His rugged features appeared to be utterly emotionless. Neither by word nor sign did he give indication either of satisfaction or adverse criticism. Watching his employer Rob could learn nothing.

Suddenly Mr. Findon sat bolt upright in his revolving chair, folded the foolscap sheets and handed them to Rob.

"All O.K.," he remarked tersely. "Couldn't be better. Act upon it, and you won't go far wrong. When can you start for Falmouth?"

"By the mail train from Paddington to-night, sir."

"Excellent! Take these for incidental personal expenses. That's all right. Well, good luck! I may run down and see how you're getting on when you've started to lift the wreck!"

# CHAPTER II

## The Night Mail

At six o'clock Rob returned to his rooms, had a substantial meal, and then commenced to pack. He had to travel "light", to avoid being encumbered with anything he could actually do without. On the other hand he must leave no essential behind. He had to be equipped for perhaps two months afloat, except for a few hours' hurried visits to some isolated port. For necessities of clothing he must be independent of the shore. Kit for fair weather and foul, uniforms for use in the variable conditions of an English summer, replacements—since salvage work is hard on clothes—all had to be got ready in addition to oilskins and sea-boots. Technical books, instruments, and other articles indispensable to his calling had to be found room for, so that no delay would be caused by their absence during the impending operations.

Everything packed to his satisfaction, Rob "shifted"—to use a nautical expression—into working uniform. For an indefinite period he had finished with the conventional dress of city life. He was about to be cut off from the amenities of town. Newspapers would come to him only at irregular intervals. He would have no postal address other than c/o Messrs. Findon & Rayse, Ltd., and with reasonable luck he might expect letters once a week. Instead of lying between linen sheets in a comfortable bed he would soon find himself in coarse blankets, and in a narrow bunk in a small cabin on board the salvage-craft *Gleaner*. But outweighing all these slight disadvantages would be the pleasure of exchanging the petrol-reeking air of London for the crisp, exhilarating salt-laden breezes of the English Channel.

He was keeping on his rooms. It was necessary to have a *pied-à-terre* in London, and the Company paid for its retention, except when it was a case of proceeding abroad with the possibility of remaining away for several months.

At Paddington, Rob expected to find a crowded train, since the summer holiday season was close at hand. To his relief he secured a compartment to

himself, and with typical British insularity drew the blinds on the corridor side. He saw prospects of being able to snatch a few hours' sleep during the long journey to the west country.

The train had barely gathered speed when the sliding door was opened, and Rob was no longer in sole possession.

The new-comer was a man of above average height, bronzed, and bearded in naval style. He was dressed in dark blue, with a soft felt hat. He carried a malacca walking-stick in addition to a small suitcase. The latter he placed in the luggage rack, and, having dusted a corner seat with a folded newspaper, he sat opposite to Rob, but next to the corridor.

Rob looked at him mainly with the idea of forming some opinion of the new arrival's profession, which, probably, he might never be able to verify.

He had a seafaring air. It was unlikely that he was a naval officer. Holders of his Majesty's commission do not as a general rule travel in third-class carriages, even though they may be in plain clothes. Rob put him down as a Merchant Service Captain about to join or rejoin his ship at one of the west country ports.

The stranger was in the act of opening his newspaper when his eyes met those of his fellow-traveller.

"Good evening!" he remarked pleasantly in well modulated tones. "You're bound for Falmouth, I take it?"

"I am," admitted Wroxall. "A good shot that, sir, on your part."

"Knew I wouldn't be far off the mark," continued the other. "Happened to see the badge on your cap on the rack over your head. Findon & Rayse, Salvage Company, isn't it?"

"You know our firm, then?" asked Rob, secretly gratified that the new-comer was not only aware of the existence of a comparatively new company, but that he was able to identify the badge, even in the imperfect light in the carriage.

"They did a job for my owners off the Mumbles," explained the other. "The *Amberley* of Crawfords & Craig's. Smart job they made of it, too."

"I remember the case, though it was before my time," remarked Rob. "So you are in Crawfords & Craig's?"

"I command the *Amilcar*. Fosdyke's my name, if that is of any interest to you. The ship fractured her mainshaft off the Longships, and is just

completing repairs at Falmouth. We're bound for Bonny, Calabar, and Abuea, with a cargo of railway material. I suppose you've never heard of Abuea?"

Rob smiled.

"I happen to have heard of it," he replied. "It is a small port in the Cameroons."

"Have you, by Jove!" exclaimed Captain Fosdyke. "That's strange—a one-sided hole like that. In what connexion did you know of it?"

"I was on the point of being sent out there," explained Wroxall. "A cargo boat, the *Lapwing*, went ashore just inside the bar, and our people are going to raise her."

"They'll have some job, take my word for it," declared the Captain. "I know the spot. Shifting sand—regular quicksands. Well, I may run across you out there."

"I'm not going on that job, just yet," said Rob. "Probably in another two months, when our suction sand-dredger is at liberty, I may be sent out there. It's rather a coincidence coming across someone who knows that part of the coast. Will you have a cigarette?"

"No, thanks!" Captain Fosdyke waved aside the proffered case, and proceeded to fill a well-coloured meerschaum. "Pipe's more in my line—something with a bite in it. Coincidence? Bless my soul, the world's chock-a-block with coincidences. Just before I left the hotel I've been staying at for the last week, I came across one that brought me up all standing."

He struck a match and puffed at his pipe.

Had Rob not responded to the implied invitation his curiosity would not have been satisfied. But, being curious, he rejoined with an inquisitive "Well?"

"At dinner I was yarning with an old chap who had held a Government job in Calcutta. We mentioned the Hugli, and I casually asked him if he knew the James and Mary Sands. 'James and Mary Sands?' he replied, 'I should think I did. I remember a vessel going ashore there in 1876—forelock coming adrift from the anchor-stock did it—capsizing and disappearing within three minutes!' 'That's strange,' I remarked. 'Do you happen to know the pilot's name?' 'Yes, let me think! I have it; Captain Denver of the Hugli Pilot Service. I can tell you what he wore when he was brought ashore!' 'That's very remarkable,' I said. 'There's Captain Denver,

sitting at the other end of this table. He was telling me about the same incident only this morning!’ You see, these two old gentlemen, each is well over eighty, had been staying at the same hotel for a week, and hadn’t spoken to each other since 1876. That’s only one of many cases I have come across in which coincidence stands out as prominently as Polaris on a clear night!”

“You know the West Coast well, I take it?” remarked Rob, anxious to profit by his companion’s experience.

“As well as most skippers on that route,” replied Captain Fosdyke. “My father and my elder brother were in the same line, and I dare say the name Fosdyke is known on the Coast. My brother Dick was the first to take a vessel into Abuea after the Germans were driven out of the Cameroons, and they’d shifted the leading marks and put down mines in the fairway. He was in command of the *Antibar*. She was supposed to have been put down by a U-boat in ’17. At any rate she never turned up—lost with all hands.”

“Hard lines,” remarked Rob sympathetically. “There’s one blessing; in future wars merchant shipping will be protected from ruthless sinking.”

“I wonder!” rejoined Captain Fosdyke. “I wonder! Modern warfare is a pretty dirty business, and since it has been proposed at the London Naval Conference to shift the onus of submarine atrocities from the commander of the under-surface craft to the government of the country whose flag they fly it seems to me that there’ll be precious little regard for rules and regulations. From what I see of it, the Naval Conference was merely an opportunity for continental nations to assert what strength they wanted—not what they were willing to reduce—Great Britain having already decided upon scrapping valuable cruisers and abandoning the construction of others. In my opinion—and you’ll find most seafaring people think the same—the statesmen who convened the London Naval Conference will go down to posterity as empire breakers—nothing more nor less!”

“It is claimed that the submarine is a weapon of defence essential to weaker nations,” remarked Rob.

“Is it? As a commerce destroyer, perhaps, and it certainly isn’t fit for that. France and Italy want to retain submarines because they are mutually distrustful of each other. It seems to me that people of Latin extraction haven’t the right temperament for the sea—either on or under it. What did French and Italian submarines do in the Great War? Practically nothing. The Germans made full use of them. The British and the Yank did so whenever an opportunity occurred. Germany isn’t allowed submarines; Britain and

America are willing to scrap theirs, and the sooner the other nations agree to do the same the better for all concerned. Scrapping submarines is one of the first essentials towards the establishment of lasting understanding and good fellowship amongst nations. By the way, have you ever been down in a diving-dress?"

Rob admitted that he had on several occasions.

"Don't think I'd fancy it," remarked Captain Fosdyke. "Although, mind you, I'd like to have the experience."

"If you take my advice, you won't," declared Wroxall.

"Oh! why not?"

"Speaking professionally and with no offence, you are not only a little too old, but you aren't physically fit for diving."

"Young man, I'm perfectly fit, and never felt better in my life!"

"I don't question that," said Rob. "You may be perfectly all right for your particular occupation. But when it comes to finding yourself under very considerably more than atmospheric pressure—I wouldn't take the responsibility of sending you down!"

They discussed various matters pertaining to salvage-work—decompression, the use of compressed air, the uses of cement for underwater repairs, and exchanged anecdotes of skilful and successful operations both on the ships afloat and the sunken ships that, but for the salvor's work, would have made their last plunge to Davy Jones's locker.

"Hello!" exclaimed Captain Fosdyke, as the train commenced to slow down. "Truro already, by Jove! This journey's gone quickly! Wonder if we have to wait long for a connexion?"

Rob collected his luggage. The captain, who had left most of his in the van, went off to retrieve the rest of his belongings.

There was something exhilarating in the cool morning air, for it was now light, and the triple towers of the Cathedral stood out clearly above the roofs of the Cornish town.

"Mr. Wroxall, I believe?"

Rob, bending over some of his belongings, straightened himself and looked at the speaker—a cheerful-faced lad of about eighteen, whose visible attire consisted of a long leather coat, golf cap, leggings, and boots.

"I've brought a car to take you to Falmouth," explained the youth when Rob had admitted his identity. "Mr. Findon sent a trunk call to say you were on the mail train, so Captain Condor suggested to our manager that I should run into Truro with the car."

"Awfully good of you," said Rob, taking at once a liking to the lad. "You've not had much sleep last night."

"I'm used to that. A fellow gets accustomed to night work in our job. I happen to be one of Findon & Rayse's apprentices, and I think I'm being sent with you in the *Gleaner*."

"I'm glad of that," rejoined Rob. "What's your name?"

"Denis—Paul Denis," was the reply.

At that moment Captain Fosdyke, having seen that his luggage was correct, came along the platform. Seeing Wroxall talking to someone, he paused.

"What's the car, Denis?" asked Rob. "Two-seater?"

"No—four," was the reply. "Why?"

"A gentleman I met on the train," explained the Assistant Engineer. "He's for Falmouth too. We might offer him a lift. . . . I say, Captain, we've a car. Can we run you into Falmouth?"

"Thanks awfully," replied Captain Fosdyke. "Better than waiting here for twenty minutes. I'll tell the porter to take my gear."

"Good morning, Captain Fosdyke!" exclaimed Denis, "I didn't expect to run across you here and at this time of day."

"Providing you don't run over me with your car, I don't mind," remarked the merchant skipper, smiling. "But dashed if I can fix you!"

"Please, don't," countered Denis. "It's hard lines if I am to be fixed by you—although you did give me jolly good hiding once. And I thunderingly well deserved it too!"

"I've tanned a good many youngsters during thirty years at sea," admitted Captain Fosdyke. "Some of them didn't deserve it, perhaps, but the majority did! But I must confess I don't remember you."

"It wasn't at sea where you gave me a hiding," explained the youth, obviously enjoying the older man's perplexity. "It was about eight or nine years ago, when you were living at Hoylake (when you weren't at sea, of

course). My people lived in the next house, and on one occasion and one only I shinned up one of your apple trees. You caught me!"

"You're Captain Denis's son, then."

"Right, sir!"

Fosdyke turned to Rob.

"Didn't I say the world's chock-a-block with coincidences, Mr. Wroxall? But if we remain on this platform reminiscencing much longer we might just as well have saved Denis the trouble of bringing the car."

Denis led the way to the waiting open car. The joint luggage was piled either in the back, leaving room for one passenger, or strapped to the grid.

"Going to take her, Mr. Wroxall?" asked Denis.

Rob shook his head.

"I'd like to, but for various reasons," he replied. "I don't know the road, and I might pitch the lot of us out. I haven't a driving-licence with me, and even at this time of the morning I might be asked for it by a bobby. And, as I don't want to contribute to the Cornwall County funds in the form of a fine, I'd better let you carry on. Will you sit with Denis, Captain Fosdyke, and I'll squeeze in the rear seat."

Denis slid into the driver's seat, waited until his passengers were safely on board, and then pressed the self-starter. Quickly the car gathered speed, and was soon doing a good forty along the up-and-down gradients bordering the wooded shores of the Fal and its numerous creeks.

"Steady, man, steady!" cautioned the Captain more than once. "You'll capsize the lot of us!"

"It's all right, sir, really," Denis assured him. "She'll do sixty easily. I've got her well under control."

But it was perfectly obvious to Rob that the Captain was far from feeling at ease. Several times he positively gasped, while he gripped the top of the door so tightly that his knuckles showed white under the tan.

"Nervous as a cat!" thought Wroxall. "Hope he doesn't try to grip the steering-wheel."

Captain Fosdyke's ordeal, however long it might seem to him, lasted barely twenty minutes. After whizzing through the deserted streets of Penryn, the car pulled up at the Prince of Wales' pier.

The Captain alighted and shook hands with Rob and Denis.

“They’ve undocked the *Amilcar*,” he observed, pointing to a tramp steamer lying at anchor with several other vessels in Carrick Roads. “I may get away on this afternoon’s tide. If I don’t, come aboard, both of you, if you can. If not, cheerio! to our next merry meeting—on the West Coast perhaps!”

Captain Fosdyke beckoned to a waterman to assist him with his luggage and to row him off to his ship.

Denis set the car in motion to complete the remaining distance to the Falmouth depot of Messrs. Findon & Rayse, Ltd.

“Decent fellow, Captain Fosdyke,” remarked Rob, who had shifted to the front seat vacated by his acquaintance of the train. “But wasn’t he frightfully jumpy in the car!”

“And I guess I should be if I’d been through what he has,” rejoined Denis. “He won’t say anything about it, but my pater told me. He was in command of a vessel that was chased by a U-boat for eight hours. They shelled him. He ordered everyone off the bridge and took the wheel himself, zigzagging all the time. He was hit by splinters three times, once in the head, but stuck it until the U-boat sheered off when a destroyer showed up. He was in hospital three months, came out, got another ship, and was torpedoed in her. He was taken prisoner and remained in Germany till the Armistice. After that he went to sea again. He told my pater that the only time his nerves are all right is when he is on the bridge! Here we are: here’s the jolly old hack-yard!”

# CHAPTER III

## Captain Condor

The “hack-yard”, as Paul Denis irreverently termed it, was the branch depot of Messrs. Findon & Rayse’s Salvage Company. It was situated on the shores of a backwater on the west side of Falmouth Harbour. Formerly a shipbuilding yard in the far-off days when Falmouth was at the height of its prosperity as a packet-station, it had become derelict until Mr. Findon, scenting its possibilities, acquired the property and proceeded to equip it for the requirements of modern marine salvage work.

The building sheds had been converted into spacious stores, where steel and wire ropes, blocks, tools, buoys, timber for shoring, diving-bells and diving-dresses all had their appointed places. A fairly pretentious stone-built house surrounded by a well-kept garden occupied part of the premises. In it lived Captain Condor, the Marine Superintendent and Skipper of the salvage vessel *Gleaner*. Between the work-yard and the street was a row of cottages in the occupation of permanent employees of the firm. There were two slipways capable of hauling up the largest vessel of the salvage fleet, and a small stone jetty terminating in a wooden pier equipped with cranes and a pair of sheer-legs. Of the ground not built upon, most of it was covered with old iron and steel plating—the remains of various wrecks raised by the firm and, found to be unfit for repair, broken up for disposal as “scrap” metal.

Although it was yet early in the morning—the workmen had not started work—smoke was issuing from the chimneys of Captain Condor’s house.

“The Cap’n told me that breakfast would be ready,” observed Denis, as he switched off the ignition of the car. “Your luggage will be all right until we get a man to bring it into the house.”

Rob had rather dreaded the meeting with the branch superintendent. He knew that Captain Condor was an elderly man, and, although their respective duties ran on parallel lines, it was quite possible that their ideas might clash. If they were temperamentally opposed to each other the result

would be disadvantageous, if not fatal, to the impending operations. The Captain might resent working with a much younger man.

But the young assistant engineer's misgivings were quickly set at rest when the door was opened by Captain Condor, who, in a deep, hearty voice, welcomed the new arrival.

"I'm rare glad tu see you, Mr. Wroxall!" he exclaimed. "Come in! Come in! You'll be real glad of something to eat an' drink after your long journey from Lunnnon."

Captain George Condor—or Cap'n Garge as he was known to his friends and neighbours—was a tall, massively built man of about forty-five. He was full-faced without being flabby. His blue eyes twinkled with grim humour under a pair of bushy eyebrows. He had a rather heavy moustache clipped close at the ends. His face was tanned by sun and sea. His hair was thick and inclined to curliness. Faithful to a fast-dying custom amongst Cornish seafaring folk, he wore gold earrings. As the Captain stood on the steps of the front door, Rob noticed that he had a slight stoop—the result of years in vessels with insufficient headroom, and that his feet were placed well apart while his big frame swayed slightly from side to side—another indication of long service on the heaving decks of sea-going craft.

He was dressed in a reefer coat and trousers of dark-blue pilot cloth, double soft collar, and black tie. His heavy black boots with leather laces, although well cleaned, were treated with "dubbin". His reefer coat was unbuttoned, revealing an expanse of waistcoat across which was a massive silver chain. Later, Rob discovered that at one end of the chain was a large silver watch that once belonged to Cap'n Garge's "grandfer"; at the other a gold box containing a caul—another symbol of old-time seafaring superstition that the possession of this peculiar object was considered a sovereign safeguard against the wearer meeting his death by drowning.

When out of doors Captain Condor wore a glazed-peaked cap, complete with badge, white covered or otherwise according to recognized dictates of authority.

Rob, a fair judge of human character in spite of his youth, sized his man up in a quick, appraising glance. What he saw was good. He grasped the proffered horny hand in a bond of comradeship.

A few minutes later the two principals in the impending salvage job were sitting down to a plain but substantial Cornish breakfast in which

pasties and rich clotted cream, fried whiting, eggs and bacon were offered to and accepted by the Captain's guest.

"When do you propose getting tu work?" asked Condor.

"As soon as possible," replied Rob. "We mustn't lose the advantage of these neap tides."

The district superintendent slapped his massive thigh.

"That's rale good tu hear you!" he exclaimed. "Give me a man who knows how tu work his tides. These neaps ("nips" was his pronunciation) will gi' us a fine opportunity tu place hawsers under the wreck. Not that we'll have a soft job, I reckon. There's the counter-currents below fifteen fathom that's tu be taken into account. You've had enough tu eat? Perhaps you'll be wanting to go tu sleep a few hours, or did you have a caulk in the train?"

"I can carry on quite all right, thanks," replied Rob. "I'll get my luggage in and then we'll go through the list of gear. There may be something I have omitted, so if you find anything that will be wanted I wish you'd let me know."

Captain Condor perused the list and pronounced it as "perfect as he knew how". Then he glanced at his watch.

"Bell'll go in two minutes," he observed. "I make a point of being at the in-muster. P'raps you'll be coming along o' I—along with me, I mean."

"Certainly," agreed Wroxall, although he felt a disinclination to move from his comfortable chair. A good meal, coupled with the soft, relaxing Falmouth air and following upon a sleepless night probably accounted for his lassitude.

He went with the captain to the ticket office at the entrance gates. The warning bell had already rung and the workmen were trooping in, each "clocking-in" under the vigilant eyes of a foreman.

"There's Black—one of our best divers," remarked the captain, indicating a tall, slenderly-built man. "And there's White, another good diver. Strange their names being Black and White, but that makes no difference to what they can do. And there's Trevarrick, the man who blew the bows off the *Samson*, when she got hard ashore along down by Carn Dhu."

The stream of men thinned as the hands of the clock approached the hour. Almost at the last moment a dark-featured, curly-headed man,

reminding Rob of a Spaniard, dashed up to the recorder and “clocked himself in”.

“Cut it fine again, Polglaze,” exclaimed Captain Condor. “Nearly lost it this time.”

“Zure, zur,” agreed the man. “It all comes along o’ livin’ in the terrace. When I had a house in the ’ope’ I could du a rare sprint and catch meself oop!”

“That’s one of the divers’ attendants,” explained Rob’s companion, when Polglaze had gone beyond earshot. “A sound fellow, but inclined tu cut things fine. Did you follow his excuse?”

“ ’Fraid I couldn’t.”

“He’s recently moved into one of the houses on the firm’s premises, so if he’s late he’s late; but when he lived a mile from the works he could always run and gain on the time he would have taken to walk. That’s one disadvantage of having employees living close to the works.”

“But it’s very handy in other respects,” remarked Rob.

“Ay; it doesn’t take long tu get a crew together. I’m going tu do it now.”

With that Captain Condor beckoned to the foreman.

“This be Mr. Wroxall from the Lunnon office,” he said. “He’s in charge of the job I was a-telling you of yesterday. I want the *Gleaner* ready, full crew and gear aboard, month’s provisions stowed and steam raised. How long afore you’m ready?”

The foreman scratched his head.

“Have you got a list of gear wanted, sir?”

“I have that,” replied Captain Condor.

“Say a matter of four hours an’ t’ *Gleaner*’ll be ready to start, sir.”

“Right—by half-past ten, then.”

Leaving the foreman—who during the district superintendent’s absence was in charge of the depot—to make the required arrangements, Captain Condor ordered a man to bring Mr. Wroxall’s gear down to the jetty.

“We may as well go aboard and see tu things there,” he suggested. “Not that there’s likely tu be aught amiss but ’tes best tu be on t’safe side like!”

Then as he passed the office he shouted: “Paul, are you’m there? Look lively, my boy, we’m away come a’past ten.”

“Ay, ay, sir!” replied Denis, and in high glee he hurried off to exchange the routine of office work for the excitement of an instruction trip in the Company’s salvage tug.

“Glass steady an’ wind nor’west,” observed Captain Condor. “If it holds up and wind’s aslant off the land we ought to get the wreck slung in fine style. Mind you, I’m not sayin’ it’s going tu be child’s play, Mr. Wroxall. Now, in you get and I’ll row us off.”

He indicated a tubby dinghy moored to the jetty by a generous scope of painter. Making his way down a vertical ladder, the bottommost rungs of which were slippery with seaweed, Rob stepped into the boat and sat in the stern-sheets.

The captain followed with an agility unexpected from one with his massive frame, shipped the crutches and pulled with long, steady strokes.

It was now half-flood, and with the tide under her it did not take the dinghy long to cover the distance between the jetty and the salvage tug.

“*Gleaner* ahoy!” hailed Captain Condor. “Stand by to take our painter!”

# CHAPTER IV

## The Search

Rob Wroxall's new floating home was a twin-screw craft of 250 feet "between perpendiculars", 40 feet in beam, and with a mean draught of 12 feet. She was by no means a chicken, having been laid down in a Clydeside shipyard twenty-five years before as an ocean-going tug. Originally she was "built composite", that is of wooden planking on steel frames, the timber being teak. Since then her hull had been doubled by fitting an additional outer skin, also of teak, with a massive oak rubbing-strake. Her masts had been removed and two stumpy "sticks" substituted, each with four derricks. Auxiliary engines provided power to the derrick winches and also to the air-compressors and pumps, while full electrical lighting current was obtainable from dynamos. Over the squat stern but under the double towing hawse projected an enormously thick baulk of timber fitted with tackle whereby it was possible to obtain a direct lift of eighty tons. In the davits hung two thirty-foot boats solidly constructed to withstand rough usage, as well as other boats of lighter construction for work of a less strenuous character.

Rob was met at the gangway by a short, thick-set man in salt-stained uniform, whose chief striking peculiarity was the enormous spread of his arms and his disproportionately short and bowed legs.

"This is Mr. Brash, Ben we call him, our Chief Mate, Mr. Wroxall," explained Captain Condor. "Ben, this is Mr. Wroxall from the Lunnon office, who's come to take charge of our next job."

"Pleased tu meet you, sir, surely," said Brash, tugging at an imaginary forelock; for, with the exception of a few wisps of hair at the back of his head, he was as bald as an egg. "I've seen tu it that they've fixed you up in a comfortable cabin, proper-like. So be you'm wanting tu see it?"

"Later, when Mr. Wroxall's gear comes aboard, Ben," interposed the Captain. "We'll be having a look around while Mac's raising steam. See your towing hawsers are clear; we'm taking 18 and 19 lighters, and as like as not we'll have tu fetch a couple more afore we get a proper lift o' she."

“What’s she like?” inquired Ben, referring to the wreck which had to be removed from the sea-bed.

“No one knows for certain,” replied Captain Condor. “May be she’s been there for donkeys years, an’ the trawlers have only just got their nets foul of her. It’s certain sure she hasn’t foundered recently.”

“But surely in a recognized fishing-ground she couldn’t have remained there long without being discovered,” observed Rob. “That’s been puzzling me from the first.”

“Pure chance, Mr. Wroxall, pure chance!” replied the Captain. “A fleet might trawl over the ground for years and miss the wreck every time. That calls to mind a salvage job I took on a couple o’ summers back. A gent with his wife was coming from Helford River tu Falmouth in a motor-boat. Quite a light-built craft she wur, a matter o’ twenty-five feet over all. His missus had a fair amount o’ jewelry with her, which to my mind she didn’t ought tu. ’Tany rate she broke her shaft—the boat, you’ll understand—and down she goes in ten fathom. The owner comes tu me an’ axes for a lump sum contract tu raise her. He was fair sure on the spot an’ gave me the bearings he’d taken just afore she dipped. Like a fool I gave a price on behalf of the firm, thinking it would be a soft job getting her up. Believe me we dragged for four days afore we got the wreck.”

“So Findon & Rayse lost on the deal?” remarked Rob.

“’Deed they did!” admitted Captain Condor. “But talkin’ of luck in salvage jobs, I call to mind when I wur a young man an’ workin’ for the Poole Harbour Board. A gent fishing off the quay dropped his diamond ring overboard. That shows again how fullish-like ’tes tu go tempting Daddy Neptune wi’ jewelry. Well, the gent goes to Cap’n Chislett, the Harbour Master as was, and tells him of his loss. The Harbour Master get the grab-dredger alongside the quay, and, believe me, the first lot of mud the grab brought up had the ring lying fair and square on the top!”

“That was luck, if you like,” observed Rob. “Ha! This looks promising!”

He indicated a massive steel, dome-topped cylinder stowed on deck close to the main derricks. It was about twelve feet in height and about six in diameter, and was fitted with various unions and a small door at the base. It was a diver’s decompression chamber of the latest design, and an apparatus of enormous benefit to men making deep descents.

“Almost halves a job, that does,” commented Rob’s companion. “Makes diving like sojering is to-day compared to what it was when I wur a lad.

Isn't that so, Trevarrick?" he added, addressing the diver who had just come on board.

"It's a sight better bein' boxed up nice an' comfy in that than dangling for a couple o' hours at the end of a rope before you dare be hauled above the surface, sir," declared the man. "Slow decompression in the old style ain't exactly honey an' jam!"

"Your gear's aboard, sir!" reported the Chief Mate.

"Right!" replied Rob. "I'll come along."

The Assistant Engineer had been given a cabin aft on the starboard side of a saloon under the poop-deck. It was spacious considering the size of the vessel, having originally been two cabins, now knocked into one. Against the for'ard bulkhead was his bunk, fitted with a high bunk-board as a silent testimony to the *Gleaner's* rolling and pitching proclivities. At the foot of the bunk was a built-in wash-stand with hot and cold water taps. An easy chair clamped to the deck, a wardrobe, book-case, and a large flap-table, big enough to take full-sized plans, completed the fittings. The cabin was lighted in the daytime by means of two large opening scuttles with the usual dead-lights and dark-blue curtains; at night the occupant had the choice of one, two, or three electric lamps conveniently fixed to the bulkheads. Overhead, but now motionless, was an electric fan.

"This will suit me down to the ground, Mr. Brash," declared Rob enthusiastically, after he had given a brief appraising look round.

"Don't ee say thet, sir!" protested the Chief Mate. "'Tes rale unlucky to talk such of any craft afloat."

"Then I won't say it again while I'm on board, unless the *Gleaner* goes into dry dock," rejoined the young man laughingly. "All right, I'll start unpacking and get everything shipshape."

Left alone Rob set to work to hang his spare clothes in the wardrobe; to place his shaving tackle on a shelf where it was unlikely to be thrown about when the vessel was under way; to stow his books, mostly of a technical nature, in the rack, which was fitted with a batten to keep the volumes in place.

Engrossed in this task, Rob hardly noticed the sudden roll of the ship until a loud blast on a siren made him look through one of the scuttles.

A tramp steamer had just passed within half a cable's length of the *Gleaner*. On her stern Rob read the legend: *Amilcar*—Liverpool. Captain

Fosdyke had not lost much time in getting under way.

Rob dashed on deck, hoping to get a glimpse of his former companion in the night-mail, and to semaphore him a farewell message; but the opportunity was lost.

“I hope I’ll run across Fosdyke again some day,” thought the Assistant Engineer, as he returned to his task of unpacking.

“We’re well nigh ready to get under way, Mr. Wroxall!” announced Captain Condor. “I’ve had a careful tally kept of all gear sent aboard, and it fits with the list you gave me.”

With a feeling akin to shame Rob realized that the Cornishman had undertaken a task that by rights should have been his. Captain Condor was responsible for the navigation of the *Gleaner* to and from the site of the wreck, and for all gear appertaining to such navigation. The plant necessary for the salvage operation came under the young Assistant Engineer’s supervision. It was he who had compiled the list of gear required; it was he who should have seen it on board. Instead he had been attending to his personal effects in his cabin.

However, the mischief, if any, was done. Fervently Rob hoped that nothing essential had been overlooked, and promised himself that in future he would not forget his responsibilities.

Going on deck and making his way to the bridge, Rob found that the *Gleaner* was all but ready to cast off from her moorings. Captain Condor was on the bridge, together with the quartermaster. The Chief Mate was on the fo’c’sle, superintending the unmooring operation, while the Second Mate, whom Rob had hitherto not seen, was aft directing the biting of the towing hawser of a large lighter that bore on both bows the number 19.

The other lighter, No. 18—which, unlike No. 19, was fitted with a heavy-oil engine—was already plugging her way at a modest six knots towards the harbour mouth.

Virtually, at this stage of the proceedings, Rob was a mere passenger. He had nothing whatever to do with the navigation or management of the ship, so he was free to look around. What he saw pleased his eyes. Falmouth, in the brilliant morning sunshine, looked a picture of delight. On the one hand the old-world houses of the town, climbing the rising ground from the water front. On the other the wooded heights of St. Just and St. Mawes. Ahead the grim outline of Pendennis Castle on one side of the entrance, with St. Antony Point on the other, the isolated Black Rock showing up midway

between the two headlands. Astern, the upper reach of Carrick Roads with its crowd of anchored shipping, and farther away the winding course of the Fal between steep well-wooded banks. Small sailing craft dotted the dancing wavelets of the harbour, while in harmony with the old-time association of Falmouth, two “wooden-walls of Old England”, happily preserved from the ship-breakers’ hands, swung idly at moorings.

“All fast aft, sir!”

“How many fathom?” inquired the skipper.

“Ten, sir!” replied the Second Mate. “We’m ready t’veer out thirty more soon as we’m clear.”

“Good! At that! All ready to let go for’ard, Mister?”

“All ready, sir!” answered Mr. Brash.

Captain Condor rang down for “Half ahead starboard; half astern port,” ported helm and signed to the Chief Mate.

With a rush and a roar the inboard end of the bridle ran through the hawsepipe. The buoy rocked violently as three of the hands heaved at the chain to bring it on board again.

“All gone, sir!”

Slowly the *Gleaner* swung round, while the hands aft carefully tended the hawser connecting her with the lighter. Gradually the strain on the latter tautened, and with increased speed the towing vessel steadied on her course.

Outside Black Rock, speed was reduced to six knots in order to keep pace with the motor-lighter.

Captain Condor gave the course to the helmsman and, for the first time since getting under way, spoke to his passenger.

“Fair tide, now, Mr. Wroxall. Let’s hope we don’t see Falmouth again until we bring the wreck back wi’ us. Grub’ll be ready at noon, so after that you’d better turn in. You’re looking fair tired!”

Rob agreed that he was tired; but the novelty of a run up Channel more than outweighed his desire for sleep. He was not feeling hungry, although he had had a very early breakfast.

“Then you ought to be,” declared the captain. “Give me a man who knows how to stow his victuals any day. I’ll warrant after a good tuck-in you’ll be ready for sleep.”

Judging by the generous repast Captain Condor was a man who believed in putting precept into practice. He was right, too, concerning Rob's need for rest. Accordingly the latter compromised by bringing a deck-chair on the lee side of the bridge, where he could be at ease and watch the ever changing panorama of the rugged Cornish coast.

Sleep won! Almost before he had settled himself he dropped into a sound slumber, hardly stirring until Mr. Brash awoke him with the news that tea was ready.

"Two bells, an' we'm abeam o' Bolt Head, sir," he reported.

Rob gazed landwards. Facing him were the tall dark cliffs of Devon, his outlook terminating at Bolt Tail to the west'ard and the low-lying rocks off Prawl Point showing just above the horizon.

"We haven't done badly," he remarked. "At this rate we should be over the wreck in another two hours."

The Chief Officer shook his head.

"Tide's agen us now," he observed. "It runs most powerful off the Start. I reckon we won't get there afore ten."

Before ten o'clock! And the young assistant engineer, in his zeal, was hoping to be able to commence operations well before sunset.

As a matter of fact it was soon after nine when the *Gleaner* and the two lighters arrived in the proximity of the wreck. The dumb-lighter's hawser was trans-shipped from the *Gleaner* to the motor-lighter, in order to leave the tug unhampered in her attempt to locate the position.

Rob, armed with a sextant, began to take shore angles, Captain Condor took bearings with the compass, the two mates swept the surface of the sea with their binoculars.

Observations showed that the *Gleaner* was close to the reported position of the wreck, but the buoy previously placed to indicate the exact spot was not to be seen.

Its absence might mean hours, perhaps days of hard work before the submarine sweeps would locate the desired object.

"'Tain't to be wondered at," remarked Captain Condor. "Like as not some craft fouled the buoy in the dark an' carried it away. We'm not far off the place. It's patience, Mr. Wroxall, patience an' a slice of rale good luck!"

Rob admitted that side of the picture. On the other hand time was money with Messrs. Findon & Rayse. They were paying for the *matériel* and *personnel* and paying heavily. Captain Condor, being on a fixed wage, was not unduly perturbed by delays.

“I think we’d better try sweeping at once,” said Rob.

Captain Condor shrugged his shoulders.

“As you wish, Mr. Wroxall.”

As soon as possible a mark-buoy was dropped. The motor-launch and a rowing boat were then lowered and manned. They proceeded in opposite directions, paying out a length of flexible wire until the span rested on the bottom of the sea.

Then, taking bearings from the mark buoy, both craft forged steadily ahead on parallel courses.

Watching from the *Gleaner’s* bridge, Rob followed their progress with the greatest attention. In the gathering darkness he could discern the outlines of the pulling boat, and the faint gleam of the motor-launch’s starboard light.

Presently, in spite of their coxswain’s efforts, both craft began to swing towards each other.

“Got anything, Ben?” hailed Captain Condor through a megaphone.

“Sure us have, zur!” replied the Chief Mate, holding his hands trumpet-wise to let his words carry down wind. “Sommut girt her be.”

“Belay then!” ordered the Captain. “We’ve got it, Mr. Wroxall,” he added.

The *Gleaner* and the motor-lighter then manœuvred until the ends of the wire were taken on board. Both forged gently ahead. The strain on the sweep nearly approached working strength, according to the reading on the dynamometer, before the signal was given to stop engines. The spot was then carefully buoyed, and the ends of the span transferred to a floating barrel.

“That’ll do for to-night, I allow,” suggested Captain Condor. “We’m far luckier than I thought. Tu-morrow we start in earnest. Thanks be, glass be high and wind off shore.”

Rob, enthusiastic and energetic though he was, could raise no objection. There were limits to human endurance, and since it was inadvisable at

present to work in shifts, the hands must necessarily be given a good night's rest.

Contrary to his expectations Rob slept soundly. Soon after daybreak he went on deck, threw a chip overside, and watched it drift lazily past the ship's side. Then, having lowered a Jacob's ladder, he plunged overboard and enjoyed ten minutes' hard swimming before returning on board to towel vigorously, and then dress.

"Bless you!" ejaculated Captain Condor when Rob mentioned his swim. "You went overboard from an anchored craft in a tideway? 'Twas rale foolish."

"Oh, I threw a chunk of wood overboard to test the strength of the tide," replied Rob. "It was almost slack water. And there were two of the crew standing by."

"That alters the case," rejoined the Skipper approvingly. "As I said afore I admire a man who pays due respect to the tides. Now, before Trevarrick has his breakfast, you'd better send him down to see what we've hooked."

Rob readily agreed to the suggestion. It was, he knew, hard lines on the diver to send him down in nearly twenty-five fathoms before he had broken his fast; but he was fully aware—and so was Trevarrick—of the risk of diving directly after a meal.

The diver donned his dress. His attendants adjusted his life-line and affixed the leaden weight to his breast and back. Slowly his heavily soled boots shuffled as he made his way to the side.

Then his head-dress was fitted, air-tube and telephone wires connected up, and the front glass of the helmet screwed down tightly.

Four men, two on each pump, were already impelling air through three hundred feet of armoured indiarubber pipe. It was their task to keep up a certain pressure. Whether it suited the diver or not did not matter; he had the means of regulating the supply.

Trevarrick gave the signal.

Down he went by the shot-line, his descent being governed by the rate at which his life-line was paid out. Bubbles marked the spot where he had disappeared, though at ten fathoms his copper-helmeted figure was invisible to the watchers on the deck.

The diver was lowered with fair rapidity, until the slackening of the life-line announced that he had reached the bottom. According to the position of

the mark-buoy, he had to cover only about ten yards before arriving at the wreck.

While the attendants at the pumps were methodically carrying out their duties, there was another scene of activity.

The decompressing chamber was being prepared for lowering. As soon as it was over the side, Polglaze, the principal attendant, entered the metal cylinder, closed the door, which was provided with a lock capable of being operated from either the outside or the inside, and gave the signal for compressed air to be admitted into the chamber.

In a few minutes Polglaze was subjected to an atmospheric pressure equal to that of the diver at twenty-three fathoms. Beyond a slight buzzing in the ears Polglaze felt no inconvenience. The fairly rapid increase of pressure could be borne without danger, provided the man was physically fit. It was the release of pressure that was the danger. Unless it were carried out strictly according to written instructions the occupant or occupants of the decompressing chamber might easily be killed owing to the stoppage of their arterial blood.

“O.K.!” reported Polglaze by telephone, and without delay the dome-topped cylinder was lowered to a depth of twenty fathoms—or about twenty feet above the bed of the sea and close to the spot where Trevarrick was making his investigations.

Rob paid no attention to the descent of that most recent invention. At least, not yet. He was well acquainted with its properties and use, and no longer regarded it as a scientific marvel, but merely as a machine, an instrument, which is to assist the diver in his work. Wroxall’s attention was directed to the telephone between Trevarrick and himself, as he eagerly awaited the diver’s report.

It was not an easy matter to make conversation audible. The hiss of escaping air, the diver’s stertorous breathing, and even the splash of the wavelets against the *Gleaner’s* sides—all were magnified by the sensitive microphones.

“Very strong current . . . making slow headway . . . firm, sandy bottom . . . nothing in sight,” came Trevarrick’s report. Then, after a long pause—“No good; it’s only a ship’s anchor!”

# CHAPTER V

## The Wreck is Located

Hardly unable to conceal his disappointment, Rob asked the diver if he could shackle the bight of the span to the anchor. Since that object was also a source of danger to fishermen's nets it was just as well to get it to the surface. Also, its salvage ought to contribute to a slight degree towards the cost of sending the diver down.

At the end of another precious three minutes—for the time available for working at that depth is necessarily strictly limited—Trevarrick reported that the wire span was secured to one of the flukes of the anchor.

"Current getting stronger," he added.

"Up you come, then," ordered Rob. "Look out for the decompression chamber."

On receiving these instructions the diver retraced his steps towards the shot-rope, guiding himself by means of his distance line. Keeping a sharp look-out, as well as his limited range of under-water vision permitted, he espied a second rope, bowed by the tide although weighted at its lowermost end.

To this he made his way. Grasping the rope he hauled himself up with very little effort until he gained the outside of the decompression chamber. Then groping for the door he flung it open.

This would have been an impossible task owing to the tremendous pressure of water, except for the fact that the compressed air within the cylinder neutralized the exterior pressure. The air, subject to several atmospheric pressures, also prevented the water rising in the decompression chamber to any appreciable height.

Awkwardly Trevarrick climbed into the cylinder. Then he waited, sitting with his legs dangling in the water, until Polglaze cast off the diver's life-line and air-tube and opened the front of his helmet.

The door was then closed and firmly secured on the inside and Polglaze gave the signal for the decompression chamber to be hauled up.

In a few minutes the cylinder was hoisted close up to the derrick and swung inboard. Trevarrick had made the ascent in a twenty-fifth of the time he would have taken had he been raised to the surface by the usual method—being hauled up a few feet and then left hanging by his life-line until, accustomed to the slightly lesser pressure, he was again raised another short distance, repeating the process until the surface was reached.

Instead of thus spending an hour or perhaps two in decided discomfort, the diver, with his attendant, was being “decompressed” on the deck of the *Gleaner*, although still in a hermetically sealed chamber. The great difference was that this process was taking place above the surface and not in the semi-darkness of the depths of the sea.

While Trevarrick and Polglaze were thus accustoming themselves to the return to normal atmospheric conditions, active steps were taken to lift the anchor which the diver had discovered.

The mark-buoy was left in position, but the ends of the wire span were brought to the “gallows” projecting from the *Gleaner*’s stern and thence to one of the stern winches.

As the strain increased, the *Gleaner*’s quarter sunk lower in the water. For some moments the result was anxiously awaited, since it was a question whether the wire might part under the tension. Realizing the danger, Captain Condor ordered all hands to stand well clear. Bitter experience had taught him what might be the result should the wire part and the inboard end, coiling like a released spring, sweep everything before it!

Suddenly the ship trembled under a violent jar. Her stern lifted quite a foot and then subsided with a smack that sent the foam flying from under her squat counter. The anchor had been broken out of the ground that had held it so firmly and for such a length of time.

After that it was an easy matter to bring the object to the surface. With the tackle chock-a-block she hung from the gallows, plain for anyone to see—a mass of rusty iron heavily encrusted with barnacles.

Obviously it had once belonged either to a first-rate man-of-war—one of the old three-deckers—or to one of the famous East Indiamen. No other vessel of that period carried an anchor of that size.

Originally it had a wooden stock, square in section and tapering towards each end; but the timber had long rotted away, leaving the arms, the shank,

and the enormous ring to which the hempen cable used to be bent—all deeply corroded after years of submergence.

“Not worth picking up,” declared Captain Condor disgustedly. “Now if ’tud been a decent stockless anchor——”

“It’s out of mischief, anyway,” rejoined Rob. “It won’t foul any more fishermen’s gear, and I dare say some museum will be glad of it.”

“Mebbe,” agreed the skipper morosely. “To us it’s useless junk not worth stowage. And we’re no nearer gettin’ tu the wreck than we were yesterday.”

“I suppose there is a wreck?” asked Rob. “I mean, I suppose there hasn’t been a mistake and the supposed wreck is only this anchor?”

Captain Condor shook his head emphatically.

