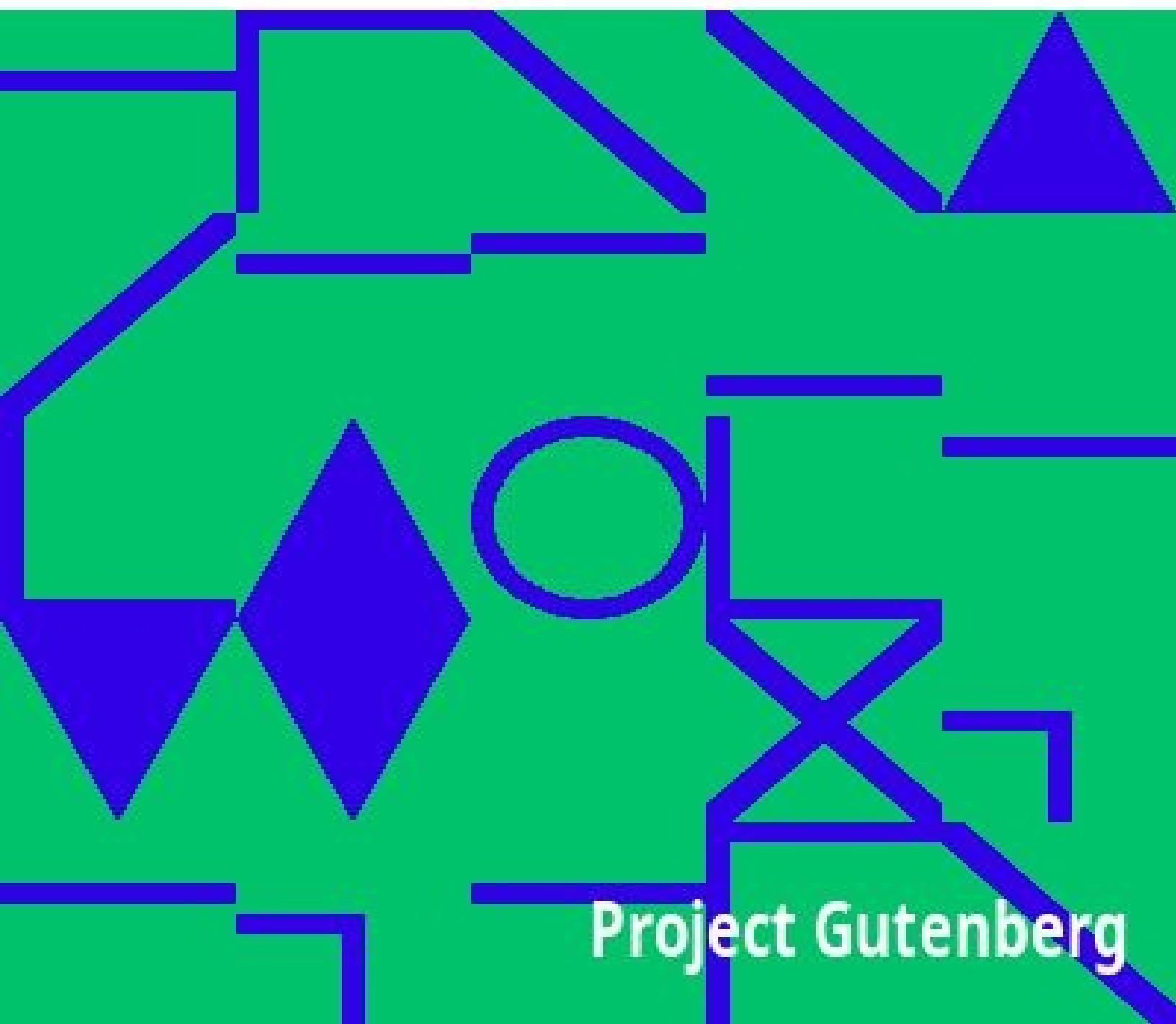


Commander Lawless V.C.

Being the Further Adventures of Frank H. Lawless, Until Recently a Lieutenant in His Majesty's Navy

Rolf Bennett



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COMMANDER LAWLESS V.C.

**BEING THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF FRANK H.
LAWLESS,
UNTIL RECENTLY A LIEUTENANT IN HIS MAJESTY'S
NAVY**

BY ROLF BENNETT

**Author of "THE ADVENTURES OF LIEUT. LAWLESS, R.N.," "CAPTAIN
CALAMITY," etc.**

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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CHAPTER I

THE NIGHT ATTACK

Flight-Lieutenant Lawless sat on an empty soap-box in a large shed watching his mechanic cleaning the engines of a monoplane which was housed there. The Lieutenant was sucking vigorously at an empty pipe, and, although his face wore an expression of deep melancholy, this was not a case of cause and effect, the gloom was due to his thoughts, not to his ineffectual efforts to draw smoke from an unfilled pipe—and he had plenty of tobacco, anyhow.

Misfortune seemed to have dogged his footsteps ever since his transference from the Navy proper into the Flying Wing. In the first place he had discovered, with feelings of mingled astonishment and humiliation, that he was subject to violent attacks of air-sickness which, so far from wearing off, grew more acute as time went on. That this should happen to a man who had navigated a little cockle-shell of a destroyer in the stormiest weather with never a qualm seemed preposterous. But it was so, and, though the shameful secret was shared only by his mechanic, he was always fearing discovery. Also, because the Fates were against him, he had smashed up two monoplanes, and, with his mechanic, only escaped death by a miracle. As a result of the inquiries following upon these two mishaps Lawless had been severely censured, and his chances of being sent out to the Front remained less hopeful than ever.

No wonder he felt depressed at thought of these things, and fervently wished himself back aboard the old *Knat*, chasing up and down the North Sea in search of enemy ships.

But his meditations were suddenly interrupted by Mike Cassidy, the mechanic. Mike was fumbling in his pockets, a comical look of bewilderment on his face.

"Th' divil!" he said.

"What?" asked Lawless, suddenly waking up.

"'Twas to meself I wus spaking, yer honour."

"Just calling yourself names, eh?" said the Lieutenant, with a twinkle in his eye.

Mike went on searching his pockets, and at last gave an exclamation of relief. The couple of tiny screws which he had carefully wrapped in a piece of paper and then mislaid had come to light. He took them out, and then threw down the piece of paper, which fluttered to the ground. The Lieutenant idly picked it up, his thoughts far away on those visionary battlefields, and glanced absentmindedly at the print. It was a notice issued by the North British Railway, and read as follows:—

"FIVE POUNDS reward will be paid to anyone giving information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons who on the night of the 4th inst. caused disfiguring paint marks to be made on the railway track and girders of the Forth Bridge."