“No fear!” he replied. “Fishermen on this part of the coast know what they’m saying. If they say ’tes a wreck then a wreck sure well ’tis. . . . Get that hook shifted for’ard, Mr. Brash. We’m going tu start sweeping again at once!”

Again the motor-launch and the pulling boat were lowered and the span engaged as before. It was hard and slow work for the tide was now running strongly.

For an hour the sweeping operations were continued, but without success. At the end of this time the dog-weary oarsmen were replaced by fresh men from the *Gleaner*, and the tedious task resumed.

By now Trevarrick and Polglaze were released from the decompression chamber and the diver was asked to make his report.

“There’s not much to say, sir,” he said. “’Cept for that there anchor I saw nothing. But what gets over me is the strength of the undercurrent close to the bottom. There wasn’t much of a run o’ tide down to fifteen fathom, but farther down it was runnin’ that strong that I’d all I knew how tu keep my feet.”

“How far could you see?” asked Rob.

“Twenty feet, mebbe thirty,” replied the diver. “Much like starlight it be down there; though when the sun’s more overhead I might be able to see better. If so be——”

“Mr. Wroxall!” shouted Captain Condor, “Brash has reported that the sweep’s foul o’ something big!”

“Then let’s hope it isn’t another anchor!” said Rob, as he hurried aft.

The two boats were now nearly a cable’s length astern of the *Gleaner*. So fierce was the tide that, straining on the wire rope, they had swung almost side by side. The motor-launch had stopped her engine and the men in the pulling boat were leaning forward on the thwarts in utter exhaustion. They had had forty minutes’ gruelling work under a broiling sun, and now that it looked as if their object were achieved, they were too done up to show any enthusiasm over their success.

Noting the position of the two boats, Rob did not feel very sanguine. Unless the bight of the sweep had caught either the bow or stern of the wreck they would not be almost touching each other. Otherwise, assuming the sunken vessel to be two hundred feet in length, the ends of the span would have been correspondingly spread apart.

“We’d better send either Black or White down,” he suggested.

Captain Condor shook his head.

“Patience, Mr. Wroxall, patience! We must wait till the tide slacks. A diver wouldn’t stand a chance wi’ the full ebb bearing him to lee’ard.”

“I suppose not,” admitted Rob. “But if it’s like this during neaps what will it be like when the spring tides are on?”

The Cornish skipper shrugged his shoulders with a gesture that undoubtedly indicated the presence of Spanish blood in his veins.

“Patience, Mr. Wroxall, patience!”

Rob’s direct question remained directly unanswered. What the conditions would be during springs had to be left to the imagination.

For the next three hours little could be done, although Rob took frequent compass bearings as the *Gleaner* swung to the tide, and threw chips overboard to test its strength. He made one discovery: that the direction of the tidal stream was not constant during the ebb. At three-quarters ebb it was setting obliquely from the shore—a circumstance that might be of extreme importance to subsequent operations.

At last Captain Condor expressed his opinion that the conditions were favourable, or at least possible, for another descent.

As quickly as possible White was assisted into his diving-dress and was lowered to the bed of the sea.

For nearly five minutes after he had begun to walk the length of his distance-line no report came from the diver. Bubbles were ascending to the surface, but owing to the known existence of a counter-current these gave little or no indication of the direction he was taking. Several times Rob spoke to him, but, probably on account of the hiss of escaping air, his words were inaudible.

“Something’s wrong with the telephone,” declared Rob. “White’s saying something; but I can’t distinguish the words. . . . Hello! Hello! Can you hear me?”

The diver was certainly speaking.

Suddenly his words came through clear and distinct.

“I can hear you, sir, I’ve been trying to reply. Can you hear me?”

“Yes, yes! Now I can.”

“I’ve found the wreck,” reported White. “I’m under her stern. It’s raised about seven feet above the sand.”

“Can you follow the wire span?”

“No, sir, it must be round the bows; I’ll see.”

At intervals came telephonic reports of the diver’s progress.

“It’s slow going. There’s a strong current against me. It’s stirring up the mud. . . . I reckon I’m nearly amidships. She’s lying with a list to port. . . . Plenty of silt this side.”

Then came another long pause, followed by incoherent words from the diver.

“I reckon as there’s a short in the wires, sir,” suggested Trevarrick, who, although off duty, was taking the diver’s equivalent to a busman’s holiday by remaining on deck.

A moment later the fateful message came through with startling distinctness:

“I’m foul of something,” reported White. “I’ve been trying to hack myself clear; but——”

Then an ominous silence.

# CHAPTER VI

## A Submarine Rescue

“He’s foul of something,” declared Rob, addressing the knot of men standing around. “He is afraid he cannot free himself.”

“I’ll go down, sir,” volunteered Trevarrick, knocking the ashes out of his pipe and replacing it in its case.

“Better not,” objected Rob. “You’ve had one spell to-day already. What about you, Black?”

“ ’Course I’m ready,” replied the man.

“Drat you, Bill!” exclaimed Trevarrick. “I put in for the job first, I did! ’Sides, he’s my pal!”

“An’ mine, too, look you!” declared Black. “Lawks! An’ you’re argufyin’ while he’s stuck down there. The boss said as ’ow I was to go, didn’t you, zur?”

“Yes, you go,” decided Rob firmly, knowing that only definite orders would settle the friendly yet time-wasting argument. “Get busy, Polglaze!”

The attendant held up the stiff diving-dress and assisted Black to don it. Meanwhile two more air-pumps were brought aft and connected up in order to ensure a sufficient supply to the second diver. Others of the crew prepared the decompression chamber, which, even though it could not accommodate two men in addition to the attendant, would be of material assistance in getting one of the divers to the surface.

But which one?

Rob, holding the telephone, was now a silent spectator of the preparations. At intervals he called to the trapped diver, but no message, reassuring or otherwise, came in reply.

“P’raps he can hear but can’t say anything, sir,” said Trevarrick. “Keep on tellin’ him we’re coming to his assistance. Warn him not to cut his life-

line and blow himself up.”

Rob did so, fervently hoping that his message “got through”. In a last extremity White might sever life-line and air-tube and “blow himself up”—in other words, trust to the increased buoyancy of his diving-dress under additional air pressure to bear him to the surface. This operation was fraught with danger. For one thing he might be entangled in such a manner that he would be still held a prisoner. If he did rise to the surface the sudden release of pressure would render him insensible even if it did not kill him. If found senseless the only course open would be to lower him again to the former depth and then bring him up again in the decompression chamber.

“All ready!” reported Polglaze.

Rob beckoned to Paul Denis, who had been a rather awed spectator. The apprentice was new to this side of submarine salvage work, and the thought of White’s terrible predicament had shaken the lad considerably.

“Hang on to this telephone, Denis,” said Rob. “Keep calling at about every half-minute, and watch for signals. . . . Now, Black, directly you have your helmet on we’ll test your telephone.”

The test was successful. Polglaze gave the signal and the diver went over the side on his desperate attempt at rescue.

Descending by means of his life-line and guided by his unfortunate fellow-diver’s shot-rope, Black reached the bottom in record time.

The young flood had now set in, and by a fortunate circumstance the fierce counter-current that previous divers had reported had considerably eased in strength; but the sediment thrown up by White’s boots and also by his efforts to free himself was still in suspension, thus limiting the rescuer’s range of vision to about six feet.

Black switched on the electric lamp attached to his belt, but the result was negligible. Stooping cautiously he picked up the slack of White’s distance-rope, and commenced to follow its direction.

The rope had sagged considerably. In fact one portion of it was actually under the stern of the wreck. The tip of the lowermost blade of a propeller, black but curiously free from marine growth, was almost level with Black’s helmet.

Cautiously hauling in the slack of the distance-rope, and discovering to his intense satisfaction that it had not fouled anything, the diver resumed his

way, following the submarine equivalent to the silken clue to Fair Rosamund's labyrinth.

The current was now with him. He had to lean back as he walked in order to prevent himself being thrown on his face.

Suddenly he stopped. Right ahead was what appeared to be a waving mass of seaweed. Yet his experience told him that it was not seaweed. Even in a slight current marine growth of this description trails almost flat on the ground in long undulations.

On Black's right rose the side of the wreck, covered with weeds and barnacles. Ahead rose this mysterious barrier into whose ill-defined mass White's distance-rope led. Obviously this was the entanglement that held the unfortunate diver in its clutches; and since it imprisoned White it was nearly certain to hold a similar fate in store for his would-be rescuer.

Yet, undismayed though well aware of the danger, Black did not hesitate.

Knife in hand he advanced, hacking cautiously and deliberately at the obstruction.

Then he knew.

The dark mass consisted of fathom upon fathom of trawl nets that, having fouled the wreck, had been cut away by the fishermen. Interlocked by numberless mutations of the tide, the nets had formed themselves into an entanglement so formidable that even the lion-hearted diver experienced a sensation of dismay at the thought of the fate of his comrade.

He remembered that the tide had changed. Somewhere in that congested maze of nets, and being forced farther and farther away by the terrific pressure against the barrier, was White. It seemed hardly possible that he could yet be alive. There was no sign either of his life-line or air-tube. The only clue was the distance-line, and it was quite likely that White in his struggle had allowed it to become detached.

The diver hacked away again and again. At each stroke the rolled fabric fell apart, only to be swept by the current to interlock more tightly than ever with the rest of the nets.

A tough fragment of meshed line trailed round Black's right leg. He stooped and cut it adrift. As he did so he caught a glimpse of a pale-grey line grotesquely distorted in the rays of the lamp.

He stepped back and then took two paces to his right. Grasping the object, he discovered that it was his comrade's air-tube. A little distance

from it was White's life-line.

Replacing his knife, Black stuck his heels firmly in the sand and hauled gently at the life-line. There was considerable resistance. Thanks be! White had not gone to the desperate extreme of cutting away his life-line and air-tube.

Heaving away strongly Black had the satisfaction of knowing that he was hauling his unfortunate comrade towards him. Then the rope refused to come home another inch. He was pulling against the mass of netting in which White was entombed.

This was against White's favour, but decidedly in Black's. The latter was in no immediate danger of being entangled since the trailing portions of the net were being forced away from him by the current.

By the aid of the lamp the diver examined the tangled mass at the spot where the tautened life-line disappeared. There seemed to be a bulge—something of a solid nature. Carefully he probed with his bare hand—and touched the inflated rubber dress of the man he had come to aid!

Even on the very threshold of success Black kept his head. He realized that when he used his knife to cut away the few inches of compressed netting one ill-judged sweep of the keen blade might easily slit the tough rubber and canvas fabric of White's dress.

So intent was the man upon his work that frequent inquiries on the telephone he completely ignored—not because he did not want to report progress, but simply because, in the intensity of his task, he was oblivious to everything else.

At length he paused.

"Getting at him," he reported. "Stand by to take in the slack of both sets o' gear. Is the decompressor ready? It'll be wanted tur'ble bad in a few minutes!"

Then he resumed his task, cautiously cutting through the numerous meshes and tucking the severed ends aside. His bare hand came in contact with White's greatly inflated dress. Groping, he found the other's hand, squeezed it, but received no response.

Five minutes more and the luckless diver—or was it only his corpse?—was released from his flexible and tenacious cage.

"Steady on both life-lines!" requested Black, and as the tension increased he made his way slowly along the distance-line, half supporting,

half dragging his comrade to the shot-rope.

“Decompression chamber coming down to you, Black,” announced Rob at the other end of the telephone. “How are you? How’s White?”

“I’m doing well, sir,” was the reply. “Can’t say about White. . . . Here we are at the shot-rope.”

Glad of the slight assistance afforded by the weighted rope—which should have been vertical, but was considerably bowed by the tide, Black remained supporting his unconscious comrade until a dark object a few feet above his helmet indicated that the life-saving cylinder was within reach.

Fumbling with his disengaged arm, Black succeeded in opening the air-tight door. It was out of the question for him, unaided, to lift the other diver up and guide his massive bulk through the aperture.

Fortunately Polglaze, stationed within, realized the rescuing diver’s predicament. He lowered a rope with a bow-line. This Black slipped under the shoulders of his comrade and gave the customary signal by jerking the rope for the attendant to haul up.

In water the diver’s dead-weight was very little more than that of the volume of water he displaced, but once in the highly compressed air of the cylinder, White, with his metal helmet, and with lead on his chest, back, and feet, was far too heavy for Polglaze to raise. Although the attendant was a powerfully built man that task was beyond him, and White was utterly incapable of doing the slightest thing to help himself. As the unconscious man was hanging half in, half out of the decompression chamber it was useless to attempt to lift the cylinder to the surface; for, if this were done, the compressed air would blow itself out through the open aperture, with dire results to both White and Polglaze.

But the inventors and makers of the decompression chamber had made provision for such a state of affairs.

On the inside of the domed top was an eyebolt. To this Polglaze affixed the hook of a purchase-tackle, engaging the hook of the lower block to the bow-line round the diver’s body. Then, tailing on to the running part of the tackle, the attendant hauled White into safety, cast loose his life-line and air-tube and closed the air-tight door.

Waiting patiently upon the bed of the sea, Black saw the free end of his comrade’s air-tube—ejecting a rapid flow of bubbles—swing clear from the cylinder overhead.

Then, as he watched, the decompression chamber was raised, passing beyond his range of vision.

“Ready to come up, sir!” he reported, and waited for the commencement of a tedious ascent. His immediate task was accomplished; but now came the discomfort of a painfully slow progress to the surface. He knew that an hour and a half must elapse before he would be free to breathe air at normal atmospheric pressure—Nature’s free and wonderful gift that only those who have been temporarily deprived of it can fully appreciate.

# CHAPTER VII

## The Second Span

Meanwhile on board the *Gleaner* preparations had been completed for the reception of the unconscious diver.

Blankets had been warmed, hot-water bottles filled, and oxygen held in readiness to administer to the patient. The motor-launch had been dispatched at full speed to Brixham, there to enlist the services of a doctor. She returned before the decompression chamber had been brought to the surface, and instead of one medical man three had volunteered to give their services to the gravely affected man.

At length the massive metal cylinder was hoisted clear and swung inboard. The doctors, not being in direct contact with their patient, had to communicate with Polglaze by telephone and tell him what to do until sufficient time elapsed before the decompression chamber could be opened to admit air at normal pressure.

Rob, once he knew that White was alive and that all that could be done for him was being done, centred all his attention upon the diver who was dangling from his life-line forty feet from the bottom and a hundred feet below the surface.

There were no comforts for Diver Black. Since there was only one decompression chamber—and that was in use—he had to be brought to the surface in the old-fashioned way. Suspended in almost utter darkness, affected by the numbing cold of the water, liable to be attacked by dog-fish and other ferocious denizens of the depths, he had to endure the prolonged ordeal of being hauled a few feet nearer the surface, left stationary for twenty minutes or more, and then lifted another few feet. This procedure was necessary because the molecules of air forced into his blood passages must be allowed to disappear gradually, otherwise apoplexy would inevitably result. To make matters worse, the diver himself had to be his own judge of the slow speed of his ascent. There were fixed tables giving the distances of each “lift” and the intervening periods of passive

suspension; but if in spite of adherence to this table the diver had reason to believe that decompression was too rapid, he must telephone to his attendants and get them to lower him to a greater depth again.

Rob did his best to cheer the man by maintaining a telephonic conversation with him. But the young engineer had to confess to himself that he felt anything but cheerful. Things on this, his first independent operation, had not gone well. True, the wreck had been located even though it had not been identified, and then only after one costly failure. And now one of the three divers was incapacitated. Perhaps his nerve would be gone and then he would never be able to descend again. Had it been merely a case of lost nerve the remedy would have been simple. The man would have been ordered to make another descent immediately. But White was physically incapable of so doing. As far as Messrs. Findon & Rayse, Ltd., were concerned, another diver would have to be forthcoming, and the once-skilled and daring man now imprisoned in the decompression chamber would have to be “taken on” in some other capacity, or perhaps invalided and given a pension for the rest of his life.

Rob found himself debating whether he was in any way responsible for the mishap. Theoretically, of course, he was responsible for everything in connexion with the operations, whether successful or otherwise. But had he done anything that might have caused or had he left anything undone that might have averted the accident? Ought he to have made the descent himself? He wished he had; but on that point the Company’s regulations were emphatic—“On no account must the officer in charge of salvage operation permit himself to make a descent. All diving must be performed by skilled men upon whose report the Officer-in-Charge will rely.”

“What’s the time, sir?” inquired Black.

Rob told him, adding that in another twenty minutes he would be up.

“It’s always the last half-hour that seems longest,” rejoined the diver.

All the while the coupled air-pumps were kept steadily at work, men relieving each other at regular intervals. The only indication that that task was approaching its end was the steadily receding needle of the pressure gauge.

Presently Rob felt a hand laid upon his shoulder. Removing his headphones he turned and saw Captain Condor standing close to him.

“Tide’ll be slack in a couple o’ hours, Mr. Wroxall,” he announced. “Maybe you’ll be wanting tu get the for’ard lifting hawsers in position?”

Rob stared at him.

“But I say—” he protested. “These two men?”

The Cornishman smiled.

“Black’ll be up in a few minutes,” he remarked. “An’ White’s out of the decompression room. The doctors are giving him something that fair does wonders tu him.”

“He’ll have to be taken ashore to hospital.”

“Lor’ a mussy me!” exclaimed Captain Condor. “How you do talk, Mr. Wroxall! One ’ud think White wur a babby! ’Tain’t the first time he’s been in a tight fix, not by long chalks! I’ll warrant he’ll be fit an’ willing tu go down again afore you’m a day older!”

The young engineer smiled in return. Cap’n Condor’s optimistic outlook and good spirits were infectious. Apparently he, Rob, had been making mountains out of molehills. Evidently a man of White’s physique and temperament quickly recovered from a harrowing experience such as he had just passed through, although there was no denying that the consequences might easily have proved fatal.

Black’s helmet appearing over the side, as two attendants assisted his cumbersome progress, brought Rob and the Captain to the spot.

Quickly the diver’s front helmet glass was unscrewed. The man’s face looked a bit blue and moisture was oozing from under his red woollen cap.

“Didn’t see much, sir,” he reported. “Slings are under the stern all right. Can’t get near the bows. They’re bunged up with cast-off nets, same as caught White. How is he, sir?”

“Alive, and getting on splendidly,” replied Captain Condor.

“Thanks to your bravery,” added Rob.

“’Twas naught but any o’ we chaps ’ud do,” protested the Cornishman, breathing deeply, as his attendants removed his copper helmet. “As for that wreck, sir, if you’m guided by me, you’d best drag a hawser under her bows an’ trust tu luck. ’Tain’t no use sendin’ a man down wi’ all that net driftin’ all over the place.”

“Which way is she lying, do you think?” asked Rob.

“’Tes difficult tu say, sir. Since you ax me, I should say ’er bows are in that direction “—he pointed in a direction about three miles south of Berry

Head—"an' she's broadside on tu the shore wi' a list to port."

"So White reported before he was trapped," remarked Rob.

The diver smiled.

"There be confirmation for you," he said. "I do declare if you sweep on the ebb you'll pick up the bows surely."

Renewed energy took possession of the young Assistant Engineer. Supported by such loyal and wholehearted men in his ticklish task his spirits rose.

"If you're ready, Cap'n Condor."

"I am that," responded the Captain. "We'll get the hawsers ranged and the motor-lighter alongside. Ben!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered the Chief Mate.

"Signal No. 18 alongside. We'm sweeping under the bows of the wreck."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

While Rob was waiting for the lighter to take one end of the sweep one of the doctors strolled up, smoking a cigarette.

"Your man's making quite a good recovery, captain," he announced. "He'll be almost himself by morning. My colleagues will be wanting to be put on shore very shortly, but if you haven't any objection I've a proposition to make."

"How can I have any objection, sir, if I don't know your proposition?" inquired the cautious Cornishman. "P'raps Mr. Wroxall, our engineer in charge here, will be the one to say."

"Well, it's simply this," continued the medico. "I'm not in practice in Brixham. I happen to be staying there on a brief holiday. I'm very keen on being afloat and your work interests me immensely. So what do you say to putting me up and putting up with me for a week? I can then give an eye to my patient, and be on the spot if my professional services are required. Of course I'll stand my shot!"

Captain Condor held out his horny hand.

"We'm only too pleased, sir," he replied. "As for axin' you for your victuals we sure wouldn't think o' such a thing. Of course," he added, "the

Company'll pay for the services o' you three gentlemen, won't it, Mr. Wroxall?"

"Naturally," agreed Rob, who had taken a liking to the young doctor. "And, in spite of her appearance, you'll find accommodation on board the *Gleaner* very comfortable."

"What's wrong wi' her appearance, Mr. Wroxall?" demanded Captain Condor, jealous for the reputation of his command. "As for her accommodation—you get all the advantage of a crack liner an' no flunkys hangin' around for tips."

"Then I'll be perfectly satisfied—my name's Stanniforth, by the by," replied the *Gleaner's* newly-appointed honorary surgeon. "Ah! I see my colleagues have completed their work, so if you've no objection, Captain Condor, I'll go ashore with them and pick up my sea-going kit. If you won't mind ordering the boat to wait for ten minutes that will give me ample time."

While Stanniforth was ashore the task of placing the bow-slings in position proceeded with the least possible delay. It was a race against time and tide.

A six-inch steel hawser was paid out between the *Gleaner* and No. 18 lighter, both craft manœuvring until at two cables' distance apart and well "up-stream", the centre of the span was approximately in a straight line ahead. In the wake of the six-inch wire another of four and a half inches was towed, to serve to prevent the wreck "surging" when lifted clear of the bottom.

Slowly the two craft forged ahead with the tide until a decided increase of the strain on the heavier span indicated that the wire was under some large obstruction. Both vessels then increased the number of their propeller revolutions, the *Gleaner's* engine going ahead and the lighter's motor going astern alternately.

This action had the result of see-sawing the span between what was hoped to be the bows of the wreck and the sand on which she was resting.

Rob, standing on the bridge with Captain Condor, took a rough bearing of the two mark-buoys previously laid to take the extremities of the span laid under the stern of the wreck. Judging by their position it seemed almost certain that the bow span had been hauled into position.

"I think you'm right there, Mr. Wroxall," agreed Captain Condor. "Now we're on the track, I should say."

“Then we’ll take in the slack of the pendants,” decided Rob. “That’s all we can do till next low tide, except for transferring the bow hawser to the mark-buoys. I don’t suppose the tide will be strong enough to shift the span?”

“It ’ud take Niagara to shift ’un,” declared the skipper. “Ben! do ’ee shift over! Make fast an’ cast off; then we’m done for to-night.”

There was quite a jovial supper party aft that evening. All, including the newly-joined doctor, were in high spirits; for the rescued diver having been reported as out of danger and progressing favourably, and with everything in readiness to hoist the mysterious wreck on the morrow, there was every reason to expect the success of the operation.

So with her three green lamps—the recognized sign of a wreck-raising vessel at anchor close to the scene of her work—the *Gleaner* swung to the change of the tide. On deck two look-outs kept watch, ready to give warning should any change in the weather set in during the night. Down below, sleeping soundly as the result of a day’s labour faithfully performed, the salvage party awaited the call to arise and resume the task they had set themselves to do.

# CHAPTER VIII

## The Crucial Moment

“Quarter to five, sir!”

Rob opened his eyes to find one of the *Gleaner’s* boys standing by his bunk with a cup of tea in his hand.

“Thanks, Jones; what’s it like outside?”

“Grey mornin’, sir; no wind.”

“Right!”

At the boy’s satisfactory weather report, Rob hurriedly drank his tea, slipped out of his bunk and consulted the barometer placed against the bulkhead. It showed 30·25 inches, with a tendency to rise.

Discordant clatter overhead—he had slept oblivious to that—told him that the hands were already preparing for the resumption of work. It was still three hours before dead low water, and every minute of that time would have to be taken up if the hawsers and slings were to be satisfactorily adjusted before the young flood commenced to make.

Already the crew had had breakfast. With the exception of the Chief Mate, who was directing operations on deck, the officers were able to snatch a hasty yet substantial meal before it was necessary for them to go on duty.

Even Dr. Stanniforth was up, ready to take a passive interest in the proceedings—and an active one should his services unfortunately be required.

“Slept well, Doc?” inquired Rob.

“Splendidly, thanks,” replied Stanniforth, modestly omitting to add that he had turned out three times in order to visit his patient. As a matter of fact White was still sleeping a natural sleep and the doctor had no reason to disturb him.

“Lighter alongside, sir!” announced Brash.

“Best be going on deck,” suggested Captain Condor, draining his fourth cup of tea. “We mus’ be mighty particular about getting those hawsers fixed, Mr. Wroxall.”

Rob nodded. At that hour of the morning conversation did not flow freely; but he recognized the wisdom of the skipper’s words. Success depended chiefly upon the correct adjustment of those massive wire slings, and it was very easy to err in that direction.

Already the motor-lighter was picking up her ends of the wire spans. Her “dumb” sister, now lashed alongside the *Gleaner*, was to receive the other ends of the wires, and it was the *Gleaner*’s first task to move No. 19 to the required position.

It took the best part of an hour to bring both lighters almost side by side and parallel with the wreck lying twenty-three fathoms below. The *Gleaner*’s boats then laid out anchors fore and aft of each lighter to prevent them swinging to the change of the tide.

This done, four baulks of timber, fifty feet in length and twelve inches square, were laid across the decks of both lighters and at regular distances apart, and so arranged that there was now a gap of ten feet between the two craft.

Each baulk was securely lashed to prevent it slipping, but with sufficient “play” to allow for the normal swell of the Channel sea. A number of four-inch fir planks were also woolded to the baulks, i.e. bound firmly with rope lashings, in order to give the latter additional strength and to save them from unnecessary damage from the chafe of the wire hawsers.

Before the *Gleaner* cast off and had anchored ahead of the two lighters, Rob went on board No. 19 in order to be in closer touch with the necessary preparations. Stanniforth and young Paul Denis went with him, the former because he was curious to see how the lifting operation was to be performed; the apprentice because it was part of his training to acquaint himself with the use of various appliances inseparable from marine salvage.

“We’re nearly ready now,” remarked Rob, turning to the young doctor.

Stanniforth, who hitherto had scrupulously refrained from diverting the Assistant Engineer’s attention by asking questions, took advantage of Rob’s opening.

“I suppose you’re using those winches to lift the wreck?” he inquired.

Rob smiled and shook his head.

“No fear,” he replied. “Not when we have the tide to do the work. All those winches are doing is to take in the slack of the wires while the tide is falling. Directly it is dead low water we secure the lifting hawsers to those baulks and wait for the rising tide.”

“I see, but excuse my asking; what if the weight of the submerged wreck exceeds the buoyancy of the lighters? You know the lifting capacity of the lighters, but I understand from Captain Condor that there is a considerable uncertainty about the dead-weight of the wreck.”

“I hope we’ve a good margin of safety for that,” replied Rob. “Of course if the lighters show signs of being unable to lift the wreck we’ll have to let go the hawsers and be smart about it, too!”

Stanniforth pointed to a seemingly complicated arrangement of chains securing the ends of each pair of slings.

“You’ll have a job to cast that lot adrift in a hurry,” he remarked. “Considering there’s a strain of more than a hundred tons on each wire——”

“The breaking strain is a hundred and twenty tons.”

“Well, then,” continued Stanniforth, “with this enormous strain it seems to me to be an impossible task to cast off the wire.”

“It would be,” explained Rob, “but for that steel gadget—‘slip’ we call it—with the movable arm held merely in position by that ring. Knock that ring forward and the arm flies back, releasing the links of the chain at each end.”

“I hope it won’t be necessary to give a practical demonstration,” observed the doctor.

“And I too,” agreed Rob, furtively placing his hand on the wooden bulwark.

Stanniforth was quick to notice the act.

“You’re a little superstitious, I see,” he remarked.

“Most people whose calling is connected with the sea are,” admitted Rob.

“That reminds me of an incident that happened to my father during the War,” said Stanniforth. “He was sent from his depot to take over two newly-built motor-vessels from a yard on the East Coast to navigate them to a South Coast port. The party consisted of thirteen officers and men, the number of the railway engine that took them part of the way was 13; they

left the depot on the 13th day of the month, and started the voyage on a Friday. When one of the craft was taken over it was found that she was numbered wrongly, so the figure was painted out and the correct one substituted. That's equivalent to changing a ship's name. My governor admitted that in view of these uncanny facts he was feeling a bit 'windy'."

"And what happened?" asked Rob.

"Absolutely nothing as far as he was concerned," replied Stanniforth. "Although it was in March and the equinoctial gales were about due, the passage round the Forelands and down Channel was as calm as a millpond."

"So much for superstition, then!" rejoined Rob.

"Precisely," agreed Stanniforth, and forbore to add the information that forty-eight hours after his father was demobbed the craft with the altered number blew up and was totally destroyed with the loss of one of her crew.

"Tide 'bout done, sir!" announced the Chief Mate.

Rob consulted his wrist-watch. According to the Admiralty tide-teller low water was not due for another twenty minutes. Barometric pressure and the presence of strong winds far out on the Atlantic might easily account for that.

"Very good, Mr. Brash! Bowse down and secure the inboard ends of your pendants and wires. . . . That's to save you a job, Doctor," he added in explanation. "If one of those wires carried away and swept the deck there'd be some broken bones!"

The clank of the steam-winchs ceased. The chains were brought to their respective slips and the wires to the winches cast off. Save for the lapping of the water against the bluff bows of the lighters and the gentle hiss of escaping steam, hardly a sound broke the silence.

Almost imperceptibly and noiselessly one of Nature's giant forces, that of the tide, was at work.

Presently the massive baulks commenced to creak as the strain upon the six-inch wire slings began to tell. In spite of the woolded planks the wire strops of the enormous purchase blocks began to cut into the timber.

Gradually both lighters sank lower and lower. Anxiously and silently Rob watched the load numbers painted on bows and stern, which gave a fairly accurate idea of the downward pull upon the slings.

Within an hour following the turn of the tide, the freeboard of each lighter, normally six feet, was reduced to two, and still the wreck showed no sign of “liveliness”.

A liner bound up-Channel passed a good five miles to the southward. Long after she was out of sight her swell came surging shorewards, breaking heavily over the outer lighter in its course. For some moments it seemed as if either the wire slings would carry away or the lighter be swamped by the weight of water. But after plunging violently both lighters settled down to a state of passivity, and the anxiety was for the present allayed.

Higher and higher rose the tide; lower and lower dropped the freeboard. The baulks of timber were groaning with a vengeance, while the wires creaked and moaned dismally.

Even the usually imperturbable Ben Brash looked anxious. Glancing at the Chief Mate Rob realized that there was slight consolation to be had from him.

“Think she’ll lift, Mr. Brash?” he asked.

The Cornishman shrugged his shoulders.

“ ’Twill be one way or t’other in a brace o’ shakes, Mr. Wroxall,” he replied dubiously. “I’m thinkin’ you’m better stand by tu give the order tu loose all!”

It was a critical moment in Rob Wroxall’s career. Upon him and him alone depended the giving of the fateful order. If he gave it then it meant that in spite of his carefully-worked calculations he had woefully underestimated the dead-weight of the wreck. There would be tedious and costly delays while larger lighters were being sent round from the Company’s Thames-side depot. A reprimand from Mr. Findon and possibly a recall. He, Rob, would be regarded by both the principals and the employees of the firm as a failure—a bad number—as one who, having been given his chance, had thrown it away.

If, on the other hand, he ordered “Stand fast” and the lighters were pulled under by the strain the result would be even more disastrous. Valuable gear and perhaps still more valuable lives would be lost without any compensating result whatsoever.

“Hold on: it will pan out all right!”

The words sounded clear and insistent.

Rob actually turned, expecting to find someone speaking. To his surprise there was no one standing near except Brash, and he had not a voice at all like that. The voice sounded like Stanniforth's: very much so, in fact; but the Doctor at that moment was standing on the fore-deck, roughly seventy feet away.

“Mr. Brash!”

“Sir?”

“I'm holding on. She'll lift in a minute or so!”

“Very good, sir!” rejoined the Chief Mate without visible emotion, although he felt admiration for the young engineer's plucky if foolhardy decision.

A moment later the deck quivered under Rob's feet. There was a sullen swish of agitated water. Glancing at the other lighter he saw with unbounded satisfaction that the freeboard had increased by at least a foot.

Across the intervening space of water came Captain Condor's voice booming through a megaphone:

“Well done, Mr. Wroxall; we've lifted she!”

# CHAPTER IX

## Baulked!

The mental strain passed, Rob felt strangely elated. His enthusiasm surprised even himself. He wanted to conceal it—to disguise from his companions the emotion that followed hard upon the heels of success.

For success it was. He had achieved it, with the aid of his assistants and the harnessing of the tide. And, remarkable fact, he had done so at the first attempt following the adjustment of the slings.

“We’ve got her, Mr. Wroxall,” exclaimed Brash. “There was a mort o’ suction to overcome. The sand held her that cruel! I reckon she’s a couple o’ feet above the bottom.”

“Yes,” admitted Rob, “it was the suction that nearly baulked us. I thought it was a case of having to let go everything.”

The Chief Mate stumped aft to superintend the buoying and letting go of the stern-fasts. The cable and anchor could be recovered later.

Now came another period of waiting. Until the tide was at three-quarters flood it would be a mere waste of time to attempt to tow the wreck into shallower water. He made use of the interval by ordering the hands to dinner, taking the precaution of stationing two men to watch for any untoward incident that might jeopardize the operations.

It was nearly two o’clock in the afternoon when Captain Condor hailed with the information that he was now ready to take the lighters and the suspended wreck in tow. According to calculations the latter was now seven feet clear of the bottom.

Slowly the *Gleaner* backed stern-foremost toward the unwieldy pair of lighters. A heaving line was thrown. To the end were bent two towing hawsers, one being secured to the bow of each lighter.

Then at a funeral pace the powerful tug headed shorewards.

It was a strange procession. Over a hundred feet below the lighters hung the suspended hull of the unknown vessel, see-sawing slowly in the bights of the spans, for in spite of pendants and check-lines the pendulum-like motion was decidedly pronounced.

Astern of the lighters were towed the motor-launch and two of the work-boats which for the present did not require to be hoisted.

The *Gleaner* had barely commenced towing when a motor-boat was observed to be coming towards the flotilla. She was travelling at high speed and throwing out a large bow-wave.

“Confound that craft!” exclaimed Rob. “Some inquisitive newspaper men, I suppose. If she doesn’t slow down she’ll shake us pretty badly with her swell.”

Apparently Captain Condor was of the same opinion, for he sounded a blast on the siren and, stepping to the end of the bridge, waved his right arm to indicate that the motor-boat must either slow down or sheer off.

The little craft eased down, put her helm over and ran alongside the *Gleaner*.

This much Rob noticed; but, any risk of danger from the swell being past, he paid no further attention to the motor-boat. His chief concern was the towing operations. Too fast a speed and the wreck, known to be encumbered with a huge mass of derelict nets, might easily surge and snap the wire slings.

Then—“You’re wanted, Mr. Wroxall,” announced Denis.

“What about?” demanded Rob curtly. “Don’t you see I’m very busy?”

“Of course you are,” agreed the apprentice, “but that chap insists on seeing you.”

He pointed to the side. Rob was now aware that the motor-boat had left the *Gleaner* and had made fast to the lighter. There were three men on her. Two evidently formed the crew, but the third looked like a civilian official overconscious of the dignity of his position.

“Come aboard!” invited Rob. “I’m afraid I can’t pay much attention to you at present. For any information I must refer you to Captain Condor.”

“*You* will give me the information I require,” was the astonishing rejoinder. “I am a Home Office official, and I wish to know why you have not filled in Form 445 B, reporting an accident to a diver in your employ!”

“Good gracious, man!” exclaimed Rob with pardonable indignation, “do you think I have nothing better to do than to fill in a form? As a matter of fact I’ve already done so, and I have been waiting for an opportunity to send it ashore. Also it may interest you to know that the man in question is now perfectly fit and it is quite possible that he will make another descent to-day.”

“The fact of the person involved in the accident being now in a position to——” began the official pompously. Then——

“Stand clear everybody!” yelled Brash.

The warning in some cases came too late. There was a flash of flying wire. The snake-like coil sweeping across the lighter’s deck caught the interfering individual in the small of the back, hurling him against Rob. Before the latter could grasp the man, the official cannoned off him and subsided heavily into the motor-boat alongside.

Then Rob sat down with more vigour than dignity as the wire, its force nearly expended, brought up against his sea-booted legs.

Both lighters were rolling violently. The motor-boat alongside had her gunwale badly crushed as she rolled in the violent undulations.

In a trice, filled with apprehension, Rob regained his feet. One glance told him that his fears were realized. The bow slings had parted and the wreck had again plunged to the bed of the sea.

Held by the after slings the two lighters brought up almost dead, while the *Gleaner*, unaware of the disaster, was still forging ahead.

Something had to go! With a terrific crash the towing bitts of No. 18 lighter were torn completely out of her, while the hawser between No. 19 and the *Gleaner*—a 3¼-inch flexible steel wire—parted like packthread.

“Anyone hurt?” inquired Rob loudly, for on the fore-decks of both lighters men, thrown by the flying wires, were picking themselves up in various degrees of celerity.

A few complained of slight bruises, but, fortunately, Dr. Stanniforth’s services were not required for them. It was the Home Office official whose case demanded attention.

“I reckon he’ll have to make out Form 445 B for himself,” remarked Denis with a grin.

Rob nodded, but did not commit himself to make any remark. He was sorry for the man; yet at the same time he wondered whether, if he had not butted in at a most inopportune moment, the mishap would have occurred.

Then Rob directed his attention to the state of affairs as far as the wreck was concerned. Soundings showed that she lay in what would be twenty-one and a half fathoms at low water, ordinary spring tides. That meant that in addition to being towed half a mile nearer shore she now lay in nine feet less water than formerly. This was a distinct gain, but less than had been hoped for; but on the other side of the account must be placed the fact that the slinging operations would have to be undertaken again.

Under the supervision of the Chief Mate the ends of the parted six-inch slings were brought to the capstans of each lighter. When at length the wires were hove in it was found that they had been severed at the bight, or practically at the lowermost part of the span. It might be that some jagged projection on the keel of the wreck had started the damage, for upon examination the strands showed no signs of inherent weakness.

“Them wires ’ll make a pair o’ good pendants, sir!” declared Brash. “We could do wi’ a pair, so it’s not a great loss. Are you sendin’ another wire down now, sir?”

Rob considered. The sea was calm and the tide was easing. In another hour it would be high-water.

His problem was this: should he unship the massive baulks of timber, in itself a lengthy operation, let the stern of the wreck settle on the bottom and then pass a wire span under the bows in the usual way? Or, since the stern was about nine or ten feet clear of the bottom and the bows embedded in the sand, would he be able to ship the bight of a heavy wire hawser under the wreck from aft to a position calculated to lift the bows again without disturbing the baulks of timber still rigged between the two lighters? One serious objection to the latter course was the probability that the derelict nets—a veritable death-trap—were still entangled over the bows of the sunken vessel.

“I’ll risk it!” he decided.

A request was then made to Captain Condor for Divers Black and Trevarrick to come on board the lighters with all convenient speed, bringing with them the necessary air-pumps and other gear.

Meanwhile Brash, at Rob’s direction, prepared a reel of seven-eighths flexible wire as a “pilot line”, and another span of new six-inch steel rope.

“An’ another while you’m about it, sir,” he suggested. “We can’t be too certain!”

“Do so, by all means,” agreed the young Assistant Engineer cordially.

While waiting for the gear, Rob went to see how his unwelcome visitor was progressing. Stanniforth had just finished “patching him up”, as he termed it, and the patient was looking very subdued. His air of petty officialdom had entirely disappeared.

“There’s no reason why you fellows shouldn’t take him back,” observed the doctor, addressing the two men in the motor-boat.

“Suttingly, zur,” agreed one, touching the peak of his cap. “But wot I wants to know is, wot about the damage tu my boät?”

“She is knocked about a bit,” conceded Rob. “But she can be repaired.”

“But who’s tu pay fer she?” persisted the man.

Rob shook his head.

“Ask me another,” he replied. “We didn’t invite you alongside, did we? You’d better see your passenger about that.”

Grumbling, the two men restarted the motor and headed shorewards.

“Bother the man!” exclaimed Rob. “Why did he want to butt in just at the critical moment?”

Stanniforth placed one hand on the young man’s shoulder.

“Don’t let that worry you, Wroxall. Fellows of that type simply can’t help interfering. From the moment they join the Civil Service they’re taught to believe that the more bumptious they are the more efficient they are reckoned in their superiors’ estimation. They aren’t allowed to use initiative. They’re made to be cogs in a Government machine, and private enterprises and undertakings have to suffer in consequence. Any big private concern run on these lines would go bust in a month!”

“The concern has gone bust in less than a week,” rejoined Rob, indicating the tangle of gear with which some of the hands were coping.

“But don’t get rattled about it,” cautioned Stanniforth. “The greater the difficulties surmounted the greater the triumph!”

“That’s one way of looking at it,” agreed Rob.

“The only way,” rejoined the other. “That is, if you are determined to succeed, as I think you are!”

When Trevarrick and Black were almost ready to descend, Rob explained what he wanted done.

“It’ll have to be a quick job,” he said, “because we can’t employ the decompression chamber. It is not practicable to bring the *Gleaner* alongside and we haven’t the lowering gear. Besides the cylinder will only accommodate one diver in addition to the attendant. So if you’re down for only ten minutes the period occupied in regaining the surface is correspondingly reduced.”

“We don’t mind,” declared Trevarrick. “We’ll be as quick as we know how. I take it I’m to pass the thin wire underneath the hull to my mate an’ work it as far for’ard as we can.”

“Exactly,” replied Rob. “You will almost certainly find that the stern is well above the bottom. Establish connexion and then work for’ard as far as you can; but whatever you do stand from under in case the after slings burst.”

The two divers descended almost simultaneously, Trevarrick from No. 18 lighter and Black from No. 19. Already the thin wire had been shackled to a shot-rope and one end allowed to touch the bottom.

In a few minutes a jerk on the wire announced that Trevarrick had reached the scene of the operations. He reported that he could see fairly well without having to use his lamp, and that the wreck was, as Rob had supposed, lying with the stern slightly raised and with hardly any list.

Working for’ard of the span already in position, the man thrust a long iron rod under the wreck in his companion’s direction. In order to make the rod conspicuous a large piece of white bunting was tied to its end.

Anticipating the place where the end of the rod would appear, Black grasped it and drew it towards him until he got hold of the wire secured to the other end. Then both divers made their way for’ard, one on either side of the wreck, until the wire was prevented from sliding farther on account of the keel of the sunken vessel touching the sandy bottom.

Black thereupon bent his end of the wire to his shot-rope, and both men signalled to be hoisted.

This operation took the best part of an hour, but the men eventually regained the open air without showing signs of distress.

“Anything more to report?” inquired Rob.

“No, sir. The wire’s about thirty feet from her bows as far as I could judge. She’s resting almost on her forefoot with most of her clear of the bottom.”

“Did you see any signs of bilge keels?” asked the director of operations. “We don’t want the slings to chafe against those.”

“Never saw no bilge keels,” declared the diver. “Mebbe they’m torn away. She’s in a pretty mess. Funnel, masts, an’ top-hamper swept clear.”

“You went over the deck then?”

“No fear,” replied Trevarrick. “Her guard-rails were all adrift, and there was quite a strong current a-setting athwartships. I didn’t want my gear caught when there was no need.”

“Quite,” agreed Rob, who by this time had a very wholesome respect for the erratic undercurrents on the bed of the sea. “There will be plenty of opportunity to examine the wreck when we’ve got her in shallow water. All ready, Mr. Brash? Good! Let them heave away, but keep a man on the reel to see that the wire doesn’t pay out too rapidly.”

Directly the thin wire was brought to the deck of one lighter, two six and a half inch wires were bent to the end remaining on board the second lighter. These were then lowered under the wreck and brought up to the surface on the other side. The pair of heavy wires were then separated until it was calculated that the bights of the spans were between thirty and forty feet apart.

“We’ve got her now, right enough!” declared Mr. Brash.

“I think so,” replied Rob. “Spell-ho for all hands! Thank goodness the sea’s calm and the glass still steady. There’s nothing more to be done till close on low water, so you’d better see that the men get a meal and a few hours’ rest.”

While there was work to be done Rob had stuck to it, oblivious of fatigue. Now that the inevitable period of inaction was beginning he felt absolutely dead beat. No doubt the men were feeling much the same, although long and irregular hours are the rule rather than the exception in submarine salvage work. Much of their labour depends upon the tides, and the tides know not Trade Union hours. Wherever practicable the men work in shifts; but there are occasions when prolonged, single-shift operations are necessary, with the compensating benefit of double pay. In Rob’s case he,

being a salaried official, would receive no monetary recognition of the extra hours he worked, even if, as he would have to do, he was on duty twenty hours of the twenty-four. In the event of a successful termination of the operations he would probably be congratulated by the directors and then put on to another job of greater magnitude!

Like most masters and officers in the Mercantile Marine, he held no fixed tenure of office. His appointment was at the pleasure of his employers. He was entitled to a salary with an annual increase provided he carried out his duties successfully. For failure, even not due to his own fault, he was liable to be dismissed at a month's notice without right of appeal.

Many a man similarly situated would tend to adopt the policy of "safety first" as far as he, personally, was concerned. But Rob was cast in a different mould. Although cautious in as far as he was responsible for the lives of others under his orders, he was ready to run risks on the chance of achieving success. His action in laying out the new slings in an unorthodox manner was a case in point, and events would shortly prove whether the risk was justified.

Dog-tired, Rob returned to the *Gleaner*, snatched a hasty meal, and then threw himself "all standing", except for sea-boots, on his bunk. In a few minutes he was oblivious to everybody and everything, and remained so until he was aroused by Mr. Brash shaking him by the shoulder.

"Quarter tu one, Mr. Wroxall, an' 'tes a calm night. Tide be almost done, I allow!"

# CHAPTER X

## A Dash for Shelter

Feeling like nothing on earth—to use his own expression—Rob rolled out of his bunk, switched on the light, bent and retrieved his sea-boots.

It is about this hour that human vitality is said to be at its lowest. In Rob's case it was sheer tiredness; for when not utterly fatigued he was able to awake at any hour of the night and tackle whatever task he had to perform with vigour of body and brain.

“Right-o, Mr. Brash!” he replied. “Everything ready?”

“Sure, sir; an' t'boat's waitin' alongside. Best mind how you do tread; it's rale slippery on deck.”

The warning was a timely one, for the *Gleaner's* planks were glistening with heavy dew.

Coming straight from the lighted cabin, it was some moments before Rob's eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, for, although there were arc lamps overhead the bridge, funnel and other top-hammer cast deep shadows upon the deck.

The Chief Mate gripped him by the arm. The discerning Cornishman was well aware of the conditions of the night.

“You'll be all right in a minute, Mr. Wroxall,” he said. “Go easy-like. Steady! Here's the boat!”

Rob brought up at the edge of the gap in the bulwarks. Eight feet below and rising and falling to the slight Channel swell was one of the *Gleaner's* boats waiting to tranship him to the lighter. Someone in the stern-sheets was holding a lantern, shading it with one hand lest the glare should dazzle anyone getting into the boat.

Face to the rope ladder Rob descended until his foot touched the gunwale of the boat as it rose in the swell. Then, watching his opportunity, he dropped agilely upon the stern grating.

“Hello, Doctor!” he exclaimed, recognizing the man with the lantern. “You out too? You ought to be between the blankets, my dear sir!”

Stanniforth laughed.

“Turning out at all hours of the night is part of my job,” he rejoined. “I am also too interested in this work to miss more than I can possibly help. And—” he added to himself—“I must keep a watchful eye on you, young man; you’re setting the pace too strongly.”

“It’s a decent night, anyway,” observed Rob. “It might have been raining cats and dogs.”

“In which case I think I would firmly decline to appear,” added the Doctor.

It did not take long to pull across to the nearer of the two lighters. They presented a weird spectacle. Powerful electric lamps flooded the decks with dazzling light and played upon the twin columns of steam rising almost perpendicularly in the still night air. The door of one of the furnaces was open and the ruddy glare beating upon the men standing by gave them the appearance of pantomime demons. By way of contrast several of the crew were silhouetted against the green light of the three wreck-marking lamps, hoisted to warn passing shipping of the presence of a temporary, uncharted danger to navigation.

“We’ve taken in the slack, sir, against your coming,” reported the foreman. “Shall we secure?”

In a glance Rob noticed that the vessels comprising the salvage fleet were swinging to the change of tide.

“Yes, please,” he replied. “How much wire have you taken in?”

“Four fathom fore and aft, sir.”

“Good!”

The information was of a particularly cheering nature. It meant that at low tide the wreck had settled on the bottom in shallower water, so that, in addition to taking in slack of the newly-positioned slings, it had been possible materially to reduce the length of the original wire. Consequently at the next high tide a clear lift of from ten to twelve feet could be expected.

Another period of tedious inactivity followed. The tide was invisibly doing the work. All Rob and his assistants and hands could do was to stand by until nearly high water, when the wreck was to be moved nearer in-shore.

The slings held, even though the ground-swell became more noticeable as the hours sped.

When dawn appeared the sky was of a vivid reddish hue. The temperature, too, had fallen since midnight.

“Weather’s workin’, sir,” remarked Brash. “It du look as if we’m in for something.”

“’Fraid so,” agreed Rob. “How’s the glass? Mine was steady at one this morning.”

The Chief Mate stumped off to a small cabin aft. Presently he returned with the information that the barometer there had dropped six-tenths.

“Best see what the Old Man has tu say,” he suggested.

Rob glanced in the direction of the anchored *Gleaner*. In all probability Captain Condor was sleeping the sleep of the just. Unless urgently wanted there was no reason why he should not be so doing.

But even as he looked, Captain Condor appeared on the bridge.

“Lighter ahoy!” he hailed.

“Ay, ay, sir,” answered Mr. Brash.

“We’m just this minute got a wireless gale warning,” announced the captain. “Southerly gale all coasts, Galway tu Dungeness, veerin’ later. We’d best slip everythin’ an’ make for Dartmouth till it’s over.”

Rob snatched up a megaphone.

“It’s for you to say, captain,” he replied. “The wreck’s six feet or more clear of the bottom. Can we risk towing her farther in before letting her go?”

“That’s for you tu say,” answered Captain Condor in terms of contradiction. “We’ll get a hawser passed tu you in less’n a quarter of an hour. How long will it take you tu slip an’ then unreeve the baulks?”

“An hour,” declared Rob. “Think there’ll be time?”

“I du reckon the storm won’t be here yet awhile,” hazarded the *Gleaner*’s skipper. “Once I’ve got the dumb lighter in tow I don’t worry over much about that. ’Tis the baulks that give me concern.”

“Right!” decided Rob. “Get a hawser out as quickly as you can, please.”

“What does all that mean?” inquired Dr. Stanniforth.

“Simply this,” explained Rob. “The two lighters are connected by these heavy timber logs which also take the wires supporting the wreck, as you know. Now the situation is this: there’s a storm approaching. Ought I to let the wreck down to the bottom again, unship and stow the baulks, and have the lighters taken into Dartmouth without the least possible delay? Or should I risk retaining the advantage already gained and have the wreck towed shorewards until she grounds, before making for harbour? I’ve chosen the latter alternative.”

“Then jolly good luck to you!” exclaimed Stanniforth.

Captain Condor was as good as his word, for in exactly fourteen minutes both lighters were in tow and were moving shorewards at about one knot.

Thirty minutes later the wreck grounded in nineteen fathoms with Berry Head bearing  $292^{\circ}$ , distant two miles. Although the distance made good was considerably less than it would have been had it been possible to wait till high water, the wreck was appreciably closer in-shore. That was something well worth while; but now came the task of getting all shipshape and making the dash for harbour before the storm broke.

There was no time to lose. During the last twenty minutes indigo-coloured clouds fringed with ragged wisps of a lighter hue were appearing above the horizon. The swell, too, was increasing and already the white water was lashing the East Cod Rock and the steep cliffs in the vicinity of Berry Head.

The hands worked at high pressure, yet it was a case of methodical operation. The ends of all the wire slings had to be buoyed before letting go, otherwise when the lighters returned to the scene divers would have to descend to recover the cast-off wires. Then both lighters were allowed to drift well clear of the wreck before letting go anchor.

Now came the dangerous job of unlashng the massive baulks and stowing them on deck—a task complicated by reason of the swell. But until this was done the lighters were locked in an embrace that was hazardous to both.

Still there was no wind. The surface of the sea outside the line of surf was unbroken save for the swirling on the tide rips. But for the distant but rapidly approaching clouds and the still falling barometer there was nothing to indicate the coming gale.

At length the last of the baulks was hoisted inboard. No. 18 motor-lighter, now free from her consort, instantly got under way, while No. 19

waited only till the *Gleaner* had her in tow before slipping her buoyed cable.

Hardly had she gathered way when a sudden and heavy squall swept down. Unballasted and with a generous amount of freeboard, the lighter sagged to lee'ard like a bladder until with a vicious jerk the stout hawser took up the strain.

Rob had remained on the lighter in order to superintend the operation of casting off the wreck. By the time this had been done there was no chance of going on board the *Gleaner*, without serious loss of precious minutes. Consequently he, with Dr. Stanniforth, was forced to endure the discomforts of the rolling, hard-pressed No. 19.

From the latest position of the wreck to the Mewstone, at the entrance to Dartmouth Harbour, was six and a half sea miles. The wind, as is often the case in a summer's gale, had quickly piped up to forty miles an hour and it was still increasing. It was almost a "nose-ender" as far as the *Gleaner* and her consorts were concerned, and in addition there was a strong flood tide to contend with.

Sheltering in the wake of the helmsman's canvas screen and dodgers, Rob found himself wondering why Captain Condor had elected to make for Dartmouth instead of taking advantage of the tide and running for Brixham, which was only a third of the distance to the former harbour.

Actually it was no concern of Rob's. The responsibility of the choice rested entirely with the skipper of the *Gleaner*. The former was neither a seaman nor a navigator: Captain Condor was both.

Rob had yet to learn that under certain circumstances it was better to make for a port to wind'ard than one under the lee. The Captain had chosen Dartmouth in preference to Brixham on account of the former having a wider and deeper entrance than the artificial harbour inside Berry Head. Had he made for the latter there was the risk of having to manœuvre between a number of trawlers, and, hampered as he was by having the lighter in tow, Captain Condor had made a wise choice.

Yet it was tedious work—a struggle against the elements every foot of the distance. Huge seas swept over the *Gleaner's* plunging bows and poured across the lighter's decks from stem to stern. The latter rolled like a barrel and steered like a dray, bringing up with disconcerting jerks every time the towing hawser took up the strain.

The motor-lighter, too, was making heavy weather of it. Frequently she was hidden from sight by clouds of flying spindrift; yet she was battling her

way slowly yet surely towards her harbour of refuge.

“Another hour and we’ll be in, Doc!” bawled Rob in Stanniforth’s ear, for the Doctor was obviously feeling anxious at his first experience of being afloat in a gale of wind.

“Glad to hear it,” rejoined Stanniforth. “But it seems to me that there is a strange sense of insecurity in being towed in a sea like this. The jerky motion, the absence of mechanical sounds and all that, you know!”

“There’ll be a stronger sense of insecurity if the hawser parts,” remarked Rob grimly. “With a rocky lee shore a mile or so away we wouldn’t stand much chance. But don’t worry. That hawser’s some hawser, I can tell you, and the *Gleaner* could tow a battleship!”

Reassured, Stanniforth produced his pipe, proceeded to fill and light it. After a few puffs he gave up the attempt and contented himself by gazing at the expanse of foam-lashed reddish cliffs.

“Hello!” he exclaimed, “what are we doing? We are pointing out to sea!”

“Condor’s giving those outlying rocks a wider berth,” explained Rob. “We’re nearly there. You’d better hang on hard. We’ll be broadside on in a minute or so, and then we’ll roll, I give you my word!”

“Didn’t think it possible for this packet to roll more than she has been doing,” rejoined the young doctor.

Rob expected a “dusting”, but the ordeal proved to be worse than he had looked for.

As the *Gleaner* and her tow turned to make the harbour entrance vicious seas poured over the lighter’s port side—not merely foam, but solid green water. One of the massive baulks, in spite of having been secured by chains, was lifted quite a foot from the deck, descending with tremendous force as the wave swept onwards. Almost at the same time Stanniforth was swept off his feet. Fortunately he managed to retain his hold of a stanchion, but the teak grating on which he had been standing was swept overboard.

For perhaps thirty seconds—it seemed very much longer—the deck of the lighter from the after coaming of the hatch to for’ard was buried in hissing, frothing water. Then, looking more like a half-tide rock than a vessel built by men’s hands, the lighter, rolling terrifically, emerged from the welter of storm-torn seas.

The struggle was of short duration, for the flood tide setting into the harbour and the now following wind quickly brought the *Gleaner* and her

charge abreast St. Petrox and Dartmouth Castle.

Rob gave another glance astern. To his relief he saw that No. 18 had also rounded the Mewstone and was practically within shelter.

Once more he had taken risks and Fortune had favoured him.

# CHAPTER XI

## Merely an Interlude

The towing hawser was cast off and the *Gleaner* and No. 19 both dropped anchor on the Kingsweir side of the harbour.

Rob waited only until the motor-lighter also dropped her hook, then, accompanied by Dr. Stanniforth, he was ferried across to the *Gleaner*.

“We’re just in time, Mr. Wroxall,” was Captain Condor’s greeting. “It’s blawin’ tur’ble hard outside. But I’m rale glad we hung on tu get the wreck farther in-shore. Now get a good meal, both of you. You must be proper famished. ’Tis all ready!”

There was steaming coffee, eggs and bacon, and freshly-baked bread brought off from the shore. But Rob, although he was hungry, had no appetite. He drank three cups of coffee, but pushed his plate aside.

“You’m not going tu eat that?” asked Captain Condor reproachfully, pointing to the heavily-laden plate.

“I feel too jolly tired,” replied Rob. “The sooner I write my report to head office and get to my bunk the better I’ll be pleased.”

At that Doctor Stanniforth, who had been furtively keeping an eye on the Assistant Engineer-in-Charge, thought it was quite about time he butted in.

“Look here, Wroxall!” he exclaimed. “Let the report go hang until you’ve made up arrears of sleep. You’d probably fall asleep as you try to write it, and then there would be a few errors! As a medical man and practically the ship’s doctor, I forbid you to tackle that report until you’ve slept the clock round. The responsibility is mine!”

“That’s right, Doctor!” agreed Captain Condor. “Do ’ee make him go tu his bunk! A man that cannot eat good victuals is in a bad way!”

Greatly to Stanniforth’s relief, for he quite expected him to be obstinately rebellious, Rob capitulated.

He went to his cabin, undressed and turned in. In spite of the coffee he had drunk, notwithstanding the howling of the wind and the rattle of torrential rain, he quickly fell into a sound, dreamless sleep.

Ten hours later he awoke feeling refreshed and ravenously hungry. The storm had blown itself out, and Dartmouth Harbour was bathed in brilliant sunshine.

After a bath and shave Rob dressed and went on deck. Captain Condor was smoking a pipe and reading a newspaper. Seeing Rob approach he folded the paper and came towards him.

“You’re looking your old self, Mr. Wroxall,” he exclaimed. “After a good square meal you’ll be ready to write that report, I know!”

“Yes, but shouldn’t we be getting under way again?” asked Rob.

“Mr. Wroxall, when you’ve written that report you’ll doubtless take it ashore to post. While you’re there have a short walk to St. Petrox and look seaward.”

It was a delicately administered rebuke. Rob realized that the state of the sea out in the English Channel must be very different from that of the land-locked water of Dartmouth Harbour. Although the gale had abated there was still a heavy breaking sea outside. In fact, the roar of the breakers on the Verticals and other outlying rocks could be distinctly heard on board the *Gleaner*.

So he went below, ate a hearty breakfast, and spent two hours composing his report to Messrs. Findon & Rayse, Ltd.

“It’s something to be able to say that we’ve made fair progress,” he thought. “But it was a bit of a risk hanging on till the last minute. I’m glad I did, though!”

Acting upon Captain Condor’s suggestion, Rob walked out to the point beyond St. Petrox Church, and there the scene that met his eyes removed all doubt as to the chance of resuming operations.

It was a wicked sea. Long rollers, extending miles from shore, came tumbling in, lashing themselves in fury against the iron-bound coast. Two miles or so away a “three-island” tramp bound down Channel was shipping it green, as tons of water poured over her well deck and spray flew high over her bridge. Clearly, although there was very little wind, the state of the sea was such that the two lighters would roll gunwale under if they attempted to proceed to the wreck. It would be impossible to place in position the baulks

of timber, essential to the lifting operations, until conditions improved considerably.

So, after spending an interesting couple of hours in exploring the weather-worn Dartmouth Castle and the adjoining Church of St. Petrox, Rob returned on board to wait for the time when the experienced Captain Condor could give the order for the flotilla to put to sea again.

Stanniforth, who asked to remain on board, protesting that a holiday ashore after being afloat was a holiday wasted, suggested to Rob that fishing would be an admirable way of whiling away the time. Rob pointed out that after fishing for objects of several hundred tons' displacement lowering baited hooks into the water was too jolly tame for anything, and proposed a trip in the motor-launch.

This suggestion was acted upon, and the two chums—for thus they were by this time—had a pleasant and not altogether uneventful run up the Dart as far as Totnes.

On the homeward run—they had the ebb tide with them—they were hailed by a party on a sailing yacht that had got aground (if such a term could be applied to soft mud) just above the village of Dittisham.

“Can you tow us off, please?” inquired an immaculately flannelled youth of about twenty, who with another fellow of about the same age and two rather jolly-looking girls comprised the complement of the craft—a five-tonner without auxiliary power.

“We jolly well ought to,” remarked Rob to the doctor. “A salvage job like this is a mere bagatelle. Will you stand by to take their rope while I back in as close as we dare? With the tide running like this we'll have to be careful.”

“Right,” agreed Stanniforth.

Rob hailed the yacht.

“Heave us a line,” he shouted. “A stout one. We daren't come alongside.”

The be-flannelled youth held up a coil of almost new manila. Balancing himself on the already inclined counter, he waited until Rob went astern and the launch got within ten yards of the yacht.

“Now heave!” exclaimed Stanniforth.

The youth did so and nearly overbalanced himself in the effort. The rope fell wide, and although the doctor made a grasp at it with a boathook it drifted out of reach.

Gingerly the yachtsman gathered in the rope, transferring mud and slime to his clothes, much to his obvious disgust.

At the next attempt Stanniforth caught the rope and proceeded to bend it to one of the two towing-posts in the launch's quarter.

"Are you all fast?" he inquired.

The yachtsman signified that he had made his end secure.

"Then stand clear!" cautioned the doctor, and motioned to Rob to "Go ahead!"

In their previous efforts to extricate the yacht from her muddy berth the crew had lowered and stowed the mainsail and had rolled up the headsails. They had been pushing with the sweeps with no other result than bedaubing everything, including themselves, with mud. The girls had certainly given a hand, judging by the slimy stains on their dresses, but—and this was a circumstance that gave Stanniforth occasion to wonder—their faces bore not the slightest trace of mud.

Rob had no chance to note these details. His whole attention was directed to his part of the operation—to keep the motor throttled down until it was time to go ahead, and to hold the launch's bows diagonally up stream in order to counteract the ebb tide.

Receiving Stanniforth's signal, Rob gave the engine more throttle and let in the clutch very gently. Nevertheless the launch gathered way fairly rapidly under the action of her propeller, driven by a twenty-horsepower engine.

The tow-rope tautened. Stanniforth yelled to the yachtsman nearest the helm to hold the tiller amidships, lest in going astern the rudder might be swung hard over owing to the resistance of the mud. In that case the rudder would act as a most efficient brake or it might snap under the strain.

But nothing of the sort happened. What did happen surprised not only the crew of the yacht but their would-be helpers in the motor-launch.

First there was a terrific crash as the boom-crutches smashed. Down came the boom, gaff, and furled mainsail, narrowly missing the two male yachtsmen in their descent. In fact, one of the men, darting backwards to avoid the blow, subsided over the cockpit coaming and disappeared in a foot

or so of water overlying the mud. In a trice he regained the yacht, looking a very forlorn object.

“Stop her!” yelled Stanniforth. “Go astern!”

Before Rob could do so the mischief went still farther. The tautened topping-lift whipped the mast backward until the forestay parted with a twang like that of a bow-string. The mast snapped off short just above the hounds, falling on deck together with a raffle of blocks and ropes.

The yacht never stirred an inch!

As in the case of most mishaps the cause was not realized before it was too late.

The inexperienced yachtsman had given Stanniforth the free end of the main-sheet. Consequently there was the power of a 20-h.p. engine transmitted through and increased by the mechanical advantage of one double and one single block comprising the main-sheet purchase.

Something had had to go and it had gone!

“Bunglers!” exclaimed Rob under his breath. “I expect they’ll blame us for that! Ask them if they haven’t a good warp on board. We can’t let them stay here till four in the morning! Tell them to look sharp. The tide’s taking off very quickly!”

Roused to action by Stanniforth’s insistence, the crew produced a three-inch warp which was passed to the launch by means of a light line. Under Rob’s direction the warp was made fast to the mast just below the gooseneck and “stopped” to the horse—the iron on which the lower main-sheet block travels—in order that the pull would be dead aft.

Once more the launch went ahead. For some seconds little happened. More and more throttle was given to the motor.

“Get for’ard!” shouted Rob. “Get for’ard and roll her!”

Fortunately the crew of the stranded yacht understood. The two girls and one of the youths made their way to the fore-deck, leaving the remaining member of the party—the one who had tumbled overboard—to keep the tiller amidships.

The alteration of trim and the swaying motion set up by the crew turned the scale. The yacht began to move, gathering way as she slid through the mud, and presently she was afloat once more.

“Sorry your gear carried away,” said Rob.

“My silly fault, I’m afraid,” replied the cause of the mishap generously. “You see, we don’t know very much about yachting. I suppose there’s someone who can repair the damage?”

“It’ll mean a new mast,” declared Rob.

The faces of all the crew lengthened.

After a while the actual facts came out. They had chartered the yacht at Torquay for a month. The cruise was due to end on the following Saturday—three days hence. Although they had had to take out an insurance policy, one of the clauses was to the effect that the charterers had to pay the first ten pounds of every claim. They were by no means wealthy and the holiday had only been made possible by the result of careful saving. Also, they had been cautioned against taking the yacht, which drew four feet six inches, up the Dart above Dittisham. To make matters worse they had lost the dinghy, and it was while attempting to pick the truant up that they found themselves fast on the mud.

“The only experience my brother and I have had in sailing was on the Broads,” volunteered one of the young men. “These”—with a vague gesture—“are our sisters. They know as much about this sort of game as we do!”

At this interesting information the young doctor gently nudged his companion.

“We’d better tow you down to Dartmouth,” suggested Rob. “Even though the tide is with you you won’t be able to do much with your gear smashed aloft.”

“Will the cost be much for a tow?” asked one of the youths.

“Not a cent, of course: why?” rejoined Rob. “Oh, *that*: that’s the name of the firm I belong to—a salvage company, but they wouldn’t think of receiving payment for a little thing like this. It’s merely what any decent fellow would do; only we’re awfully sorry there was a bit of a mess up.”

Stanniforth had another mild surprise when Rob announced his intention of lashing the launch alongside the yacht instead of towing her from ahead.

“Absolutely the best way,” explained Rob artlessly. “You see, if we have to go astern the yacht would overrun us if we were towing her. Lashed alongside we can check her way easily, although she’s a lump of a craft. Besides, they can do the steering.”

The facts were as Rob had stated; but in this own mind the young doctor was firmly convinced that the mode of towing had been adopted solely

because it afforded a means of conversation with the yacht's crew and the fair members of her complement in particular!

In this way they proceeded downstream without further mishap, overtaking the derelict dinghy about a mile lower down the river. By a slice of good luck the boat had kept practically to mid-stream and she was recovered and towed astern without difficulty.

Then Rob, who believed in the proverb that what is worth doing at all is worth doing well, suggested taking the yacht alongside the *Gleaner*.

"I think we can fix you up with a new spar," he declared.

Captain Condor received the party warmly, and invited the amateur yachting crew to tea.

"Worse things happen at sea than losing a stick," he observed. "We'll make that all right for 'ee. Ben!" he shouted, addressing the Chief Mate. "Do 'ee look down in th' hold. I reckon there's a lil' spar, thirty feet may be 'tes. Get 'en on deck an' let's have a look."

Mr. Brash descended into the hold, and with the assistance of one of the crew brought it on deck.

Taking Captain Condor aside Rob called his attention to the fact that the spar was the Company's property, but that he would pay for it.

"Certainly, Mr. Wroxall, certainly!" agreed the conscientious Cornishman. "I reckon as if fifteen shillin's a fair price for that lil' spar. As for fittin' she, I've done a bit o' spar-makin' in my young days. After we've been tu tea if you'll gi' a hand we'll soon have she shipshape."

The Captain was as good as his word, and after the meal he set to work to smooth and shape the spar. While he was doing this Rob and the two yachtsmen unstepped the broken mast and stripped it of all its metal-work.

Well before sunset the new mast was completed and placed in position. The standing and running rigging was fitted, and except for the bareness of the wood, there was nothing to indicate that the yacht had been remasted.

"'T'es too late to slap on a coat o' varnish tu-day," observed Captain Condor, wiping his blistered hands upon a piece of waste. "I'll allow that mast looks nohow wi'out varnish. Maybe if you'm anchoring nigh-about's we'll give it a lil' coat in t'morning. Come a fine, sunshiny day 'twill be bone hard afore noon."

At slack water the yacht cast off from alongside the *Gleaner* and was swept to a berth close by on the Kingsweir side.

Next morning, as soon as the dew had dried off the decks, Rob and the young doctor rowed across to the yacht, where the former went aloft in a bosun's chair and gave the mast the necessary coat of varnish.

That, apparently, ended the episode as far as Rob was concerned. It was merely an incident, but the merest incidents sometimes lead up to bigger things. Not that Rob gave any serious thought to that. It had been an occasion on which he was able to help others in difficulties, and with his customary thoroughness he had seen the business properly completed.

Two hours later, the sea in the Channel having subsided, the *Gleaner* and the two lighters again proceeded to the scene of their operations.

## CHAPTER XII

### Unwelcome Supervision

The *Gleaner* arrived at the wreck just as the westward Channel stream was beginning, or two and a half hours before low water by the shore. This gave the salvage party sufficient time to retrieve the mark-bouys, place the two lighters in position, and rig up the baulks and slings before the rising tide came to their aid.

The air was still and the temperature high. The sun shone in an unclouded sky while the surface of the sea was unruffled. It was ideal weather for the job, but it had other results.

News of the successful lifting of the wreck had reached the seaside towns of Torquay, Paignton, Brixham, and Dartmouth, and astute motor-boat and other pleasure craft proprietors had advertised trips to the scene of the operations. Rowing-boats, too, were eagerly hired. The result was that the salvage flotilla was surrounded by a fleet of small fry crowded with people who apparently expected the wreck to appear in full view.

Eagerly the crowd watched the adjustment of the wire spans. Then the apparent inactivity on the part of the salvors puzzled them. They could not understand that it was the rising tide that was doing the lifting part of the business, and at the best the wreck would be raised only a matter of ten or twelve feet on one tide. They expected to see divers being sent down, to hear the chatter of powerful winches, and then to have the enthralling spectacle of the mysterious wreck appearing above the surface.

In vain the trippers appealed to the men in charge of the pleasure craft for information. All they had in reply was an assertion that if they waited a little longer (and of course paid more for the hire of their craft) their curiosity would be amply satisfied.

Taking a mild interest in the “gallery”, Rob and his assistants “hung on to the slack”, waiting until the tide had made sufficiently to enable the wreck to be towed closer in-shore. Beyond taking occasional soundings there was

little else to be done except to refuse firmly but courteously numerous requests from spectators to be allowed to come on board and watch the operations at close quarters.

After three hours of more or less patient waiting, one of the trippers—a fellow wearing a black morning coat, soiled white waistcoat, grey flannel trousers and brown shoes, and sporting an imitation Panama—tried to be funny.

“’Ere, you blokes!” he shouted in stentorian tones. “When are you goin’ ter get a move on? I reckon a Trade Union plumber ’ud give you a week’s start an’ win by a dozen lengths!”

Without a second’s hesitation one of the salvage workmen rejoined:

“Pity he hadn’t spent that week putting your bathroom taps in order, old son!”

Roars of laughter followed this sally, to the complete discomfiture of the unwashed heckler.

This served to keep the spectators in good humour for some time. Then they became restive, asserting, rightly enough, that they had been lured to the scene under false pretences.

“When will the wreck be seen?” inquired someone.

“We’ve taken ten days to shift it less than a mile,” replied Rob. “So with reasonable luck it should be high and dry at the end of next month! I can assure you that there is nothing to be gained by waiting, and you are hindering the operations. As for the wreck, although divers have been down, we have no definite knowledge of what she is. I’m sorry to have to disappoint you, but these are the true facts of the case!”

This statement had the effect of dispersing the hampering throng of boats, and at an hour before high water the *Gleaner* took the lighters and the suspended but invisible wreck closer in-shore.

While the operation was in progress the yacht that Rob and his comrades had befriended passed, bound to the east’ard. Her crew waved vigorously to the *Gleaner* and her consorts, and shouted wishes for the success of the operations, to which the salvage party replied by a rousing cheer.

When the wreck touched bottom just before high water soundings showed that she had been lifted vertically by the tide to a height of eleven feet and brought eight hundred yards nearer the shore.

“At that rate it won’t be long before we have her high and dry,” declared Rob, well pleased with the day’s work. “Provided the weather holds and the wind keeps out of the east’ard, of course.”

“Where are you taking the wreck to?” asked Stanniforth. “Not Brixham, I believe.”

“No; Elbury Cove,” replied Rob. “It has a clean sandy bottom, although open to easterly and southerly winds. If it blows hard from either of those directions when the wreck is lying there I’m afraid there won’t be much of her left.”

“You’ll have carried out the contract.”

“Yes, as far as the Admiralty is concerned; but we’ll lose our chance of making anything out of the metal.”

“Tell me,” continued the young doctor. “How is it that the contract was made between your firm and the Admiralty? I thought that the removal of wrecks that are a danger to navigation concerns the Board of Trade?”

Rob shook his head.

“I don’t know,” he replied, “unless——”

The sentence remained unfinished.

“And you don’t even know what’s below us?” continued Stanniforth.

“I don’t,” agreed Rob. “Directly we’re in shallow water I mean to go down myself.”

“I thought you weren’t allowed to do so.”

“As Assistant Engineer in Charge of Operations—no,” agreed Rob. “But Wyatt is coming down from Scarborough to have a look round—he’s senior to me and that gives me the chance I’ve been wanting to take.”

“Wish I could make a descent,” remarked Stanniforth wistfully.

“Sorry, it can’t be done,” declared his companion. “Believe me, you aren’t the first by any means who has asked us to let him try a little amateur diving.”

“I see,” rejoined the doctor resignedly. “But I hope you’ll get the wreck exposed to view before I have to go home. When’s Wyatt coming down?”

“As soon as I am able to report that the wreck is lying in ten fathoms,” replied Rob. “Probably about next Wednesday, provided there isn’t a serious

hitch.”

Fortunately the weather conditions remained favourable and there was no untoward occurrence to delay operations.

The *Gleaner* and the lighters were able to remain at the scene of operations, and twice in every twenty-four hours the wreck was lifted and taken closer in-shore.

On the Tuesday morning she was inside an imaginary line joining Berry Head and Hope’s Nose and consequently within the limits of Tor Bay. At low water soundings gave nine and a half fathoms.

For the first time for nine days Rob went ashore, and telegraphed the reassuring news to Messrs. Findon & Rayse. Within forty minutes came their reply to the effect that Mr. Wyatt was being ordered to proceed from Scarborough to Brixham without delay.

The news did not give Rob unbounded satisfaction. The mere fact that the principals were sending a Senior Engineer to report upon the work which Rob had supervised from its inception and had carried out within measurable distance of success tended to “rub him up the wrong way”. From what he had heard and seen of Wyatt he had formed the opinion that the man was fussy and apt to be domineering. He had a decided tendency to find fault and could be cuttingly sarcastic in his remarks to his subordinates.

“If Findon was coming down as he promised, I wouldn’t mind,” thought Rob. “He’s a bit of a rough diamond, but he’s genuine. What he says he means and he doesn’t beat about the bush.”

At eleven o’clock on Wednesday morning Rob again went ashore in the motor-launch in order to meet his superior officer, who had telegraphed that he would be on Brixham Quay at 11.30.

Rob gave himself plenty of time as he intended to go to the railway station in time for the arrival of the train. To his surprise he found Wyatt, looking very tired, standing on the quay close to the tablet commemorating the arrival of William of Orange when he landed to overthrow his father-in-law King James II in 1688.

“Morning, Wroxall!” was Wyatt’s greeting. “You’re well on time, I see.”

“I always try to be,” replied Rob.

“And I too. Matter of fact I’ve been on the road since ten last night. Not so dusty, eh? But you see the roads are fairly clear at night and a fellow can shift.”

"A jolly good ride anyway," declared Rob admiringly. A fellow who does a little over three hundred miles motoring in a trifle under thirteen hours was worth congratulating. "You must have shifted. Have you had breakfast?"

"Yes, at Exeter. Well, we may as well get a move on. I didn't come all the way to have a yarn on Brixham Quay!"

Wyatt said little during the run out to the *Gleaner*. He curtly acknowledged Captain Condor's greeting, and then asked to be shown both the log and the Engineer's Record Book. Armed with these he went to a spare cabin and did not appear again until the officers' dinner was served at 1.30.

"So she's in nine and a half fathoms, I see," he remarked. "What is she?"

"Cannot say," replied Rob. "Except for sending divers down to adjust the slings no one has been down."

"Then how the deuce are you to know that she's properly slung now?" demanded Wyatt. "You've lifted her all this way without examining the under-water tackle? Man alive, you're simply asking for trouble."

"Well, we haven't," declared Rob stoutly. "I took good care to see that the wires were above the estimated dead-weight of the wreck and that the pendants and fore and aft guys were up to the work required of them."

"The estimated dead-weight," rejoined the Engineer with the suspicion of a sneer. "If you don't know what you've got hold of how are you to estimate its weight on water?"

"Ask me another," replied Rob, choking back his anger. It was humiliating to be questioned in this manner in the presence of the *Gleaner's* officers. "You'd better put that question to Mr. Findon. He gave me the estimated weight and I made my calculations accordingly. I presume you don't intend to question his figures?"

At this Captain Condor threw his head back and laughed uproariously. The Cornish skipper feared no one on earth and showed scant respect to anyone deserving none. Although he had not met Mr. Wyatt before he had sized him up pretty accurately.

"I allow you'll have tu rise very early in the mornin' tu catch the Boss napping, Mr. Wyatt," he remarked, when his mirth had subsided. "P'raps you'd be likin' tu ax me a few questions concerning my handling of th' *Gleaner*?"

The engineer spluttered. He was one of those individuals who, like the nettle, are easily subdued when handled firmly.

“I was merely interesting myself in what Mr. Wroxall had done,” he said lamely.

“Be that as it may,” countered Captain Condor, “I’m Master of this craft, and take my orders from no one except Mr. Findon and Mr. Rayse. On board we make it a point not to talk shop while we’re at meals.”

At this point Dr. Stanniforth tactfully steered the conversation into less dangerous channels by starting a discussion on the effect of prolonged motoring upon the driver.

But Wyatt refused to be “drawn”.

“I know what you’re aiming at, Doctor,” he declared. “You’re trying to get me to admit that the mere fact of having driven a car from Scarborough to Brixham has made me nervy. Don’t fall into that error! I maintain that I am perfectly capable of carrying out my duties.”

“Quite possibly,” agreed Stanniforth. “But I would also point out that there are more ways than one of carrying them out—and you won’t get far with the hectoring manner you have been adopting.”

Again Wyatt collapsed.

“I’m sure I don’t know why I find myself in a hostile camp,” he protested.

“That’s your seeking,” said Captain Condor. “Mr. Wroxall here has borne the heat and burden of the day, and done right well; and now you come along and start cross-questioning him worse’n a lawyer up at Bodmin Assizes.”

After the meal Wyatt got Rob aside and returned to the attack.

“How is it you haven’t ascertained the character of the wreck?” he demanded.

“Because in view of the nature of the operations it was impracticable to do so,” explained Rob. “At low water there is a two-knot current running, and as the bows of the wreck are smothered with abandoned nets, it is too dangerous to send a man down. When the tide is slack the wreck is clear of the bottom, and you must agree that it is also undesirable to send a diver down to a suspended object of that nature. Besides at that period we

commence towing operations. Now that the wreck is out of the main Channel tide a diver is going down this afternoon.”

“Ah! A reliable man, I trust?”

Rob nodded.

“I can trust him as well as I can myself,” he declared.

“Um! Which one?” asked Wyatt, with a wave of his hand in the direction of the three professional divers who were sitting on a hatch within view.

“This one!” replied Rob, pointing to himself.

# CHAPTER XIII

## Rob's Discovery

"You are not going down, Wroxall," declared Wyatt. "It is against regulations for an officer in charge of operations to descend."

"I am perfectly aware of that," replied Rob coolly. "On that account I have not done so; but your arrival upon the scene has altered the case. You are for the present the Engineer-in-Charge."

"I am a supervisor only."

"Oh, no; not at all," continued Rob. "You come here—on your employers' instructions, I admit—and start adversely criticizing my work. To all intents and purposes you imply that I don't know what I'm doing, that I've been taking needless risks, and that what has been done is due solely to sheer good luck. Three times you've asked me a question which shows you know very little about local conditions concerning the tides."

This was a serious allegation. Nevertheless it was true. Wyatt realized that if Rob stated this in his report to head office "all the fat would be in the fire".

"Look here, Wroxall, you have no reason to say that," he protested. "Be reasonable."

"I am," replied Rob swiftly. "You maintain that you are not now in charge of operations. Very well then: there's no reason why *you* shouldn't get into a diving-dress and go down and make your own report, based upon your actual observations and not upon my statements, which you are pleased to criticize."

It was a challenge that Wyatt declined to accept. He had done a certain amount of diving earlier in his career but latterly he had managed to avoid making descents. A slight mishap some years ago had unnerved him for this work, and now the thought of being challenged to descend appalled him.

“Very well then,” he said loftily, in order to disguise his true feelings. “Since you are so keen upon going down, I’ll waive my objections and accept your contention that for the present I am in charge of operations.”

“Thanks,” replied Rob shortly.

He then went across to Trevarrick.

“I’m going down, Trevarrick,” he announced. “I’ll want you down too. We’re going to examine the wreck. We’ll not require a shot-rope as I want to land on her deck.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” replied the diver.

“Mr. Brash!”

“Sir?”

“I want you on board No. 18. Get a couple of grapnels, lowered, twenty feet apart, and see that they obtain a firm hold on the wreck. There’s bound to be some of the stanchion rails standing. They’ll give a good hold.”

“Be very careful, sir,” cautioned Mr. Brash. “I reckon the masts an’ funnel o’ she have carried away, and maybe a mort o’ the deck. There’ll be plenty o’ jagged ends of iron tu watch. It ’ud rip your air-tube as easy as I could cut a pig’s throat!”

Rob was in no great hurry to don the diving-suit. After his passage of words with Wyatt he realized that he had been excited and it was risky for anyone in that state to dive. Prudence urged him to get Stanniforth to sound his heart; but he feared still more the possibility or probability that the doctor would veto his proposed descent. He arrived at the decision not to consult Stanniforth after arguing with himself that it was only by chance that Stanniforth happened to be on board, and if he had not taken up his post of honorary surgeon to the flotilla no other medical man would be present to decide one way or other.

The tide was now falling. The wreck was lying hard on the bottom. On the surface the ebb was running at half a knot—certainly no more. The sun was shining brightly and the sea was calm. Altogether the conditions were extremely favourable for a descent.

At length Rob, encased from the neck downwards in the diving-dress, shuffled awkwardly to the side. One of the attendants adjusted his copper helmet and connected air-tube and telephone wire.

“All ready, sir?”

“All ready!”

The men at the air-pumps commenced their monotonous task. Rob’s front glass was screwed to his helmet; he was guided over the side; his bare hands grasped the rope that led to the grapnel which in turn was engaged to some part of the wreck thirty-five or forty feet below.

Just below the surface he stopped to adjust the air escape valve. The irritating buzzing in his ears ceased. Then, as easily as a spider drops at the end of a single thread, Rob slid down the tautened rope.

In a very short time the soles of his lead-weighted boots touched a solid object. It was light enough at that depth to see for a distance of about twenty feet. He found that he was standing on the weed-covered deck of the wreck. In front of him was a horse-shoe-shaped structure, rising with slightly tapering sides to a height of about five feet. Above it were two pole-like objects, both of which had been obviously broken off at a couple of feet above the junction with the roof of the structure.

Rob was no longer in doubt as to the character of the wreck. It was a submarine.

What was more, it was a foreign submarine—German more than likely. No British under-surface craft had a conning-tower of that shape.

He made his way for’ard, trying to see the identification number on the conning-tower, but the metal-work was so thickly covered with barnacles and weeds that he was unable to do so.

Carefully manipulating air-tube and life-line, for the deck was encumbered by various objects, all more or less coated with marine growth, Rob retraced his steps aft. He had not gone more than a few yards when he caught sight of Trevarrick, his form grotesquely magnified by the water, just on the point of reaching the deck.

“Pretty lash-up here, sir!” observed Trevarrick, by means of the double circuit telephone.

“Yes,” agreed Rob. “Come aft.”



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#### A MARINE NIGHTMARE

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They passed over a large closed hatch that apparently housed one of the disappearing quick-firing guns. Just abaft of this was the telescopic aftermast used chiefly for sending the wireless aerial aloft. It was not only telescopic but the lower section was lying on the deck with the shrouds

unshackled and frapped to it. This and other objects systematically secured told Rob that the submarine was in diving trim when she was sent to the bottom—either by accident or by hostile design.

Eight feet abaft the mast was a jagged rent. The fissure was so hidden by seaweed that Rob almost stumbled into it. He recovered himself just in time; not that the fall would be likely to hurt him, but that his inflated dress might be torn by the jagged edges, with dire results.

Rob paid particular attention to the damage. So far as he could see, although he had not gone for'ard of the conning-tower, this was the only vital damage the hull had received above her surface-running water-line. This discovery was important, since the submarine could be taken into shallow water and pumped out. If she were then watertight it would be a fairly simple matter to tow her to Findon & Rayse's yard at Falmouth, there to be broken up.

Examination showed that the fissure was about six feet in length and five inches wide at its greatest breadth. This type of craft is double-hulled, but in this case the edges of the outer deck-plating had been forced through the inner skin.

The damage did not appear to have been caused by a projectile but more likely by a surface craft passing diagonally over her while she was in the act of submerging.

"Caught it fair," remarked Trevarrick. "Wonder they hadn't found she at the time. They Germans usually sent up a mark-buoy, when they had time. When you'm finished aft, sir, we'll look for that buoy, or where it should be."

"Diver! Hello, diver!"

The call boomed simultaneously in the helmets of both Rob and his companion. It was Wyatt calling for information.

"Ay, ay, sir!" replied Trevarrick.

"What is she?" inquired the engineer. "Why haven't you reported before this?"

"We'm still lookin', sir," replied the diver, and Rob was almost certain that the man was winking at him!

"And take care to examine the slings!" continued Wyatt. "I want to know exactly how far apart they're placed."

“Ay, ay, sir!” replied Trevarrick, and deliberately released a quantity of air with the express purpose of interrupting the conversation.

Although Rob had scrupulously refrained from saying anything derogatory about his superior officer in the presence of the crew, Wyatt’s arrogant attitude had been so pronounced that they could not fail to notice it and to form their own conclusions.