Lawless was not a Sherlock Holmes, so he did not try to draw inferences or make deductions from the statement he had just read. Still, it puzzled him. Why should any "person or persons" employ their leisure moments in dabbing paint on the girders and track of the Forth Bridge?

Lawless tossed the paper aside, and, for a time at least, forgot all about the notice. It was not till later on that he had occasion to recall it.

"I expect we shall have to go out to-night, Mike, so have everything ready," he said, rising to his feet.

"I will that, yer honour!" answered Mike, turning a hot and beaming face upon his superior.

As he had anticipated, Lawless received orders to set out at eight o'clock that night on a scouting expedition. Although the public was kept in ignorance of the fact, the military authorities were nightly expecting a German attack on Rosyth. Every precaution had been taken to render such an attack abortive, and the entrance to the Forth was guarded by destroyers and submarines. Still, the seemingly impossible sometimes happens in time of war, and there was always a chance that the enemy might creep through the defences by some means or other. Already an apparently harmless merchant steamer had been stopped off Leith, and, upon examination, found to be chock-full of dynamite ready to be fired by time-fuses. No doubt this would have been exploded under the Forth Bridge, with the result that no warships could have entered or left Rosyth till the river mouth had been cleared of the *débris*.

As an additional precaution, therefore, two or three aeroplanes were sent out

nightly to scout along the coast from Fife Ness to St. Abb's Head. The aviators so employed found it a monotonous, unexciting task in which, so it seemed, neither glory nor promotion was to be earned.

And this particular night's scouting proved as tame and uneventful as the rest. Under normal conditions, a night flight above the Firth of Forth as far west as Linlithgow would have afforded a most picturesque spectacle with the lighted towns and cities beneath. But now Edinburgh, Linlithgow, and Dundee, and even the small towns and villages, were practically in darkness, since nearly all the public lights, besides those of the great emporiums and factories, were either unlit or else shielded from observation above. And out at sea only merchant vessels showed lights, those carried by warships, large and small, being masked.

"Even the passenger flights at Hendon were more exciting than this!" growled the Lieutenant to himself as, just before dawn, he steered a homeward course in the direction of the Forth.

He little thought as he uttered his complaint that within twenty-four hours he would have had enough excitement to last him a lifetime.

The machine had reached the Forth and was crossing it just above the bridge, when Mike, who sat immediately behind the Lieutenant, uttered an exclamation:

"Are me eyes desaving me, or have the hivins turned topsy-turvy?"

"What's the matter?" asked Lawless, for the patent wind-screen with which the machine was fitted made conversation possible even when travelling at a high speed.

"Thim stars below us, sorr. Sure now, is it upside down we're flying?"

Lawless looked below, and saw what at first seemed to justify Mike's anxiety as to the position of the heavens. Immediately beneath the machine was a cluster of luminous specks for all the world like distant stars, shining up instead of down upon them. They were certainly not lamps of any sort, and the dull glow they gave out seemed as if it might be the reflection of some distant lights. Yet there was no moon, nor, so far as Lawless could discover, anything which could account for this extraordinary effect of reflected light.

He circled over the bridge two or three times, hoping to discover the cause of this mystery, but without success. While he was doing this a train rumbled across the bridge, and during its passage Lawless noted that the luminous specks

disappeared. They were again observable as soon as the train had passed, however, and the Lieutenant concluded from this that they were situated on the railway track itself.

"Deuced queer business!" he muttered.

But there was no time to make further investigations that night, so he continued his flight to Montrose, still pondering over the mystery.

"By the way, Mike," he said, when they had alighted opposite the hangar, "don't say anything about those lights we saw on the bridge. I'm going to investigate the matter myself."

Mike readily promised, and Lawless was strolling away when a thought suddenly struck him.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated aloud. "I believe I've got it!"

His memory had flashed back to the notice he had read, offering a reward in connection with certain paint marks on the Forth Bridge. No doubt the misguided "person or persons" who had daubed the bridge had used luminous paint. This, of course, would explain the phosphorescent glow which had so puzzled him.

The question now was, had it been done merely as a joke or for some specific object? If for a joke, it was difficult to see where the humour came in; if for an object, it was equally difficult to see what purpose it could serve.

"I'll have a closer look at the bridge when I've rested a bit," he told himself.

That afternoon the Lieutenant took a train to Queensferry. He then set out to walk back over the bridge along the railway track. The paint daubs were clearly visible, though not, of course, phosphorescent in the daylight. It struck him as peculiar that these marks had a definite shape, or rather two definite shapes. One took the form of a St. Andrew's Cross, the other the form of a star—that is, instead of two intersecting lines of the same length, there were four.

But that was not all. A careful examination showed that these stars were placed at the weakest part of the bridge; in other words the parts which would be easiest to destroy by means of dynamite. Finally, the marks could only be seen from above the bridge, not from below it.

Lawless whistled softly when he had made these discoveries.

He returned to the depot, and went at once to his commanding officer and told him of the discoveries he had made. He also explained at some length his own theory concerning them. The commanding officer listened patiently at first because he was a good-natured fellow and liked to see his officers exercise initiative and resource. But his interest in the story soon flagged, and when Lawless began to state his deductions it wilted entirely. An expression of resigned boredom appeared on the officer's face and remained there till the interview came to an end.

"So you see," concluded the Lieutenant eagerly, "it requires no great effort of imagination to realise what the German plans are."

But it required more imagination than the commanding officer was capable of exercising. Indeed, he was not an imaginative man and prided himself upon the fact. He didn't regard imagination as consistent with the duties of a soldier; consequently, he made no effort to encourage it in those under his command.

"It's a very ingenious theory, very!" he said; "but unfortunately the grounds upon which you base it appear to me to be entirely unsatisfactory."

And for the time being that settled the matter so far as the commanding officer was concerned.

That evening, when the Lieutenant arrived at the hangar preparatory to setting out on the nightly scouting expedition, he brought with him a curious looking implement. It consisted of a stout spar about ten feet long, at the end of which was attached a long, curved knife, not unlike a billhook in appearance.

It was not difficult to fix the spar securely to the machine so that the business end protruded about six feet beyond the driver's seat, somewhat after the manner of a steel-pointed ram. This done, and it being time to set off, the machine was taken out of the hangar and a few minutes later Lawless and Mike were high above the flight station.

Lawless now steered straight for the Forth Bridge, as he wanted to find out first of all whether the luminous marks were still visible. Having satisfied himself that they showed up as vividly as ever, he swept round in an easterly direction, making straight for the open sea.

They had just passed above the Bass Rock, when the Lieutenant, who had been

gazing expectantly into the darkness ahead, shouted a question to Mike:

"Do you see anything in front of us?"

The Irishman, who possessed remarkably keen eyes, raised himself a little and peered over the Lieutenant's shoulder.