Which was bad for discipline; but Wyatt simply had not the knack of handling men. His idea of authority was to issue orders in harsh tones, often without being explicit upon the work he required to be done.

When the buzzing of the escaping air had ceased, Rob suggested that he and Trevarrick should go for’ard and see if it were practicable to free the bows from the mass of derelict nets.

On the way Trevarrick stopped just in front of the conning-tower. Then, by the aid of a small crowbar which he had brought down with him, he commenced chipping away the thick deposit of barnacles on that part of the deck.

Soon, even at arm’s length, the man was hidden from Rob’s gaze by the clouds of particles raised by the work of his crowbar; and since there was now hardly any current, it took a considerable time for the submarine nimbus to disperse.

When it did Trevarrick pointed to the exposed portion of the deck. In spite of years of submergence there was remarkably little corrosion of the metal, probably owing to the protective nature of the barnacles.

There were clear indications of the existence of a small hatch, measuring roughly fifteen inches square.

Again Trevarrick brought the crowbar into play, forcing the chisel-pointed end into the narrow crevice. Then, gaining a purchase, he levered the hatch up. Once started it gave readily, and a large double conical-shaped object leapt upward to the surface, leaving in its wake a snake-like line of rotten, water-logged rope.

“That’ll answer Mr. Wyatt, sir!” remarked the diver. “’Tis the submarine’s watch-buoy. I’ve seed many a one afore tu-day.”

This particular task accomplished, Rob and his companion went for’ard, passing the hatch of the concealed bow-gun and the lowered telescopic foremast.

The forehatch, like the main and conning-tower hatchways, was hermetically sealed on the inside, but a few feet for'ard of the former the deck had collapsed. This did not mean that the inner plating had been holed, and cursory examination pointed to the fact that it was practically intact.

Rob was cautiously testing the state of the corroded plating when he stepped back as quickly as his diving-dress permitted.

Out of the cavity came a hurried procession of crustaceans—vicious-looking lobsters, their appearance rendered truly terrifying by the fact that they were distorted in the translucent water. Some of them looked as large as a terrier, and Rob realized that to receive a nip from the claws would be no joke, notwithstanding the protective nature of the canvas and rubber-plied diving-dress.

He had frequently seen crabs and lobsters during previous descents, but these invariably scuttled out of his way. He had even been attacked by dog-fish, which he had scared by the simple expedient of releasing a jet of air from the valve in his helmet. But he had never before been threatened by a mob of lobsters looking far more formidable than the rats of Hamelin.

The instinct of self-preservation urged him to leap out of the way. He did so, temporarily forgetting the relative lightness of a diving-dress under water. As a result Rob leapt almost vertically to a height of about twenty feet above the deck.

Down he came, landing fairly and squarely upon the back of a large crustacean. In air his weight would have crushed the lobster's shell with the greatest ease; but the creature wriggled and scurried away, leaving Rob feeling like a nervous and inexperienced skater!

It was then that Trevarrick came to his aid. Rob fancied he detected a broad grin on the Cornishman's face as he swept the writhing mass of shell-fish aside with a crowbar.

Slowly Rob proceeded for'ard until he saw that the whole of the bows was still enveloped in a tangle of derelict nets. Although a considerable quantity had disappeared during the operation of moving the wreck shorewards, there was enough left to constitute a menace to divers.

"We've seen enough for the present," declared Rob to his companion. "Up with you!"

Trevarrick gave the signal and was promptly hoisted to the surface, since the depth was not enough to make gradual decompression necessary.

Then Rob followed and gained the short iron ladder clamped to the side of the lighter.

Wyatt, all impatient for information, could hardly wait until Rob's front-plate was unscrewed. To do him justice, the engineer had refrained from asking Trevarrick for particulars since it was considered etiquette to obtain a report from the officer-diver when one takes part in a descent.

"Well, what is she?" he asked laconically.

"Submarine—German," replied Rob with equal brevity.

"How do you know that?" continued Wyatt.

"There's her identity buoy somewhere. We sent it to the surface."

Wyatt had never heard of such a device. Neither had Rob until Trevarrick had enlightened him on the subject. The buoy had been recovered and was lying on deck.

The engineer signed to two of the hands to bring it to him. Even then the weed and barnacle encrusted object gave him no clue.

"Best scrape 'en gentle, sir," suggested Trevarrick. "You'm sure tu find summat wrote on it."

While Rob was being assisted out of his diving-dress Wyatt set to work to remove the marine deposit from the buoy.

At length part of an inscription was exposed to the light of day after nearly a score of years of submergence:

"Telefonbote liegen lassen. Telegraphieren . . . ort liegestelle . . . U-boat . . . Wilhelmshaven. Unterseeboot . . . hier gesunken."

This message was engraved on a brass plate let into the convex surface of the buoy, but corrosion had completely obliterated parts of the inscription.

"Do you know what that means, Wroxall?" asked Wyatt in a manner that conveyed a challenge.

"Not exactly; but I can guess," replied Rob.

"Guessing doesn't get a man very far," sneered the engineer.

"Can *you* tell me the exact translation of the original inscription, Mr. Wyatt?" inquired Dr. Stanniforth, taking the first opportunity of "butting in" between his chum and the supercilious official.

Wyatt could not; but he would not admit his ignorance. He had been hoping that Rob could enlighten him, and, with that knowledge in his possession, he would be able to make a report to head-quarters embodying the information.

On a previous occasion Wyatt had been let down badly over a French translation in connexion with a salvage job on the Brittany coast. The information had to be embodied in his report. He knew no French, so asked a subordinate to give him the rendering of the translation. This the latter did, but Wyatt got the *kudos*. He never even had the decency to give his assistant credit for what he had done; and once having “picked his informant’s brains” he rewarded him by treating him in an off-hand, sneering manner, much as he had with Rob Wroxall. A few weeks later, however, another French document required translation. Unabashed, Wyatt took it to the same subordinate and politely asked him to give the version in English. The latter did so—but he purposely inserted several “nots” into the translation, thus completely altering the context!

Mindful of that unfortunate episode, Wyatt had tried to “pump” Rob and had not succeeded. And when challenged by Stanniforth he excused himself on the score of having to draft a report.

“Get your report into Head Office as soon as you can, Wroxall,” suggested the young doctor. “Don’t let him forestall you. I’ll tell you what that inscription means. It is—‘Let telephone buoy alone. Telegraph immediately to Underseaboats’ base at Wilhelmshaven. Submarine No. So and So sunk here.’ I suppose you don’t know her number?”

“I do not,” replied Rob. “At least not yet. I was wondering why the commander of that U-boat hadn’t released the telephone mark-buoy.”

“Because he was afraid to, I suppose,” suggested Stanniforth. “He would have done so had his craft sunk in home waters; but he must have realized that had he done so our destroyers would have depth-charged him. Or, of course, she might have sunk like a stone. Was she much damaged?”

“Not so far as I could see. We’ll have to wait till she’s high and dry.”

At that moment Captain Condor came over from the *Gleaner*.

“So you’ve found a U-boat, Mr. Wroxall?” he began. “Now that du surprise me! We’ve a most interesting job on, I can see; but before we can open her we must inform the Admiralty.”

“Really?” rejoined Rob. “Why, I thought the Admiralty had renounced all claim to the craft provided we shifted her from the fishing-grounds.”

“May be,” continued Captain Condor. “But they hadn’t any idea she was a U-boat. Afore we dare open a hatch we must have a naval officer present or there’ll be considerable trouble for you an’ me!”

# CHAPTER XIV

## Exploration

“Mr. Wyatt’s writing his report now,” answered Rob.

“Is he?” snorted Captain Condor. “Let him! I’m skipper of the *Gleaner*, and he can’t stop me sending a wireless. Do you get out your report, Mr. Wroxall, and I’ll get Sparks to push it through as soon as ’tes ready. Meanwhiles I’ll get in touch with the Admiral Superintendent at Devonport—as nice an old gentleman as you’ll meet in the west country—and let him know. You say you didn’t find her number? Well, no odds. She’s a U-boat right enough, and that’s what matters.”

“Wreck four feet above the bottom, sir!” reported the Chief Mate.

“Very good, Mr. Brash!” rejoined Rob. “You might inform Mr. Wyatt.”

Brash shrugged his shoulders. Like the rest of the crew he looked upon the engineer as an interloper, and an unpleasant-mannered one at that. Nevertheless he went aft and delivered the message.

“Can’t you see I’m busy?” snapped Wyatt.

“ ’Course I du, sir,” replied the wily Cornishman. “But the after sling du seem to be groanin’ badly. Mebbe you’ll look and see for yourself whether she be all proper like.”

The wire in question was correctly placed and standing up to the work well, but Brash knew that the bait was irresistible. In his eagerness to discover a possible flaw in Rob’s handiwork—or rather the handiwork for which he was directly responsible—Wyatt would certainly set aside the writing of his report in order to find fault with his subordinate.

Meanwhile the *Gleaner*’s wireless operator had got into touch with the wireless station at Devonport Dockyard, and a reply was soon received stating that a naval officer would be leaving for Brixham immediately.

Before the message was received Rob had drafted his report and had handed it to the *Gleaner*’s wireless operator, while Wyatt was still wasting

time in trying to discover a defect that didn't exist.

When at length he did complete his egotistic report Captain Condor greeted him with the information that "the Governor" was on his way down and would be on board that evening.

"What, Mr. Findon?" stammered Wyatt, gasping like a stranded carp.

"Surely—why not?" replied Captain Condor. "You don't seem overpleased, I notice."

At high water by the shore the wreck had been moved another half-mile. Three more "lifts" and she would be within the limits of Elbury Cove. Then the secrets of what was concealed within her hull would be revealed, provided the weather remained quiet. A gale from the sou'east'ard would be fatal to final operations.

As Wyatt declined a suggestion to go ashore in order to meet Mr. Findon, Rob and Captain Condor set off in the launch to Brixham.

The Senior Partner greeted his Falmouth Superintendent most cordially, and then turned to Rob.

"You've done remarkably well, Wroxall," he said. "Remarkably well! I never expected you'd get the wreck in less than a month. We've done splendidly over this contract. And finding a submarine is something beyond my expectations. I was under the impression that you would have hooked a small coasting steamer. Quite a lot were lost between Prawle and the Lizard during the War. Where's Wyatt, by the by?"

"On board the *Gleaner*, sir."

"Oh! And how do you get on with him?"

"I haven't had much chance in that direction," replied Rob cautiously.

Mr. Findon changed the subject and questioned Rob closely concerning his work upon the wreck. But, directly the launch ran alongside the *Gleaner*, the Senior Partner went to the cabin he invariably used when on board, and sent for Wyatt.

Of the nature of the interview no one outside the cabin knew; but it was obvious that Wyatt had a rough time with his chief. Actually the former had been reported upon as unsatisfactory in connexion with the salvage work at Scarborough. Very reluctantly Strong, the Senior Engineer on that job, had had to report unfavourably upon him, and in order to clear the way for an unbiased report upon Mr. Wyatt, the latter had been sent down to the

*Gleaner*. During that time conclusive evidence had been obtained concerning Wyatt's incapacity, and during the interview Mr. Findon had told him clearly that unless he altered his ways and took an intelligent interest in his work he would have to leave the Company's service.

"I suppose that fellow Wroxall has been saying things behind my back!" remarked Wyatt sullenly.

"He has not," replied Mr. Findon sharply. "He said nothing to your detriment. As a matter of fact I'm taking you to task over the Scarborough job. I think you'd better return and do your best to work with Strong."

"I'd rather resign than do that," declared Wyatt heatedly.

"And I'll be happy to accept your resignation," rejoined the Principal suavely. "But perhaps you'd better sleep on it, and let me have your final decision to-morrow morning. Remember, I'm not finding fault with your technical work, but with your inability to work with others. Apparently you've not only hampered Strong, but you've created a lot of ill-feeling amongst the hands, and in work of this nature anything of that sort is to be strongly deprecated. So think it over, and let me know to-morrow."

Wyatt spent a sleepless night. He realized that Mr. Findon was not far out when he spoke of the relations between the workmen and himself. But apparently his employer had not discovered that as a salvage engineer he was a failure—or, rather, that he was a fortunate individual who by sheer bluff had managed to create the impression that he was well up in his work. Jobs of this sort were difficult to obtain, and it might be a hard matter to convince another employer of his questionable ability. So, finally, Wyatt decided to eat humble-pie and to ask Mr. Findon to allow him to withdraw his resignation.

By noon Wyatt was on his way back to Scarborough, much to the relief of the *Gleaner's* complement and of Rob in particular.

At the top of the next spring tide the task of placing the salvaged U-boat ashore in Elbury Cove was accomplished. The last lift brought her deck within a couple of feet of the underside of the baulks of timber between the two lighters. Since the water was too shallow to allow the *Gleaner* to tow her into the cove, hawsers were tied from the bows of the lighters to winches temporarily fixed on shore.

As the tide commenced to ebb and the conning-tower of the stranded U-boat appeared above the surface, excitement ran high. Thousands of spectators had flocked to the scene until the beach was black with people.

Pickets of armed blue-jackets from the Devonport Command had been brought in to augment the local police. Reporters and press photographers were everywhere in evidence; while on a tall trestle a cinematographer, precariously perched, was taking moving pictures of the animated scene.

Mr. Findon, although taking the keenest interest in the proceedings, made no attempt to interfere with Rob's task. He realized that his youthful Assistant Engineer was quite capable of bringing to a successful conclusion the work of salvage; and that, since the most difficult part had already been overcome, it was only fair to let Wroxall take his share in the spectacular portion of the operations.

The Admiralty representative, Commander Dymocke, R.N., was also "standing by". It was to be his duty to make a detailed examination of the U-boat when she was freed of water. None of the salvage officers knew why a Naval man should have been detailed for this duty. Years ago the Admiralty knew all that there was to be known concerning this type of craft. There were no longer any German submarines. They had all been surrendered at the Armistice—those that had not been previously sunk during the Great War.

Possibly Commander Dymocke knew that his mission was merely a formal one; but it was his duty and he had to perform it. As a sub-lieutenant he had had plenty of experience in submarine warfare, and in consequence he would be able to form an accurate idea of the manner in which this particular U-boat had met her fate.

He was a burly, jovial man and Rob took to him from the first time they met.

"How are you going to get rid of the water, Mr. Wroxall?" asked the Commander.

"By motor-pumps, sir," replied Rob, pointing to three of these powerful engines, visible on the deck of No. 19 Lighter, which had purposely been allowed to ground alongside the wreck. The motor-driven lighter had backed into deep water after the timber baulks had been unshipped and stowed.

"I wouldn't, if I were you," remarked the naval officer. "You'll excuse my mentioning the matter, I'm sure; but if powerful suction pumps are employed, there is a big chance of unduly disturbing things. When she's dry you'll realize what I mean."

"I do now," rejoined Rob. "You would employ smaller pumps? You see, as far as we know the hull's intact below the surface-cruising water-line."

"I would suggest making holes in her side—they needn't be more than six inches in diameter—and letting the water out slowly as the tide falls."

"Good idea, that!" agreed Rob. "I'll get the oxy-acetylene gadget to work."

By this time the tide had dropped a matter of five feet, and already a considerable portion of the bulging sides was exposed. The bows showed more above the surface and were still covered by the mass of abandoned nets that had so nearly cost Diver White his life.

Seeing some of the spectators in boats attempting to tear away the meshed twine, Captain Condor shouted to them to desist. Then, catching an amused smile on Dr. Stanniforth's face, he added an explanation.

"Maybe, Doctor, you'm thinking that rotten stuff is no good to anybody, and best out of the way. I'll allow it's best shifted, but that's got tu be done careful-like."

"What is the idea, then?" asked Stanniforth, still wondering why the Cornish skipper should show such solicitude for a mass of rotting nets.

"'Cause there's money in't," explained Captain Condor. "These nets, however much they'm damaged, 'll fetch a tidy sum from the Dittisham plum-growers. They use 'em tu protect the fruit from birds."

A boat containing the oxy-acetylene plant came alongside. One of the hands, wearing a mask with dark glasses, directed the fierce flame at a spot Rob had previously indicated.

In a remarkably short time the flame cut a hole through the U-boat's side almost as easily as a gouge being thrust into a cheese. The hiss of steam was followed by a gush of water from the interior of the hull, accompanied by the characteristic stench of stagnant bilge-water.

"That's a clear indication that she isn't holed badly under the water-line," observed Rob. "I think we'd better burn a hole for'ard in case her watertight bulkheads are holding."

"If that's so you may have to make a dozen holes," added Commander Dymocke. "It all depends upon what time the crew had after she was 'downed'. Naturally, if they hoped to save themselves, they'd close all watertight doors; but since the U-boat was doomed it would only serve to prolong the agonies of the wretched men. . . . No, I think you'd better avoid that part; it's too jolly near the flat where the warheads are stowed."

“By Jove, I think I’d better!” agreed Rob, glad of the advice of someone conversant with the internal arrangements of a German submarine. “But I should have thought that the explosives would be harmless by this time.”

“It’s better to be sure than sorry,” declared the Commander. “Only last month a trawler brought ashore a mine that had been drifting about for at least sixteen years. Our experts dismantled the wart—that’s what they’re called in the Service, you know—and the guncotton was found still to be of a highly explosive nature.”

While the tide was still falling men were employed at removing the thick deposit of barnacle and weeds encrusting the U-boat’s deck. It was then possible to form a fairly definite opinion as to the cause of the disaster. Almost without doubt the U-boat had been rammed while in the act either of diving or of breaking surface. The deep gash aft clearly indicated the blow dealt by the forefoot of a surface craft.

“It may be that the vessel that rammed her wasn’t aware of the fact,” said the Commander. “She might have felt a slight shock only, but the blow was sufficient to send the U-boat down. But, frankly, I’m puzzled to account for the damage for’ard of the conning-tower. It may be that the poor blighters, finding themselves dying of slow asphyxiation—assuming that the watertight transverse bulkheads held—placed a detonator at this spot and blew the deck up.”

“Pretty ghastly business that,” remarked Stanniforth. “Submarines should be done away with. The British and Americans were willing to do so at the London Naval Conference; and it seems a significant fact that the nations who did hardly anything with their submarines during the Great War are the men who pressed so strongly for their retention!”

These remarks caused Rob to recall a somewhat similar statement by Captain Fosdyke on the occasion of their meeting in the train to Truro.

“I’ve been told that the Admiralty have a device for effectually dealing with any hostile submarine directly it leaves its base,” he observed. “Is that correct, sir?”

The Commander smiled wryly. Twenty years of naval discipline, during which period he had been impressed to maintain “official reticence and reserve”, had given him an impenetrable armour.

“I trust that you have not been misinformed, Mr. Wroxall,” he remarked quietly.

During the next two hours half a dozen drain-holes were made in the side of the wreck. In each case a copious discharge of water followed, indicating that, whether the bulkhead doors had been closed or not, the whole of the interior of the hull had been completely flooded. The sand upon which the wreck lay was now dry, although it would not be dead low water until ten o'clock.

As soon as the lowermost hole had ceased to discharge water, wooden plugs were inserted into each of the purposely-made apertures in order that, as the tide made, the U-boat would be water-borne.

"If you are ready we'll start opening the hatches," suggested Rob.

"Very good," agreed Commander Dymocke. "It will soon be sunset, but I suppose you can run an electric, light cable from a dynamo? We'll have to use artificial light in any case, whether it be day or night. Curious how those people hang about, isn't it? They've seen all that they'll be able to see; but perhaps they're hoping you'll let them on board at a shilling a head! I'll warrant if they did few if any of them would get a wink of sleep to-night!"

By the time the electric-lighting set was in readiness the attack upon the hermetically-sealed hatches began. These, in normal conditions, were secured by clips on the inside; and after years of submergence and inactivity these fastenings were practically immovable. Once more the oxy-acetylene flame had to be employed to remove the heavy metal lids from their seatings.

A waft of evil-smelling air shot up from the first hatch that was opened.

"Thanks, I'm not having any without a gas-mask," remarked the Commander.

"Nor I," added Rob. "There will almost certainly be gas; carbon-monoxide, Doctor?"

"Possibly," replied Stanniforth guardedly. "Of course the batteries have ceased to give out sulphated hydrogen long ago, but there are other decomposing factors to be taken into consideration. You won't encounter explosive gas, or the acetylene flame would have set that off before now."

The first party to descend consisted of Rob, Commander Dymocke, Stanniforth, Brash, and two of the lighter's crew, all wearing the latest type of gas-mask, and looking, in consequence, like hideous demons of the pantomime.

A powerful electric light in a long wandering-lead and protected by a strong metal cage was first lowered into the hull. Then, headed by Commander Dymocke, the explorers descended the rusty, slippery steel ladder.

A strange sight met Rob's eyes as he paused in the narrow alleyway just for'ard of the motor-room. He had been on board "scrapped" submarines before during his service with the Salvage Company, and what had then struck him was the fact that, notwithstanding these craft had been condemned to be broken up, their interior conditions looked remarkably spick-and-span.

But here was utter desolation. The one-time red lino-covered deck was ankle deep in foul slush. Bulkheads were festooned with still dripping seaweed. The elaborate system of pipes and electric wires, each one of which was once painted in a characteristic colour or else kept in a brightly polished state, was welded into a solid mass by a conglomeration of barnacles, mussels, and other shell-fish. The place looked more like a sea-cavern than the interior of a submarine.

Dymocke touched Rob's shoulder and pointed first for'ard, then aft. The gesture was clearly understood. The Commander was pointing out that neither of the watertight doors at either end of this part of the alleyway had been closed. Obviously, then, with the flooding of the after part of the vessel the water had rapidly filled the midship section and the U-boat must have sunk like a stone.

The exploring party filed through the elongated oval-shaped doorway in the motor-room bulkhead. Some of the men carried electric torches in addition to the more powerful lamp and quickly the compartment was flooded with light.

On the deck overhead the U-boat had apparently received her first and fatal blow. Already the gash in the outer skin had been examined, and it was now possible to ascertain the full extent of the damage. The forefoot of the ramming vessel—presuming that the U-boat had been sunk by collision, deliberate or accidental—had ripped the inner plating to a distance of about five feet, but the fissure was now blocked by dense marine growth. Nevertheless the hole had been sufficiently large to admit a considerable quantity of water—enough to "down" the submarine by the stern. Directly the salt water came in contact with the storage batteries dense poisonous fumes had been given out, thereby driving the mechanics and engineers from their posts. The deeper the doomed vessel sank the greater became the

pressure of water pouring in through the rent, until her stern bumped heavily upon the bed of the sea.

There was distinct evidence to show that the U-boat had been running her electric motors when the disaster occurred—another proof that she was either submerged or about to dive when the disaster overtook her. In this part of the ship death had come suddenly and swiftly. The engine-room staff had been overwhelmed before they could struggle through the narrow bulkhead doorway.

Gifted with keen imagination, Rob reconstructed the scene. The U-boat, perhaps a fortnight out from her base, had been alternately the hunter and the hunted. Much of that fortnight she had spent submerged, only coming to the surface at night to charge batteries, or by day when a possible easy prey showed itself. Always there was the dread that the supposed defenceless merchant vessel might prove to be a deadly Q ship, and in consequence the nerves of officers and men were on edge.

Then, certainly without a word of warning so far as the wretched mechanics were concerned, came a crash that sent the U-boat rolling to starboard.

The jar probably smashed the bulbs of the electric lamps and plunged the compartment into darkness. This was immediately followed by an inrush of water. Wires “shorted” and sent out vivid blue flashes. There were numerous explosions as the deadly gases were ignited by the crackling electrical discharges.

Half blinded and suffocated by the fumes, the doomed men tore madly from the alleyway, hoping against hope to be able to close the watertight doors behind them. But not one passed through the narrow oval aperture. Struggling desperately with one another, they were jammed in a writhing mass till death ended their agonies.

These men had to do their duty. They were compelled to do so. Once a voluntary service, it was no longer so. And similar horrible scenes will be enacted in the next naval war simply because the Admiralties of certain Powers have not the moral courage to scrap all under-surface craft as weapons of a most cowardly, bestial, and inhuman character.

Rob’s thoughts were interrupted by the Commander motioning to him to go on deck. The reason was obvious. The wreck was lifting to the rising tide and beginning to bump heavily. During the few minutes the explorers had

been below a heavy “scend” had set into Elbury Cove, and steps must be taken immediately to secure the U-boat from the assaults of the sea.

# CHAPTER XV

## The Manœuvres of Stanniforth

It was now dark. Two cable lengths to seaward the *Gleaner* lay at anchor, but Captain Condor was not on board her. He was standing on the submarine's deck close to the open hatchway, and impatiently awaiting the reappearance of Rob and his party.

"I don't like the look of the weather, Mr. Wroxall!" he declared, as soon as Rob had removed his mask and was taking in deep, copious draughts of the salt-laden air. "Glass has just dropped a tidy bit—two-tenths tu be exact—an' there's a tumble into t'Cove."

"Perhaps it's the swell of a passing liner," suggested Rob.

Captain Condor shook his head.

"Wish t'wur," he rejoined. "But t'ain't. Weather's workin', so we'd best be off out of it. The wreck'll flut in half an hour. I've an idea I'll take her in tow right away tu Falmouth. What say you, Captain Dymocke?"

"Excellent idea!" agreed the Commander. "Only I feel I must point out to you that the U-boat will be a brute to tow—like a half-tide rock, in fact."

"Don't see why," objected Captain Condor stubbornly. "I've had a look tu her rudder. It's jammed pretty well amidships; and if I station No. 18 astern tu check her from yawing——"

"Yes, but don't you see the submarine's in diving trim. Her ballast tanks are full and the pumps are out of action. You can't blow the ballast."

"Can't I just!" rejoined the Cornish skipper. "What's the old *Gleaner* got air compressors for, sir? I'll allow I'll free those tanks in half an hour. Mr. Wroxall, you look as if you've had enough. Tu my certain knowledge you haven't slept a wink these twenty-four hours. Do you nip aboard the *Gleaner* an' turn in. Leave everything tu me and we'll be off the Dodman afore you need turn out."

It was a great temptation, but Rob resolutely resisted it.

“Thanks, I’ll have to stand by till she’s safely in tow,” he replied. “What about the dumb lighter and the small craft?”

“I’ve seen tu them, Mr. Wroxall,” replied Captain Condor. “The launch has already towed the lighter into Brixham. We’ll pick them up another day. Now I’ll see about getting a hawser passed. . . . Mr. Brash! Do ’ee go ashore with a party an’ cast off everything. When you’m done that take over No. 18 and stand by tu steady the wreck when we get under way. We’ve four hours’ foul tide, I’ll allow, but when it sets to the west’ard we’ll hop along fine.”

The salvage workers knew their job. Men worked either singly or together with a set purpose. Already the holes made in the U-boat’s side had been securely plugged, and a couple of powerful pumps had been placed on deck ready to cope with any unsuspected leak or to expel water that might find its way below through the rents on deck.

The towing hawser from the *Gleaner*, with a chain span in the centre, was taken on board the U-boat, and shackled to another span round her conning-tower, the hawser being seized to the bows to ensure a correct lead.

Then as the hawser grew taut the submarine glided slowly from Elbury Cove into the deeper waters of Brixham Roads.

Commander Dymocke had been perfectly right concerning the U-boat’s trim. Owing to the flooding of her ballast tanks she was riding barely awash, and although temporary repairs had already been effected to her damaged deck it was obvious that even in a moderate sea she would be swept from stem to stern. Not only would she be a heavy lump to tow, but she would sheer madly in her present trim.

Accordingly the submarine was brought alongside the *Gleaner*, large faggot fenders being placed between the two vessels to prevent undue grinding and bumping. All hatches were opened, and men wearing gas-masks descended to fix inlet and outlet pipes to the various ballast tanks.

Dawn was breaking when the last of the water ballast was expelled. Hatches were then replaced and secured, and the *Gleaner* again prepared to cast off.

“Naught tu worry about now, Mr. Wroxall!” shouted Captain Condor from the *Gleaner*’s bridge. “Do ’ee jump afore we go ahead!”

Easy in his mind, and realizing that he had carried out his duty, Rob jumped to the *Gleaner*’s deck. Hardly able to keep his eyes open, he groped his way to the bathroom and was soon revelling in the comfort of a hot salt-

water bath. Then, after gulping a cup of cocoa, he made a bee-line for his cabin and was soon lost to things mundane in a sound, dreamless sleep.

He was utterly unaware that the U-boat was making very heavy weather of it in tow of the powerful tug; that the motor-lighter astern of the submarine parted three hawsers during the passage down Channel; completely oblivious of the terrific hammering of the waves as the *Gleaner* pounded her way with a weather-going tide until even the hard-bitten Cornish skipper considered the desirability of taking refuge inside Plymouth breakwater.

Nor did Rob awake when the tug rolled gun'le under abreast of the dreaded Dodman, and the first thing that roused him from his deep and refreshing slumber was the roar of the cable running out of the hawsepipe.

Hardly able to realize the situation, Rob glanced at the cabin clock. It was a quarter to three. He went to the scuttle and threw back the blue curtain. One glance reassured him. The *Gleaner* was safely in Falmouth Harbour, and already one of the Company's smaller tugs was nosing the salvaged submarine towards her final resting-place in the breaking-up yard.

Then the thought suddenly flashed across his mind: what had happened to Mr. Findon?

Rob last remembered seeing his chief watching the party descend into the hull of the wreck. Had he gone ashore? Or had he made the passage round to Falmouth in the *Gleaner*? If the latter, was Mr. Findon aware that he, Rob, had waited until the U-boat was safely in tow before turning in? That, in his mind, was an important point.

The Assistant Engineer dressed quickly, putting on clean clothing. That was essential; for in salvage work entailing the examination of a raised wreck the conditions are, to say the least, filthy. Even when one is wearing a boiler suit the stench of bilge water and other objectionable matter permeates the clothing. Prolonged immersion in boiling water is the only remedy so far as clothes are concerned, and even then a distinctive reek is apt to remain.

Having dressed, Rob made his way to the saloon. The only occupant was Dr. Stanniforth, and for the first time since he had taken up his honorary post the young medico had a grouse:

"A London County Council sewerman's job is a jolly sight cleaner than this, Wroxall," he remarked, *apropos* of the before-mentioned reek.

“Well, you volunteered to go down, Doc,” rejoined Rob, smiling. “But, I say, where’s everybody? Where’s the skipper?”

“Condor’s gone to lie down. First sleep he’s had for thirty-six hours,” replied Stanniforth. “Brash is superintending the job of getting the wreck ashore. Dymocke’s gone to the Green Bank Hotel with the primary idea of getting a hot carbolic bath. I believe he’s telegraphed to Devonport for a complete kit.”

“And where’s Mr. Findon?”

“Off back to town. Before he went, my lad, he gave you a pretty pat on the back! I won’t tell you what he said in case your hat’s a good fit. It won’t be when you know.”

That, at any rate, was good news.

Rob touched the bell for the steward. Then he went to one of the scuttles.

“Blowing pretty hard,” he remarked.

“So I should think,” agreed Stanniforth. “Not being a seafaring man I should describe it as a hurricane.”

“Hardly as bad as that.”

“And you slept through it all,” continued the doctor. “Evidently Captain Condor thought it was fairly heavy, because he mentioned to me that he gave the coast a wide berth—ten miles, I believe—until he opened into Falmouth Harbour.”

“That was because he had the submarine in tow,” explained Rob. “If the hawser had parted he would have had time to get her in tow again before she drifted ashore.”

Just then the steward appeared.

“What’s going for grub, steward?” asked Rob.

“Almost anything you want, sir. The provision boat has just been alongside.”

“Then get me a jolly good meal, please. I’ll leave the choice to you.”

In less than a quarter of an hour Rob sat down to breakfast at twenty minutes past three in the afternoon—whiting, huge rashers, rolls, dairy butter, new-laid eggs and unlimited Cornish cream and jam, with coffee served with hot milk that did not come from a tin!

Stanniforth watched his chum tuck in.

“Aren’t you having anything?” asked Rob.

The young doctor shook his head.

“There’s nothing much wrong with you, my lad, if you can stow that away after a stormy passage. I regret to say that I still feel the horrible motion and in consequence prefer to fast. Well, on second thoughts I will have just a cup of coffee.”

Having fed right royally, Rob went on deck and asked the Chief Mate for a boat to be manned to put him ashore. Although the berthing of the salvaged submarine was a task for which Captain Condor was responsible, he felt that he wanted to be on the spot to see the operations carried out.

Dr. Stanniforth had hardly exaggerated concerning the severity of the gale. It was now at its height. Commencing from the sou’west the wind had backed to sou’east very quickly. Had not Captain Condor taken the desperate chance of towing the submarine round to Falmouth, the chances were that by this time she would have been pounded and battered in Elbury Cove, which was quite open to the present direction of the gale.

Even in the comparatively sheltered water of Falmouth Harbour there was a heavy scend and a choppy sea, as the tide was now ebbing and directly opposed to the wind. Black Rock, in the centre of the entrance, was frequently hidden by clouds of spray, while in Carrick Roads vessels at anchor were pitching, rolling, and sheering in the strong weather-going tide.

“Boat alongside, sir!”

“Very good!” replied Rob. “Coming ashore, Doctor?”

Stanniforth, leaning over the rail, looked down into the frail cockle-shell in which a couple of hands were fending her off from the ship’s side. Actually she was a strongly-built ship’s boat of eighteen feet in length, but when viewed from a vertical height of about twenty feet her dimensions seemed considerably reduced. The only means of getting into the boat was a rope-ladder, the lower rungs of which were alternately swinging out into space or flogging the *Gleaner’s* side with every roll of the ship.

Stanniforth badly wanted to get to dry land, ostensibly “to stretch his legs”. An indescribable sensation in the pit of his stomach was more directly responsible for the yearning; but a brief survey of the waiting boat made him hesitate.

“I don’t think I will, just yet,” he replied half-heartedly.

“Come along,” prompted Rob. “It’s as easy as winking.”

“Then let me see you do it,” rejoined Stanniforth not illogically.

Without hesitation Rob swung his leg over the rail, groped for the topmost rung of the ladder and descended. Then, waiting his opportunity as the boat rose on the crest of a roller, he leapt over the stern sheets, lost his balance, and subsided in a most undignified manner across the stroke thwart.

Although Rob regained his balance and his composure in a remarkably short space of time, his performance did not tend to reassure the doctor.

“If you’m wantin’ badly tu go ashore, sir,” volunteered Mr. Brash, who had just returned on board, “us’ll soon rig up a bo’s’n’s chair an’ lower you from one of the davits.”

Quite erroneously Stanniforth jumped to the conclusion that the Chief Mate was “pulling his leg”. The idea of being ignominiously lowered at the end of a rope into the boat stiffened his previously wavering attitude.

“Thanks, Mr. Brash, I’ll manage,” he replied.

Without mishap the doctor descended until his feet were almost level with the gunwale of the boat when the latter rose on the crest of a wave.

Then he hesitated.

“Jump, sir!” shouted one of the boat’s crew.

Unfortunately Stanniforth made a half-hearted effort. His feet missed the gunwale by inches, and the next instant he disappeared between the boat and the ship’s side.

Promptly the two hands shoved off vigorously until the boat was an oar’s length away and drifting with the tide. This action puzzled Rob considerably. The men knew; he did not; for had the boat been still alongside and the doctor was coming to the surface and had grasped her gunwale the chances were that he would be crushed between her and the ship.

Fortunately Stanniforth was a good swimmer, and when he did reappear he struck out for the boat, which by this time was about twenty feet from the ship. In a few moments he gripped the transom and clambered over into the stern-sheets.

“Well, I’ve done it, Wroxall!” he exclaimed gleefully, for the immersion had banished all lingering sensations of sea-sickness. “But I might have done it spectacularly by diving from the bridge!”

The incident was witnessed by Captain Condor's deputy, and as the boat ran alongside the jetty he hurried to meet it.

"You've had a dose o' Saltash Luck, sir, I see!" he exclaimed. "Do 'ee come up tu my house and I'll fix you up with a suit o' mine while yours is drying."

"Thanks awfully," replied Stanniforth. "But it's my watch I'm worrying about."

He held out a remarkably good gold hunter, snapped open the case and found that it was still going.

"That'll be all right, sir," declared the Deputy Superintendent. "A wipe down is all it wants, 'cause it doesn't seem as if any water's got into the works. 'T'es funny what some watches'll stand. I remember during the war when I was stationed on the East Coast. ('Course bein' a west-country man who knows every inch of this part of the coast, that was where I was sent; and Lowestoft men were pushed down tu Cornwall. That's a way they have in the Admiralty!) Well, I was saying that whiles I was on the East Coast we found a couple of Germans wandering on the beach. They told us they'd swum ashore from a U-boat which had to dive sudden-like and leave 'em in the ditch. We weren't satisfied with the yarn, so we sent 'em along to Scotland Yard, to be questioned by some of the big pots there. One of the Germans had a watch which, afore he was captured, he had buried in the sand with some other gear of his. When the stuff was found the watch was still going. So the police at Scotland Yard came to the conclusion that the Germans were pitching a yarn, and that instead of swimming ashore they had landed in a boat for some purpose. But they got no change out of that German, for when they put the watch under water for a full half-hour they found that it was still ticking! But, Lardy! Here I be talking about that an' you'm still in your wet things. Do 'ee come this way, sir!"



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# **BADLY TIMED**

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While Stanniforth was shifting into borrowed plumage, Rob went down to the beach where the U-boat was lying. The tide was now at three-quarters ebb and the submarine was nearly high and dry, held by wires fixed to bollards on the wharf to prevent her rolling outwards and down the shelving shore.

“We’ve got her fixed up pretty well now, sir,” reported the yard foreman. “Commander Dymocke has just telephoned to say he will be along shortly. I suppose we must not open the hatchways until he arrives?”

“Rather not,” replied Rob. “He has his orders to be present at the examination. Hello! here he is.”

The Commander, who had taken the precaution to don oilskins and sea-boots—attire that caused him personal discomfort, for the weather was hot in spite of the terrific wind—greeted Rob cordially.

“The sooner we get this unpleasant business over the better, Wroxall,” he continued. “The Admiralty are making arrangements for the U-boat crew to be given proper burial. I think we’d better have all hatchways opened and send someone down to open all watertight doors. That’ll freshen the hull up a bit before we get down to serious work. What I’m particularly anxious to find is her log. It should be on board, unless the *Kapitan-leutnant* had time to dispose of it.”

“How could he if she were submerged?” asked Rob.

“In several ways. If he blew up the deck, as I fancy he did, he might have placed the log-book close to the explosive; or he might fire the log out of one of the torpedo tubes. The book, being enclosed in a weighted metal box, would hardly be likely to be found, although during the War one of our trawlers brought up a most important German signal code book in his trawl. . . . Yes, get hold of a reliable man and send him down. Caution him not to disturb anything, please.”

Rob told off Trevarrick for the job. The diver had no occasion to don his diving-dress, but wore overalls and a gas-mask. As soon as the hatches were removed by means of oxy-acetylene flames the man descended by the forehatch.

In twenty minutes he reappeared through the after-hatch and reported that he had had to open only two watertight doors, both for’ard of the ’midships or conning-tower hatchway.

“And a pretty ghastly business it be, sir,” he declared. “If I wur you, Mr. Wroxall, I’d give it a miss.”

“Can’t, I’m afraid, Trevarrick,” replied Rob. “If a job has to be done, it has to done, and there’s an end to it.”

“That may be, sir,” rejoined the Cornishman doggedly. “But that’s not to say someone can’t do it for you. You’ll allow you can’t say I haven’t warned

you!”

The Commander, who had been keeping well to wind’ard, was making an external examination of the U-boat’s bow tubes.

“Badly corroded, Wroxall,” he remarked, “but they do not appear to be damaged otherwise. Where’s Stanniforth?”

“Drying after a ducking,” replied Rob, and proceeded to give an account of the doctor’s misadventure. “Do you want him?”

“I don’t propose to ask him to conduct a post-mortem on the crew,” replied Dymocke gravely. “But it would be well to have him on the spot if any of us is overcome by foul air. Thank goodness there is a gale blowing. It will help to free the hull from fumes. I suppose that if we give the breeze twenty minutes’ play it will be safe to go below without a gas-mask. However useful these gadgets are, they do not enhance a man’s appearance. I wonder if your storekeeper has a couple of windsails? They’d help matters considerably.”

Inquiries showed that these articles were not available, but the storekeeper, with ready resource, suggested fixing up two cowl-ventilators from a vessel recently broken up in the yard.

These unwieldy objects, each weighing four hundredweights, were man-handled on deck, and placed in position to ensure a strong through-current of air.

While this work was in progress Captain Condor came ashore, and almost at the same time Dr. Stanniforth, arrayed in borrowed plumage that was practically a skin-tight fit, appeared upon the scene.

“Good idea that,” commented Captain Condor, referring to the ventilators. “How long do you think you’ll be, Commander Dymocke, before you’ve finished with her?”

“Oh, a couple of days, perhaps—why?”

“Because the sooner we’ve finished our job and the ship-breaker can get busy, the sooner Mr. Wroxall gets his promotion.”

“I say, that’s news!” exclaimed Rob. “What do you mean, Captain?”

“Merely what I hears,” replied the Cornish skipper. “Mr. Findon was so remarkably well pleased with the way you lifted the wreck that he intends sending you in charge of the operations on the *Lapwing*.”

“In charge?” queried Rob incredulously. “Isn’t Tomlinson doing the job? I was going as Second Salvage Officer when this business came along.”

“In charge, I said, Mr. Wroxall,” said Captain Condor. “Tomlinson seems to have made a mess of things; too fond of ‘square-face’, and the result is that he’s to be invalided home. Alcohol’s a good servant, but a very bad master. Wish I were coming along o’ ye, but I’m too old for the Coast. It’s a young man’s job.”

“Nothing like so unhealthy as it used to be,” remarked Commander Dymocke. “I served a commission there in 1911-12, and never had a day on the sick-list.”

“May be, sir,” rejoined Captain Condor. “But being afloat’s different to grilling and stewing ashore.”

“Where is the exact place?” asked Stanniforth.

“Abuea—Cameroons,” replied Condor briefly. “Maybe you’ve never heard of the place?”

“No,” replied the doctor.

A little later Stanniforth found an opportunity to take Rob aside.

“Look here, Wroxall,” he began. “I’m afraid I’m rather impulsive in certain things. To come straight to the point, I’d like awfully to go with you. Do you think your employers would consider my application to go as medical officer?”

This totally unexpected proposal took Rob completely by surprise.

“Why, I thought you were fed up already,” he remarked.

“By Jove! I’m only just beginning to enjoy myself,” declared Stanniforth. “A post as medical officer on a salvage job on the African coast would be the very thing.”

“But your practice?”

Stanniforth shrugged his shoulders.

“I could easily get a locum for, say, six months in a year. I’ve been thinking that out for some time. But you don’t seem very anxious for my company.”

“On the contrary, I am,” assented Rob warmly. “I’m afraid I’ve a bad habit of looking ahead for trouble.”

“You have that,” agreed Stanniforth bluntly. “I’ve noticed that before today. But I take your assurance that you’re willing to put up with my company.

“More than that, I’ll be delighted.”

“Good!” declared the young doctor. “Directly Dymocke has completed his examination—and I’m curious to see the result—I’ll go up to town and beard the formidable Mr. Findon in his den.”

“But it is more than likely there’s a doctor on the staff at Abuea already.”

Stanniforth laughed.

“Pessimist!” he declared. “As a matter of fact I sounded Mr. Findon on that very point just before he went ashore. There isn’t one; but there is going to be. And his name is John Stanniforth!”

# CHAPTER XVI

## “Like Rats in a Trap”

“Time, I think!” exclaimed Commander Dymocke, snapping the case of his watch.

The party detailed to continue the examination of the U-boat ascended the brow that had been placed in position and gained the deck. There was no marked enthusiasm over their task. Each man realized that his duty would be of a disagreeable nature and the sooner it was carried out satisfactorily the better.

Judging by their appearance they looked more like a shift of coal-miners preparing to descend a mine than a band of experts about to investigate conditions on board a craft that for years had lain undiscovered upon the bed of the sea. Each man wore thick overalls, tightly fitting at neck and wrist, while his legs were encased in stout leather knee-boots. They wore thick gloves of the same material as a safeguard against cuts and contusions both from the jagged metal and glass lying below decks and from the knife-like barnacles that encrusted the wreck.