"B the powers, if 'tis not a dirigible, 'tis the ghost av wan!" he exclaimed.

"I thought so," replied Lawless in a tone of grim satisfaction. "And, what's more," he added under his breath, "she's making straight for the Forth."

Both the aeroplane and the airship must have been travelling at a very considerable speed, for even as the Lieutenant spoke the dirigible changed from a blurred outline into a well-defined shape. There was no mistaking her now—a gigantic Zeppelin, armed, no doubt, with bombs and machine guns.

"Now we'll have a chance of testing this little invention of mine," murmured the Lieutenant, almost with a chuckle; and he gave a glance of satisfaction at the weird apparatus attached to the machine.

As a preliminary to the duel the Lieutenant rose in the air, circled above the dirigible, and then swooped down and passed abreast of the car, so close that the crew could be distinctly seen.

"That's the challenge!" he shouted gleefully. "Now for it!"

Making a wide sweep, he steered full-tilt at the airship's tremendous gas vessel in such manner as to rip it up with the hooked knife attached to the spar. That was his sole weapon of offence, and he hoped, by repeated attacks, to destroy completely the gas-bag and thus cause the vessel to sink.

The task was harder, even, than it looked, for the Zeppelin, like all dirigibles, was provided with a number of separate gas compartments, so that a leakage in one would not materially affect the stability of the whole structure, which would only collapse after several gas chambers had been ripped open.

A strange thrill passed through both men as their little machine rushed against the tremendous bulk of the airship, much as a swordfish might attack a whale. Suddenly there was a tearing, ripping sound; the monoplane quivered from nose to tail with the shock of the impact and then passed right across the top of the gas vessel, the knife rending the fabric as it went.

"Well, that's lost them some gas, anyhow," murmured Lawless as he brought the head of the machine round, ready to swoop down a second time.

As they approached again they could hear shouts from the airship, and the next moment a small projectile whistled past them.

"They're using a pneumatic gun," ejaculated the Lieutenant.

Before another shot could reach them, the knife attached to the aeroplane was again tearing its way through the fabric of the balloon, making a tremendous slit right across the upper part of one side. As Lawless brought the machine round once more he saw the airship heel, and judged from this that she must have lost a considerable quantity of gas, several compartments having probably been ripped open.

"Three or four more attacks like the last, and she'll collapse," he said.

He steered as before straight at the swaying bulk of the airship, which, after the first attack, had reduced her speed to about twenty miles an hour. Then, as the knife thrust itself into the gas vessel, there was a sharp, cracking sound. The aeroplane seemed to stop with a terrific jerk, tilting forward to such an extent that both pilot and mechanic were nearly flung from their seats. Then, recovering its balance with equal suddenness, it darted forward and passed the dirigible.

"Saints preserve us!" ejaculated Mike. "Wus it a cyclone or a church staple that struck us, yer honour?"

As a matter of fact the knife had struck one of the aluminium girders which formed the framework of the balloon structure, and snapped off.

"Be ready to take the steering wheel!" shouted Lawless.

He bent forward, and, picking up a long sheath-knife which formed part of the aeroplane's equipment, placed it in the belt of his leather jacket. Then, turning the machine, he wheeled round once more, rose above the dirigible, and then descended until only a few feet separated the aeroplane from the gigantic gas-bag immediately beneath it.

"Take the wheel now!" he cried, and then, to Mike's amazement and horror, stood up and leapt out of the monoplane, alighting on the broad surface of the airship's gas envelope.

Finding himself safe, he drew his knife and started to rip and hack at the skin of the balloon. He had known, before making his perilous leap, that he was courting almost certain death, for, should he succeed in deflating the gas vessel, he himself would share in the disaster which must follow.

Yet he knew that if the dirigible reached the Forth Bridge her crew would be able to drop explosives without serious interruption. There were no anti-aircraft guns in the neighbourhood at that time, while an attempt to beat off the aerial monster with rifle fire would be hopeless. He alone could avert the threatened disaster.

The monoplane, now in charge of Mike, had disappeared in the darkness, and Lawless supposed that the mechanic had gone off to give the alarm.

While the Lieutenant was still hacking away at the balloon fabric, a man's head appeared above the rounded edge of the gas vessel. Lawless did not notice him at first, but when the portion of fabric upon which he was kneeling suddenly grew taut under the climber's weight he looked up.

"The devil!" he muttered.

He gripped his knife tightly and drew back a little. He had an idea that he might be able to spring upon his antagonist before the latter had time to assume the offensive. Just as he was about to do this a second head appeared above the edge of the balloon, but on the opposite side and Lawless realised that his first plan was now hopeless. There was nothing for it but to await the attack. Yet even then he could not restrain a grim smile at the thought of his extraordinary position. There had been many strange combats in many strange places; but surely never before had there been a fight on the top of a huge airship five or six hundred feet above the sea.

Nearer and nearer crept the men, one on each side of the Lieutenant, and the latter braced his muscles for the coming struggle. Then, as if acting upon a given signal, the two Germans simultaneously levelled revolvers at him, at the same time shouting something he could not understand.

To have attempted resistance when covered by two revolvers would simply have been courting a useless death, and so Lawless, guessing what they wanted, threw his knife away and made a sign that he surrendered. After all, he reflected, he might do more as a live prisoner than as a dead hero.

The men crawled up to him, and one, who had the end of a rope round his waist,

slipped it off and placed the noose beneath the aviator's shoulders, then, both holding the line, they lowered their prisoner down through a sort of hatch, and eventually he found himself standing upon the deck of the airship.

"Who are you?" asked a voice in excellent English; and, turning, the Lieutenant saw that his questioner was an officer, evidently the commander of the Zeppelin.

"Flight-Lieutenant Lawless. Who are you?"

The officer stared at the Englishman for a moment. Then, without deigning to answer what, under the circumstances, must have seemed an impudent question, he turned to give an order to his men.

The great airship lurched forward, and Lawless knew by the rush of wind that she was travelling at full speed again towards her destination. Meanwhile a couple of men bent a rope round his wrists and ankles and then lashed him to one of the elastic steel girders which encircled the car. Ten minutes later the Lieutenant caught sight of a dull glow in the sky to westward, and knew that they were fast approaching Edinburgh—and the Forth Bridge.

Lawless was at the fore-end of the car, and almost in total darkness, for not only were the lights on deck masked, but the crew worked with electric torches which threw out only momentary gleams of light. Taking advantage of this, he began to work the cord which bound his wrists up and down against the sharp edges of the girder till at last he frayed the rope sufficiently to break it.

This done, to remove the cords from his ankles was but the work of a moment, and then he stood free to act once more. For a time, however, he did not move, but stood as though still fettered, in order not to attract the attention of the crew till he had decided what to do.

All at once everybody on board the dirigible was startled by the sound of guns in the distance, and next moment the sky was illuminated by searchlights which swept the horizon like tremendous phosphorescent antennæ.

Mike had given the alarm!

Several minutes elapsed before the searchlights found the airship and focused themselves upon it, and then everything on board was illuminated by the dazzling rays. A few seconds later the sound of firing increased, and Lawless guessed that a battery of howitzers was being trained on the dirigible. But as yet the distance was too great for the gunners to get the range, and he knew that,

even when they did so, the guns fired at too low an angle to hit an object so high above them.

Thanks to the brilliant illumination of the searchlights, he was able to see everything as though it were broad daylight, and, among other things, he noticed hand grenades placed at various points around the car. They were evidently provided for dropping on small objects or groups of men, where the use of a bomb would be unnecessary and wasteful. In a flash he had determined what to do.

The dirigible was now within a mile of the Forth Bridge and about five hundred feet in the air. If the present speed were maintained, it would be directly over the bridge in less than five minutes. The howitzers had by now been supplemented by small groups of sharpshooters, but with the exception of a few stray bullets which occasionally whistled past the small-arm fire was likely to do as little damage as the heavier guns. It was clear that, unless some unforeseen accident occurred, the airship would accomplish her purpose.

As they drew nearer a fresh burst of firing, this time from the bridge itself, showed that two guns had been dragged on to the railway track to command a better range of the approaching airship. But this attempt, like the rest, was in vain, for the shells flew harmlessly below the car, and, even had they been able to reach it, an ascent of fifty feet or so more would have placed the dirigible but of danger again. Only an anti-aircraft gun, firing at right angles to its base, could hit the terrible war machine above.

All this time Lawless was waiting for his opportunity—and at last it came. Springing forward, he seized one of the hand grenades and flung it with all his strength at the gas-bag above his head, hoping that it would explode and ignite the gas. Unfortunately, it struck a girder below the balloon, but in doing so ignited some of the cordage, which, being creosoted, began to burn furiously.

The commander, realising the danger—for the cordage passed over the gas envelope and must soon ignite it—gave some orders, and while several of the crew climbed up in order to try and put out the burning ropes others rushed upon Lawless.

The latter, however, had managed to seize another grenade, and, holding it high above his head, threatened to hurl it amongst them if they advanced another step. While they stood hesitating, and the commander himself seemed uncertain what to do, there came a wild cry from the men who had climbed into the airship's

rigging.

Looking up, the Lieutenant saw that, in spite of all efforts, the ropes were still burning. In a few seconds the fire must spread to the balloon, and that meant annihilation.

The commander sprang to a lever, pulled it, and next moment the dirigible began to descend. He had opened the gas valve in the wild hope that the airship might sink to the water safely before the threatened explosion took place. It was their one chance of escape from a terrible death.

Slowly, very slowly, the monster dirigible descended. Everybody had forgotten Lawless in the horror of the threatened calamity, and all eyes were turned towards the smouldering cords, which occasionally burst into flame in the upward rush of wind caused by the airship's descent.

Would they reach the water before the explosion took place? That was the question each man asked himself.

Cork life-belts were hurriedly served out to the crew, who stood by the rails of the car ready to spring out as soon as the distance rendered it moderately safe. Yet all the time the little wisps of flame rose faster and faster, sometimes disappearing, only to be fanned into life again by the draught of air. Masses of charred and smouldering rope fell on the deck from time to time and were promptly flung overboard.

Nearer and nearer to the water sank the airship, and nearer and nearer to the gas holder reached the flames. Now they were not more than a hundred feet above the water; a few more moments would decide their fate. It was a race between the sinking dirigible and the flames, the odds in favour of the flames.

The firing had ceased for some minutes, for all who saw the airship knew that she was going to her own destruction. Boats approached in readiness to rescue the survivors should there be any, but stood off again when it was seen that a tremendous explosion was imminent.

For some seconds Lawless had been watching a small piece of burning cordage nearer to the gas envelope than the rest, and which, apparently, had not been noticed by the crew. Suddenly it flamed up, and he saw it ignite the fabric of the balloon. With a cry of warning he sprang overboard, but even as he did so there was a blinding flash of light, a terrific explosion, and then—darkness.

When Lawless again opened his eyes it was to find himself on a little bed in what appeared to be a hospital ward. His head, he discovered, was bandaged, and when he attempted to raise himself such an agonising pain shot through his left leg that he fell back gasping.

When he looked up again a nurse was bending over him with a cup in her hand.

"Where am I?" he asked in a dazed voice.

"In hospital," replied the nurse gently. "Drink this," she added, holding the cup to his lips.

The Lieutenant obeyed, though he was all anxiety to hear what had been the ultimate fate of the Zeppelin. When the nurse had withdrawn the cup from his lips he begged her to tell him what had happened.

"The papers say it exploded about fifty feet above the water and that everyone on board except yourself was killed," she answered.

He was left to himself for a little while after that, and then the surgeon came to dress his injuries, which consisted of a broken leg and some burns due to the explosion. Shortly afterwards he received a visit from his commanding officer. The latter was in great fettle at the honour and glory which the heroic action of Lawless had earned for the Montrose corps. If he remembered the interview of the previous day, when he had pooh-poohed the Lieutenant's arguments, he made no reference to it. He was not a man to bear malice.

After he had heard the story of the extraordinary battle in mid-air he rose to go.

"By the way," he said, "you'll be pleased to hear that you have been recommended for the V.C. And, by Jove, I'll say this, you've earned it!"

But it was reserved for Mike Cassidy to bring to the invalid a newspaper containing the official notice that the Victoria Cross had actually been conferred upon Flight-Lieutenant Lawless.

"'Tis meself that's afther wishing ye miny happy returns av the day, sorr," he said.

CHAPTER II

THE DERELICT

The destruction of the Zeppelin, apart from the dramatic circumstances attendant upon it, naturally created a great sensation, particularly in Scotland, it being the first enemy airship ever brought down north of the Tweed. Lawless was, of course, the hero of the moment, and the illustrated papers overflowed with photographs of him taken before and after the great air duel: in hospital, convalescent, eating, drinking, sleeping, in uniform and out of uniform. Hitherto forgotten episodes in his naval career were raked up and presented to an eagerly absorbent public, which refused to read, discuss or hear about anything but Flight-Lieutenant Lawless and his combat with the Zeppelin. He was the most talked of man in the world for nearly a week.

"It's simply been beastly sickening," remarked Lawless. "I'm fed up."

His old ship, the *Knat*, had put into Leith, and Sub-Lieutenant Trent had seized the opportunity to visit his old commander in the hospital.