In addition to electric lamps with wandering leads that had already been lowered into the interior, flashlight torches formed part of the equipment of the explorers.

At the head of the conning-tower companion ladder—the only one now available owing to the other hatchway being obstructed by the temporary ventilators—Commander Dymocke bent a rope round his waist and handed the coils to two of the men.

“Just in case there’s gas still hanging about,” he observed. “I’ll remain below by myself for three minutes. During that period I will count slowly; if you don’t hear me you’ll know that something’s wrong. Then haul me on deck as roundly as you can!”

The naval officer commenced his descent. Directly his head disappeared below the level of the coaming he commenced counting:

“One—two—three——”

Then a scuffling sound, followed by a pause.

“All right!” rang out the Commander. “It was that confounded tread—slippery as butter! Now then; four—five—six. Seems quite all right here, taking everything into consideration—seven—eight. Can you hear me? Nine—ten. Remember the perfumes in the Burlington Arcade, Stanniforth? Well, we could do with some scent here, but otherwise there’s not much to complain about. Eleven—twelve——”

In this strain Dymocke kept on until the specified three minutes had elapsed.

“All right below here!” he reported. “Come on down. Mind you don’t slip.”

Rob was the next member of the party to enter the hull. With his torch slung round his neck by a lanyard he was able to make free use of his gloved hands, and presently he was standing by the Commander’s side.

Compared with the warm open air the atmosphere was decidedly dank and chilly. Although most of the bad air had been expelled there was an unpleasant reek hanging about. It reminded Rob of the sulphuretted hydrogen that he and his fellow-pupils used surreptitiously to make in the lab., and thence convey to one of the classrooms, to the frenzied wrath and incoherent indignation of the French Master.

As soon as Stanniforth and the two hands had rejoined the party the actual work of examination began.

“We’ll try the captain’s cabin first,” decided Commander Dymocke. “This way.”

He went along the alleyway leading aft from the submerged control station. The first door on the starboard side, like most of those on board, was of the sliding pattern. It had been burst inwards, a fact that clearly indicated that the cabin had filled very slowly after the catastrophe until the pressure of water in the alleyway had forced the metal door inwards.

The Commander had not made any mistake concerning the position of the German captain’s cabin, for still discernible on the door were the words *Kapitan-leutnant*, in raised brass letters.

For the present Dymocke and his companions were baulked. The door, although fractured for the greater part of its height, was still in its frame; but being badly buckled it could not be made to slide in its appointed grooves,

apart from the fact that the latter were deeply encrusted with barnacles. The steel panel was so rigidly fixed in its frame that it resisted the Commander's manual efforts to shift it.

"A slab of guncotton would soon settle the problem," he declared, "only we don't want to disturb things too drastically. How long will it take to bring the oxy-acetylene gadget on board, Mr. Wroxall?"

"About twenty minutes," replied Rob. "There's an apparatus in store. Robson, ask Captain Condor to let you have a couple of men to bring the gear on board."

"There's no reason why we should hang on to the slack," remarked the Commander. "While they're preparing the gear we may as well try our luck for'ard. We know that the watertight doors are now open because your chief diver—what's his name?——"

"Trevarrick," replied Rob.

"Ah, Trevarrick—a stout fellow! Well, he's opened them for us. Be careful. The deck's stiff with broken glass. Do you notice how it lies?"

Rob had not; but when Commander Dymocke called his attention to the fact he saw that, whereas the deck was ankle deep in mud and sand, the part immediately adjoining the for'ard side each transverse bulkhead and coaming was covered with pieces of glass and broken metal in addition to the accumulation of silt. There were pieces of incandescent electric globes, which, had they been broken in air, would have shivered into minute fragments, jagged fragments of dial-glasses from the instrument boards, similar substances from gauge tubes, and, curiously enough, a large number of broken bottles. Later it was discovered that amongst this U-boats victims was a vessel whose cargo partly consisted of bottled claret. Several crates had been removed to the submarine. Probably a number of bottles were opened, but there had been no opportunity to dispose of the empty bottles. Far more were found full, and being full had resisted the pressure of water when the disaster happened.

"Well, what do you make of it?" asked Commander Dymocke.

"I never thought that there was so much glass to be found in a submarine," remarked Rob.

"Yes, but the position of it?" pursued the naval officer. "To me that points to an important bearing upon the catastrophe. The submarine was holed aft. For a considerable time her for'ard bulkhead held, so she sank to the bottom stern foremost. Everything movable and heavier than water slid

aft until it brought up against the transverse bulkheads. It's possible that hours elapsed before she filled for'ard and settled on an even keel. If so, the poor fellows who weren't immediately drowned had a pretty rotten ending. Here we are in a submerged control room where the executive officers on duty were stationed. There are the lower ends of the two periscopes with the object-lenses blown completely out of them by the pressure of water. And look at those instruments!"

He pointed to several dials on the instrument board, close to which were what had once been a clock and an aneroid barometer. Both the latter were crushed almost as flat as if a steam-roller had passed over them; but although festoons of seaweed hung on either side, the brass cases had successfully withstood the attacks of crustacean growth.

"Whoever was on duty here had time to run for'ard before the compartment was flooded," continued the Commander. Then he stooped to pick up a mass of sodden leather and pulped paper.

"Hello! This looks like the rough working log. 'Fraid it won't tell us much. Written up in indelible pencil, evidently, and consequently illegible. Hope we have better luck with the fair log! Now then, mind how you tread and keep your head down."

Commander Dymocke's warning was timely; for one passing through the narrow oval aperture in the for'ard bulkhead, it was necessary to step over a confused mass of sodden rags and blackened bones. This compartment was the crew's mess-room, and here the two officers and the men who had survived the first phase of the disaster had taken refuge.

Mingled with this melancholy debris were mess-traps, knives, forks, spoons, all badly rusted; aluminium ware corroded by the action of the salt water; an object that at one time was a gramophone; a partly constructed model of a Friesian fishing smack—all these objects pointed to the domestic side of the former occupants of the mess-room. The war-like side was represented by a number of rusty revolvers. It was almost certain that some of the crew, unable to withstand the horrors of a lingering death in the as yet watertight section of the foundered U-boat, had shot themselves; for when, after some difficulty, Dymocke succeeded in "breaking" three of these weapons, exploded cartridges were found to be firmly corroded in the chambers.

On the ceiling a great gap was visible, although it had been temporarily closed when the raised submarine was taken in tow from Brixham Roads. The jagged edges were bent outwards, showing that the fissure had been

caused by an interior explosion. In the vicinity, pipes and electric wires had been wrenched from the bulkhead and trailed forlornly like tendrils in the gloom of a tropical forest.

“Those poor blighters have paid the price of Admiralty according to German standards,” observed the Commander. “Come on, let’s get out of here. We’ll try the torpedo flat. Mind you don’t fall through on the storage batteries. The deck looks rather rotten here.”

Passing through another watertight doorway Rob found himself right in the eyes of the ship. The flat was found to be untenanted by any human remains. Nor were there any torpedoes, but the leads and pipes were in a chaotic state, which caused Rob to wonder whether there had been another internal explosion.

“Yes, I fancy there was,” replied Commander Dymocke, when Rob had put the question to him. “But not in the accepted sense. It was those air-flasks that caused the damage, and probably not till several months after the U-boat was ‘downed’. The air in them was kept under an enormous pressure, and when, owing to the slow corrosive action of salt water, the walls of the cylinders—air-bottles we call them—weakened, they burst. And another thing, the U-boat was making for home when she sank. Do you know why I can say that with certainty? Because she’d fired all her torpedoes. Not being a minelayer her offensive powers were done when her torpedoes were discharged. She was on her way either to Kiel or Wilhelmshaven. The latter, more than likely, since that name was given on her telephone buoy.”

“But her bows were pointing sou’west,” argued Rob. “Away from Germany, that is to say.”

“Naturally,” explained the Commander. “Owing to mines and nets in the Straits of Dover these U-boats had to go round the west coast of England and Scotland and thence north of the Shetlands. If we do have the luck to discover her log in a legible condition I think you’ll find I’m right. And you’ll also find that she had a good bag during her unfinished cruise. The U-boat commanders were very careful to give precise information concerning their prizes. Yes, the log will give us her story if we have the luck to find it.”

“The men with the oxy-acetylene plant are ready, sir,” announced one of the party.

“Good!” rejoined Rob. “Shall we tackle the *Kapitan-leutnant’s* cabin?”

“Rather!” replied Commander Dymocke. “And if we find what we want that will quite satisfy me for to-day.”

“And me too,” mentally ejaculated Rob.

It did not take the flame long to eat through the steelwork that had prevented the sliding door from opening. The naval officer was so impatient that he did not wait for the metal to cool, and it was only prompt action on Rob’s part that prevented him burning his hands.

“By Jove!” exclaimed Dymocke. “I never thought of that!”

“I’ll shift it, sir,” volunteered one of the men. “If you’ll stand aside——”

He gripped the edge of the door with a pair of long pincers. The bent rectangular sheet of metal clattered to the floor of the alleyway, sending up a dense cloud of vapour as the hot steel came in contact with the saturated deposit of slime on the deck.

“While you have the apparatus here you might open those doors,” suggested Rob, pointing to the cabins adjoining and opposite the captain’s.

“Ay, ay, sir!” replied the workman.

“Only don’t disturb anything,” cautioned Commander Dymocke. “Now, Mr. Wroxall, I think we can continue our examination.”

It was obvious that the unfortunate German *Kapitan-leutnant* was lying on his bunk and probably asleep when the disaster occurred, and that before he was drowned like a rat in a trap he had made a desperate effort to open the jammed door. His uniform, the remains of it, was strewn over the slime-covered floor, and not, as in the case of the other officers and crew, partly covering the skeleton. A pair of prism-glasses, a bunch of rusty keys, and an automatic pistol were hanging from hooks in the bulkhead, while on the heap of debris was an object that at one time was a moving-picture camera. A “compactum” washhand stand had been wrenched from its fastenings and lay on the deck in company with three of the four drawers of a dressing-table.

While Rob was contemplating the dire spectacle as a whole, Commander Dymocke, with one object in view, was paying scant attention to the scene of the hideous tragedy. Like a terrier after a rat he was devoting his attention to finding the much-wanted log-book.

A tin case, badly eaten by rust, was found in one of the drawers. Carefully the Commander removed the padlock—its fastenings were rusted

to such an extent that they broke quite easily—and withdrew a number of sodden documents, most of which were written on parchment.

“Ship’s papers,” he announced. “Captured ones. It’s futile to attempt to examine them until they’ve been carefully dried. The tin case has saved the parchment from being devoured by crabs; but on the other hand it has rusted the documents rather badly. Hello! This looks promising!”

He pulled from under the bunk a heavy metal case that had hardly suffered from corrosion. In the sides several holes had been bored so that, had there been time for the German captain to throw his confidential papers overboard, the case containing them would have sunk like a stone.

“That’s what I’ve been looking for,” continued the British naval officer. “We’ll take it up to the office, and have it opened carefully. . . . Eh! what’s that you say?”

# CHAPTER XVII

## The Brass Buckle

“We’ve opened this door, sir,” reported one of the workmen. “Will you just cast your eye here, sir?”

The cabin indicated was on the port side and adjoining the engine-room for’ard bulkhead. Here the state of confusion was less noticeable than in the case of the *Kapitan-leutnant’s* cabin for the reason that it had not been so generously furnished. In fact, there were hardly any articles to come adrift.

In it there were two almost complete skeletons, both clad in uniforms that, in spite of the ravages of time and salt water, were still recognizable as those of the British Mercantile Marine. One of the victims was once a tall man, certainly not less than six feet in height; the other was under medium height and massive of frame.

“An example of how submarine warfare flouts all conventions,” remarked Commander Dymocke. “According to all international agreements submarines capturing merchantmen were required to remove their crews to a place of safety before sending the vessels to the bottom. In practice, of course, this cannot be done, but the Germans had a double purpose in capturing the skippers of torpedoed ships. We’ll be able, I think, to identify these two unfortunate officers and to give them a decent burial. . . . All right! That will do for to-day.”

Gladly Rob ascended to the open air. The experience had made him feel ill. He had hardly bargained for this sort of thing in marine salvage work. He staggered down the brow, ignoring the volley of questions fired at him by a knot of eager reporters. In fact, he was hardly conscious of their presence. It was not intentional rudeness on his part, but the effect of sheer mental and physical nausea. To witness the effects of a disaster at sea would be within the scope of his profession. It was this case—one of many—of man’s inhumanity towards man that had shaken him so badly.

Directly Commander Dymocke appeared, carrying the U-boat's papers, he was surrounded by the throng of pressmen who, by some means, had been informed that the examination of the salvaged vessel was in progress.

"Gentlemen," announced the Commander, in reply to the avalanche of questions, "we have made a preliminary examination of the U-boat. It is true that we have found the corpses of two British merchant seamen, though how you came to know this already passes my comprehension. At present they are unidentified, but when these documents have been deciphered I think that the Admiralty will be in a position to issue a statement. I regret that, owing to certain circumstances, it is impossible for me to give you permission to view the interior of the vessel at the present moment. No doubt at an early date Messrs. Findon & Rayse will give you full facilities to do so."

"But," protested one of the pressmen, "many of us are special representatives sent down from London. It seems hardly fair that we should be denied information——"

"No authentic information will be withheld," replied Dymocke suavely. "There is no secrecy over the affair, but I know you would not like to be given a statement concerning facts of which we still are in ignorance. I will answer any questions you care to put, provided I can give a definite answer. You can interview any of the party concerned in the work. But I have already made it clear that until the Admiralty investigations are completed no unauthorized person will be admitted to view the interior of the submarine."

The reporters accepted this decision with a good grace. After all, they were level-headed men and realized that the naval officer's statement was a sound one, and, more than anything, he had treated them courteously.

So they contented themselves by interviewing all and sundry who had anything to do in connexion with the salvage work; while the Commander, having seen a guard posted at the gangway to prevent strangers going on board, made his way to the office to write his report and to make arrangements for the opening of the metal case containing the U-boat's log and other confidential papers.

Just before eight o'clock that evening, Commander Dymocke issued a statement for the benefit of the persistent pressmen who still hung around the salvage yard.

Having made a cursory examination of the papers, he was in a position to state that U445 had accounted for the sinking of five British merchant ships between the 8th and the 15th of March, 1917, and that when she was herself sunk—apparently as the result of being accidentally rammed by an unknown surface craft—she had on board the Master of the *S.S. Antibar* and the Master of the *S.S. Barbel*. These two were captured and taken on board the submarine because of their determined resistance when chased by the U-boat. Her *Kapitan-leutnant*, Karl von Greirhausen, had logged the statement that he had chased the *Antibar* for six hours, and had been hit twice by her stern gun, before, under cover of night, he had succeeded in getting into a favourable position for torpedoing her. At dawn U445 came to the surface and overhauled the *Antibar's* boats. The captain was then ordered to come on board. A few hours later von Greirhausen recorded a gale. That probably accounted for the loss of the *Antibar's* crew. Three days later—the last entry in the log was at 3.10 a.m.—U445 was sunk with all on board.

The following morning was a memorable one for Rob Wroxall. He was expecting to spend a fairly quiet day. There was no need for his presence on board U445, and he was unfeignedly glad to keep clear of the ill-omened wreck. He could see the submarine from his cabin port-hole in the *Gleaner*, and the sight of her made him almost lose sight of the fact that her salvage was his achievement. The shadow of the discovery of the secret within her hitherto hermetically sealed hull had overshadowed his sense of elation over his successful work.

“You’re very quiet, Wroxall,” remarked Dr. Stanniforth as they tarried over breakfast.

“Feel a bit off colour over yesterday,” confessed Rob.

“I suppose so,” agreed the Doctor. “Pretty gruesome, I admit, and hanged if I can see the necessity of harrowing the feelings of the relatives by all this publicity. But buck up! To change the subject; do you think I’ll get a reply from Mr. Findon to-day!”

“Might,” replied Rob. “Mail ought to be on board any moment. Here are the daily papers.”

“By Jove!” exclaimed Stanniforth, who had heard nothing about Commander Dymocke’s statement to the Press representatives. “Here’s a whole column dealing with the examination of the U-boat. Those fellows haven’t lost much time in getting their copy through, and apparently they’ve let their imagination take the bit between its teeth.”

“Mixed metaphor that,” commented Rob.

“Well, you know what I mean,” rejoined the doctor. “Here, read it yourself.”

Rob was not more than half-way through the close column of print when one of the *Gleaner’s* crew rapped on the cabin door.

“Telegram for you, sir!” he announced.

It was from head office:

“Arrange to sail for Accra, Saturday. Take charge of *Lapwing* operations. Letter follows. Findon, Rayse, Ltd.”

“I’ve got it, Doc,” exclaimed Rob. “I’m off to Abuea next Saturday. They’ve put me in charge of the salvage work on the *Lapwing*.”

“Nothing mentioned about my application?” inquired Stanniforth anxiously.

“Not a word. They’d hardly mention that in a telegram to me. You’ll probably hear from Mr. Findon direct.”

“Hope so,” rejoined Stanniforth. “That is, provided he gives me the appointment. Hello! Here’s the morning’s mail coming off. Let’s see what luck we have.”

They went on deck to await the arrival of the boat.

In all there were about a dozen letters. Some were for the regular crew of the *Gleaner*. Those for Captain Condor had been left at his house. There was one for Stanniforth and four for Rob.

“From my brother,” announced the doctor, glancing at the postmark. “I suppose he’s written to say he’ll take over my practice while I’m away, and then I’ll have a letter from Mr. Findon saying that he’s very sorry, but he regrets, &c.”

Rob’s correspondence in three cases was of a purely private nature. The fourth was a circular from a firm of outfitters calling attention to their experience in providing tropical uniform and clothing.

“Now, how did Blazer and Stamp know my address here, and how did they know I was under orders abroad?” remarked Rob.

“That’s easy,” explained Stanniforth. “These big outfitters get inside information. Often a candidate for a Naval or Military commission gets the first intimation that he’s passed his exam through a letter from an outfitter

congratulating him on his success, and at the same time offering to provide him with uniform! So I suppose the same tactics are employed by these people. . . . Yes, my brother says he can fix things up all right, so far as I am concerned. The sooner the better. Have a cigarette?"

The two chums brought out deck chairs and settled down to a quiet read on deck under the lee of the chart-house.

In this manner two hours passed.

Then, happening to glance shoreward, Rob noticed that a square flag, white with the letter T in red, had been hoisted on the flagstaff at the end of the jetty.

"Another telegram for the *Gleaner*!" he exclaimed. "Where's the duty-boat?"

When the telegram was brought off to the ship Rob saw that it was addressed to him. Opening the orange-coloured envelope he read the following somewhat startling message:

"Wroxall—Findon, Rayse, Falmouth: Was my late brother wearing brass-buckled belt? if so, please retain. Fosdyke, Master, *S.S. Amilcar*."

"What on earth does this mean, Doc?" exclaimed Rob, handing Stanniforth the telegram.

Stanniforth read it carefully.

"It's from the brother of one of the two Mercantile Marine officers whose bodies were found there," he replied, indicating the salvaged submarine. "That's plain. The name Fosdyke is the same. Didn't you read that in the paper?"

Rob shook his head.

"I gave that report a miss," he replied. "But it's strange—very. I met this Captain Fosdyke in the train when I came down here to commence the salvage job."

"Evidently he remembered that," continued the doctor. "So, for some reason, he wants you to see if there's a brass-buckled belt belonging to the dead man."

Rob studied the telegram again.

"Sharp work," he commented. "This was sent off by radio from Las Palmas at 7.40, or roughly nine o'clock Greenwich time. Rugby picked it up

at 9.10, and it arrives here soon after eleven. That's clear enough; but what puzzles me is how Captain Fosdyke got the news, seeing that it first appears in to-day's London papers."

"That's simple enough," explained Stanniforth. "You'll probably find that the news came through to one of the Cape liners in the form of a radio press message. Then, more likely, the skipper of the liner either knew Captain Fosdyke personally or knew that his ship was in the vicinity. So the news was again radio'd to the *Amilcar* and Fosdyke immediately sends off a wireless to you! But the strange part about it is why your friend Fosdyke is so keen on your getting hold of a brass-buckled belt."

"Perhaps there's a pouch attached to it," suggested Rob.

"Why not find out at once?" rejoined Stanniforth. "They'll be removing the remains for burial during the forenoon, I believe. Look here," he continued, noticing the worried look on Rob's face, "I'll go and see if the late Captain Fosdyke is wearing the belt. You wait here."

"But I say——" protested Wroxall.

"That's quite all right," declared the young doctor reassuringly, "I'm used to this sort of thing. Leave it to me. Perhaps you'd better let me have the telegram to show Dymocke; not that he is likely to raise objections, but \_\_\_\_\_"

Stanniforth went ashore, and in less than half an hour returned on board with a brown paper parcel.

"Here's the belt," he said briefly. "There's no pouch attached to it; there never was, so far as I can make out."

He unwrapped the parcel and placed the belt on one of the deck-chairs.

There was nothing of an unusual nature about the article. It was an ordinary leather belt, about an inch in width and turned almost black by reason of a prolonged submersion in salt water. The buckle was covered with a thick deposit of verdigris, but judging by its shape it was similar to thousands of buckles to be bought in any outfitters' shop.

"I wonder if that's the one Fosdyke is referring to?" asked Rob. "There's nothing peculiar about it, as far as I can see."

"Suppose we clean the buckle," was the doctor's practical suggestion. "A little sand and paraffin will soon remove the verdigris. We'd better put gloves on. One can't be too careful mucking about with dirty brass."

The task of polishing the buckle had hardly begun when the stitches fastening the leather came away.

“Better sling the leather overboard, it’s rotten,” suggested Stanniforth. “It’s the buckle that is the important thing, evidently.”

“No; I’ll keep it,” rejoined Rob. “Perhaps it’s important. Now, we’d better go carefully.”

Twenty minutes’ cautious work succeeded in restoring the brasswork to a state approaching brilliancy. Then it became apparent that there were letters and figures engraved upon the buckle. They were roughly made, not by scratching with a sharp instrument, but by the action of sulphuric or nitric acid:

56. 63. S 6 W. S ½ E.

“So that’s what Captain Fosdyke’s after,” exclaimed Rob.

“Undoubtedly,” agreed Stanniforth. “But what do they mean?”

His companion shook his head.

“I don’t know what the figures mean,” he replied. “But it looks as if the letters are two compass-bearings. And Fosdyke wants me to freeze on to them. To tell the truth, I don’t like the responsibility. Supposing I lose the thing?”

“It seems to me that since you are going out to the West Coast and he’s there already, there may be a possibility of your being able to hand him the buckle personally.”

“The *Amilcar* may be homeward bound before I reach Abuea,” objected Rob. “I tell you what; I’ll take a rubbing of the inscription and then send the belt to Fosdyke’s home address.”

“Do you know it?” asked Stanniforth.

“No, but young Denis Paul will. He’s not likely to forget it, since he told me that the Captain had given him a hiding for sneaking his apples when he was a kid.”

“Is Captain Fosdyke married?”

“I don’t know. Probably Paul does.”

“I don’t think I’d risk sending the buckle to his house,” said Stanniforth. “The best thing you can do, since you won’t take the risk of retaining it, is to

place it in a sealed packet and deposit the packet with a bank, giving the bank authority to hand it to Captain Fosdyke on demand. Then if you have a rubbing of the letters you'll probably find that's all that Fosdyke wants."

Acting upon this suggestion, Rob went ashore and deposited the buckle in one of the local banks. He also sent off a radio message to Captain Fosdyke stating that his wishes had been carried out.

On his way back to the ship he found that the second post was in. Amongst the letters was one for himself, bearing the Salvage Company's seal, and a similar envelope for Dr. Stanniforth.

"Got rid of the buckle, old son?" inquired the latter.

"Yes, and wirelessly to Fosdyke that it was O.K. Matter of fact I said that his wishes had been carried out. Perhaps that was an exaggeration."

"You said nothing about the marks on the buckle?"

"Rather not," replied Rob. "And what's more, I don't intend to give him that information by letter. It seems as if neither of the Fosdykes wanted those figures and letters made known, otherwise why couldn't they have written home concerning them? The poor fellow who went west in U445 didn't, otherwise he would not have gone to the trouble of engraving these signs on the buckle of a belt he was wearing, and Captain Fosdyke wouldn't have wasted good money in sending a radio message to me. But here's a letter for you, Doc; I may tell you it's from Findon & Rayse."

Stanniforth opened the envelope and began to read its contents. Watching him Rob saw the doctor's brows contract. He looked first disappointed, then puzzled. Finally he gave a breezy laugh.

"Your employers don't commit themselves, Wroxall," he said. "They lead off by saying that there is no vacancy for a medical man on the staff at Abuea. The port authorities' surgeon's services are available, they say. Also they politely remind me that they did not ask me to apply, but since I have done so, what remuneration am I prepared to accept for a six months' contract? So they've nibbled, Rob, and now it's up to me to land my fish!"

"And what do you propose doing?"

"Going up to town to-night and interviewing Mr. Findon."

"And it seems as if I'll have to go up too," rejoined Rob. "I've to see Mr. Findon at his office at two o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

# CHAPTER XVIII

## The Next Task

It was with mixed feelings that Rob Wroxall bade farewell to Captain Condor and the men who had so whole-heartedly assisted him in bringing his first responsible salvage job to a successful conclusion. Having achieved this object he looked forward to tackling a more difficult operation. Once U445 was safely beached in Falmouth Harbour his interest in her waned. Stanniforth “chipped” him, remarking that he was like a terrier that, having made a kill, scorned to touch the rat once the rodent, its neck broken, has been tossed aside.

“Perhaps you’re right there,” admitted Rob. “’Fraid I wasn’t cut out for an undertaker’s job. There’s one thing for which I am truly thankful: there was no loss of life when the *Lapwing* went ashore.”

“It’s going to be a big task getting her afloat?”

“Big isn’t the word for it,” replied Rob. “From the preliminary report it seems as if she’s aground close to the harbour entrance. She was thrown completely on her beam-ends, and has been slowly sinking in the shifting sand. In consequence of her being there the harbour bar is both shifting and shoaling.”

“Then why don’t they blow her up and get rid of her that way?” asked Stanniforth.

“Because of the cargo,” replied Rob. “Most of it consists of special rustless steel girders for a railway bridge across the Abuea River. Our firm signed a contract with the Cameroon Mandative Authorities to remove the wreck and recover the cargo within eight calendar months. The Deputy-Commissioner has written home complaining of the inefficiency of the man in charge of the salvage operations, so Mr. Findon has recalled him and sent me out in his place.”

“Without hearing what the fellow had to say?”

“Hardly. Tomlinson, apparently, has admitted failure.”

“And left you to straighten things out. That’s always a rotten job, because it doesn’t give you a fair start. But you’ll do it all right.”

“I hope so,” rejoined Rob. “And if I get a touch of brain-fever through over-worry you’ll be there to set me right.”

Rob obtained a further insight into the difficulties confronting him when he reported at the firm’s head office.

“Tomlinson’s let us down badly,” announced Mr. Findon in his outspoken manner. “Booze, of course, is the cause of it, and in consequence we have to pay dearly for every bottle of square-face he’s guzzled. And he went about the job in the wrong way from the start. It’s useless to attempt to make use of a sand-dredger if the stuff’s washed back into the excavation with every flood-tide. And the trouble is that although you haven’t much range of tide to help you—the rise at springs is only six feet—the tidal current runs at a good four knots. The great thing is to salve the cargo. The steelwork represents a possible loss of a quarter of a million to the Cameroon Railways, and so far nothing has been salvaged. You can’t get lighters alongside, the *Lapwing*’s right on her beam-ends, and the steelwork’s jammed tight under hatches and is both awkward and heavy to handle. If we salve the stuff and refloat the ship by the 1st of February, well and good. If not, we’ll stand to lose about twenty thousand pounds. Now, I’m giving you practically a free hand. Here are all the documents dealing with the job to date. Go through them and draft your plan of operation. If you want any help from me, ask for it. I’d like to see that draft by noon tomorrow.”

“Very good, sir.”

“And if it’s as satisfactory as the one you submitted about U445, it is very good,” rejoined the Principal. “Oh, by the by, about this application from Dr. Stanniforth. He’s a friend of yours, I believe?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Rob, “though I haven’t known him long. You may remember he was one of the three doctors who came on board the *Gleaner* when Diver White got trapped. Captain Condor let him remain on board, and he’s been with us ever since until he came up with me yesterday.”

“We’ll engage him—if his terms are reasonable,” observed Mr. Findon with caution. “Really we ought to have our own doctor on the spot. It’s all very well having the service of the Abuea port medical officer, but he can’t be in two places at once. Dr. Stanniforth’s calling here this afternoon. . . .

And there's another point; most of our men on the *Lapwing* job are natives. You've never handled a West Coast crowd of blacks?"

"No, sir."

"Well, then, take my advice and handle 'em firmly. Let them know you're boss, and that you won't stand any nonsense, and they'll respect you. Treat them well, but don't show individual favour even if it is deserved. They're as jealous of each other as a parcel of puppies! That's one reason why Tomlinson failed. They saw him drunk day after day, with the result that they hadn't the slightest respect for him, and that undermined the authority of the white foremen and chargemen. So bear what I say in mind. Very good! Let me have that report to-morrow."

Rob spent the rest of the day in scanning the bulky pile of documents relating to the operations on the *Lapwing*. Particularly interesting and illuminating were the unhappy Tomlinson's reports, written in his own hand.

Undoubtedly the superseded engineer had started well. His earlier reports were clearly written, his deductions sound, his plan of operations lucid, and generally his tone was sensibly optimistic. Then, figuratively like the cloud no bigger than a man's hand, appeared the first sign of decay in his moral fibre. The reports became longer and of a rambling character. There were admissions of failure, but Tomlinson did not blame himself, but those under his orders. The actual writing, too, deteriorated from a fair script to a disorderly scrawl embellished by smears of spilt spirits.

Then there was a break in the sequence of Tomlinson's reports. A brief note from the District Commissioner to Messrs. Findon & Rayse called their attention to the fact that the salvage work, so essential both to the harbour development and to the construction of an important railway bridge, was not proceeding satisfactorily, and suggested that unless certain steps were taken to speed up the work—and amongst them the appointment of another engineer—there was almost a certainty of the penalty clause being put into operation, to the financial detriment of the salvage firm.

To this statement was appended an independent report of the state of the wrecked *Lapwing*. She had struck on the starboard side of the entrance to Abuea Harbour and practically on the inner side of the bar. Another fifty yards and she would have been in deep water. After striking she had rolled over on her port side and had quickly dug a bed for herself in the yielding sand. Within a few days the spit of sand had extended beyond the wreck and had seriously lessened the width of the navigable channel.

It had so far been impossible to unload the bulky and valuable cargo, and apparently Tomlinson had attempted the useless task of attempting to dredge a channel through which the ship could be hauled ahead into deep water. He had never taken into consideration the fact the *Lapwing* would have to be got on an almost even keel before this could be done.

After carefully considering the data given in the documents and on an accompanying harbour chart, Rob felt that he was in a position to submit his scheme of operations, although he was quite aware that when he arrived upon the scene there might be conditions that as yet were unknown to him. At any rate he had a sufficient general knowledge of the state of affairs to be able to formulate a sound plan of action. At least, he hoped so.

There was another disturbing factor in the case; that was the frequent mention of a Mr. Greig—David Greig—who was Tomlinson's assistant engineer. Undoubtedly the latter had a bad opinion of David Greig, and, so far as the correspondence went, David Greig had not been in a position to defend himself. Now that Tomlinson was superseded what would be Greig's position? Would he be recalled as well? If not, how would he work under Rob, who was his junior in age and also in length of service?

Just as Rob had completed his draft plan Dr. Stanniforth burst into his room like a young tornado.

"I've got the appointment, Wroxall!" he announced. "So all I have to do is to collect my kit, and join you on the ship at Liverpool. A jolly old wagon load of anxiety has been lifted off my shoulders, I can tell you."

"I wish it were lifted off mine," rejoined Rob.

"What do you mean?" asked the young doctor. Rob told him.

"My dear fellow, you seem to have a knack of meeting troubles half-way," said Stanniforth. "I've told you that before. I know you've a tough job in front of you. It's like having to restore an old building that has been attacked by dry rot. When you start cutting away there's no knowing how much you'll have to remove before you can commence the actual restoration. On the other hand your mountain may turn out to be a molehill. As for this Mr. Greig, he may be quite a decent sort and quite willing to work in complete harmony with you. So, for goodness' sake don't look for trouble."

"But I must look ahead," protested Rob. "When a fellow is solely responsible for the supervision of a job he must visualize it right up to the completion!"

“By all means visualize it, then,” rejoined Stanniforth. “But visualize it hopefully and your troubles will fade into thin air.”

Encouraged by his chum’s optimism, Rob took his report to Mr. Findon.

The Chief read it carefully.

“Sounds promising, Mr. Wroxall,” he remarked. “You can get along with it. But there’s one thing I’d like to tell you; there is an abundance of brushwood in the vicinity of the wreck. A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse and a hint goes a long way with an intelligent listener. Do you follow me?”

# CHAPTER XIX

## An Accidental Shot

At the appointed time Rob and Dr. Stanniforth boarded the mail-boat at Liverpool. Already Rob knew that Diver Trevarrick and his attendant Polglaze were under orders for Abuea and had had their passages booked in the same ship; but he was pleasantly surprised to find that Denis Paul was already on board.

“Didn’t know you were coming out with us,” remarked Rob, as he greeted the pupil-apprentice. “Mr. Findon never mentioned it to me.”

“He may have forgotten to do so,” suggested Denis. “As a matter of fact Mr. Rayse sent me. You see, my pater knows him very well, and I got him to make a special application.”

“I see—personal influence.”

“Hope you don’t mind, sir,” said the youth earnestly. “I was awfully keen to go out with you——”

“Mind? Of course I don’t,” declared Rob. “Where are you berthed?”

“Second class,” replied Denis. “But I hope I’ll be able to see you sometimes on the way out. They seem awfully strict about that in the ship. Polglaze wanted to ask me about something and they wouldn’t let him leave the steerage. I have to go down to him.”

“It’s regulations,” explained Rob. “Apparently a fellow can go down on this ship, but he can’t go up! Right-o, I’ll make a point of looking you up. There’s a lot I want to talk to you about.”

The majority of Rob’s fellow-passengers consisted of Nigerian Protectorate officials either returning from leave—they could easily be detected by their sallow, lean features from which the equatorial sunburn had not disappeared—and others taking up an appointment for the first time. Many of them were mere youths engaged upon what is termed a “tour” of two years. Before that time would be up most of them would be

automatically placed in two classes—potential Empire builders or failures. The remainder, in spite of vastly improved health conditions, would have paid their last debt to nature in what is still known as the “White Man’s Grave”.

There were traders, too, known as West Coast Men, together with a sprinkling of Army officers on their way to rejoin their native regiments.

Apparently none of the other passengers was going on to Abuea. At least when Rob asked the purser for information that worthy replied that he didn’t think any were going farther than Bonny and Calabar. In any case they, like Rob and the *Lapwing* party, would have to tranship at Lagos. But the purser was mistaken.

After dinner on the first evening out, a group of men were yarning in the smoking-room. It was blowing and raining hard and consequently most of the passengers kept under cover.

Presently one of the men addressed Rob, who was sitting with Stanniforth at one of the tables.

“Is that right that you’re the new engineer in charge of the *Lapwing* operations?” he inquired.

“I am,” admitted Rob.

“H’m; then you’ve got a tough job.”

“Unquestionably,” agreed Rob.

“Confound your impudence!” exclaimed the man loudly, and swung on his heel and made for the opposite side of the smoking-room, followed by a roar of laughter from all the men within earshot.

“Now what have I done?” thought Rob. “Must have put my foot into it with a vengeance.”

Stanniforth, too, was taken aback at the incident. He could not account for the ill-mannered fellow’s outburst.

“You scored very neatly that time, sir,” remarked one of the passengers.

“I don’t see how,” rejoined Rob guardedly.

“Do you mean to tell me that you’ve been on the Coast, and don’t know ‘Unquestionably Jones’?”

Rob shook his head.

“I’m on my way out for the first time.”

“Really! I thought from your bronzed features you’d been there before. My error! Well, I’ll explain, and these gentlemen will bear me out. Jones is the harbour-master at Abuea; but before then he had a post at Cape Coast Castle. Unfortunately he’s just a little fond of ‘bending the elbow’, otherwise he isn’t a bad sort. But to tell you how he got his sobriquet. He had to attend at the Castle a public dinner at which the Governor presided. In the course of a speech His Excellency made some reference to a local incident, and Jones, who was three sheets in the wind, had the temerity to shout ‘Question’. There was a dead silence. Then the Governor asked very cuttingly: ‘And what did you say, Mr. Jones?’ ‘I shaid unquestionably, Your Exshellency!’ explained Jones, ‘unquestionably!’ The Governor continued his speech and apparently the incident was closed. But from that time onward, Jones was known on the Coast as ‘Unquestionably Jones’, and it riles him. Quite by chance you mentioned the word and he’s feeling peeved.”

“Thanks for the information,” said Rob. “But the fellow’s a touchy customer to think that I purposely tried to chip him. What would you do, Stanniforth?”

The doctor smiled.

“Forget it!” he replied.

“But the fellow is the harbour-master at Abuea,” persisted Rob. “We ought to be working together, and now, before we’re far from Mersey Bar, we’re at loggerheads.”

“Then go over and apologize to him,” proposed Stanniforth.

At this suggestion Rob bridled.

“What! Apologize for something I haven’t done!” he expostulated. “No fear!”

“Don’t be a young ass,” continued Stanniforth bluntly. “For one reason, it isn’t diplomacy to be on bad terms with a harbour-master, especially if you have to rely upon his co-operation at Abuea. For another, you have figuratively trodden on the fellow’s corns, although you had no intention of doing so. So when you have the chance—you needn’t chase him to do it—explain matters to him.”

“That won’t do, Doc,” expostulated Rob. “If I’m not supposed to know that he’s called ‘Unquestionably Jones’, how can I explain to him? After all,

he was the one to get in a temper.”

“Have it your own way, then,” rejoined Stanniforth unruffled. “Only don’t forget he’s the harbour-master at Abuea!”

Shortly after ten o’clock Rob and the doctor turned in; or, rather, they went to the two-berth cabin allotted to them. A considerable amount of unpacking and “getting straight” required to be done under conditions that were new to them both. For one thing, the cabin—it was No. 14—was not so commodious as the single-berth ones each had had on board the *Gleaner*. On the latter vessel they were ship’s officers, here they were merely first-class passengers with a considerably restricted number of cubic feet of space in which to move.

“Strange how some people object to No. 13,” remarked Stanniforth, as he unlocked his cabin trunk and proceeded to arrange his hair-brushes and shaving-gear. “In some liners they discreetly ignore the number altogether and No. 13—which is the 13th for all that—is given the number 14. I see that on this ship No. 13 has been converted into a bathroom; so presumably the occupants of every cabin in this section can share whatever bad luck there is. By Jove! It’s blowing pretty hard! Wind right abeam, too!”

“Yes, until we round Holyhead and then it will be a following wind,” replied Rob. “She’s rolling a bit now. She’ll corkscrew like anything when she’s stern-on to the waves. See that all your gear’s properly stowed or it’ll be all over the shop! Now, ‘bags I upper berth’. Reminds one of one’s schooldays, doesn’t it?”

“You’re too late, my festive,” replied Stanniforth. “I’ve already taken possession of the upper berth in the same way in which a British railway traveller secures a corner seat—by placing his hat on it!”

The doctor was on the point of climbing into his bunk when the ship gave a heavy lurch. His bare feet slipped on the edge of the lower bunk board, but by maintaining his grip he saved himself from being hurled backwards across the cabin.

Even as he hung on there was a sharp whip-like crack, just audible above the roar of the wind and waves, and practically simultaneously a small, neatly drilled hole appeared in each of the opposite bulkheads!

A second or so earlier and Stanniforth’s head would have been in the direct track of a bullet!

Even then he did not realize his narrow escape. It never occurred to him that that small hole in the partition a few inches above his pillow had been

caused by a high-velocity bullet.

“Stand clear, Doc!” exclaimed Rob warningly. “Some fool is playing about with a revolver. There may be another shot!”

“A what?”

“A revolver!”

“Believe you’re right,” rejoined Stanniforth coolly. “A miss is as good as a mile; but the fellow ought to be ticked off for his carelessness. I’ll ring for the steward!”

But before the doctor could touch the electric bell-push there was a frenzied succession of taps on the door.

“Hello! What do you want?” demanded Rob, thinking perhaps that either a passenger had gone off his head and was attempting to enter with homicidal intentions or else one of his terrified and wounded victims was asking for sanctuary.

“Are you all right, sir?” inquired an anxious voice. “There’s been a slight accident. My fault entirely.”

At that Rob unlocked the door. Outside, and blinking in the glare of the electric light, was “Unquestionably Jones”.

There was no doubt that the man was in an awful funk. His deeply-tanned features looked positively grey. His hands were shaking as he steadied himself against the door frame.

“Not much damage done,” said Rob reassuringly. “No one was hit, although my friend here may claim damages for shock. Come in, Mr. Jones.”

Up to that moment the man had not recognized Rob. When he did—and realized that the occupants of the cabin were taking the situation calmly—he gave a sickly smile.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Wroxall; very sorry.”

“Don’t mention it,” rejoined Rob, his *amour-propre* soothed by the words, although they probably referred to Jones’s accident with his revolver and not to his outburst of temper earlier in the evening.

“I was taking my revolver out of my suitcase, when the ship gave a lurch. I must have touched the trigger,” explained the culprit. “By George, sir! I thought I’d plugged someone.”

“You nearly did,” remarked Stanniforth without any suggestion of bitterness. “But for the lurch you mentioned, I might have got it through the head. Isn’t there a regulation that all firearms belonging to passengers are to be given into the captain’s charge?”

“I know,” admitted Jones frankly. “But half the tin-pot regulations in this ship are made to be broken.”

“Like these bulkheads, I suppose,” added Stanniforth, pointing to the incriminating holes in the enamelled partitions. “Personally I don’t mind extra ventilation, but people using the bathroom might object. Hadn’t we better plug the holes before they’re discovered? I don’t think anyone else heard the report, because of the noise outside, but if we don’t cover up the bullet holes there’ll be a most unholy row to-morrow.”

“I say, it’s jolly sporting of you two,” declared Jones gratefully.

Stanniforth unstrapped his medicine chest and from it produced two indiarubber corks.

“That’s one advantage of having a medical man as your next-door neighbour,” he observed. “These fit the holes nicely.”

“And to-morrow I’ll get the carpenter to give the bulkhead a flick of white paint,” added Jones. “A ten-shilling note will square him all right and cheap at the price.”

“I think we’d better explore the bathroom,” suggested Rob, entering into the spirit of the thing. “We ought to find the bullet or it will give the show away.”

Cautiously they went out into the alleyway. There was no one else in sight. The plate on the bathroom door indicated that it was vacant.

Stanniforth fumbled for the switch, found it and pressed it down. There was a click but no light.

“Out of order,” declared Jones. “They don’t expect people to have baths between sunset and sunrise. I suppose there are no candles.”

He struck a match. There was a gimballed candlestick on the bulkhead. When lighted it gave a feeble glimmer.

“Look out!” cautioned Rob. “The deck’s covered with glass splinters. We’d better find our slippers, Doc.”

In the excitement they had overlooked the fact that both were barefooted. “Unquestionably Jones” was fully dressed and was wearing

fairly stout-soled shoes.

The trio returned to No. 14 cabin, where deficiencies in footgear were made good. Then Stanniforth suggested that it would be well to bring a brush along.

“I don’t feel inclined to sacrifice one of my hair-brushes,” he remarked. “Perhaps you have one you can spare, Mr. Jones? And while you’re about it, bring along your electric light bulb.”

Since he was the cause of the trouble, Mr. Jones could not well refuse, so he went to his cabin to get the required articles. Since the bullet from his revolver had smashed the bulb in the bathroom, Nemesis ordained that his cabin should be plunged into darkness in order to remedy the lighting defects in No. 13.

The trio then repaired to the bathroom, locked the door against possible belated patrons, and proceeded to “tidy up”.

Fortunately the socket-holder of the lamp had escaped damage, and with a new bulb the electric light was once more obtainable.

Using a newspaper as a dust-pan, Jones set to work to brush up the minute fragments of glass. While he was thus engaged Rob and the Doctor examined the track of the bullet.

Although the missile had made a clean hole in No. 14 cabin bulkheads, it had made rather a mess in its entry into No. 13. On the partition above the head of the bath was a zinc plate on which was painted the warning “Notice: do not switch off the light while in the bath!” The bullet had cut a jagged hole in the plate, completely obliterating the words “do not”.

Then in its course the bullet had shattered the electric light bulb, and had mushroomed itself against a vertical iron pipe. The remains of the nickel missile were found lying in the bath, together with more fragments of glass. But for the fortunate intervention of the metal pipe the bullet would have traversed the bulkhead and entered No. 12 cabin, probably with fatal results to the occupier of the upper berth.

It took the three conspirators the best part of an hour to camouflage the damage. The notice-plate they unshipped, flattened the jagged edges of the bullet hole, and replaced the rectangular sheet of metal so that the aperture in the bulkhead was hidden by an undamaged part of the plate. The splay on the pipe they covered with a mixture of soap and pumice dust. Finally they washed out the bath and swept the particles of glass into the wastepipe.

“’Fraid you’ll have to turn in in the dark,” remarked Rob to the occupier of No. 15 cabin.

“Unquestionably Jones” winked knowingly. He had not the slightest intention of being deprived of his electric light; so he coolly unshipped one of the bulbs in the alleyway, replaced it with the socket of the broken one, and, having thanked the two chums for their assistance, went to his own cabin.

Both incidents—the little scene in the smoking-room and the affair of the accidental revolver shot—were, to use a diplomatic term, considered closed so far as Rob was concerned.

Apparently Mr. Jones successfully “squared” the carpenter, for the incriminating marks were painted out early next day.

For the rest of the voyage “Unquestionably Jones” was quite affable to Rob. He made no reference to the first incident, nor did Rob mention the subject. Although the harbour-master of Abuea was a hot-tempered individual he had the redeeming characteristic of being genuinely grateful, and before long he showed it towards Rob in no half-hearted way.

# CHAPTER XX

## The Black Pilot

Nineteen days after leaving Liverpool, Rob and the members of his party arrived off Abuea Bar. They had transhipped at Lagos to a small coasting steamer, where the accommodation was both limited and uncomfortable, and it was with considerable eagerness that they looked forward to exchanging their cramped quarters afloat for the doubtful pleasure of existing on the fringe of a West African sandbank.

The *Zamba* had stopped her engine and was drifting aimlessly in seventeen fathoms, waiting for the pilot to take her over the bar. This was a doubly difficult task; for in the first case the wreck of the *Lapwing* had altered the course of the channel and was continuing to do so. Secondly, a dense miasmal mist hung over the land, completely obscuring Abuea from sight.

“Well, where is the harbour anyway?” asked Dr. Stanniforth, who, with his companion, was standing under the bridge in order to obtain slight protection from the sun’s rays.

“Ask me another,” replied Rob, tilting his double-crowned sun-helmet in order to wipe the perspiration from his forehead and eyes. “It may be another two hours before we’re in, so I vote we have lunch.”

“No lunch gwine, sah!” exclaimed the black steward, who had overheard Rob’s suggestion.

“No lunch? Why not?”

“’Cause voyage supposed end ten o’clock, sah! Contract ’im finish with breakfas’. No more meals on board dis ship! But I tell you dis,” he continued, lowering his voice. “For half a crown a head me git you private slap-up lunch, see?”

“‘Sharpen your cutlasses, lads, and the day’s ours!’ ” quoted Stanniforth. “In other words ‘Tighten your belts and we’ll do this rascally nigger in the eye’. Talk about exploitation! Hello! Is that the pilot?”

The wail of a siren was followed by the exaggerated shape of a vessel emerging from the mist at about a cable's length on the *Zamba's* port bow. The latter also gave a belated succession of blasts, signifying in marine parlance, "Way is off my ship: you may feel your way past me."

The other vessel was proceeding dead slow. She was towing a surf-boat alongside in which were a couple of Kruboyes. Over the side of the tramp hung a Jacob's ladder, down which a "coloured gentleman" wearing a peaked cap, pilot coat, and a loin-cloth was climbing.

"That's Plum Duff, one of the harbour pilots," explained Mr. Jones, who had just come on deck. "He's killing two birds with one stone. We'll be over the bar within twenty minutes!"

"By Jove! she's the *Amilcar*!" exclaimed Rob.

"I thought so too," added Denis Paul. "Yes; I can make out the name on her bows."

"Fosdyke's ship, isn't she?" asked Stanniforth.

"Yes," replied Rob. "Just the man I want to have a yarn with, but that's out of the question."

It was. The *Amilcar*, having dropped her pilot, increased speed and was soon lost to sight in the sweltering haze.

In a few moments the surf-boat was alongside the *Zamba*. The pilot, with exaggerated dignity, ascended the side, his peaked cap jauntily set at an angle, and a vivid scarlet handkerchief protruding from his breast pocket. His bare calves were bedaubed with red paint, unintentionally removed from the *Amilcar's* rail, but fortunately for his self-esteem he seemed ignorant of this embellishment.

On his way to the bridge the pilot had to pass the knot of British passengers. By virtue of his exalted official position he made straight for them, quite expecting that they would give way and allow him a free passage.

"Confound you, Plum Duff!" roared "Unquestionably Jones". "Take the starboard bridge-ladder and don't barge in here!"

The Kruman's demeanour underwent a sudden and startling change. Until that moment he was unaware that the Abuea harbour-master was on board, for Mr. Jones was not expected back from leave for another week.

"Sorry sah! Me no expect you, sah!"

"I don't suppose you did," rejoined the harbour-master grimly. "Now get a move on, and take the ship over the bar as fast as you can."

"No 'urry, sah!" protested the pilot. "Bar him all a-shift 'cause dat bad-fella *Lapwing* am still in de way. Dey not get she off dis side ob Judgment Day."

"Be careful, Plum Duff!" cautioned the harbour-master. "These gentlemen have come from England specially to refloat her!"

"God save King George, sahs!" exclaimed the pilot, grinning from ear to ear. "Me berry pleased to meet you, sahs! Now me know de bar will be clear in half a brace of shakes, p'raps less!"

"You've quickly changed your opinion," thought Rob, amused at the *volte face* of the ebony-featured pilot. Then:

"Do you know where the *Amilcar* is bound?" he asked.

"Yas, sah. Him bound Bonny, Akassa, Lagos, Accra, Cape Coast Castle, Axim, an' p'raps Freetown. Den back again—p'raps three months! Is Capn'n Fosdyke on board? Sure, sah. He gib me dis testimonial jus' now."

The Kruman handed Rob a creased and damp paper. On it was written:

"I hereby certify that Pilot Plum Duff will talk the hind leg off a donkey if you give him the ghost of a chance.—Thos. Fosdyke, Master, S.S. *Amilcar*."

Rob had all his work cut out to keep himself from laughing, but Paul, reading over his superior's shoulder, began to yell with merriment. Then, catching sight of the look of outraged dignity on the Kruman's face, he tried with indifferent results to switch over to a distressing cough.

"Plum Duff!" exclaimed the harbour-master sternly, "don't you know that it is forbidden for licensed port pilots to ask for testimonials?"

"Sure, sah!" agreed the Kruman with child-like blandness. "But de Captain he so like de look ob my face dat he gib me testimonial without me ask!"

"Plum Duff, you limb of Satan!" expostulated the skipper of the *Zamba* from the bridge, "stop chattering and hurry up; or I'll cut myself a new belt from your black hide!"

The pilot hurried away and climbed the bridge-ladder. Rob could hear him expostulating with the Old Man in a vain effort to stand upon his dignity.

Then the engine-room telegraph bell clanged and the propeller once more began to revolve.

“Fault of the Universal Brotherhood of Man theory,” remarked Jones. “Put half an idea in that direction into a Kruman’s head and he’s out of hand before you can say ‘knife’. And another reason is that we employed thousands of them in England and France during the War. They saw too much that wasn’t good for them. Mind you, I don’t advocate ill-using the fellows, but it’s absolutely essential if you want to get any work out of them to let them know from the start that you don’t intend to stand any nonsense. But to give Plum Duff his due, he’s a clever pilot.”

“So I should imagine!” agreed Rob, staring into the mist. “What leading marks are there? I cannot see any buoys.”

“There *ought* to be several buoys,” replied the harbour-master. “The trouble is that they are often carried away by vessels colliding with them; and of course the channel may have shifted since I went on leave, but Murchison, my assistant, is quite capable of seeing to that.”

“But how does the pilot find his way in?” asked Stanniforth.

“Unquestionably Jones” shrugged his shoulders.

“Ask me another. I believe he smells his way in. But, joking aside, although he will never admit it to me, I think he follows the edge of the flood and ebb streams. The water pouring in or out of the entrance carries with it a lot of discoloured sediment. That gives him a rough guide and so far he hasn’t piled a vessel aground.”

“Then who put the *Lapwing* ashore?” asked Rob.

“Another black pilot,” replied the harbour-master. “The yarn goes that he ran her aground purposely because a foreign firm who lost the contract for the steelwork of the new bridge bribed him to do so. I won’t vouch for the accuracy of that story; but it is a significant fact that the pilot bolted after the stranding and made his way over the boundary. Hello! It’s clearing a little. There’s the eastern point of the entrance. You’ll spot the wreck in a few minutes.”

Eagerly Rob looked in the direction indicated. It was almost useless to attempt to use field-glasses. The hot moisture had set up condensation not only on the outside of the lenses but on the inside.

Presently he made out an indistinct shape looking like the half-buried carcass of a stranded whale. It was lying within fifty yards of the deep-water

channel.

Nearer acquaintance showed that it was the wreck of the ill-fated *Lapwing*. She was hard over on her port side. Her stern, or what was visible of it, was considerably damaged. Masts, funnel, bridge and deck-houses had vanished. Her hatches had disappeared, but an attempt had been made to plank over the gaping cavities in which the precious cargo was still stored. Between her and the open sea sand had been piled up in smooth-backed hummocks, but even these would be practically awash at high spring tides.

It was Rob's first sight of the formidable task that had been entrusted to him, and the prospect was not a pleasing one. There was a vast difference between working out a salvage case on paper in a London office and having to tackle it in grim reality amidst the yielding, shifting sand of a harbour in tropical Africa.

And because it was a formidable task he realized that its achievement would bring its own reward. It was a foe worthy of his steel.

"If she's not off by the end of February, it won't be for want of trying," he said to himself. "I haven't been sent here to acknowledge failure, so the sooner I get to work the better!"

The coaster was now plunging in the heavy rollers on the bar. Although it was nearly dead low water she had a couple of fathoms under her keel. She dipped her bows, her propeller, half in air, raced furiously, kicking up clouds of white foam. For a moment it seemed as if she was out of contact. Then the stern steering gear chattered noisily, the stern dropped; the propeller "bit" once more.

"You're obah, sah!" announced the pilot to the Old Man, who, if the truth be told, had endured long-drawn-out moments of suspense, "you're obah, captain! You no get new belt from dis gen'lman's hide dis time!"

# CHAPTER XXI

## David Greig

It was about a mile and a half from the bar to the quay at Abuea, the channel being fairly wide and well-buoyed.

Rob's first impression of the town was not unfavourable. Like many waterside towns, especially in the Tropics, it might not improve upon closer acquaintance; but the white-walled, corrugated iron roofed houses had their ugliness mitigated by the profusion of palms that lined the principal streets from the quay. The latter was quite a substantial affair, being constructed of ferro-concrete during the German administration of the Cameroons. Conspicuously perched upon rising ground was the Imperial Government House, now occupied by a Deputy Assistant Commissioner of the Protectorate—or, to give it its official title, the Mandated Territory of the Cameroons. Close to it were the bungalows of the European population, and, separated by a belt of tropical trees, was the native quarter. Except for the Government House, the only conspicuous building was a ruined fort, placed in a commanding position between the town and the harbour approach. Although it had been heavily armed it had never fired a gun in anger; for during the brief but successful British operations in the earlier stages of the Great War, the German garrison had been withdrawn to augment the mobile force that eventually surrendered with honours of war. The fort was then dismantled and allowed to fall into decay.

Between the ruined fort and the lagoon comprising the greater part of the harbour was a low-lying belt covered with jungle. The miasmal swamp extended in a wide sweep round the eastern side of the lagoon almost to the sandy spit on which the *Lapwing* lay. Across the river opposite the town of Abuea conditions were similar, so that accounted for the fact that no buildings had been erected there and no bridge had been projected. The railway bridge, upon which the ultimate prospects of Abuea as a thriving commercial port depended, was to cross the river fifteen miles farther up, where the banks on either side were firm and the ground higher and consequently immune from floods.

As the *Zamba* slowed down on approaching the quay, Rob noticed that a considerable crowd had assembled to watch her arrival. Most of the people were black. There were Hausas, Askaris, and a number of natives of Arab or Moorish descent; negroes wearing nothing but a loin cloth, others with frock-coats, tall hats, and white spats on bootless feet. Behind the crowds were a number of antiquated motor-cars, mostly with left-handed drive and with white canvas hoods in place of those seen at home before “saloons” ousted the once popular “tourers” from British roads. Most of these vehicles were driven by natives in bizarre costumes, who out-jehued Jehu by careering madly along the pavement-less streets with cheerful and utter disregard of everything and everybody!

The *Zamba* was made fast. Two brows were run out, one for white passengers, the other for natives.

Up the former came a tall, lean, mahogany-hued man of about thirty, wearing white drill clothes and a “topee”. Gaining the deck, he scanned the faces of the new arrivals.

“Cheerio, Mr. Jones!” he exclaimed, recognizing the returned harbour-master. “Back again! Had a good time, you lucky blighter! I say, is Mr. Wroxall here? Ah, thanks!”

He came towards Rob, who was standing a few feet from the gangway, waiting for his luggage to be brought on deck.

“So you’re Mr. Wroxall?” he continued. “We’ve been expecting you. My name’s Greig. Thought I’d better come along to show you your quarters.”

Rob shot a keen appraising glance at the speaker. So this was David Greig, assistant engineer to the unlucky Tomlinson, and now to act in a similar capacity to him. The man who, although senior both in age and service, had to take instructions from and work under him.

Another imagined difficulty had melted into thin air! For his age Rob had a sound knowledge of human nature. He could form a quick opinion of a person’s character and was rarely at fault. And his initial impression of David Greig was that here was a jolly decent, unassuming fellow who would return confidence for confidence.

In appearance Greig was above average height, slimly built, but with remarkably wide and square shoulders. His face was long and thin, his features gaunt and tanned to a deep brick-red colour. His eyes were grey, and when engaged in conversation he kept them looking straight at the face of the person addressing him. There was frankness, not a bold challenge, in

that look, and in consequence it inspired confidence. He usually spoke in clear, even tones that came naturally to him. There was nothing pedantic in his speech. He said what he wanted to say in a few words. On the other hand he was a good and attentive listener.

“Awfully good of you,” replied Rob in answer to the invitation. “So quarters are provided? Well, Doc, that’s saved us a lot of trouble. Mr. Greig, this is Doctor Stanniforth, our medical officer.”

“Glad to meet you,” said Greig, extending a lean, muscular, bronzed hand. “I didn’t know that we were to have our own doctor. I hope that from a professional standpoint you won’t be wanted here. All the same, you’re welcome.”

There was a wistfulness in Greig’s words that told their own story. Here was a young Briton, keen on his work, yet hampered by a superior who was not only incapable but, owing to his intemperate habits, could not be termed companionable. But Tomlinson was out of it, and Greig, hoping for the best, was not disappointed on the arrival of his new chief, and a young, cheerful-looking medico.

The fact that Rob Wroxall, though undoubtedly junior in point of age, was his superior did not enter into Greig’s calculations. He was content to carry on—he had been carrying on splendidly since Tomlinson had left the scene of his unsatisfactory labours—and to assist the new arrivals to achieve a successful climax to the difficult salvage operations.

Having introduced Denis Paul, Trevarrick the foreman diver, and Polglaze his trusted assistant, Rob said farewell to Harbour-master Jones—promising to look him up before very long—and stepped ashore from the *Zamba* without the slightest regret.

At a word from Greig half a dozen natives threw themselves upon the baggage and took it to a waiting lorry.

“You’d better see your gear safely in the luggage-car,” he suggested. “I’ve placed Tin Jam Pot—he’s a most reliable boy—in charge, so you can be certain nothing will be stolen on the way. Here’s our bus.”

He indicated a six-seater car with a double sun-awning. The driver was a Kruman wearing a peaked cap, white coat decorated with chevrons and badges removed from discarded military uniforms, and spats—precious little else, except that he had a bugle slung round his neck by a piece of tarnished gilt braid. This was merely a concession to his idea of vanity. Long years had passed since the bugle last gave a note. In all probability it never would

again. Judging by native standards it was ornamental, polished brass being highly prized by the “Coast” boys. It was not useful; rather the reverse, for it had a knack of getting mixed up with the control levers when the dusky chauffeur bent forward over the steering-wheel.

“What’s the matter with the fellow?” Rob asked, noticing the Kruman’s crouching attitude as he drove. “Is he in pain?”

Greig smiled.

“They all do it out here,” he replied. “They think it gives an exaggerated idea of speed. Give a nigger anything mechanical and he’s speed mad! A gramophone, for instance, he’ll run at top speed. European music means nothing to him unless it’s rendered at a terrific rate and transformed into a high-pitched discord. I’ve often wondered if that is how jazz music originated.”

During the rest of his drive Rob asked no more questions. He was “scared stiff”. The negro driver was not more reckless than the majority of his kind, but his antics made Rob’s hair stand on end.

With an utter disregard for the proper side of the road he drove at a good forty miles an hour. Pedestrians and dogs scurried like frightened hares as the car wobbled and jolted whenever the chauffeur released one hand from the steering-wheel to make full use of Klaxon and bulb-horn. Rounding corners with two wheels in the air, he grinned cheerfully over his shoulder as the car slithered before the tyres regained a grip on the dusty road.

Twice a native policeman, white-gauntleted to indicate that he was there to control traffic, tried to stop the erratic driver; but the latter merely grinned and shouted some insulting remark in the Coast dialect.

At length the car pulled up with a terrific screeching of fiercely applied brakes, and Rob, bruised and shaken, realized that he had arrived at the quarters allotted to him by the Findon & Rayse Marine Salvage Company.

The sight soothed his shaken nerves, for “what he saw was good”.

It was a bungalow built of cement with a galvanized iron roof, but the walls were partly hidden by luxurious creepers, and the sheet-iron was camouflaged under a reed thatch. There were French windows and a wide, shady veranda, with a stone pavement under it on which several cane lounge chairs had been placed. Keenly observant, Rob noticed that the legs of these chairs were resting in circular tins, which on closer acquaintance he found to contain paraffin—to withstand the attacks of ants!

On one side of the bungalow was a large iron tank which collected rain water from the roof. This water was to be his drinking supply. Incidentally it was covered to a depth of about an inch with paraffin as a protection against mosquitoes, and one of Greig's first warnings was to impress upon Rob the need for precaution concerning drinking water:

"For goodness' sake don't drink it straight from the tank. See that your house-boy boils every drop—it's very necessary that it *does* boil—and then make him run it through a filter. Do you know one of the first things I'm going to do when I get home?"

Rob shook his head.

"I don't," he replied. "What?"

"Drink water straight from a tap!" declared Greig solemnly. "Pints of it! You don't know how we on the Coast look forward to that! And people at home grumble at having to pay a water-rate!"

It was arranged that Rob and Stanniforth should share the bungalow. There was plenty of room.

"Topping show, what?" exclaimed the former. Then, a thought striking him: "Did Tomlinson live here?"

Greig shook his head.

"No, thank good——" He broke off and continued: "No, he chummed up with a trader on the voyage out and shared his bungalow after his arrival. Except when Tomlinson was on the works I saw very little of him. You'll have to find your own house staff, Mr. Wroxall, but that will be easy. I'm lending you one of my 'boys'—a really reliable fellow—and he'll be able to help you in your choice. He seems to know the character of every house-boy in Abuea!"

"Since you've provided us with lunch you must stop and share it," invited Rob, and Stanniforth joined in the invitation.

"Thanks, I will," replied Greig. "Provided you let me off directly after! I haven't been down to the *Lapwing* since nine this morning; and although my—or rather our—two foremen can be relied upon to keep the natives at their work, I don't like being away too long. Sorry, I didn't mean to talk shop."

"I don't mind in the least," rejoined Rob. "But perhaps that subject is *taboo* at meals. However, I'll come along with you after lunch."

“As you wish,” agreed Greig, inwardly pleased that here was a man who was showing an interest in the work, and, unlike Tomlinson, did not mind turning out in the heat of the day. “As you wish; the tide will be ebbing after two o’clock and we’ll be able to see how things go!”

# CHAPTER XXII

## Rob's Inspiration

After the meal Rob gave instructions to Brass Pot—the Kruboy lent by Greig—to engage a suitable staff and lay in provisions. Then, accompanied by Stanniforth, he went with Greig down to the quay by car, where a motor-launch was waiting to take the party across to the scene of the salvage operations.

“Why can't we walk?” asked Rob. “It isn't far down to the quay.”

“For two reasons,” replied his Assistant Engineer. “Firstly, in this heat you'll perspire with the exertion of walking and then catch a chill sitting in the launch. Dr. Stanniforth might be able to pull you through, but the chances are he wouldn't,” he remarked grimly. “Chills are the curse of this place. I've seen fellows apparently quite all right one day and buried the next. Secondly, if that reason isn't enough, it's *infra dig.* to walk. It lowers the White Man's prestige in the eyes of the native!”

“Thanks, the first reason is enough for me,” declared Rob. “I say, where's your bungalow?”

“Not very far from yours,” replied Greig. “I might even walk from one to the other, if necessary,” he added with a smile. “But there is telephonic communication between the two. We've quite a decent service in Abuea. The Germans started it when this was part of the Kameruns. I've been running a line down to the wreck, but it isn't completed yet. I had to keep the men busy until you arrived, and that was one of the jobs. It will be useful when it is in working order.”

“I'm sure it will be,” agreed his new chief.

Thinking matters over, Rob wondered at the dogged persistence of this young Briton who, practically single-handed, had gamely carried on after Tomlinson's recall. Many a man, sick of his superior's inefficiency, would not have had the heart to tackle the task of holding on until the arrival of a new Managing Engineer, who might possibly be as inefficient as his

predecessor. It required more than average grit to work in that enervating climate with the additional disadvantage of having to supervise “mixed” labour.

Soon the launch was cleaving her way through the muddy waters of Abuea harbour. In spite of the fact that Rob had not exerted himself, he felt as if he were in an overheated hot-house. There was little or no wind. What there was was following the launch. The rays of the sun reflected from the oily surface of the water made the air under the awning almost unbearably warm.

“Do you have any bathing here?” he asked. “The water doesn’t look very inviting.”

“Not in the harbour,” replied Greig. “The place is stiff with sharks. At low tide there’s quite a jolly swimming pool inside the reef. Look, there’s a huge brute astern!”

Right in the wake of the launch could be seen the dorsal fin of an enormous shark. On the voyage to the Coast Rob had frequently seen these ferocious fish, but never before such a one as this.

“Do they interfere with work on the wreck?” he asked.

“Rarely,” replied Greig. “We don’t have many ground-sharks. Sometimes a bottle-nosed shark will come close at high water, but we keep a watchman armed with a rifle to guard against them.”

At length the launch eased down and ran alongside a rough jetty consisting of barrels filled with sand and stones that supported a staging of hewn planks. Here the party disembarked and made their way for about a hundred yards on fairly fine sand until they came as close to the wreck as the state of the tide permitted.

“I’ve been trying to sink interlocked piles to form a caisson,” explained Greig. “The shifting sand is a formidable obstacle to that; so I’ve been concentrating upon building groynes and making a barrier on the seaward side. So far, the defences have withstood two on-shore gales, and I’m hoping they will continue to do so.”

“And at low tide what do you do?” asked Rob, watching the receding water swirl past the exposed bilge keel of the wreck.

“Since Mr. Tomlinson left I’ve been getting parbuckling wires in position,” replied Greig. “It’s been a tremendous business see-sawing them under the hull. So far there are six in position. I thought they’d be useful,

although Mr. Tomlinson was opposed to the idea. You see,” he added apologetically, “I had to keep the hands employed.”

“Is she still settling in the sand?”

“Oh, no, there is about thirty feet depth of sand overlying a fairly hard sub-stratum.”

“That sounds hopeful,” declared Rob, although he quite realized that the task of righting, or partly righting, the wreck, when two-thirds of it was buried in soft, shifting sand was no light one. “What happens when the tide falls? Does the water inside the wreck drain away to outside level?”

“Yes, because of the damage aft,” explained Greig. “The holds are full of sand and water; but when we’ve had the portable suction pumps at work the level appreciably falls; so I don’t think that the hull is badly holed. The bulkheads, or most of them, are still intact.”

“It’s unfortunate that her masts are gone,” remarked Rob. “They would have been useful as sheers for the parbuckling wires.”

“Mr. Tomlinson ordered them to be cut away to reduce top-hammer,” declared Greig.

“And what did you say to that?”

“Since you ask me, I did expostulate, but he told me he knew a jolly sight more about the job than I did, and shut me up.”

“H’m! And I believe he tried to excavate a trench on the starboard side?”

“Which filled in at every tide. Until we surround the wreck with a watertight dam I don’t see how we can clear the sand away on the starboard side.”

Rob offered no comment. The suggestion was hardly practicable. The amount of labour and material required would be prohibitive. Obviously some other scheme was necessary. The hull must be rolled on an almost even keel. Since lighters could not be brought alongside, the natural lift of the tides was out of the question. Another disconcerting factor was that the cargo—heavy steelwork—was still in the holds and could not be removed until a powerful crane was available, and only after the hull was uprighted could this work be accomplished.

“Well, Doctor, what do you think of my latest patient?” inquired Rob.

Stanniforth shrugged his shoulders.

"I've pulled a few patients round who were supposed to have one foot in the grave," he replied, "but I'm dashed if I know what to do with one thirty feet in the sand! But you'll find a way."

"I hope so," rejoined Rob. "It seems, though, as if it was unnecessary to bring Trevarrick out here. A diver isn't needed on this job. He can't dive in sand!"

"Nor has the *St. Sampson* been of much use," added Greig, pointing to a large suction-dredger that was making her way in from seaward. "Luckily the Harbour Board wanted her, and I cabled home for permission to let her out to them."

"She'll be here if she is wanted, then," commented Rob, though he too wondered what had possessed Messrs. Findon & Rayse to send such a costly dredger all the way out to Abuea. It was obvious, owing to the shallow water within three hundred yards of the *Lapwing*, that the *St. Sampson* would be unable to remove the sand that had all but engulfed the former.

"Hello, what's that?" exclaimed Stanniforth. "A fire! It looks as if your telephone line is in danger, Greig."

The Assistant Engineer shook his head.

"The fires are intentional," he explained. "We isolate small patches of scrub and burn them, otherwise the brushwood would overtop the telephone wires. You see I'm using short concrete posts. Wooden ones are useless because of the ravages of ants, and cast-iron ones are too expensive. One has to rely upon expedients out here."

*"Brushwood!"*

The word caught Rob's attention and held it.

Like a flash a remark of Mr. Findon's occurred to him. "There is an abundance of brushwood . . . and a hint goes a long way with an intelligent listener!"

Brushwood! Why, here at hand lay the means of overcoming the as yet unsurmountable problem of the shifting sand.

"Mr. Greig," he said, "I'll want thirty men to start cutting brushwood as soon as possible. No more must be burnt."

His subordinate gave a surprised, inquiring glance, but made no comment.

“You’ve a temporary office here, haven’t you?” continued Rob. “Over there? Right. Come along, Stanniforth, too. We’ll discuss my plan there.”

“Don’t get excited, old son,” whispered the Doctor warningly.

“I’m not,” protested Rob, although he had to admit that he was.

The discussion lasted more than an hour. It was more or less a one-sided discussion, for as Rob unfolded his spontaneously conceived scheme Greig realized that here was something that gave a decided promise of success. And as the expounder of the proposition continued, his subordinate grew more and more enthusiastic and confident.

“By Jove!” he exclaimed at the end of Rob’s remarks. “It’s the goods, Mr. Wroxall! It’s the goods!”

# CHAPTER XXIII

## Temptation!

It was nearly sunset before Rob returned to his quarters. He wanted to be alone—to ponder over the difficulties that confronted him. It was one thing to devise a hasty scheme and to expound it with sanguine enthusiasm, another to ruminate at leisure over the pros and cons. Nevertheless he felt that he was on the right track, and that, making allowances for minor considerations and taking proper precautions against possible difficulties, there was at least a fifty-fifty chance of ultimate success.

Although Rob had given him no hint, Stanniforth had the intuition to realize that the young engineer wished to think out his problem alone, and on that account the doctor had accepted an invitation to spend the evening with David Greig, especially as he found that they had a hobby in common. Both were very enthusiastic chess players—a game in which Rob Wroxall had not the faintest interest.

Before the short tropical twilight—a matter of a few minutes—had given place to night, Black Spot, one of Rob's newly-engaged native servants, switched on the electric light, closed the jalousied shutters, and adjusted the mosquito-curtains. Then, having set the electric fan in motion, the Kruman, who, during the performance of these tasks made hardly a sound, glided out of the room.

“Now I can get down to it,” thought Rob, unlocking his dispatch-case in which he kept the plans and documents relating to the operations. “First, how many cubic yards of——”

He was interrupted by the silent reappearance of Black Spot, who placed a tantalus and a syphon of soda on the table at his master's elbow.

“Here you!” exclaimed Rob. “What's this for? I don't want it. Who told you to bring me whisky?”

The Kruman grinned expansively.

“Him lib for massa an’ lib for massa’s pals,” he explained. “No cough-cough water den palaver him hang fire. Him make lib for ease jaw-tackle all him time!”

“Who gave you book to bring this here?” demanded Rob, using the vernacular which he had learnt from hearing Greig addressing his boys.

“Brass Pot him fetch,” replied Black Spot.

Rob considered. Since Brass Pot was Greig’s boy it was possible that he had acted under his master’s orders. His remark to the effect that whisky was necessary to make guests convivial was significant.

“Put it over there,” ordered Rob, pointing to a table against the wall. “Leave the soda-water and bring me a bottle of lime-juice.”

These orders Black Spot carried out quickly and silently, then he went out and shut the door.

“Now to settle to work,” thought Rob, and suiting the action to the word, he was soon deep in calculations affecting the development of his latest plans.

Thus absorbed, Rob was heedless of the swift passing of time. Actually he had been working for an hour and a half when there came the sound of a car approaching and stopping outside the bungalow.

Then came a knock on the inner door and Black Spot appeared carrying a salver on which was a somewhat large visiting card.

On the card was printed: “Jerome Cyrus Bloggs.”

In the left-hand corner the words “Messrs. Caliban & Tophet, Limited” had been cut through by a pencil.

“I wonder what he wants,” thought Rob. “It’s early for a formal visit. I haven’t been here twelve hours yet. And too late for a business call, unless it’s the custom of the place. Just the sort of thing that happens when a fellow wants to do a spot of work! I’d better see him, I suppose.”

Rob was not favourably impressed by his belated caller; rather the reverse.

Mr. Jerome Cyrus Bloggs was an individual of middle height, florid complexioned, with flabby cheeks. He was clean-shaven with full over-red lips and an insignificant receding chin. His hair was dark and badly wanted cutting. It reeked of oil, but his breath reeked worse.

He was wearing a faded apology for evening dress, including a pleated shirt-front, a made-up bow tie and a scarlet cummerbund.

“Good evening,” said Rob curtly. “What can I do for you?”

It was characteristic of him to be short with anyone to whom he took an instinctive dislike.

“You might be able to do a thundering good lot,” replied his visitor. “But that’s neither here nor there at present. I’m just paying you a neighbourly call. ‘Unquestionably Jones’ told me you had arrived by the *Zamba* and suggested I should look you up. (‘Now I wonder if he did?’ thought Rob. ‘I doubt it!’) I don’t believe in letting the grass grow under my feet even in this one-horse show, so here I am.”

“Quite!” rejoined Rob, without committing himself.

Mr. Bloggs looked slightly disconcerted.

“You’re busy, I see,” he observed.

“I have to be.”

“You’ll ease down before you’ve been here very long,” continued Bloggs with a sickly smile. “We have to be sociable or we’d wilt through sheer boredom. I may say that I’m keenly interested in the *Lapwing* operations, though!”

“Really?”

“Yes; you see, I was your predecessor’s principal pal. We digged together!”

“So you’re the miserable blighter who made him go off the deep end!” thought Rob. “And you’re a bit ‘fresh’ now!”

“You found Tomlinson an entertaining companion, then?” he remarked.

“Companion!” echoed Bloggs. “Companion wasn’t the word. He was a real sport. So when I heard you were hanging out here all by yourself I said to myself: ‘Now I’ll look that young man up and put him wise as to who’s who’.”

So it was evident that Bloggs had no idea that Stanniforth was sharing the bungalow. That went to prove that the harbour-master had not made the suggestion with which Rob’s caller had credited him.

A suspicion of a smile flitted over Rob’s features—as if he wanted this rotter to give him his opinion on every person of importance in Abuea with

whom he was likely to come in contact!

“’Fraid I’m more interested in my work than in people,” he remarked.

“Ah! that’s what I like,” exclaimed Bloggs. “That is, if work means roping in the rhino! On a job like the *Lapwing* a smart man can do that all right. But ’cuse me! This is a ‘long ship’, isn’t it?”

“I don’t understand.”

Bloggs waved a podgy hand in the direction of the tantalus.

“Meaning a fellow’s got to wait a long time to be asked to have a drink!” he explained.

“Help yourself, then,” rejoined Rob.

The caller needed no second invitation. He poured himself out a stiff peg.

“Aren’t you drinking?” he asked. “Be sociable!”

Rob shook his head.

“Not keen,” he replied.

“You will be before long,” declared Bloggs. “Soft drinks are too lowering, and the water’s poison. Ah, well! we may as well get down to brass tacks. I’ve a little proposition to make that will be to our mu’shall ’vantage.”

“Then let’s hear it,” prompted Rob, not because he wanted to enter into any arrangement with the inebriated waster, but with the idea of finding what was at the back of his mind.

“It’s like this, my boy!” explained Bloggs thickly. “Tomlinson and I worked very well together, and there’s no reason why you and I shouldn’t continue on the same lines. You’ll be using hydraulic cement on the job.”

“Quite possibly,” admitted Rob.

“That’s my line. Sole agent in Abuea for Caliban & Tophet. Now this is between ourselves; say you give me an order for three hundred tons——”

“But I shan’t need half that quantity.”

“’Zactly! You’re smart! There ain’t no flies on you, mister. You give me an order for three hundred at £9 a ton delivered. I supply a hundred and give you an invoice for the three hundred. Your firm pays up handsomely, and there’s a matter of £1800 on a fifty-fifty basis, see?”

Indignation held Rob speechless. Bloggs in his cups had given himself away. Moreover he had made it clear that the unfortunate Tomlinson was not only a drunken, inefficient waster, but a swindler.

While Rob was still trying to express himself forcibly the door opened softly and Stanniforth appeared.

“Sorry, old son!” exclaimed the doctor. “Didn’t know you had anyone here.”

“Come in, Doc!” invited Rob cheerfully. “Come in! This gentleman has called with a most illuminating suggestion concerning the *Lapwing* operations. Now, sir,” he continued, addressing Bloggs, who, at the sight of a third party, was beginning to realize that he had said far more than he would have done in his sober moments. “Now, sir, if you will kindly repeat your proposal, Dr. Stanniforth will doubtless be pleased to offer me his opinion!”

For some moments there was a dead silence. Stanniforth glanced from Rob’s face to that of his unwanted visitor, and then to the table, on which there was *one* used tumbler. The fleeting suspicion that he had unexpectedly found his chum taking part in a drinking orgy or even a convivial evening (which on the Coast might easily become the forerunner of a steady “soak”) vanished. So Rob had not been mopping “square-face”.

Stanniforth was no bigot. If he had occasion to drink he did so. He knew his capacity to a glass, and never exceeded it. But he did not know whether Wroxall knew *his*; and on that account he had been anxious to discover whether his chum was about to follow the example of the whisky-sodden Tomlinson.

But the flush on Rob’s face was not that caused by even a small quantity of spirits. He was boiling inwardly, hardly able to resist the temptation to boot the miserable Jerome Cyrus Bloggs out of the place.

As for Bloggs, his jaw was wagging feebly. In his maudlin state he retained a sufficient glimmer of sense to realize that he had said too much to the wrong man, and that the best thing he could do was to decline Rob’s invitation.

“Mishtake! my mishtake!” he exclaimed. “I’d best be going!”

Without a word Rob opened the door.

Bloggs, with averted face, staggered out, and presently they heard his car set in motion.

Heedless of the possibility that the room would be invaded by a host of mosquitoes and other winged insects, Rob left the door open. The humid, miasma-reeking air was preferable to the atmosphere left by Bloggs.

“Hectic evening, what?” remarked Stanniforth cheerfully.

“Hectic isn’t the word, Doc!” replied his chum.

“Don’t tell me if you don’t want to,” observed the young doctor after a lengthy pause.

“I do, but I’m hanged if I know where to begin.”

“Take your time,” prompted Stanniforth.

When Rob had finished his narrative the other man knocked the ashes from his pipe and carefully refilled the still warm bowl.

“You won’t be troubled by that blighter again,” he remarked. “But the question is, are you going to trouble him?”

“I don’t quite follow you.”

“Obviously, on his own admission, Bloggs has been defrauding your employers. Apparently Findon & Rayse have been paying cheques for purchases of cement, not to Caliban & Tophet, but to Bloggs, their agent here. Why, I don’t know, except that Caliban & Tophet may have their headquarters out of the British Isles. It’s up to you to discover the amount of the irregularities.”

“Quite,” agreed Rob. “I mean to do that; but you see there’s Tomlinson to be taken into account. He was led away by that fellow, and he’s been punished enough already.”

“That’s not for you or me to say,” demurred Stanniforth. “He’s a fraudulent employee—or was. He was dismissed for inefficiency and drunkenness, but that doesn’t wipe out the fact that he is also a thief.”

“But dash it all, Doc, I don’t like——”

“Duty is often something we don’t like doing, but it’s up to us to do it all the same,” remarked Stanniforth. “Tomlinson took the risk. He was sufficiently sober at times to realize that he was defrauding his employers and that he was likely to be discovered.”

“But I’m an Engineer-in-Charge—not a detective,” protested Rob.

“Yes, Engineer-in-Charge. That means that your duties also include the watching of your employers’ interests. You’ll have to report the matter.”

“ ’Spose I’ll have to,” agreed Rob wearily. “Well, what about turning in?”

Ten minutes later Rob went to his bedroom, satisfied himself that the metal bowls in which the legs of the bed rested were filled with paraffin, turned in, carefully drew the mosquito curtains, and extinguished the electric light by means of a switch at the end of a flexible cord.

Although he was bodily tired sleep was long denied him. He lay awake thinking of many things—of the cubic content and weight of bundles of brushwood, of bags of cement, of the calculations upon which he had been engaged when he was interrupted by Bloggs’ appearance. Of Tomlinson and of how to deal faithfully with his employers without being unduly harsh with his unfortunate predecessor. And then of Bloggs himself, and how he could deal with him. Obviously, since Bloggs had not made his statement in the presence of a third party, it would be out of the question to bring him to justice unless direct proof were forthcoming. Bloggs would certainly retaliate by bringing an action for slander against him, and then what would be his position in regard to the salvage operations? Mentally he consigned Bloggs to perdition.

Suddenly he saw light—figuratively speaking! Here was a solution to the problem. It sounded practicable. The more he thought of it the more it became convincing.

“I’ll tackle it to-morrow,” he decided. Then glancing at his luminous wristlet watch, “No, my error! I’ll see to it this morning!”

And with that resolve he fell asleep.

# CHAPTER XXIV

## Bloggs Disgorges

At sunrise Rob arose and “tubbed”. It was his first bath on African soil, and the experience was one of many to remind him of the disadvantages of the Coast. Although the water was supposed to be cold, it had a temperature of more than sixty degrees. It had none of the healthy “tang” of fresh water at home, but had a reek similar to that of the mangrove swamps, together with a decided suspicion of kerosene. His towels too, although brought direct from England, already lacked the dry roughness by which a glowing warmth can be imparted to the skin; they felt like limp dish-cloths!

“Hello, old son!” was Stanniforth’s greeting when the two chums met at breakfast. “Slept well?”

“Fairly,” admitted Rob. “Ah! what’s this?”

He lifted the cover from a dish that Black Spot had just placed upon the table. If he expected the Englishman’s typical breakfast of eggs and bacon he was disappointed. There was curried chicken—the chicken had formed the principal item for dinner on the previous day!

“Hasn’t the cook any idea of varying his dishes?” inquired Stanniforth, ladling a quantity of yellow, oily substance, supposed to be best imported butter, to the side of his plate.

“Gracious! I hope so!” ejaculated Rob, making a vicious sweep with his knife at a large greenish-winged insect that alighted on the rim of his coffee-cup. “We hope for the best, but Greig warned me that I should be fed up to the back teeth with Coast chicken before I had been here a week. Already I fancy he’s right there!”

The insipid meal over, Rob reached for his topee.

“Coming along now?” he asked.

“Later, if you don’t mind,” replied Stanniforth. “I want to overhaul my medicine chest.”

“Right-o!” rejoined Rob, secretly pleased for once to be alone. “I’ll be back to tiffin.”

He boarded the waiting car and was driven to the quay where the firm’s launch was waiting.

Arriving upon the scene of the salvage operations, Rob noticed with satisfaction that Greig was already there superintending the cutting and stacking of brushwood. Greig, with a definite object in view, was not one to let the grass grow under his feet. He had had more than enough inaction during the régime of the deposed Tomlinson.

Somewhat to Greig’s surprise, Rob, having wished him good morning, went straight to the office.

“How long have you been here?” he inquired of the half-caste clerk.

“Only a month, sir.”

“And what happened to your predecessor?”

“Mr. Tomlinson gave him notice, sir, and sent him back to Accra.”

“For what reason?”

The clerk shook his head.

“I did not hear, sir.”

Rob next asked for the ledger and turned up the entries relating to the purchase of cement. Although a considerable quantity of this material had been used, it was obvious to him that far greater quantities appeared in the books than had been used or remained in store.

“Do you mind letting me have the storekeeper’s chits for cement receipts?” he asked.

The clerk searched in various pigeon-holes and produced two bundles of papers secured by indiarubber bands.

“Here are those since I took over, sir, and here are some dealt with by Mr. Aboni, the former clerk.”

The first bundle appeared to be in order, but one glance at the second told Rob that they had been faked. Several of the notes purporting to be receipts by the storekeeper of various lots of one hundred sacks had been altered to appear as if four hundred lots had been received and consequently paid for.

It was such a clumsy fraud that no man in his sober senses would have risked committing it.

“I’ll hang on to these chits for a day or two,” announced Rob. “They go back for a period of two months before you took over, I see. Where is the first batch?”

“I cannot say, sir,” replied the clerk, “unless they were taken by Mr. Tomlinson for audit. But I will make a thorough search.”

“Please do so,” rejoined Rob.

He then went across to the stores and interviewed the man in charge, who was also a half-caste who had been educated at a government school at Cape Coast Castle.

Like the clerk, he had been employed by the Findon & Rayse Salvage Company for only a little more than a month. Tomlinson had found some excuse to sack his predecessor, hoping by so doing to conceal the traces of his deliberate fraud. Unfortunately the duplicate receipt vouchers covered by the period under review had been destroyed since.