"You see," went on the latter almost apologetically, "I was practically defenceless against all those newspaper chaps with their note-books and cameras; I was surrounded and outnumbered. It's true I flung a pot of beef tea at one interviewer's head and made good practice with some medicine bottles among the photographers, but, though the enemy suffered several casualties, reinforcements were continually arriving."

Trent nodded sympathetically.

"'Tisn't as if they were good photographs either," he remarked. "They are absolutely like you."

Lawless shot a suspicious glance at his one-time subordinate.

"One chap," he said thoughtfully, "snapped me before I'd shaved. I'm going to drop a bomb on his office as soon as I get back to work."

As it turned out, honour and glory were not the only results the Lieutenant achieved by bringing down the Zeppelin; he unwittingly incurred a tremendous

responsibility. News of this was broken to him by his uncle, a retired major, with whom he spent the last few days of his convalescence. Animated by a delicacy which his nephew fully understood and appreciated, the major for a time refrained from discussing the Zeppelin affair. But on the day before Lawless was due to report himself at headquarters he somewhat diffidently broached the subject.

"By the way," he said, as though it were a matter which had hitherto escaped his memory, "I wanted to speak about that last little adventure of yours."

"Yes?" remarked the Lieutenant unencouragingly.

"It's likely to cost me a thousand pounds."

"Eh!" ejaculated Lawless, sitting up.

"It's my own fault," continued the major gloomily, "but I was, so to speak, rushed into it. You see, the day after you'd brought down that 'Zep.' I strolled into the club smoking-room and found everyone talking of your exploit. I kept out of it as long as I could, naturally, but when Sir John Carver started in to declare that it was nothing more than an accident, a mere stroke of luck, I got angry. Sir John, though he's as rich as Cræsus, knows no more about aviation than I do about soap-boiling, which, I believe, was his profession at one time. So I took up the challenge, and for a time we argued the matter up and down.

"He couldn't refute my professional knowledge, of course; so at last, finding he was getting the worst of it, he stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat in that detestable manner of his and said, 'I'll bet you a thousand pounds that your nephew doesn't bring down another Zeppelin within a year.' On the impulse of the moment I, like a fool, said 'Done!' and the bet was clinched there and then."

The major stopped, and there was a long and constrained pause.

"Well, uncle," said Lawless presently, "you certainly were a mug."

"It was all due," answered the major, "to arguing with a man who is not a gentleman."

They both relapsed into silence again. The major was not exactly a poor man, but a thousand pounds, especially in wartime, is—well, a thousand pounds, and the old gentleman, as Lawless was well aware, could not afford to lose such a

sum.

"So," remarked the Lieutenant after a while, "it's up to me to see that you don't lose that thou., uncle?"

"I don't say that, my boy, but if you could—er—manage to bring down a Zeppelin within the year it would be—er—a great convenience to me."

Lawless, in spite of the serious responsibility which had been thrust upon him, laughed.

"I hope this'll be a warning to you against an over-indulgence in family pride," he said.

"It was all my own fault, of course," answered the major sadly. "But remember," he added, brightening up, "the thousand pounds is yours if you get that airship. I wouldn't touch a penny of Sir John's money."

"I'm not so fastidious, uncle. So, if I do bring down a 'Zep'—which isn't at all likely, I'm afraid—I'll have much pleasure in taking charge of the cash."

In due course Lawless reported himself at headquarters, confident that now he would at once be sent to the Front. In this, however, he was again doomed to disappointment; for, much to his chagrin, he was sent with his mechanic to test a new type of seaplane off the Irish coast.

"I've a good mind to chuck the Service altogether," he growled at the thought of that thousand pounds becoming more visionary than ever. Certainly there was not much chance of encountering a Zeppelin off the coast of Munster, which was where the tests were to take place.

It was a warm, misty dawn and the moisture-laden atmosphere was like that of a damp hothouse when Lawless arrived to start the trials. These occupied the whole morning, and at noon the Lieutenant decided on a "stand-easy" so that Cassidy might partake of the lunch he had brought with him. The Lieutenant had intended to share the repast, but that last volplane had been too much for him, and he had succumbed to his new enemy—air-sickness.

While Cassidy, whose stomach was as strong as a ship's boiler, consumed his lunch Lawless pondered over his very problematical chance of ever bringing down another Zeppelin. Suddenly his thoughts were interrupted by the flickering of the needle attached to the wireless apparatus. Bending over the instrument, he

realised that it was recording an urgent message for help for some vessel in distress.

"S—S—S—S. Steamer *Nimrod* attacked by submarine," he read. Then followed the latitude and longitude of the ship's position, ending up with emergency call "S—S—S."

"Great Scot!" ejaculated the Lieutenant.

"Did ye speak, sorr?" asked Cassidy, with his mouth full of bread and cheese.

"Finish your grub, Mike; we've got a long flight in front of us," answered Lawless.

He had made up his mind to go to the assistance of the distressed vessel. At a rough calculation she was about fifty or sixty miles away in a south-westerly direction, and, as the seaplane had a speed of a hundred miles an hour under favourable conditions, the Lieutenant hoped to reach her in a little over half an hour. A glance at the petrol gauges showed that the supply was running low and that there was only enough left to carry the machine seventy or eighty miles, which would mean about twenty miles short of the return journey. But Lawless, with his usual disregard for consequences, decided to deal with that problem when it arose, nor did he stop to ask himself what practical assistance he could render the *Nimrod* when he arrived.

Shouting some instructions to Cassidy, he started the engines. The great propeller began to revolve, and the seaplane, after skimming along the surface of the water for fifty yards or so, rose gracefully in the air. The conditions, apart from the haze, were excellent for flying, and, after a flight of twenty-five minutes, Lawless made out what looked like a cloud of black smoke rising vertically above the mist. A few moments afterwards he could see the hull of a large steamer with a heavy list to starboard and so low down at the bows that her propellers were raised above the water. The Lieutenant at once volplaned to the surface, hoping that he might catch sight of some of the ship's boats, which, no doubt, had been launched as soon as the vessel was struck by the torpedo. But the low-lying mist, much thicker here than near the coast, prevented his seeing anything outside a very narrow radius.

The derelict was on fire aft, and, judging by the boatless derricks and loosely hanging falls, all the boats had got safely away. But, in spite of the deserted appearance of the ship, Lawless determined to board her and make a hasty

search in case some sick or helpless person had been overlooked at the last moment—such things had occurred before to his knowledge. A few turns of the seaplane's propeller brought her alongside, and, catching hold of one of the falls, he hauled himself on to the port taffrail.

"Mike," he shouted back to his mechanic, "stand by till I return. This packet isn't going to keep afloat much longer."

"And what'll yer honour be doing aboard that floatin' coffin, begging yer pardon, sorr?" asked Cassidy.

"I'm going to make sure that nobody's left aboard."