That was a bit of a facer for Rob. If Jerome Cyrus Bloggs could not be confronted with direct evidence—and it was fairly certain that he could not produce a genuine account of the quantity of cement actually sold by him—then sheer bluff appeared to be the only way of dealing with him.

His investigations on the spot having been completed for the time being, Rob rejoined Greig, to spend the rest of the morning superintending the work of constructing “facines” of cut brushwood.

Each bundle had to be heavy enough for two men to handle and not more. It had to be weighted with small stones and sacks of sand sufficient to make it sink in water, the whole being strongly bound with wire.

Again a sudden inspiration came to the young Engineer-in-Charge. It was the sight of the bags of sand that did it.

He went straight back to the store.

“What becomes of the cement sacks?” he inquired of the storekeeper. “Are they returnable to the contractors?”

“No, sir.”

“Then what happens to them?”

“Mr. Greig had a lot—I can give you the exact number—to build a breakwater. The others are stacked away.”

“I’d like to see them.”

To Rob’s satisfaction the empty bags, except those genuinely employed on the works, had been methodically placed in a storehouse. The former storekeeper had gone to the trouble of attaching a label to each consignment, stating the exact number. Evidently this business-like arrangement was unknown to Tomlinson, otherwise he would certainly have taken steps to destroy the incriminating evidence. And the present storekeeper had carried on with a similar procedure.

“You are very methodical, I see,” declared Rob to his highly-gratified subordinate. “I’d like to have a statement giving the actual number of sacks you have in hand, and the number issued for making the breakwater. Will you please let me have it by four o’clock this afternoon?”

Of course he realized that again there was a fly in the ointment. It was one thing to declare that all the bags received were accounted for, and another for Bloggs to assert that they were not, and that there must be a great wastage of which the engineer of the salvage company knew nothing.

At tiffin Rob confided his plan to Stanniforth.

“I’m going to beard Bloggs in his den—otherwise his bungalow,” he declared. “Do you mind coming along with me?”

“I do and I don’t,” replied the young doctor. “I’m always ready to back you up, Wroxall, although I don’t profess to be anything in the criminal investigation department. Honestly, you’d better cable a report to the firm and let them do the dirty work! They would prosecute, naturally.”

“Yes, but the main object—the salvage work—suffers,” protested Rob. “Instead of getting on with it, I’d have to attend first a magistrate’s court at Abuea, next a higher court at Cape Coast, and then one, perhaps more, in London. I used to be sorry for Tomlinson. I think I am now; but he’s a thief and deserves to get it in the neck. Only I don’t want to be mixed up in that now. That’s why I’m going to bluff Bloggs—or try to—and get him to disgorge.”

“And meanwhile Tomlinson gets clean away with his share of the plunder?”

“He won’t,” declared Rob, “unless he takes alarm. The firm can deal with him. It’s Bloggs I want to tackle.”

In the end Stanniforth agreed to go with his chum to interview the unsavoury agent of Messrs. Caliban & Tophet.

At seven o'clock Rob and the young doctor alighted outside Bloggs' bungalow. It was a fairly pretentious building situated at a convenient distance from the "Outcasts Club". Discreet inquiries on Rob's part had given him the information that it was only possible to find Bloggs in between seven and seven-thirty. At the half-hour he went to the club, except when he entertained boon companions at his bungalow in an orgy of drinking and gambling.

A boy switched on the light over the porch and scrutinized the callers.

"Hab 'pointment, sah?" he inquired.

"We have," replied Rob grimly.

The black stood aside and motioned to the two Englishmen to enter. Then, just as the boy was about to pull aside the "chik", or bamboo curtain, Bloggs' voice boomed out:

"That you, Gladley? Thought you were never coming. Dash it all, man! I—oh! ah!"

His voice trailed off in sheer astonishment at the sight of his latest visitors. It was the last straw!

Throughout the day Bloggs had been trying to reconstruct in his less drunken state the scene in which he realized he had played such a disreputable part on the previous evening. He remembered having made an utter fool of himself, yet he tried to persuade himself that it was all a dream. Unfortunately for his peace of mind, he asked the boy who had driven his car to Wroxall's bungalow if he actually did go there, and the native was most emphatic that he had gone! He was still wondering how much he had said and why he had said it to a man to whom he had never previously spoken.

"Good evening, Mr. Bloggs," said Rob.

"G-good evenin'. Very pleased to meet you, I'm sure. Aren't you Wroxall, the new engineer?"

"I am," replied Rob. "And this is Doctor Stanniforth. You met him at my place last night."

"So I did," agreed Bloggs unsteadily. "Always glad to know a *medico*. They come in dashed handy on the Coast. If——"

“Dr. Stanniforth is not here to treat you professionally,” interrupted Rob. “We have called to ask for some information concerning various consignments of cement supplied by you to my firm.”

“’Course I did,” admitted Bloggs. “That’s my business—agent for Caliban & Tophet. I’ll be pleased to book further orders on the same terms.”

“I don’t doubt that,” rejoined Rob. “But the point I wish to bring to your notice is that the quantity paid for exceeds the quantity supplied.”

“Booking error, then,” suggested Bloggs. “Soon remedy that. Have a spot of whisky?”

“Something more than a booking error,” continued Rob, ignoring the invitation. “There are eight hundred bags paid for, but not supplied—eight hundred at 18s. per two hundredweight bag—representing a matter of £720.”

At this implied accusation Bloggs’ demeanour underwent a sudden change.

“What do you mean?” he demanded thickly. “Blackmail, eh? You’ve made a mistake, my man. A costly mistake. Out you go! I’ll see my solicitor to-morrow!”

“Why not now?” asked Rob coolly. “You have a telephone! And, perhaps, we have your permission to use it in order to call up the Chief of Police?”

Bloggs’ lower jaw dropped. Then, pulling himself together, he rocked with well-simulated laughter.

“That’s good!” he exclaimed. “A capital joke, only it happens that I can see through it! I was pulling your leg last night and you thought I meant it.”

“If that’s your idea of a joke—making an accusation of fraud against my predecessor, Mr. Tomlinson—then your sense of humour is grossly distorted. We can cut that explanation out. Now, are you or are you not prepared to make out a cheque for £720, payable to Messrs. Findon, Rayse & Company?”

“Certainly not!” declared Bloggs.

“Very well, then,” rejoined Rob, reaching for his hat. “Come along, Stanniforth; we must report this matter to the Chief of Police.”

“Hang on a minute,” pleaded Bloggs. His resolution had failed him. He realized that his visitors meant business. He decided to try other tactics.

“You want a cheque payable to your employers?”

“Certainly,” replied Rob.

“But what about Tomlinson? He had his share. You want me to lose the whole sum?”

“Tomlinson isn’t here to be made to disgorge,” said Rob. “The probability is that he won’t be. On the other hand, we’ve got you on the spot. If you like you can come to an arrangement with Tomlinson at some future date.”

Bloggs shook his head.

“Now, gentlemen, be reasonable!” he continued. “I’ll admit there was an irregularity. Out here it’s often done and the outsider who gets wind of it is generally open to—to——”

“To accept a sum down in order to keep his mouth shut, eh?” prompted Rob.

“You’ve hit upon it exactly, Mr. Wroxall!”

“I have, have I?” rejoined Wroxall contemptuously. “This is to secure time. You’ve tried to square me, and now I happen to have a witness. Nothing doing in that line. Now, where’s your cheque book?”

Bloggs was willing, under pressure, to sign a cheque for the sum mentioned. Actually it was far less than the amount he had made by his infamous dealings with Tomlinson. He could afford that; but he wanted safeguards. He did not relish the idea of having to disgorge to the tune of over £700 and then have to stand his trial for fraud.

When he put this part of the case to his callers, Rob was somewhat at a loss how to reply. He was too honest to offer to hush up Bloggs’ infamy. All he wanted was to get the fellow to pay up and leave the rest in the hands of his employers.

Then Stanniforth had something to say:

“In any case a full report will have to be sent Messrs. Findon & Rayse. Whether they decide to prosecute or not is a matter that does not greatly interest Mr. Wroxall. But you must realize that having made reparation in cash, that circumstance will be in your favour.”

“I’ll sign,” agreed Bloggs, and in less than a couple of minutes Rob was in possession of a cheque for the amount he had demanded.

Next morning he paid in the cheque to the Abuea Bank, asking the manager to transfer the amount to the credit of Messrs. Findon & Rayse in London. Then he dispatched a code cablegram to his employers:

“Have to report error in branch accounts. Have rectified same and have received £720, which has been paid into your account. Detailed statement follows—Wroxall.”

“I wonder how the Chief will take it?” remarked Stanniforth.

“So do I, Doc,” replied Rob. “I hope I’ve finished with the business, anyway. And I don’t think Bloggs will give any more trouble. He’s scared stiff! And Tomlinson’s punished enough, I should imagine. So that’s that. Now I can go full speed ahead with the salvage job!”

# CHAPTER XXV

## Failure

For the next month work on the *Lapwing* proceeded at high pressure, notwithstanding the terrific heat and other difficulties inseparable from operations in a tropical climate.

While a considerable number of natives were employed upon constructing “facines”, others were set to work to strengthen the breakwater that Greig had started in order to protect the stranded vessel from on-shore gales.

Skilled workmen were detailed to build coffer dams over the now open holds. These coffer-dams consisted of stout planks, braced and shored, and made watertight by caulking. The task was a difficult one owing to the angle of the decks, the timbering having to be as nearly vertical as possible. Consequently the port side of the coffer-dams was nearly thirty feet in height and the opposite side only ten feet, so that the horizontal upper edges of the structures were well above the level of the highest tides.

Two squat tripod masts were then erected approximately where the original “sticks” had been. Over the heads of these structures were led two enormously strong parbuckling wires, which, with others, led to capstans and winches at some distance away on shore. These winches were bolted down in beds of solid concrete, their power being provided by donkey-engines.

Since it was impossible to attempt to right the vessel as she lay embedded in yielding sand, all these preparations would be in vain until the sand was removed from under her starboard side and water allowed to flow into the excavation to assist in the operation.

It was this trench that gave the greatest trouble. Removing the sand was a tedious task. A “steam navvy” formed part of the plant and this was pressed into service. A special track of iron rails, clamped to sleepers that in turn rested on planks and bundles of reeds, had to be constructed before the

steam navy could commence work. Then, within ten minutes of the start, the sand slid bodily into the trench, carrying with it the outer end of the track. Over toppled the heavy mass of machinery and six days' labour was undone. More than that, the steam navy had to be dismantled and retrieved piecemeal.

As the result of the experience gained by this unfortunate accident—which luckily entailed no injury to the men—Rob decided to renew excavation by means of manual labour.

It was not merely removing the sand close to the hull. The yielding nature of the sand made it necessary to give the sides of the trench a gradually sloping “batter”. As the task proceeded, the slope had to be faced with weighted bundles of brushwood.

Then, when the spring tides were on and the site submerged by the sea, special precautions had to be taken to guard against the sand being swept into the now prodigious excavation. From half-ebb to half-flood gangs of native workmen dug with feverish energy, while others transported the removed sand in baskets to heighten and strengthen the breakwater. At half-flood the men knocked off spade-work and threw hundreds of bundles of weighted brushwood into the trench.

Directly the tide ebbed and the water drained away through the porous soil the facines were removed and the work of excavation resumed, until the time seemed ripe for the attempt to parbuckle the *Lapwing* on to an even keel.

While these preparations were in progress other workmen had been employed in repairing the damaged stern, patching all leaks and closing all apertures, such as ventilator shafts and skylights, and making them watertight.

“High water, full and change, is at 4.30,” reported Greig in consultation with Rob. “The first tide high enough to flood the trench will be on Wednesday next at 2.10 p.m. Will that suit?”

“It should do so,” replied Rob. “We’ll fix that day anyway. I suppose it’s no use trying to keep the attempt secret?”

“Hardly,” answered Greig. “We can’t muzzle a hundred workmen. The news will be all over Abuea, and you can expect a big audience.”

“I suppose so,” agreed the Director of Operations, resignedly. “It can’t be helped; but it’s a rotten business, if anything goes wrong, being watched by a crowd of onlookers.”

When the day fixed for the attempt arrived, Greig's assertion was amply justified. Almost all the white population of Abuea, together with ninety per cent of the native inhabitants, flocked to the scene. Hundreds crowded on the sand spit, even to the extent of threatening to impede the men tending the steam hauling gear. Others watched from boats and canoes, while a steam hopper-barge had been specially employed for the occasion to bring the official staff of Abuea to the scene of operations.

Fortunately for Rob, the Chief of Police had despatched a strong force of native constabulary to keep order, and by degrees the steadily swelling crowd of spectators ashore was forced back until the salvage workers had a clear field.

As soon as the rising tide began to fill the excavation, powerful motor-pumps were set to work to cope with any possible inrush of water into the hull of the *Lapwing*; but so well had the riveters and caulkers done the work that there was nothing for the pumps to do.

Greig, keeping an anxious eye upon the temporary tide gauge, announced from time to time the height of the rising waters.

"Five feet nine inches!" he reported at length. "Only another three inches to go."

"Good!" shouted Rob, and signalled for the steam capstans and winches to commence winding.

Slowly but surely the strain on the parbuckling wires increased. Higher and higher crept the level of the water up the steeply-inclined well-deck, but the *Lapwing* gave no indication of "liveliness".

"High water!" reported Greig. Then: "She's on the move!"

Something was moving, but it was not the wreck, for with a terrific rush an enormous quantity of sand slid into the excavation. There was a tremendous agitation of water. Bundles of brushwood, in spite of being weighted, were swept away like straws.

In less than a minute a month's work had been destroyed and the *Lapwing* was at least as firmly fixed as before!

It was a bitter disappointment not only to Rob but to his staff. Even the native workmen, although success would have meant the speedy termination of their employment, were genuinely discouraged at the failure of their efforts. And when some of the black spectators shouted disparaging remarks

it took the police all their time to avert a pitched battle between the native workmen and their taunting compatriots.

One of the Government officials came up and offered Rob his condolences.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Wroxall, she'll never be got off," he remarked.

"I mean to continue the attempt," declared the young Engineer-in-Charge. "It is simply——"

A rending crash, followed by a terrific rush of water, interrupted his remarks.

Calamity upon failure! The pressure of water had burst one side of the for'ard coffer-dam, and the *Lapwing*, which up to the present had been rendered watertight, was once more flooded. To make matters worse, the inrush of the sea had carried with it tons of sand, most of which would have to be removed before the wreck could be refloated. And since the holds still contained the cargo of steel railway material, the task of freeing them from the enormous deposit of silt would be a lengthy and arduous operation.

"Hard luck, sir!" commented Greig. "But it might be worse. Both coffer-dams might have been carried away."

"Fortunately they haven't," rejoined Rob. "As soon as the tide ebbs you might get hands to work to repair the gap. We'd better have the two suction pumps rigged—the twenty-four-inch ones—and start getting rid of as much of the sand as possible. We'll have to delay excavating another trench until the spring tides are over, and then we'll have another shot at it. I'm not going to be done, if I can help it!"

# CHAPTER XXVI

## The Camels

But Rob Wroxall was “done” in spite of his optimism.

Before turning in that night he drafted a code cablegram to his employers, frankly admitting that the first effort to right the wreck had been a complete failure.

Next morning he was “down”.

In spite of the sweltering heat he was shivering violently. His head was buzzing and throbbing. His throat was burning. He tried to get up, but the effort was too much for him. Utterly helpless, he lay on his bed wondering what had happened to him, and wondering still more what would happen to the work if he were unable to direct operations.

He was discovered in this state by Black Spot when the boy came to announce that his master’s bath was ready.

The Kruboy promptly went to Stanniforth’s room.

“Massa ’Ox’ll him lib for die, I tink!” he declared.

Stanniforth hurried to his chum’s aid. Rob was incapable of speech.



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The young doctor was puzzled. Unused to tropical diseases, except for a theoretical knowledge, he was under the impression that Rob was down with the deadly Black Water fever—and yet certain of the symptoms were absent. Nor were there definite signs that Rob was suffering from sunstroke; but

whatever the malady, the patient was in a bad way. And the perplexing thing about it was that he had been stricken down so suddenly. The previous evening he was apparently well, and even elated at the prospect of turning defeat into success; by morning he appeared to be at death's door.

Stanniforth did the best thing possible. He telephoned for a doctor who, having lived and practised on the Coast for nearly seven years, was well acquainted with the prevalent tropical diseases.

The resident medico was quickly on the spot. It did not take him long to diagnose the case. It was a particularly virulent form of malaria, confined almost exclusively to the shores of the Bight of Biafra, which embraced the coast of the Cameroon territories.

"He must have drunk tainted water," declared the consultant medical man. "Quite unknowingly, of course, but there it is. It's a form of malaria that has been traced not to mosquitoes but to sand-flies of a peculiar breed, that at certain seasons travel inland and over the town. Dangerous? Yes; but with due care he'll pull through, I think. Usually it means three days of the critical stage, and then recovery is fairly rapid. I've had patients at death's door, able to get about within ten days of the crisis. But——"

"But what?" asked Stanniforth anxiously.

"There'll be recurring periods of the malady, similar to those experienced by persons who have been down with ordinary malaria—usually three days in every twenty-eight. The only remedy for that is for Mr. Wroxall to go back to England and be inoculated. Inoculation on the spot doesn't have the desired effect, you know. The serum is only efficacious when the patient is living in a temperate climate."

For three days Rob made a hard fight for life. On the morning of the fourth day he was able to retain liquid nourishment, to sleep naturally, and, on awakening, to think rationally.

"Tell me, Doc!" he implored, "no beating about the bush, mind! When shall I be able to get back to the job?"

"With luck, you'll be allowed out in another ten days," replied Stanniforth.

"Ten days! Then the next spring tide will be on! That means another month before we're ready for the next attempt. What's Greig doing?"

"Greig," replied Stanniforth, "is carrying on. He's putting the natives to work to cut a trench right round the wreck, and not only on one side. And

he's following the system you adopted by facing the slopes with brushwood."

"Good man, Greig!" exclaimed Rob weakly. "That's what I meant to do before this knocked me out."

"Then there's precious little for you to worry over," rejoined Stanniforth. "And the less you worry, the sooner you'll be able to take over."

"Any news from head-quarters about Bloggs?" persisted Rob.

Stanniforth lied handsomely.

"None whatever!" he replied.

But there was. Bloggs had fled the country. He had withdrawn his remaining deposit in his local bank, and had vanished. The rumour was that he had gone to the French Congo, where he was safe from extradition. Also news had been received that the ill-fated Tomlinson had disappeared overboard while on the homeward-bound liner. The "accident" occurred when the vessel was within six hours' steaming of Liverpool. It was a dark night, and the passenger was not missed until early next morning.

At the end of the stipulated ten days, Rob was able to go out. Although weak, he was regaining strength satisfactorily, and part of his convalescence was spent in being taken for motor rides. His two doctors, however, refused to allow him to go anywhere near the salvage operations for at least another week.

Late one afternoon Rob paid a visit to the harbour-master's office. For one reason, he wanted to find out when the S.S. *Amilcar* was likely to put into Abuea harbour; for another, he wished to have a friendly palaver with "Unquestionably Jones".

"Glad to see you about again," was Mr. Jones's greeting. "I won't offer you a peg. It's lucky for you you kept off it, or it would have gone badly with you. If you'd been like that poor blighter Tomlinson, now."

Rob, not knowing the fate of his predecessor, was not in a mood to discuss Tomlinson and his failings. More than all, he did not mean to reveal the secret of the man's defalcations. That was shared only by Stanniforth and Bloggs, and Bloggs was not likely to give Tomlinson and himself away.

"Heard anything about Captain Fosdyke?" he asked. "When is the *Amilcar* expected?"

“Goodness only knows,” replied the harbour-master. “She’s reported at Lagos, but it depends whether she picks up any cargo for Abuea. There’s a consignment of palm-oil awaiting shipment for home, but it won’t pay her to come for it unless she has something to discharge here.”

After about half an hour’s conversation on various topics, Rob prepared to take his leave.

“I’ll see you to your car,” said Mr. Jones, picking up his sun-helmet.

On the way through the yard Rob’s attention was attracted by a pair of large metal cylinders to which a number of native workmen were applying a coat of red oxide.

“Hello!” he exclaimed, “what’s the idea?”

“Oh, those,” replied Mr. Jones carelessly. “I hardly know. They are some of the gear left behind by the Germans when we occupied the town in ’15. I fancy they intended using them for underground fuel tanks. They’ve been knocking about here ever since; and as they might come in handy some day, I put the blacks on to them to give them a coat of paint occasionally.”

It was more than idle curiosity that prompted Rob to examine the cylinders closely. His physical weakness was forgotten in his eagerness as he paced the ground in order to measure their length. According to his calculations each was fifty feet in length and about ten feet in diameter. By tapping the metal he made the discovery that the plates forming the walls of the cylinders were at least a quarter of an inch thick—far more than was necessary if the tanks had been originally intended for the storage of oil.

Climbing one of the ladders, and regardless of the fact that there was red oxide everywhere, Rob gained the upper convex surface.

“Steady, Mr. Wroxall!” cautioned the harbour-master, puzzled by his visitor’s performance. “You’re not fit to go swarming up there!”

“I’m all right,” declared Rob.

In the centre of the cylinder was a manhole, the cover-plate of which had been removed. Towards either end were smaller apertures, ringed round with gunmetal. At one time these obviously were intended to receive threaded tubes, but these had been removed and rough wooden plugs inserted in their place.

Peering into the centre aperture, Rob waited until his eyes grew more accustomed to the gloom. Then he made another discovery. The interior was not only reinforced by metal flanges, but there were a number of stays

crossing each other at right angles. In spite of the humidity of the tropical climate, the interior was remarkably well preserved, owing, no doubt, to the secret process under which the cylinders were constructed.

Then, to the further surprise of “Unquestionably Jones”, Rob sat on the topmost rung of the ladder, drew his ever-present “Pond’s Engineers’ Tables” from his pocket, and commenced to make calculations.

“Both of them represent a total lift of at least two hundred tons,” he declared to the further mystification of Mr. Jones.

“If you don’t come down I’ll report you to Stanniforth,” he vowed, but Rob in his present state cared little for the threat.

After a while he descended to terra firma, linked arms with the bewildered harbour-master, and took him, not to the gate where Rob’s car was waiting, but back to the former’s office.

“Can you lend me those two cylinders?” he asked. “We’ll be quite willing to pay a reasonable sum for their hire.”

“Don’t see why not,” replied Mr. Jones. “But they’ll take some shifting. I don’t mind telling you I’ll be glad to see the last of them. A trader up-stream wanted to buy them from the Harbour Trust to store oil; only when it came to the point he found they were too heavy to take along to his place. But what on earth do you want them for?”

“They’re just the things I’ve been wanting. They are camels!”

“Camels?”

“Yes; in salvage work we call them that. They are constructed purposely to raise submerged objects.”

“I don’t doubt you’re right,” agreed Mr. Jones. “Now I come to think of it, I believe the Germans had a gunboat sunk up-stream. They were still preparing to raise her when war broke out.”

“Are there any other fittings belonging to the cylinders?” inquired Rob. “For instance, tubes fitted with valves.”

The harbour-master shook his head.

“Not to my knowledge. They were like that when I came here. Perhaps the Germans removed the gadgets before they evacuated Abuea, or the natives might have pinched the metal before our people got things in order.”

“I think I can get over that difficulty,” continued Rob. “Now what price do you think you’ll ask for the loan of those cylinders?”

The young engineer was quite prepared for a lengthy bargaining. Usually such a question met with the vague reply, “I’ll leave that to you,” followed by a deliberate refusal of the thus invited offer.

“We won’t quarrel over that,” began “Unquestionably Jones”, and Rob felt certain that there would be a haggling match. But he was agreeably disappointed. “If you send your men along to shift them, and when the job’s done you’ll oblige me with a few odd coils of wire rope and lengths of chain-stuff that’s hardly worth taking back to England—we’ll call it a deal! I’ll be more than satisfied, because, unless you’ve been in my position here, you don’t know how hard it is to get hold of that sort of gear. You send men along and I’ll lend you the small tug to tow the cylinders across the harbour.”

Hardly able to realize his stroke of luck, Rob bade the harbour-master “good afternoon” and hastened back to the bungalow.

Fortunately for him Stanniforth was out, or he might have received a severe “ticking-off” for behaving as a docile patient ought not to do.

Going to the telephone, Rob rang up his immediate subordinate.

“That you, Greig? Good! I’ve come across a couple of camels, lifting capacity two hundred tons, belonging to the Harbour Board. Jones has lent them to us, so I want you to send a gang over the first thing to-morrow morning to shift them. And you might see that eight nine-inch additional parbuckling wires are placed under the wreck. Use the existing ones as messengers. That will be the quickest way. Is that clear? Right! What’s that? Seven feet of water in the trench? No matter; we can get over that difficulty. Cheerio! See you in the morning!”

Soon after nine that evening, when Stanniforth returned after a visit to his professional *confrère*, the young doctor went to Rob’s room.

His patient was sleeping soundly.

# CHAPTER XXVII

## On an Even Keel

“You are not jolly well going to keep me off the works another minute,” declared Rob mutinously, at the conclusion of breakfast.

“I’m not going to try,” replied Stanniforth cheerfully. “Provided you go slow there’s no reason why you shouldn’t carry on. I feel inclined to congratulate myself in assisting to effect a speedy recovery. But seriously, you seem frightfully bucked about something, and the fact that you are showing a keen interest again tells me that you are practically fit.”

Rob told him of his lucky shot in discovering the two camels in the harbour-master’s yard.

“And that two hundred tons extra lift will give me just what I want,” he added. “I’m confident that the next attempt will see the old *Lapwing* righted!”

As a matter of fact Rob could with advantage have remained in his quarters for another day, and left the preparations to his capable assistant. The task of transporting the two cylinders to the sandy spit nearest the wreck occupied the best part of the day, while placing the additional parbuckling wires in position was not completed for another three days.

During this time the two cylinders had been rolled on massive planks—an operation that would have been out of the question had the compressed air pipes been in position—until they rested end to end on the top of the ramp leading to the excavation on the port side of the wreck.

They then had to be levered gently down the brushwood-faced slope without causing a landslide, until they floated on the water remaining at the bottom of the trench.

The next task was to prepare the camels with inlet and outlet valves so that they could first be filled with water and allowed to sink, and then be emptied by expelling the water by means of compressed air. The

parbuckling wires had also to be attached to the camels and to bollards on the starboard side of the *Lapwing's* well-deck.

Although the work proceeded at high pressure and with hardly a hitch, the next spring tide arrived before Rob was ready for the second attempt. It was exasperating, but mindful of Captain Condor's off-repeated warning, the young Engineer-in-Chief resolved not to risk another failure by premature action.

He had to stand by and watch six successive high tides flood the excavation and submerge the sunken camels to a depth of six feet because in the conflict between Nature and Man the former had won by a matter of about twenty-four hours.

During the ensuing period of neap tides, final preparations continued apace. All the running gear was overhauled, the air compressors and air pressure pipes tested, and the workmen were put through a rehearsal so that when the critical moment arrived there would be no confusion and no hitch that could be prevented by care and forethought.

Two days before the full moon Rob had a visit from "Unquestionably Jones".

"You're all ready, aren't you?" inquired the harbour-master. "When do you propose making the attempt?"

"On Thursday."

"H'm: well, if you don't mind my giving you a little information——"

"Not at all," rejoined Rob heartily.

"It's full moon on Thursday at a quarter to five in the afternoon. I suppose you know that the tides here are very irregular? Judging by the state of the barometer and the direction of the wind during the last twenty-five hours—did you notice that we didn't have a land-breeze this morning?—there'll be an abnormally high tide to-night. If you take my advice you'll stand by."

"Thanks awfully," replied Rob, "I will."

Taking advantage of the harbour-master's experience—notwithstanding the information given in the tide-tables concerning the "predicted height" at Abuea on that day—Rob gave orders for all hands to remain on duty and for steam to be raised in all boilers. The white employees were then told to "stand off" until four in the afternoon, while the native workmen were

served out with a meal and promised double pay for the ensuing night's shift.

Sunset was followed by a period of intense darkness lasting nearly an hour, and then the moon, nearly at its full, rose above the far-reaching swamps on the eastern side of the harbour.

"Jones is right, sir," commented Greig. "The tide's coming in with a rush. It's already pouring in through the runway. Shall I see that the strain is taken on the parbuckling wires?"

"Please do so," replied Rob. "You might tell someone to stand by the air compressors. We'll start blowing the cylinders now, I think, and give them a chance to lift gradually."

Although, as Greig had stated, the flood-tide was coming in with a rush, the rise seemed painfully slow to the now anxious Engineer-in-Charge. For, once again on the eve of another attempt, he was feeling not only anxious but dubious. A hundred questions flashed across his mind. Was there, amongst all his preparations, anything that he had left undone or had he done anything that he ought not to have done?

The trench was now almost filled, and the upper surface of each camel was only just showing above the water. The tide, too, was invading the flats surrounding the wreck, and very soon Rob and his assistants would have to evacuate their position or else run the risk of being attacked by sharks, many of which could be seen swimming in the moonlit waters.

On the temporary breakwater on the seaward side of the spit a wooden platform had been built at a distance of about fifty yards from the stern of the steeply-listing wreck. To this vantage point Rob, Stanniforth, and a couple of assistants retired. Greig had previously climbed to the *Lapwing's* deck, whence he could observe the behaviour of the two cylinders; while the rest of the working party, divided into two groups, were under the orders of their foremen.

"Five feet eight inches!" reported Paul, who had been told off to observe the tide gauge and report the height at five-minute intervals.

"Commence heaving roundly!" ordered Rob, and the command was repeated by the foreman in charge of the winding gear.

Columns of white steam rose almost vertically in the still, moonlit air. The clanking of the donkey engines and the rattle of capstan and winch pawls outvoiced the rumble of the breakers on the distant reef. The wires groaned under the strain.

And nothing happened!

That is to say, nothing of a visible character rewarded the combined efforts of the straining cylinders and the bar-tautened parbuckling wires.

“Five feet nine!” declared the apprentice at the gauge, in a tone that sounded to Rob like that of the voice of doom.

“Any sign of moving, Mr. Greig?” he asked.

David Greig consulted the clinometer that had been rigged up to one side of the after coffer-dam. He was too honest to give the slightly quivering needle the benefit of the doubt.

“’Fraid not, sir!” he replied.

Every drop of water had been expelled from both cylinders by means of compressed air. They were almost completely submerged by the water, which, having invaded the sand all around the wreck, had given the *Lapwing* the appearance of a half-tide rock.

The capstans and winches, too, had refused to budge another inch of a pawl. The heaving wires were being subjected to a strain approaching that of breaking-point as the *Lapwing* appeared to be immovably fixed.

“Five feet ten and a half!”

Already the tide was higher than on the previous and unsuccessful attempt, and then there had been no camels to tend to right the vessel. In a few minutes it would be high water. So far the coffer-dams had withstood the pressure, and no serious subsidence of sand had impeded the operations. The hull was still watertight, the cylinders were standing up to their task well, and the tide was higher than before; yet in spite of all this, the *Lapwing* remained in what appeared to be her grave.

Suddenly, above the din of the winding gear, came the apprentice’s voice, raised shrilly in his agitation, “Water’s falling, sir! Five feet three!”

There was optical proof as far as Rob was concerned. The sand flats were draining with extraordinary rapidity. The supports of the stage upon which the Engineer-in-Charge was standing were left uncovered by the receding waters.

“We’re done again, I’m afraid,” he remarked to Stanniforth. “I can’t understand.”

“Stand fast, sir!” interrupted one of the men with him. “You’ll be pitched off if you don’t hang on!”

Looking in the direction of the workman's outstretched hand Rob saw what appeared to be a huge wall of water approaching from seaward. Violently agitated, although there was no wind to account for the broken crests that glistened in the moonlight, the wave swept over the temporary barrier and swirled past the supports of the observation platform on which Rob and his party stood.

Instinctively the four men gripped the low handrail, although they must have known that it would not serve as a protection if the onrush of water uprooted the fragile structure.

Aboard the wreck, Greig, too, saw the danger. Clambering up the steeply-inclined deck he gained the rail on the starboard side. As he did so the breaker dashed against the camels with terrific force, and then brought up in a cloud of foam against the partly-submerged sides of the two coffer-dams.

Routed by the advancing water, the workmen, both white and native, took to their heels and ran for dear life along the shelving sand. Leaving the winches and winding engines to look after themselves, the employees never stopped until they gained higher ground beyond the danger limit.

Yet Rob throughout all this scene of confusion kept his eyes fixed intently upon the wreck. Of his own immediate danger and even of that of his companions he had not time to think. Now or never the wreck would be lifted from its sandy bed by the tremendous onslaught of the wave.

Even as he looked Rob saw the parbuckling wires that led over the heads of the two tripods begin to sag. Then, as the two camels again crashed against the *Lapwing's* submerged port side, the wreck shook itself clear!

Up rose the long-buried side of the ship until Greig, still gripping a stanchion, was hidden from Rob's sight by the intervening port-rail. The two coffer-dams, previously almost vertical, were now cocked at a grotesque angle, as were the tripods with their now slackened wires.

The sense of elation that filled Rob's mind at the sight was quickly subdued at the thought that perhaps the *Lapwing* might roll gunwale-under in the opposite direction. But she remained almost on an even keel, quivering perceptibly as the waters subsided nearly as rapidly as they had invaded the sand flats.

"She's up!" exclaimed Stanniforth. "You've pulled it off, old son!"

Although not of a demonstrative nature, Rob gripped his chum's proffered hand.

“Yes, she’s up!” he replied. “But it wasn’t my doing—it was a direct act of Providence!”

After that things appeared a bit hazy as far as Rob was concerned. He was dimly aware of seeing the sand flats appear again, littered with debris from the demolished gear; of the two camels, their work accomplished, bobbing in the water-filled trench where a short while before the *Lapwing* had been lying hard on her port side; of the cheers and shouts of the workmen at the successful result of their toil; of people flocking round him and insisting upon shaking him by the hand; of David Greig executing a wild dance in the moonlight upon the now level deck of the righted vessel, and shouting incoherent congratulations to his chief!

Then his sense of responsibility returned. Immediate steps would have to be taken to prevent the *Lapwing* falling over again as the tide ebbed. The camels, too, must be cast off and towed clear before being either left high and dry by the falling tide or wedged in the excavation against the vessel’s port bilge.

Gangs of men were set to work to throw bundles of weighted brushwood into the still flooded excavation so that the *Lapwing* should find a fairly solid bed to rest upon. Others were employed in tautening wires on either side of the ship to serve as additional steadying supports.

While this was in progress Rob boarded the *Lapwing* and again received congratulations from Greig, who by this time had realized that he had been making a bit of an ass of himself by executing a *pas seul* in the light of the African moon.

“Hadn’t I better see if the water’s rising in the holds, sir?” asked Rob’s assistant. “We’ll have to cut away part of the coffer-dams to do that.”

“Perhaps you’d better,” agreed Rob. “It’s best to be on the safe side, although in any case the pumps will easily deal with any inrush. I don’t know, though,” he continued. “We’re all of us feeling pretty tired. I’ll get half a dozen volunteers to stand by as watchmen and send the rest of the men off.”

“And what are you going to do, sir?” asked Greig.

“Stop here until low tide.”

“Then I’ll remain too,” decided the loyal-minded Greig.

Just then “Unquestionably Jones” came over the side and shook Rob by the hand.

“Congrats, Mr. Wroxall!” he exclaimed. “So the old cylinders came in a bit handy. But it was that black sinner Plum Duff who did the trick! By rights I should have to give him a regular ticking-off; but in the cires, I don’t think I will!”

“Plum Duff! I’m dashed if I know what you’re driving at!”

The harbour-master pointed in the direction of Abuea, where a vessel was being brought alongside one of the wharves.

“That hooker came over the bar just at the right moment,” he declared. “The pilot brought her in at a jolly sight more than the regulation five knots, and her wash gave the *Lapwing* just what she wanted to lift her. No, I don’t think I’ll make Plum Duff sit up this time!”

A thought occurred to Rob.

“What vessel is she?” he asked.

“The one you were inquiring about,” replied “Unquestionably Jones”. “The *Amilcar*, Master, Captain Thomas Fosdyke!”

# CHAPTER XXVIII

## All for Nothing

It was daylight before Rob, accompanied by Stanniforth, returned to his bungalow.

Both were deadly tired, but before Rob turned in “to sleep the clock round” he had first to write out the order for the day. Greig would also be off duty, so the senior foreman who had only “come on” at sunset was detailed to remain in charge. To him Rob gave written instructions for carrying on until he returned to direct operations.

Finally Rob drafted a cablegram to his employers: “*Lapwing* righted,” and told Black Spot to be sure to hand it in directly the post-office opened.

Then, weary in body, yet conscious that his arduous task was within sight of success, Rob turned in and was soon in a sound, dreamless slumber.

At four in the afternoon he awoke to find Black Spot ready with a pot of tea.

“Cap, him lib for call two time,” he announced, handing his master a pencilled chit.

“Then why didn’t you wake me?” asked Rob, reading the message in Captain Fosdyke’s handwriting.

“If *Lapwing* him no keep you awake, sah, den it makes for sure you no want looksee Cap his call,” replied Black Spot reproachfully, meaning that since his master was too tired to attend to his work on the *Lapwing*, he surely was too tired to receive callers.

“All right,” rejoined Rob. “Bath ready? Is Doctor Stanniforth up?”

The Kruboy nodded, and then shook his head.

“I tink him lib for sleep two time,” he observed.

“Right! Don’t wake him. Captain Fosdyke will be here again at five. See that a good meal is served.”

At the appointed hour Rob, tubbed and rigged out in clean ducks and feeling “as fresh as paint”, was ready to receive his long-expected visitor.

“Hello, Wroxall!” exclaimed Captain Fosdyke. “Awfully glad to run up against you again. But first let me apologize for shaking you up last night. The harbour-master told me about it. Really it wasn’t my fault. That scoundrel Plum Duff swore that the bar had shoaled since we were in last, and that he had to take the old hooker in at full pelt.”

“Jolly good thing for me that he did,” declared Rob. “Take a pew! Have a cigarette, or do you prefer a pipe? You had my letter, I suppose?”

“Yes; and you brought my brother’s belt out with you?”

Rob shook his head.

“’Fraid of it getting adrift; so I put it in the care of the manager of the bank at Falmouth.”

Captain Fosdyke’s face fell.

“It’s all right, though,” continued his host reassuringly. “I gathered that it was not the belt that mattered but the figures engraved on the buckle; so I took the liberty of copying them.”

“You’re on the right tack there,” said Captain Fosdyke approvingly. “It is the figures that matter. And you’ll be interested to know why!”

“I’m curious,” admitted Rob frankly. “Though, of course, I don’t want to—to—well, what shall we say? pry into your family affairs.”

“That is of little consequence,” rejoined the Master of the *Amilcar*. “It’s the story that will interest you, and since you went to a great deal of trouble to get hold of my dead brother’s belt for me it seems only right that I should tell you why such an apparently worthless article should be of great importance to me.

“I think I told you that my brother was lying in Abuea Harbour during the Cameroons operations against the Germans. His ship, the *Antibar*, was homeward bound from Cape Town when war was declared, and she was taken over by the Admiralty as a Fleet Auxiliary and ordered to proceed to Abuea and await orders.

“In his letters home Dick—that’s my brother—mentioned that he’d made a successful private deal and had been paid £3000 in gold. For some reason best known to himself he decided to bring the coin home with him, instead of doing the sensible thing and getting the Union of South Africa

Bank to undertake the transfer. But when war broke out and he was ordered to proceed to Abuea he didn't feel so happy about the money, especially as there were German armed raiders out off the Rio del Oro coast. So he asked the paymaster of the only British warship then lying in the harbour to take charge of the coin and give him an order on the Dockyard Bank at Plymouth. The paymaster refused—said he wasn't authorized to receive the money, and that if the warship (I forget her name) met with a mishap and was sunk, he, if he survived, might be hauled over the coals by the Admiralty for accepting the responsibility.

“Then Dick tried an officer in the Army Pay Corps attached to the Cameroons Expeditionary Force. He also refused to handle the cash for similar reasons, so that my brother found himself on the point of sailing for England in an eleven-knot, practically unarmed tramp and with a good chance of being torpedoed before he got there.

“So in desperation he went ashore on the night before he left Abuea and buried the £3000, taking both compass and sextant bearings of the site. All this he recorded in his letter, which I received five weeks after the *Antibar* had been torpedoed. He gave the objects from which he took his bearings, but purposely omitted to give the actual degrees in case the letter got into wrong hands. But he mentioned that he'd cut these figures on the brass buckle of his belt. You see he hadn't made allowances for German submarine methods. He was prepared to run the risk of having his ship sent to the bottom, but not to be made prisoner and subsequently drowned when the U-boat met with disaster.

“And, as you know, the *Antibar* was torpedoed in the Chops of the Channel and the U-boat was the one you raised off Berry Head.”

“So you will be able to fix the position with the help of the figures I copied out,” said Rob. “I'll get them, they're in the safe.”

Captain Fosdyke glanced at the proffered paper.

“Thanks awfully,” he remarked. “These will do the trick, I'm sure. Look here! Without offence, can I offer you a small percentage——”

Rob shook his head vigorously.

“Thanks, no!” he replied. “But I tell you what; while our sand dredger is at work cutting a channel to get the *Lapwing* into deep water I'll have a fair amount of time on my hands. I'd like to come along and do a bit of treasure hunting.”

“By all means,” agreed Captain Fosdyke. “The sooner the better, as far as I am concerned. I’m leaving for Liverpool on Monday. By the by, you don’t happen to have a chart of Abuea Harbour handy—or a Government survey map will do?”

“I’ve both,” replied Rob. “And a pair of ‘Field’s’ parallel rulers.”

The chart was produced and laid flat upon a table.

“Here’s the old fort, one of the bearings,” explained the skipper. “The factory chimney at Kibua is another. Now for the first angle. . . . Hello! this won’t do! Let’s take the next angle—the fort and Spitz Berg—it’s called Rigby Bluff now. There it is on the chart. Now, half a minute.”

Drawing straight lines, forming the required angle to these two positions, Captain Fosdyke then proceeded to describe a semicircle cutting one previously made in conjunction with the first pair of objectives.

Then——

“That’s torn it!” he exclaimed. “The money’s buried under two fathoms of water. That is, if it hasn’t been washed away before this. Since my brother hid the coins, the sea has encroached for at least two hundred yards!”

“Do you want me to check your lay-offs?” asked Rob.

His companion handed him the protractor.

“It’s not often I’m wrong at this sort of work,” he remarked. “Still, if you don’t mind.”

But the captain’s calculations were only too accurate. The site of the buried money was certainly covered by twelve feet of water at low tide and, curiously enough, it was within a hundred yards of the spot where the *Lapwing* had gone aground, nearly twenty years later.

“All your trouble for nothing, Mr. Wroxall!” exclaimed Captain Fosdyke, with a rather forced laugh. “I don’t mind confessing that I am disappointed, but that seems to be the lot of all seekers after buried treasure. It wasn’t a great amount, but knowing of its existence and that it was mine as my brother’s relation, it’s hard lines to be done out of it.”

“No chance of finding it by sending a diver down, I suppose?” suggested Rob. “I’ve a good man on the job, and he’d be quite willing to make a search, I’m sure.”

Captain Fosdyke considered and then shook his head.

“Not the ghost of a chance,” he replied. “It isn’t a case of subsidence of the land but of erosion. As likely as not the box containing the coin was laid bare by the waves at high tide before this part of the harbour attained its present depth. If so no doubt a nigger beachcomber—and there are plenty of those gentry—saw the box and helped himself to its contents. Now then, let’s switch on to something else. How have you been getting on since you came out here? I’ve heard all sorts of yarns concerning the difficulties experienced with the *Lapwing*. Apparently you’ve succeeded.”

“Up to a certain point,” agreed Rob. “She’s practically on an even keel. Now comes the job of getting her afloat, and alongside the wharf. Then my part of the business will be completed and I’ll be off home.”

“And you won’t be sorry?”

“Yes and no! It’s my first experience abroad, and according to what I’ve heard I’ve been sent to a bad patch! It has been interesting work and I’m getting used to the place, but I must admit I’ll be jolly glad to be home again, even though it means being sent out to a worse job in some other part of the globe.”

“There’s the rub,” commented Captain Fosdyke. “If your employers are like the Admiralty, they’ll probably send you right off to a salvage job in the Arctic! When war was declared in ’14, I’d just come home from a seven months’ voyage to the Singapore Straits—probably one of the hottest regions known as far as seamen are concerned, although landsmen have to exist in much higher temperatures. I was case-hardened to the Tropics, but when I volunteered for service I was sent in an armed merchantman to Archangel, got frozen in in the White Sea, and had to stick it for nearly eighteen months. But, tell me, when did you last set your glass?”

He pointed to a barometer fixed to the wall over Rob’s desk. The pointer showed 30·12 inches, the hand 29·35.

“Early this morning,” replied Rob. “Just before I turned in.”

“H’m, you did. And it’s still falling,” announced Captain Fosdyke, as he lightly tapped the instrument. “I’m off back to the old *Amilcar* at once.”

“Whatever for?” asked Rob. “Surely she’s safe enough where she’s lying.”

“Nothing’s safe in Abuea Harbour in an on-shore hurricane,” replied his visitor. “I’ve seen the topsides of a ten thousand tons vessel stove in against the piling of the berth where the *Amilcar* is lying. The safest thing is to put out to sea, but the state of the tide doesn’t serve.”

Just then the telephone bell rang.

Rob went to the instrument.

“Yes—yes—he’s here. Do you want to speak to him? Right, hold the line. . . . I say, Captain Fosdyke, someone wants a word with you.”

The skipper went to the ’phone.

“Yes—that you, Robinson? Very good—very good—right, carry on, I’m coming along at once.”

Fosdyke rang off and turned to his host.

“It’s my Chief Officer,” he explained. “There’s a storm-warning. The harbour-master has advised all vessels to proceed up-stream and shelter behind Nicholson’s Bluff. He’s sending all his tugs and small craft there too. Well, cheerio! Excuse my bolting like this. See you in a day or so, I hope.”

The next instant Rob was left alone, gazing rather absent-mindedly at the pencilled lines on the chart of Abuea Harbour—the marks that had sounded the death-knell of Captain Tom Fosdyke’s hopes of finding his dead brother’s treasure.

# CHAPTER XXIX

## The Hurricane

But Wroxall was thinking hard of other things. Clearly the storm warning was one that promised the rapid approach of a hurricane of exceptional violence; otherwise “Unquestionably Jones” would not have gone to the length of ordering all vessels to leave their berths in the estuary and seek shelter in one of the bends of the river.

In that case what would happen to the *Lapwing*? If the force of the wind were likely to be sufficient to tear vessels from their berths alongside the solidly constructed quays, how would it deal with the partly salvaged wreck, perched insecurely in an artificial trench in the middle of a low-lying spit of soft sand and exposed to the full strength of the in-shore breakers?

There was also all the plant on the site to be taken into consideration, and, above all, the safety of the men standing by the *Lapwing* until active work could be resumed.

Rob was not long in making up his mind. The safety of human lives was the primary consideration. If Fate were unkind and the operations were wrecked completely by the force of Nature, then no blame could be attached to the Chief Engineer-in-Charge. It would be a bitter blow to have all his work destroyed on the eve of success, and that was all that could be said about it! From first to last the *Lapwing* salvage operations had been a gamble—a risk that no Marine Insurance Company would undertake to cover.

Going to the telephone Rob rang up the foreman on the works.

“That you, Lawson? Listen, there’s a hurricane predicted.”

“So I see, sir,” replied the foreman. “There’s a heavy swell on the bar now. I’ve had the air compressors and the two donkey-engines shifted well above high-water mark.”

“Excellent! Now I want you to withdraw the men on board the *Lapwing*. She’ll have to take her chance. You’d better order everyone back to Abuea in

case the huts are flooded or carried away.”

“Ay, ay, sir!”

Rob rang off, and then asked to be switched over to the harbour-master’s office.

As he expected, “Unquestionably Jones” was not there. He was afloat, superintending the removal of some of the Harbour Board’s lighters to a place of safety, but a considerably harassed assistant answered for him.

“This is Wroxall speaking,” announced Rob. “What’s happened to the *St. Sampson*—the suction dredger we loaned to you?”

“She went up the river an hour ago, sir,” was the reassuring reply. “We ordered all our craft away directly we got the warning.”

There was nothing more to be said or done.

As darkness fell Rob switched on the electric light, but he could not rest. He paced up and down the room, going at frequent intervals to the still open window that commanded a view across the harbour to seaward.

There was not a breath of wind. The air was hot and oppressive, even for the Coast. The sky was overcast and not a star was visible. Except for the lights in the town all was utter darkness—a blackness that seemed to press upon the anxious watcher’s eyes.

A low rumble betokened the approach of thunder. With it came a heavy downpour of rain, but still no wind.

The raindrops falling like the rattle of a dozen machine-guns upon the galvanized iron roof awoke Stanniforth from his prolonged and heavy sleep.

Wearing a bath-robe over his pyjamas, the doctor entered the living-room and stood blinking in the glare of the lamp.

“Hello, Doc!” was Rob’s greeting. “Do you know what a wash-out is?”

“Methinks I’ve heard that plebeian expression before,” rejoined Stanniforth. “It’s raining very heavily, I see; so perhaps you are suggesting that I have a bath in the open—in other words a wash out!”

“If it’s only the rain there won’t be much to worry about,” continued Rob, and proceeded to give him an account of the situation and its possibilities.

“Worrying won’t help matters,” declared Stanniforth. “And what’s the use of your remaining up all night? Take a leaf out of my book. When I’m in

practice—at home, of course—I lose no opportunity to get a good night's rest. If there's a case, then, naturally, I'm up and off to it, but I don't stop all the night and every night waiting for something urgent to turn up!"

"That may be," rejoined Rob. "As it happens, I've had twelve hours' sleep, and somehow I don't like turning in with this hurricane brewing."

Stanniforth threw himself into one of the cane lounge-chairs.

"Very well, then," he decided. "If you won't be rational, I'll be erratic too. Turn on the wireless, old son, and let sweet music drown dull care—something tuneful and not that discordant muck they call modern music!"

"Jazz, then?" suggested Rob, knowing his companion's distaste in that direction.

"You dare!" exclaimed the Doctor. "That's an abomination at the other extreme of the scale. I decline to have my ears lacerated by discords that undoubtedly originated from the aborigines of this part of the dark continent."

Rob "switched on". He tried half a dozen stations within range, but the air was so heavily charged with electricity that a succession of loud crackling noises dominated everything.

"Another wash-out!" he exclaimed as he lifted the switch. "Hello! There's the wind!"

So terrific was the first gust that the two men looked at each other significantly. The bungalow, though strongly built, rocked on its foundations. Raindrops rattled on the roof, flashes of vivid lightning seemed to play across the room in spite of the tightly-bolted jalousied shutters. Thunder rolled and crashed incessantly, while the palm trees in the vicinity seemed to be shrieking in agony as the wind whistled through their broad leaves and bent the pliant trunks almost to the ground.

This went on for several hours. At midnight the electric light failed, and although Rob waited for some time expecting the fault to be rectified, he eventually had to search for candles. It was useless to call any of the native servants to do so. They, terrified beyond measure, were cowering behind closed doors in their own quarters.

Under the conditions conversation was almost out of the question. When the two men exchanged scrappy sentences they had to shout to make themselves understood—and then did not always succeed.

Presently the Doctor hoisted himself out of his chair, and examined the barometer.

“Glass has risen a tenth,” he bawled. “It will soon be over. I’m off to bed!”

“It will blow worse than ever,” declared Rob. “‘First rise after low indicates a stronger blow’—that’s a true piece of weather-lore.”

“Is that so?” rejoined Stanniforth. “I can hardly credit the fact that it could possibly blow harder than it has been doing. Perhaps I’d better hang on!”

Throughout those long-drawn-out hours neither man had mentioned the *Lapwing*, but anxiety on her account was the paramount thought in Rob’s mind. Stanniforth, too, worried about her probable fate, though to a lesser extent and prompted by different motives. It was consideration for his chum: he dreaded what the effect would be upon the temperamental character of his companion if, after all, the salvage operations were to be rendered useless by an act of Nature.

Suddenly above the already furious din came a terrific crash. The house, that had quivered again and again, literally rocked as if it were shaken by a severe earthquake. The noise was like that of an aerial bomb exploding within effective range. Several objects in the room, displaced by the concussion, clattered upon the rush-mat covered floor, while the air was thick with dust.

“That’s my bedroom gone!” declared Stanniforth, when the din had to a certain extent died down. “We’ll be unroofed in a tick! Hang it all, I must get my instruments and medicine chest, whatever happens!”

He snatched up a candle—one of two that had not been extinguished by the concussion—and threw open the door leading from the sitting-room into the corridor to his bedroom.

A rush of air instantly extinguished both candles. It was as much as Stanniforth could do to get his shoulders against the door to reclose it.

Rob groped for matches and relighted the candles. It occurred to him that probably his chum had overstated the damage. If the wing of the bungalow had collapsed it was evident that the party walls would not have withstood the battering.

“Where’s a torch?” demanded Stanniforth breathlessly. “I’ll have another shot at it. Shield those candles while I open the door. Do you mind shutting

if after me? I can't pull it to, that's a moral cert."

At the second attempt the Doctor succeeded in getting through the doorway. Rob, shutting the door, placed his shoulders against it and awaited his chum's return.

Presently Stanniforth knocked loudly. Rob stood aside, and the Doctor, white under his tan, stumbled into the room.

The first thing he did, after placing a leather case on the table, was to pour himself out a stiff peg of whisky and gulp it down. Then he pulled himself together and explained.

"Good thing I didn't turn in," he declared. "There's a sheet of metal, weighing a couple of hundredweight, I should imagine, blown through the roof and fallen end-on upon my bed. The frame of the bed is cut through as cleanly as if by an axe, and the bedding's wedged hard into the floor. If I had been there——"

His unfinished sentence left little or nothing to the imagination; but later on it was discovered that the mass of metal had been dislodged from a large cistern two hundred yards away. In its flight it had passed completely over three bungalows before descending with terrific force upon the galvanized-iron roof of the two chums' dwelling.

It was the hurricane's greatest and almost final kick, for just before sunrise the wind veered and then dropped almost as suddenly as it had arisen.

Unbarring one of the doors to lee'ard, Rob, armed with a pair of night glasses, went out under the veranda—or the remains of it, for the concrete paving was covered to a depth of a foot with debris. Only the posts of the veranda remained, while a few feet away two large palm trees had been uprooted and had fallen with their leafy tops almost touching the main wall of the bungalow. A two-storied house in course of construction had been levelled to the ground, and several others, even in the starlight, showed signs of having been severely damaged by the terrific hurricane.

But Rob paid slight heed to his immediate surroundings. Levelling his glasses he swept the still boiling expanse of tempestuous water within the harbour, and steadied them upon a black speck where the *Lapwing* lay. Apart from the faint starlight, the surf blowing across the sand barrier made objects difficult to discern; but there was no doubt about it; where one black object ought to have been there were now two!

That discovery was enough! Rob realized that his work had been in vain, and that the hull of the *Lapwing* had been broken completely into two by the force of wind and sea.

He swung round on his heel and re-entered the bungalow.

“We may as well pack up and go home by the first mail-boat, Doc!” he announced dully. “The *Lapwing*’s broken her back!”

# CHAPTER XXX

## The Morning After

“Hard lines!” ejaculated Stanniforth sympathetically. “Now look here, you’d better turn in.”

Somewhat to the doctor’s relief, Rob agreed.

“Suppose I’d better. For a couple of hours, anyway. Then I’ll have to see if there’s any of the plant that hasn’t been washed away. . . . Hello! That you, Black Spot?”

“Yaas, sah,” replied the Kruboy, who, now that the storm was over, was beginning to realize that he was still alive, and that he ought to be seeing to his master’s comfort. “I lib for make tea!”

“Don’t want any,” declared Rob. “How about you, Doc?”

Stanniforth shook his head.

“I can last out till breakfast,” he added.

“No tea,” reiterated Black Spot’s master. “But call me in two hours’ time. Bath ready as usual.”

“Bath him take holiday, sah,” announced the Kruboy. “Up him go up topsides. Him no find. Make lib to take Soapsud wid him; but Soapsud him say ‘No.’ ”

Further inquiries showed that during the storm one of the Kruboyes rejoicing in the name of Soapsuds had completed his work in the bungalow and then gone to his quarters, which were in a detached building about fifty yards away. Apparently he set off at a rather unfortunate time—just before the terrific wind succeeded to almost vertical torrents of rain. To protect himself from the heavy drops, Soapsuds decided to obtain a temporary and unauthorized loan of his master’s bath, a shallow, circular affair about four feet in diameter. He arrived at his quarters without the bath, and terrified his already frightened fellow-servants by declaring that on the way an evil spirit had torn the object in question away from his grasp.

Fifteen hours later Black Spot retrieved the bath, punctured in four places, from the top of a telegraph pole, half a mile from the bungalow!

Rob had barely turned in when day broke with the suddenness and brilliancy of the tropics, and a few minutes later Stanniforth burst unceremoniously into his room.

“You jolly old scaremonger!” exclaimed the latter, holding out the pair of binoculars. “What do you mean by pitching the yarn that the *Lapwing* is in two parts? She isn’t, but there’s something out there that will interest you. Go and look while I get into my clothes. It strikes me that I’ll have some work to do after all!”

With that cryptic conclusion to his remarks, Stanniforth went to his devastated room, leaving Rob, still mystified, to verify his chum’s amazing statement.

In daylight the scene of the salvage operations presented a totally different appearance from that which it had in the misty starlight.

The *Lapwing* was in the same position, and still on an almost even keel. Masses of glittering white sand had piled themselves against her quarters. Both coffer-dams had disappeared, but the wooden tripods still remained. But the strange thing about her was the presence of about half a dozen men grouped on her fo’c’sle; while astern of her and at a distance that could not be gauged by looking through a pair of binoculars, was the hull of a vessel lying completely on her beam-ends.

Already the wreck, badly battered by the tremendous breakers, was half engulfed in the yielding sand. At regular intervals she, as well as the *Lapwing*, was lost to sight in the blinding clouds of spray that flew completely over her.

Rob knew that it was now nearly high tide, but it was quite possible that, owing to the severity of the hurricane and its direction, the actual time of high water might be delayed, and its height increased well above that predicted in the *Nautical Almanack*.

And obviously men’s lives were in danger. The half-dozen of the crew sheltering on the *Lapwing*’s fo’c’sle could not comprise the entire ship’s company.

An attempt at rescue must be made with the least possible delay.

Rob hurried to the telephone. He might have saved himself the trouble and delay, for there was no response from the exchange. The hurricane had

blown down almost every telephone and telegraph wire in the Abuea district.

As soon as Rob and the doctor had dressed, they hurried first to Greig's bungalow and found the Assistant Engineer on the point of going across to theirs.

"Up all night," explained Greig. "No, no damage done here. I can't see the *Lapwing* from here, you know."

"She seems all right," said Rob, "but there's a wreck close under her stern, and some of the survivors have clambered aboard her. Is your phone working?"

"No," was the reply. "Otherwise I would have rung you up during the night."

"Then cut along round the harbour and beat up a party," continued Rob. "You'll go with him, won't you, Stanniforth? We haven't the launch available, and it's doubtful whether we could effect a landing if she were. She's sheltering with other craft above the Bluff. Right-o! I'll hurry along and find the harbour-master, if I can; but I expect he's standing by his fleet up the river."

On his way down to "Unquestionably Jones's" office, Rob had ample opportunity of observing the damage done by the hurricane. In the native quarter, barely a hut remained standing. Of the European part of the town several buildings had been unroofed, a few were almost in ruins, and hardly one had its veranda intact. Curiously enough, most of the damage to the latter was on the lee'ard side, probably owing to the eddying, upward gusts at the back of the buildings.

Everywhere the cast-iron telegraph and telephone posts had either been uprooted or had snapped off like carrots. Masses of fantastically tangled wires littered the streets, and served as a barrage to trap the weird assortment of debris carried by the wind.

Almost all the population were in the streets, the whites already at work to repair the damage done to the property. The natives, on the other hand, were almost without exception deadened by the catastrophe. In place of their usually cheerfully grinning visages, the Krumen wore faces as dismal as could be imagined.

Arriving at the Harbour Board's premises, Rob found his way barred by a huge barge or lighter that, not having been sent up the river with the rest of the craft, had not only broken adrift but had been lifted by a tidal wave right

through the yard and deposited, with a dozen of its timbers showing like the ribs of a skeleton, completely across the gate.

Fifty yards farther along Rob found a gap in the stout fencing. Through this he made his way, surmounted a jumble of marine “junk” that had been swept out of a store, and finally reached the office.

It was locked and deserted.

He was thus foiled in his first attempt to secure help, for without a boat of some description it was out of the question to get in touch with “Unquestionably Jones” and the nondescript fleet sheltering above Nicholson’s Bluff. A car would not have answered the purpose, since the Bluff was on the other side of the river and the opposite bank consisted of a wide expanse of mangroves, impassable to vehicles of any description.

So Rob hurried back to his bungalow, took his car from the garage (luckily neither had suffered from the storm), and without waiting for his Kru driver, who was probably incapable of driving at present, he set off along the circuitous road round the eastern side of the harbour.

That saved him two miles’ walking, but when he arrived at that distance from the scene of the salvage operations he found that the car Greig had taken was abandoned there. Half a dozen once tall and graceful palm trees had been uprooted and lay athwart the only track over which a vehicle could normally pass.

He saw no sign either of Greig or of Stanniforth. They had gone on afoot and it remained for him to do likewise.

Half a mile farther on Rob found the two camels. They had broken adrift from their moorings and had been swept right across this part of the harbour, driven ashore upon a bed of soft sand, where already they had been left high and dry by the now receding tide.

But Rob paid scant heed to these. Although they were borrowed plant there were other considerations demanding his attention; but the fact that they had been lifted over the sandy spit showed him that it was almost a miracle that the *Lapwing* had not been battered into a disintegrated mass of scrap metal.

On arriving upon the site of the salvage operations, Rob found quite a considerable party already assembled. In addition to Stanniforth and Greig, Trevarrick and Polglaze had made most of the journey on the running-board of the Assistant Engineer’s car. The two foremen were there, having spent the night sheltering from the storm in the cement store.

“We didn’t know what we were in for,” confided one of them to Rob. “We’d plenty of grub and didn’t think it worth while tramping into the town and back!”

“Did you see the wreck come ashore?”

“No, sir, nor heard anything of her. We couldn’t even hear ourselves speak.”

Although the wind had died entirely away, there was a tremendous scend over the bar which made the usually sheltered waters of the harbour a turmoil of broken cross-seas. The dam or wall of brushwood and sandbags that had been thrown up to protect the *Lapwing* from seaward had been entirely demolished, and except for the mound of sand against her quarters, there was surging water over all the spit, and a channel nearly a hundred yards in width separated the *Lapwing* from the nearest dry ground.

It was the latest wreck that had saved the *Lapwing* from demolition. The former, which was subsequently found to have been a small French oil-tanker bound from Whydah to Duala, had driven ashore broadside on in such a position that her hull served as a breakwater to the *Lapwing*. While the tanker was breaking up, the escaping oil proved of immense service in helping to quell the terrific seas to lee’ard of her, and not only saved the *Lapwing* from a stupendous pounding but enabled some of the French crew to battle their way to the shelter of the partly-salved vessel.

“They’ll be able to walk ashore an hour before low water,” declared Greig, referring to the knot of Frenchmen, most of whom were now lying on the *Lapwing*’s fo’c’sle, although two were waving frantically to their would-be rescuers.

“It’s not that; some of them look as if they’re badly knocked about,” replied Stanniforth. “The sooner I get to work the better. Can’t we knock up some sort of a raft? Hang it all! a fellow could swim that distance.”

“They’ll have to wait a little longer,” decided Rob. “You’d never get alongside on a raft. There’s too much of a popple. As for swimming, you’d be swept away by the current. It’s rolling hard through the gap now. And then you’d provide a meal for a shark.”

Two hours later the tide ebbed sufficiently for the rescuers to wade out to the *Lapwing*. On the previous day, there had been a wide excavation on both sides of her; this had filled up, and there was now a mound of sand piled high against her stern.

Before the Frenchmen, seven in number, could be removed, Stanniforth dealt with four compound fractures, a broken collar-bone, and three cases of severe contusions, to say nothing of minor injuries.

While he was thus occupied Rob gathered from one of the Frenchmen, who spoke English fairly well, that the tanker was supposed to be thirty miles off shore (quite possibly she was within half that distance) when the storm broke. Her engines broke down, and before a radio message could be sent for aid—to render which in the circumstances would have been a difficult and probably an impossible task—a flash of lightning burnt out her wireless. Fortunately the fire that resulted was put out before it reached the highly inflammable cargo.

Three hours later *l'Hirondelle*, that being her name, struck and was instantly thrown on her beam-ends. Most of the watch on deck were swept overboard; those below were caught like rats in a trap. But when the liberated oil quelled the breakers the survivors managed to battle their way to the *Lapwing* just before the rising tide would have rendered that attempt impossible. When they gained their refuge they were without food and water, and as soon as the sun rose the agonies of thirst were added to the pain of their bodily injuries.

During the time the shipwrecked men were receiving medical attention Rob dispatched a party to cut down and remove the obstruction across the harbour road. The two cars were then driven to the salvage station. Amongst other things provided by the firm in case of accidents were a number of canvas stretchers, and these now proved their worth.

The four Frenchmen who were incapable of walking were taken ashore on stretchers, there being no lack of volunteers to carry them all the way to Abuea hospital.

The remaining three, who were suffering from shock, exhaustion, and minor injuries, were rushed in by car, attended by Stanniforth.

The latter part of the journey proved to be the most tedious, for in spite of strenuous efforts by the inhabitants, there were several streets still almost impassable.

When Stanniforth entered the hospital to make arrangements for the reception of his batch of patients he was met by one of the visiting surgeons, who happened to be the one who had attended to Rob.

“Hello, you old Hang-fire!” was the surgeon’s half serious, half facetious greeting. “Why have you been hanging on to the slack? Here we are, like a

casualty clearing station on the western front, up to our eyes in work, and you——”

“Oh, just getting my hand in, as it were,” drawled Stanniforth. “I’m bringing along my half-dozen samples! Right-o, I’m ready! Where do you want me to start?”

# CHAPTER XXXI

## Gold!

For the next three days Rob had a slack time, judging by marine salvage operation standards.

For one thing, although the harbour was again calm, there was a heavy sea running outside, that towards high water invaded the sand spit. In these conditions it would be sheer waste of time, labour, and money, to attempt to refloat the *Lapwing*.

But the damage caused to the plant by the hurricane had to be made good; tools and materials scattered by wind and waves had to be collected whenever possible. The disorganized gang of native workmen had to be mustered, and brought under a state of discipline again. The two camels had to be refloated and returned to the Harbour Board, while, *per contra*, that authority had to be requested to release the sand-dredger *St. Sampson*, as she was now required for urgent work on the job to which she had been sent from England by Messrs. Findon & Rayse.

Much of the work Rob delegated to his assistant. It fell to the former to draft reports for the information of his employers concerning the hurricane and its effects upon the operations. He had also to formulate a plan of operations for the final floating of the *Lapwing*, since the storm had altered existing conditions to such an extent that his original scheme had to be drastically revised.

With as little delay as possible the *St. Sampson* got to work. Moored fore and aft with strong cables so arranged that she could be hauled forward as the dredging operations proceeded, she started in a direction dead ahead of the stranded *Lapwing's* bows.

Since time was a most important consideration, the crew were divided into two shifts; one under the Master and the Second Engineer, the other in charge of the Chief Officer and the Chief Engineer.

Day and night the rumble of the dredging machinery continued almost without intermission. Thousands of tons of sand sucked up by the powerful pump were deposited overside into hopper barges. As soon as each of the latter received its full cargo of sand it was towed to a depositing ground, and the sand dumped into the harbour at a spot where it was not likely to form an obstruction to navigation.

On the morning of the fifth day of the dredging operations, Rob went on board the *St. Sampson* to receive the officers' reports, and to satisfy himself that the work was proceeding smoothly.

"Getting on famously, sir!" reported Captain Blair, the master of the dredger. "Nothing but sand. Ofttimes we get rock mixed up with the sand, and then there's trouble, but here it's all plain sailing. We haven't had to stop for——"

"Avast there!" shouted one of the engineers warningly. "Stop her! There's something jamming the intake!"

Rob and the optimistic Captain Blair exchanged glances. It did not require verbal warning to show that there was something amiss. The powerful suction-pump was now ejecting only very small quantities of sand to the accompaniment of a peculiar squelching sound due to a partial vacuum in the "thirty-inch" flexible pipe.

But before the engineer in charge of the machinery could bring it to a standstill the suction pipe cleared itself of the obstruction.

Then the shoot into the hopper-barge alongside began to eject its normal flow of sand; but to the surprise of everyone standing by the sand was mingled with hundreds of yellow discs!

One of the British crew leaning over the side of the shoot made a grab at one of the discs, caught it, and examined it. Then he gave a whoop of delighted excitement:

"Gosh!" he exclaimed. "It's a bloomin' golden quid—first I've seen for donkey's years. The muck's stiff with 'em!"

With that the deck-hands, both white and black, began to fish out the precious coins. The natives in the hopper-barge, too, leapt into the cargo of deposited sand and feverishly delved for the coins.

Rob had to decide quickly how to act. He was sure beyond doubt that by a sheer slice of luck the suction-dredger had disturbed Captain Fosdyke's buried hoard. In cutting a channel through the sand she had come over the

actual spot where, years ago, the ill-fated skipper of the S.S. *Antibar* had buried his savings. The sea had encroached over the spot, and the gold had sunk deeper and deeper in the yielding sand.

Since it was undoubtedly Captain Tom Fosdyke's gold—he being the late Dick Fosdyke's sole legatee—it was Rob's duty to see that it eventually came into the latter's possession. The crews of the *St. Sampson* and of the hopper-barge had no right to take possession of as much as a single coin.

But it would be no easy matter to convince them that “findings were not keepings”.

“Shall I stop the pump, sir?” inquired the engineer.

“No, carry on,” ordered Rob. “Carry on till no more coins are brought up. Captain Blair, will you nip on board the hopper-barge and see that those niggers are kept clear. Make those who have taken any of the coins hand them over.”

The Master of the *St. Sampson* hurried off to carry out his instructions. He had no hesitation in attempting to make the natives disgorge their booty. Making his own men return their share of the spoils was another matter. In fact he was already calculating what share would eventually fall to his lot!

He knew nothing concerning Captain Fosdyke's gold. To him it was just a lucky find, outside the scope of ordinary salvage work, and as such was regarded as fair spoil.

While the suction pump was still disgorging coins and tons of sand, Rob was thinking hard. His chief idea was to do the absent Captain Fosdyke a good turn by collecting as many gold coins as possible and handing them over to their rightful owner at the first opportunity. That meant, of course, that the crew of the dredger must be informed of the facts of the case, and an appeal made to their honesty to give up the gold in their possession.

But it was not long before Rob realized that he was up against a very tough and complicated proposition, and that there were greater difficulties to be dealt with than those at the present moment.

At length it seemed as if the steady stream of gold had ceased. Rob gave orders for the suction pump to be stopped.

As the clank of machinery ceased a strange silence brooded over the dredger and the lighter. Even the excited natives stopped their shrill chattering.

Then Captain Blair's voice broke the silence.

“You niggers,” he began, “you must hand over those coins to me. They bad ju-ju. Every man-jack of you lib for die if you stick to coins after sun him set.”

The Krumen looked puzzled and worried.

“But, boss, how dis bad ju-ju?” inquired one of the men, not illogically. “Him hab King George’s head. King George him bery good. How make bad ju-ju?”

“If I say the coins are bad ju-ju, they are bad ju-ju,” declared the Master of the *St. Sampson*.

The native spokesman shook his head.

“When I sergeant in Hausa Regiment in de War dey gib me medal with King George’s head. Dat good—no bad ju-ju ’bout dat, eh?”

“I’m not going to argue with you, you black limb of Satan!” thundered Captain Blair, realizing that the Kruman had got the better of him in the discussion. “Now, then, all of you, hand over the coins you’ve stolen or you’ll be sent to jail directly we get back to Abuea.”

At this threat the majority of the natives surrendered their finds. A few, bolder than the rest, secreted the coins in their scanty clothing; but at length about fifty sovereigns were collected by the skipper of the dredger.

“I’ll take charge of these, Captain Blair,” said Rob quietly.

“Very good, sir,” agreed the Master of the *St. Sampson*. “I take it there’ll be a share out later?”

“We’ll sift every bit of the sand in the hopper-barge,” continued Rob, ignoring the other’s question. “Get the hopper-barge towed to the spoil-ground and we’ll dump the sand by hand.”

Before the barge cast off Rob sent a boat ashore for his assistant.

“We’ve found a lot of gold coins, Greig,” he explained. “While I’m seeing to the sifting of the sand in the lighter will you please remain here? Keep the dredger at work—we can’t afford to waste time—and see if there are any more coins coming up with the sand. I don’t think there will be, but it’s best to be on the safe side.”

While preparations were being made for the lighter to be taken in tow, Captain Blair, having surrendered the coins recovered from the natives, proceeded to get as many as he could from the members of his crew. Most of them, thinking that this was a preliminary to a general share-out, gave up

their findings willingly, but as in the case of the Krumen, some were not proof against the temptation to secrete the money they had previously plucked from the stream of sand as it flowed from the delivery pipe of the suction-dredger.

For the rest of the day Rob superintended the tedious dumping of the cargo of the hopper barge. Every spadeful was passed through a sieve before being thrown overboard, with the result that when the task was completed coins to the value of £1155 had been recovered.

"That's better than I expected, Captain Blair," remarked Rob. "I must explain that this money belongs to Captain Fosdyke, of the S.S. *Amilcar*, and I am taking steps to hand it over to him. I haven't the slightest doubt that he will recognize the part you and your crew took in the matter and will recompense you for your trouble."

"But I say, sir, isn't this a bit thick?" protested Blair. "It's a treasure-trove. The bulk of it goes to the finders. What is there to prove that it ever did belong to this Captain Fosdyke?"

"Proof enough," replied Rob. "Meanwhile you and I have counted the money. You agree that it amounts to £1155. I'm placing it in the local bank until the rightful owner claims it. That's all I mean to say now. Are you coming ashore with me? I see that Mr. Gregory has come on duty for the night shift so there's no need for you to go back to the *St. Sampson* until tomorrow."

To this suggestion Captain Blair objected. He was disappointed and disgruntled over the turn of events.

"I'm sleeping aboard to-night, sir," he replied.

"Very good," agreed Rob cheerfully. "I'll be on board at seven tomorrow morning."

The motor-launch pushed off, with Rob and the recovered gold in the stern-sheets. On the way back to Abuea Rob picked up Dr. Stanniforth, who had been in the *Lapwing* for the greater part of the day.

"I hear you've found Fosdyke's treasure," observed the doctor.

"How did you know that?" inquired Rob. "As a matter of fact I was just going to tell you the news."

"While you were away in the hopper-barge one of the dredger's crew rowed across to the *Lapwing* and told us!"

Night had fallen by the time the launch ran alongside the wharf at Abuea. Somewhat to Rob's surprise he saw that the harbour-master was standing at the head of the steps, and with him was a police officer and a sergeant and four men of the Hausas.

"Hello, Mr. Wroxall!" exclaimed "Unquestionably Jones". "Sorry to have to trouble you, but I haven't any option. You've found some treasure, I understand."

"I have," replied Rob.

"Where is it?"

"Here."

"Then by orders of the Resident Commissioner I have to take possession of it as the property of the Cameroon Mandative Territory."

# CHAPTER XXXII

## Good-bye to Abuea

“You’re joking!” protested Rob incredulously.

“Sorry to have to disagree with you, Mr. Wroxall,” rejoined the harbour-master; “I have my orders and here is Captain Campbell and a file of Hausas. It would be more than my job’s worth to bring them down here just for a joke!”

“But, hang it! the money belongs to Captain Fosdyke. His brother buried it.”

“So I was told,” agreed “Unquestionably Jones”. “But that’s beyond the point. Suppose we go along to my office and discuss the matter amicably. *I’m* not responsible for this business. I wish someone else had been told off to undertake it.”

“All right then,” agreed Rob. “Come along, Stanniforth, and let’s hear what there is to be said. I suppose I’m not under arrest?”

The harbour-master laughed.

“I didn’t say you were,” he replied. “But the treasure is! You’d better take charge of it, Campbell!”

The Hausas had come prepared for this task. Four of them handled a stretcher-like contrivance upon which the canvas sack containing Captain Fosdyke’s gold was placed. The police officer and Jones walked on either side of the stretcher, the sergeant behind, while Rob and Stanniforth followed. In this order the procession entered the harbour-master’s office. The money was placed in his safe and the door locked.

“Possession is nine-tenths of the law,” observed “Unquestionably Jones”. “Well, you needn’t wait, Captain Campbell.”

“Unfortunately, I must,” declared the police officer. “My orders are that a guard must be posted all night, and that I am to remain on the premises until relieved.”

“You’re making a frightful fuss over Fosdyke’s money,” remarked Rob. “What’s the idea? Who told you?”

“Sorry I can’t give you the name of the informant,” replied Jones. “You see, there are rather peculiar regulations in force in Abuea. All bullion, specie, treasure, and articles of a similar nature found within the limits of the harbour are deemed to be treasure-trove—and as such are the property of the Territory.”

“I quite understand that—if it is a case of treasure-trove,” said Rob. “But in this instance it isn’t. It’s merely gold hidden by a certain individual and recovered by me on behalf of that person’s heir.”

“One sovereign is very much like another,” objected Jones. “How can anyone prove that these coins are the actual ones hidden by Fosdyke’s brother?”

“Because they were found on the spot where, according to the bearings given, Fosdyke’s brother had buried the gold.”

“And you gave Fosdyke the bearings?”

“I did.”

“And did he look for the stuff?”

Rob shook his head.

“We laid out the position on a chart and found that the sea had encroached.”

“And Fosdyke gave it up as a bad job?”

“If you don’t mind,” protested Rob, “I’d rather not reply to the question.”

“Don’t blame you, Mr. Wroxall,” agreed the harbour-master. “I’m just putting the other side of the case to you. If I’d hidden the stuff, I’d be thundering wild if the Government collared it. What say you, Campbell?”

The police officer tugged at his moustache.

“Never possessed a bean beyond my measly pay,” he remarked. “If I had, dashed if I would have buried the stuff.”

“Neither did Captain Fosdyke,” rejoined Rob. “It was his brother who did so, for reasons that could be well explained. But this seems to me to be a jolly high-handed sort of proceeding. Hasn’t Fosdyke a say in the matter?”

“He will be allowed to lodge a claim,” replied Campbell. “But you know what it means—legal costs and all that sort of thing. As Mr. Jones remarked, how is he going to prove that the coins are the identical ones that his brother hid? That’s the knotty point.”

Soon after Rob and the Doctor took their departure, “Unquestionably Jones” again expressing his regrets at having to perform an unpleasant duty.

“What do you propose to do now in the matter, Wroxall?” asked Stanniforth, as the two friends motored to their bungalow.

“Merely write to Captain Fosdyke and tell him exactly what has happened,” replied Rob. “That’s all I can do in the matter. At any rate, that affair will be off my chest, and I can concentrate on the final stages of the salvage job.”

But Rob was decidedly wrong in his calculations; he hadn’t finished with Captain Fosdyke’s gold—not by a long chalk!

Soon after sunrise on the following day, Rob went on board the *St. Sampson*.

“You haven’t dredged much stuff during the night-shift, Mr. Coles,” he remarked to the Chief Mate, after consulting the “return” giving the quantity of sand deposited in the hopper-barges.

“No, sir, we’ve been hard at it, but it looks as if we’ve struck a hard patch. Look, sir, you can see for yourself. It’s mostly water we’re bringing aboard.”

This was certainly the case. Although the suction-pump was working at high pressure there was very little solid matter coming through.

“Have you examined the grids at the intake?” asked Rob. “You haven’t? Then we’d better stop pumping and lift the intake.”

As soon as the tackles brought the end of the large hosepipe clear of the surface the cause of the trouble was apparent. Wedged tightly against the grids was a piece of canvas.

The Chief Mate wrenched the obstruction clear, and was about to toss the canvas overboard when Rob stopped him.

“I’d like to examine that stuff,” he remarked.

The canvas was badly rotted, and in addition mangled by having been in contact with the metal grids, but on it could be discerned the stencilled letters: “. . TIBA .”.

To Mr. Coles' surprise Rob hung the fabric in the rigging to dry, and then ordered pumping operations to be resumed. Later he carefully rolled the canvas and placed it in the motor-launch.

"That will be documentary evidence for Fosdyke," he said to himself. "There's no doubt about it that was used to wrap the gold in, and the letters are part of the name *Antibar*, Captain Dick Fosdyke's ship!"

Until nearly noon Rob remained on board the *St. Sampson*. The pump was now working normally, and if the present rate of progress were maintained there was every reason to believe that the dredged channel for the release of the *Lapwing* would be completed by the next spring tide.

At seven bells David Greig came on board to relieve his chief, and Rob returned to his bungalow. But not to rest. Instead of taking his customary siesta during the extreme heat of the day, Rob wrote a detailed letter to Captain Fosdyke.

"So I've put the situation to you as fully as I can," he concluded. "I don't think I can do more beyond wishing you every success in what will probably be an irritating law-suit. I am leaving the canvas with the *Antibar*'s name on it with your agent at Abuea, as I expect that before you return I shall have finished here and be on my way home."

Three days later the dredged channel was completed with the exception of a barrier a few yards in width that separated the imprisoned *Lapwing* from her natural element.

Although Rob wished to make the final and successful effort in secret, he had to give way to the curiosity of the inhabitants of Abuea. It was out of the question to keep the date of the attempt a secret. The populace, both white and black, was determined to make the event a sort of public holiday. Not only from Abuea, but from up-country and along the coast people flocked to see the unusual spectacle of a wreck that had long been regarded as a "total constructive loss" brought in triumph into the inner harbour.

At low water the last remaining barrier was reduced so that it would give way before the rising tide. Two of the Port Authority tugs were engaged to assist in hauling the ship off, while gangs of natives were stationed to man the hawsers on either quarter and to assist her out of her berth.

At an hour before high water the barrier gave way. The artificial basin in which the *Lapwing* lay was flooded, the surface of the swirling water being covered with bundles of brushwood washed from the banks.

“She’ll do it now, I think, Greig,” observed Rob. “Keep the pumps going. Signal to both tugs to go easy ahead.”

As the hawsers took up the strain the *Lapwing* moved slowly ahead for a little less than her own length. Then she stuck and stuck hard.

The tugs were now straining their hardest. The backwash from their powerful propellers was churning the sandy water and washing the sides of the dock away piecemeal, but the desired result had yet to be achieved.

The *Lapwing* was hard aground on the remains of the barrier between her and the harbour. If she failed to get off she would certainly break her back on the falling tide and the work of months would be utterly thrown away.

Half an hour to high water! And this time there was no passing steamer to assist with her wash!

It was then that Rob executed his *coup de main*. He had anticipated the difficulty and had taken precautions to cope with it.

The two tugs were towing with an exceptionally long scope of hawser. Midway between them and the inner shore of the sand spit, Rob had sunk two heavy charges of high explosive, connected up with a battery on the *Lapwing’s* fo’c’sle.

On a signal being made, the harbour-master’s launch began clearing off the crowd of boats containing spectators until they were at a safe distance. Then Rob pressed the firing-key.

Instantly two enormous columns of smoke and spray were thrown high into the air. That was the spectacular part, but the useful side of the operation was the terrific amount of water displaced by the double and simultaneous explosion.

Sullenly a heavy wave rolled shorewards. Most of it broke upon the flat, sandy shore, but a considerable amount surged into the channel in which the *Lapwing* was aground.

Up went her bows. She quivered, hung irresolutely for a few seconds, and then, under the strain of the tautened hawsers, glided from her prison.

Amidst the cheers of the onlookers she gathered way, and looked like overrunning the tugs had not an anchor been let go.

Then, snubbing violently at her cable, the *Lapwing* brought up, afloat once more in six fathoms.

An hour later she was safely berthed alongside the wharf at Abuea. Rob had carried out his firm's contract with a bare margin of two days!

Then, having dispatched a cablegram to Messrs. Findon & Rayse informing them of the successful termination of the operations, Rob, firmly but politely refusing all invitations to celebrate his success, retired to his bungalow.

What he wanted more than anything was rest and sleep. With the reaction following his long and arduous task he could hardly realize that his object had been achieved. But when he did realize it, there came the anxious longing to return home. He had had enough of Abuea. What he dreaded most was to have to remain there until the "plant" was either sold or stowed on board the firm's vessels—a most irksome and tedious business, that of "clearing up" after the real work is completed.

To Rob's delight a cablegram came from the firm:

"Congratulations upon successful refloating of *Lapwing*. You are to return home at your earliest convenience, leaving Mr. Greig to undertake disposal or reshipment of tools and plant. Presume Dr. Stanniforth accompanies you.—Findon."

"Doc! What about it?" asked Rob. "Ready to pack up?"

"Game!" replied Stanniforth. "When's the next boat?"

The S.S. *Kano* was leaving on the following day for Bonny, whence one of the Elder Dempster Line would be leaving for England on its arrival. Accordingly, two passages were booked on the *Kano*.

At high water the *Kano*, with Rob and Stanniforth on board, crossed the Abuea Bar. She was about to drop her native pilot when a harbour launch came alongside. In the stern-sheets was a nervous-looking individual holding up a blue envelope.

"Didn't know you'd booked a passage with us, Mr. Gopher!" sang out the *Kano's* Old Man.

"I haven't," was the reply. "But I have a subpoena to serve upon Mr. Robert Wroxall re *Crown versus Fosdyke*."

Rob, leaning over the rail, looked and felt anything but pleasant. This was his reward for doing Captain Fosdyke a good turn—to be legally detained at Abuea until such times as the Crown lawyers argued the right or the wrong of Fosdyke's claim to his deceased brother's gold! It looked as if he, Rob, would have to transfer himself and his luggage to the shore-boat.

Stanniforth nudged him in the ribs.

“The blighter will have to serve the papers on you in person,” he declared. “Don’t budge. Let him come on board if he dare!”

The captain beckoned to Rob.

“Not keen on the job, are you?” he asked.

“That I’m not,” replied Rob emphatically.

“Then leave it to me,” rejoined the Old Man.

The native pilot went over the side by means of a rope-ladder—a risky business since the *Kano*, with way off her, was rolling like a barrel.

“Now’s your chance, Mr. Gopher,” shouted the captain. “Swarm up that Jacob’s ladder. Look lively about it. We can’t hang about here all day!”

The wretched man, torn between inclination and duty, balanced himself in the stern-sheets as the launch ran alongside the *Kano*’s quarter. Then, gripping the blue envelope in his left hand, he made an ineffectual leap for the ladder.

He disappeared with a terrific splash. The launch had to go astern to prevent her crushing the man’s head like an eggshell. When, thirty seconds later, the representative of the Law was hauled back into safety, he was no longer holding the subpœna. That was drifting in a water-logged condition towards Abuea Bar.

“It’s no use your coming aboard if you can’t deliver the goods, Mr. Gopher!” rang out the Old Man, who apparently had some good cause for disliking the representative of the Law. “Don’t blame me for your dose of Saltash Luck!”

With that he jerked the engine-room telegraph to “Full ahead,” and half an hour later Rob saw the last of Abuea as the palm tops dipped beneath the horizon.

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Captain Fosdyke's Gold* by Percy F. Westerman]