"Then if yer going into that smouldering hell, it's meself that's coming wid ye, sorr," said the Irishman, in defiance of all the rules of discipline.

"All right, come on then," answered Lawless, thinking the man might possibly be of some assistance.

The mechanic made the seaplane fast to one of the falls and then joined the Lieutenant. Owing to the angle at which the vessel had canted over, it was difficult to maintain an upright position on the deck, and so they slid, rather than walked, towards the main staircase. Descending this, they reached a vestibule, giving access to a magnificent saloon and also to a couple of long, narrow alleyways upon which the cabins opened. These alleyways, extending aft from amidships, were separated by the engine-room bulkheads, so that between them there was a large shaft which served to ventilate the engine-room by means of the top grating.

"Cassidy, you look in the cabins on the port side and I'll take those on the starboard," said the Lieutenant.

They separated, and Lawless proceeded along the starboard alleyway, glancing into each cabin to make sure that it was unoccupied. Everywhere there were signs of hurry and disorder, showing that the passengers had only had sufficient time to collect a few necessary articles before taking to the boats. All the starboard cabins proved to be empty, and, having reached the end of the alleyway, the Lieutenant crossed to the other side, where he expected to meet Cassidy. The latter was nowhere to be seen, however, and it was not till Lawless had made his presence known by a shout that he heard the mechanic's voice.

"Mr. Lawless, sorr, come quick! I've——"

The rest was drowned in a deafening crash, and the Lieutenant stepped back only just in time to escape being buried beneath tons of burning wreckage which had suddenly descended into the alleyway, followed by one of the huge iron girders that supported the deck above. He was thus cut off by a wall of blazing *débris* unless the starboard alleyway, through which he had just passed, was still open. Realising that there was not a moment to be lost, he dashed back, only to find his way barred by a portion of the engine-room bulkhead which had collapsed right across the passage.

Rushing back to the port alleyway, he was again stopped by the flaming barrier which lay across it. At first sight it seemed utterly impossible to get past it, but after a moment Lawless noticed a small, tunnel-like cavity beneath the wreckage where it was held up by the fallen girder, one end of which rested on the framework of the deck above. If he could only crawl through that and right underneath the smouldering furnace he might succeed in reaching the other side. So, dropping on all fours, he started to crawl into the opening, well aware that at any moment the girder might wholly collapse and crush him beneath its weight. If that happened he would be either mercifully killed outright or else pinned down and slowly roasted to death.

Almost suffocated by the smoke, he succeeded in forcing his way through and at last emerged safely on the other side. For a moment or two he was blinded by the smoke and could see nothing, but as he staggered to his feet a hand clutched his arm.

"Be the powers, 'tis yerself, sorr, the saints be praised!" cried the voice of Cassidy. "Are ye hurt, now?"

"No, no; but have you found anyone?"

"Shure I have that. There's a poor divil pinned down in his bunk yonder, and, though I've thried wid all me moight, I can't raise him."

"Then I'll lend you a hand, Mike. There's no time to lose, for this packet's settling fast," replied Lawless.

Cassidy led the way into one of the cabins, where a man lay in the lower berth, held down by the upper one, which had collapsed and fallen upon him. He was unconscious, evidently having been stunned by the falling mass. Between them they managed to remove enough of the wreckage to admit of his being dragged out of the berth. As they carried him from the cabin there came a thunderous

crash, and Lawless saw the end of the great girder under which he had crawled give way and bring down with it the burning mass it had supported. Now, both fore and aft, they were imprisoned by a wall of flaming wreckage that made escape seem hopeless.

"'Tis the end av us, sorr," groaned Cassidy.

They laid their unconscious burden down in the alleyway, and while the mechanic set up a lugubrious wail Lawless started to rip up the matting with which the alleyway was covered.

"Here we are!" he exclaimed.

He pointed triumphantly to a circular iron plate let into the deck, and Cassidy, looking down after Lawless had removed this, beheld a dark cavity which emitted an odour of stagnant water.

"We can drop into the hold through there," said the Lieutenant, "and possibly we may reach the for'a'd deck. At any rate, it's our only chance. I'll go down first, and when you hear me shout lower that fellow down to me."

He gripped the end of the manhole, lowered himself through it, and then let go. There was a splash followed by a shout.

"Are ye all roight, sorr?" called Cassidy anxiously.

"Aye, aye, lower away," came the reply from the apparently bottomless depths.

Cassidy thereupon lowered the unconscious man through the hole, and held on till he felt the weight removed from his arms. Then he squeezed through the aperture, and, letting go, found himself nearly waist-deep in water and in almost utter darkness.

"The divil!" he exclaimed.

"Now you carry this man, and I'll lead the way," said Lawless, and Cassidy, catching hold of the limp body, slung it across his shoulder like a sack.

The Lieutenant slowly felt his way through the darkness towards the bows of the ship, guided only by the downward slope, for he could not see an inch in front of him. As they advanced the water became deeper, and he began to fear that it would cut off their retreat as effectively as had the fire.

"Damn!" he ejaculated abruptly. "It's all right," he added to Cassidy, who was close behind. "I bumped against an iron ladder. There must be a hatchway of some sort at the top; so you'd better wait here till I find it."

He ascended the ladder till he could go no farther, and then, after some trouble, managed to force open a small hatch. Climbing through, he found himself on the for'a'd well-deck and drew a deep breath of pure air which came as a life-giving tonic after the foul atmosphere from which he had emerged.

"Wait a moment," he shouted back. "I'll lower a rope for you to fasten round that chap's body. We can get him up quicker that way."

There was plenty of loose tackle strewn about the deck, and, selecting a piece, he made a running noose at the end and then lowered it through the hatch.

"All ready," came Cassidy's voice a moment later. "If ye'll just hold on for a minute, sorr, I'll come up and help haul."

In a few seconds the Irishman's head appeared above the hatch, and, stepping on to the deck, he helped Lawless haul the man up.

"Now fetch the machine for'a'd, Mike, while I try and bring this chap to his senses," said the Lieutenant.

Cassidy promptly climbed on to the taffrail and made his way amidships to the spot where the seaplane had been made fast. Meanwhile Lawless did his best to revive the unconscious man by splashing sea-water over him and trying artificial respiration. In a few moments the passenger uttered a faint moan and opened his eyes.

"Feeling better?" asked the Lieutenant cheerily.

The other stared at him with lack-lustre eyes and made no answer.

"You must try and get on your pins," said Lawless encouragingly. "Come on, now, I'll help you."

The man seemed to make a feeble attempt to use his limbs, and with a great effort Lawless managed to prop him against the taffrail. By this time Cassidy had brought up the seaplane, and together they succeeded in transferring their charge to it and placing him in the rear seat. This done, they cast off from the derelict and the Lieutenant started the engines. As he did so he gave a backward glance

at the ship.

"She's going!" he cried, and as the seaplane started to rise there came a roar from behind, and the *Nimrod*, parting amidships, disappeared beneath the waves in a dense cloud of smoke and steam.

"That is the narrowest squeak I've ever had," he murmured.

He glanced at the petrol gauges, and saw that the tanks were nearly empty. There might be enough left to carry them another ten miles, but certainly not more. And, sure enough, in a few minutes the engines began to slow down, and there was nothing for it but to volplane to the surface. Their sole chance of rescue now lay in being picked up by some passing steamer, for, though the wireless apparatus could receive messages, there was no power to transmit them.

"Keep a bright look-out, Mike," said Lawless. "The sooner we're picked up the better, for I sniff bad weather coming."

By now the fog had almost disappeared before a freshening sou'-westerly wind, and the sea, so smooth and oily a short while ago, was now whipped into choppy, foam-crested waves.

It was not long before the Lieutenant's prophecy of coming bad weather began to be fulfilled. Afternoon had now given place to evening, and a hazy moon, frequently obscured by black, threatening clouds, hung in the sky. Before darkness had quite set in they were in the midst of a gale which became more and more violent every minute.

Then commenced a wild struggle, a fight against the devastating seas. The frail machine was tossed from crest to crest of each on-coming wave or else buried in the trough of the sea, whose towering walls of livid green water on every side threatened to crush it to atoms. Yet its very flimsiness helped to keep it afloat, for, having no hull or other substantial surface, it offered little or no resistance to the force of the waves. As a cork will float on the most terrific sea when a boat would be dashed to pieces, so the light seaplane, held together by its steel wires and guys, successfully resisted the onslaught of the Atlantic billows.

But the plight of its occupants was terrible. Lashed to the yielding structure by cords, they were alternately flung violently upwards and then cast down to be swamped, choked and half-stunned by the falling mountains of water. As for the rescued man, who had also been lashed to the machine, it was impossible to tell

whether he was dead or alive, and to Lawless, who expected every moment to be their last, it didn't seem to matter much either way.

So the night passed and dawn—cold, cheerless and desolate—began to break at last upon that wild waste of storm-tossed waters; a running sea of dull, greenish-grey with great ridges of seething foam rushing upon one another in serried ranks like the battalions of a devouring army. And amidst that roaring, pitiless flood there floated the battered wreck of the seaplane. Both Lawless and Cassidy, as well as their passenger, were unconscious, and, but for the fact that they were lashed to the machine, would have been swallowed up in the boiling seas long ago.

In this condition they were seen and picked up by the gunboat *Panther*, which had been sent out to search for the survivors of the *Nimrod*. All three were still unconscious when, after great difficulty owing to the heavy seas, they were conveyed on board the warship.

When Lawless at last opened his eyes he found himself lying in an unfamiliar cabin, and it was some minutes before he realised what must have happened. He was struggling to recall the terrible events preceding his lapse into unconsciousness, when the cabin door opened and a young man in the uniform of a naval surgeon entered.

"Well, how do you feel?" asked the latter, seeing that Lawless was looking about him.

"Don't quite know," answered the Lieutenant. "I'm still a bit foggy in my mind."

"I don't wonder at it, judging from what your mechanic has told me. He's a tough customer and no mistake; came to in less than an hour after you were all rescued."

"Then how long have I been unconscious?" asked the Lieutenant.

"Ever since you were picked up, and that's nearly four hours ago. We shall reach Plymouth about midday, I expect."

In due course the *Panther* arrived at Plymouth, and, just as Lawless was about to board the steam pinnace that was to take him ashore, the man he had rescued came up.

"This is the first opportunity I have had, sir, of thanking you," he said. "You have

saved——"

"Oh, never mind about that," interrupted the Lieutenant. "Are you coming ashore?"

"Yes——" The man hesitated a minute, and went on a little awkwardly. "The fact is, I'm in rather a hole. All my money and papers went down in the *Nimrod*, and I haven't a cent to bless myself with. I hate to ask you such a thing, but if you could lend me a fiver I should be deeply grateful. Here is my card."

He handed Lawless a visiting card on which was inscribed "John H. Smythe, Seattle."

"I shall be staying at the Savoy," he added, "and if you'll give me your address I'll wire you the money. The American Ambassador is a friend of mine, and will lend me sufficient till I can cable my bank."

The Lieutenant hesitated for a moment, not because he had any reason to doubt the speaker, but because he was almost penniless himself at the moment. Still, he could not help feeling sorry for the man in this unfortunate predicament, and decided to borrow the money from the captain of the *Panther*.

"Might be in a mess like this myself some day," he reflected, as, telling Smythe to wait a moment, he hurried away to interview the skipper.

The latter promptly lent him five pounds, and, as Lawless was about to leave, called him back.

"By the way, what about that fellow you found on the *Nimrod*?" he said. "He has no papers and nothing whatever to prove his identity. I have orders to proceed at once to Portsmouth, or I'd hand him over to the authorities for them to make investigations."

"I was going to take him ashore myself," answered the Lieutenant.

"Oh, then, that's all right."

The two men shook hands, and Lawless returned to Smythe, who was waiting for him at the gangway.

"All serene," he said, thrusting five one pound notes into the man's hand. "Now we'd better get ashore."

They were landed at the Great Western jetty, and Smythe told Lawless he wanted to catch the first train to London. At Millbay Station they shook hands and said "Good-bye," after which the Lieutenant went on to Devonport to report himself.

On the following morning, when he was preparing to depart for Dundee, a telegram arrived ordering him to proceed to the Admiralty. He reached London in the afternoon, and duly presented himself at the particular room mentioned in his instructions. On entering he found a group of officers seated at a table in a manner unpleasantly reminiscent of a court-martial.

He was asked for and gave a brief account of his adventures after flying to the assistance of the *Nimrod*, and then one of the officers handed him a photograph.

"Do you recognise this person?" he asked.

"Why, yes," replied the Lieutenant. "It's the man named Smythe, whom I found unconscious in his bunk."

The officers exchanged significant glances, and the one who had produced the photograph turned once more to the Lieutenant.

"We understand from the Captain of the *Panther* that the man went ashore with you at Plymouth," he said.

"Yes, and I lent him a fiver to get to London with. Here's his card," and Lawless produced the visiting card which the rescued passenger had given him.

"You have not heard from him since?" asked the officer, after glancing at the card.

"No, sir," answered the Lieutenant innocently. "It's quite possible he hasn't been able to see the Ambassador yet."

"Quite," said the other drily. "This man who gave his name as Smythe is really Reichster, the notorious German-American spy for whose capture a reward of £500 has been offered."

There was a long pause. At last Lawless pulled himself together and realised that life still had to be lived.

"I think, sir, if it could be managed, I should like to transfer back to the Sea Service," he said. "The Flying Corps is a bit too risky for me."

CHAPTER III

THE DECOY

Whether it was due to the fact that, in addition to having smashed up two monoplanes, Lawless had lost the new seaplane which he had been ordered to test, was never made clear to him, but certain it is that, soon after the latter incident, his request to be transferred back to the Sea Service was granted. That was why, in accordance with his instructions, he found himself at Devonport awaiting orders. In due course these arrived, and were to the effect that he must report himself on board the patrol boat *O47*, at Falmouth, where he would enjoy temporary rank as Lieutenant.

"Holy smoke!" ejaculated Lawless when he received the order, "this takes me down a peg. Why, I was Lieutenant-Commander——"

"Don't worry," interposed the Port Admiral encouragingly. "You'll be back where you started from before long. I'll do my best to get you your old ship, the *Knat*."

"Thank you, sir," answered Lawless gratefully.

On arriving at Falmouth he found the *O47* a grimy, unpicturesque, and weather-beaten trawler, whose prescribed beat, he was informed, lay "somewhere" west of Start Point. The skipper, a gruff, taciturn old salt, received him without enthusiasm, and grumbled audibly at having to "dry-nurse green-horns." Obviously he had never heard of the Lieutenant's exploits when in command of the *Knat*, and Lawless was careful not to undeceive him.

"I'll have a lark with the old buffer," he told himself, and felt so pleased at this idea that he forgot his indignation at having been assigned to such a wretched old tub and with inferior rank.

The *O47* left Falmouth Harbour on the following morning, and was soon stubbing her way westward, rolling as only a North Sea trawler can roll.

There was a stiff, sou'-westerly breeze blowing, and as the day waned it showed signs of developing into a first-class hurricane. The sea, which had been merely choppy to begin with, had risen until the great foam-crested billows charged

down upon each other, flinging high their white manes of wind-driven spume. The sky had turned from blue to a cold, steely grey, with low-lying clouds like banks of soiled snow on the western horizon. A pale crescent moon already showed dimly in the half-light.

In the little wheelhouse, perched high up in front of the funnel, Skipper Chard clung to a handrail and peered through the rime-frosted glass across the endless grey vista of tossing, white-capped seas.

Chard growled as the trawler, struck amidships by an extra large wave, heeled till her port taffrail was under water.

When she had righted herself, Lawless, clad in oilskins and a sou'-wester, swarmed up the little iron ladder to the wheelhouse, and, waiting a favourable opportunity, opened the door and staggered in.

"Phew!" he ejaculated. "This is weather and no mistake!"

"Weather!" echoed the skipper with a sour smile. "Wait till we get it really rough!"

The quartermaster at the wheel suppressed a smile, while the Lieutenant did his best to look apprehensive.

"I thought this was pretty rough," he said apologetically.

"Oh, it's a bit choppy, I'll allow. But rough——" The skipper smiled a smile, more eloquent than words, that expressed all the scorn which a seasoned salt feels for a greenhorn who has still to learn the ways of the sea.

"It'll be my watch in five minutes," said Lawless. "I expect you will be glad to go below."

The skipper grunted. No one but a raw amateur would have turned out for his watch before being called; it was the brand of inexperience.

"Keep her as near west by south as may be," said the skipper, jerking his head towards the binnacle. "Send for me if you sight anything."

While he was speaking, eight bells struck, and as the sound died away a seaman came up the iron ladder to relieve the quartermaster at the wheel. As the off-duty man stumbled out of the wheelhouse, the skipper also turned to leave.

"You'll need to keep a bright look-out," he remarked grimly. "As like as not _____"

He paused abruptly, then snatched a pair of binoculars out of the box attached to the handrail, and focused them on a small object, barely discernible to the naked eye. He remained thus for more than a minute, with legs stretched wide apart, swinging back and forth automatically with the motion of the vessel.

"Have a squint," and he handed the glasses to the Lieutenant.

The latter focused the binoculars on the strange vessel ahead. She was a steamer of about fifteen hundred tons, with the word *Gelderland* painted in huge white letters on her hull amidships, together with the Dutch colours.

"A Dutchman," he observed, handing back the glasses.

"A private of marines could tell that," snorted the skipper. "Question is, what's she doing right away west here?"

The Lieutenant made no answer; which was wise, since none was expected. Chard shouted an order to the quartermaster, who echoed it, and began to turn the heavy wheel.

"Signal the Dutchman to stop," commanded the skipper.

It being too dark to use flags or semaphore, Lawless picked up the signal lamp and flashed the message across the intervening space. He waited for an answer, and, none coming, called up once more.

"Can't get a reply," he said after the second attempt.

"I'll get one, though," muttered the skipper; and, sliding back one of the windows, he leant out.

"Stubbs, put a shot across that hooker's bows!" he shouted.

"Aye, aye, sir!" answered the gunner, and bent over a small quick-firer that was mounted on the well-deck forward.

Next moment there was a bright yellow flash and a reverberating boom. The shell was seen to strike the water some twenty yards in front of the Dutchman's bows, sending up a small pillar of foaming water. But the stranger, instead of stopping, suddenly altered her course, and a cloud of black smoke which began

to pour out of her funnel showed that she was firing up.

"All right!" ejaculated the skipper. "But we'll cop her yet. Looks suspicious, her cuttin' away like that. Climb on the fo'c'sle and signal that if she don't stop we'll sink her!"

Lawless descended the ladder, staggered across the slippery, reeling deck, and mounted the fo'c'sle head. Crooking one arm round a stay to steady himself, he jerked out the signal in a somewhat uneven succession of dots and dashes. Still the stranger made no answering signal, and at last he climbed down.

"Put a shot through her funnel!" yelled Chard.

The gunner breathed hard as he adjusted the sights and waited till the *O47* swung up for a second on an even keel.

Bang!

The shell sped true, for where the Dutchman's funnel had stood there was now only a jagged stump of metal, with columns of smoke issuing out of it. Also her captain had seen fit to slow down at last.

"Mr. Lawless, I'm going alongside," shouted the skipper from the wheelhouse. "Serve out cutlasses and revolvers, in case the Dutchmen start to play monkey-tricks."

The Lieutenant served out the weapons, after which he climbed on the fo'c'sle head to help bring the trawler alongside her quarry. It needed no little skill and judgment to accomplish this in such weather and with darkness coming on.

The high bows of the *O47*, towering above the low decks of the *Gelderland* as the trawler came racing up, threatened to crash right into the Dutchman and cut her in twain amidships, but the trawler's engines were reversed in the nick of time, and her stern slewed round so that the two vessels lay alongside each other.

Skipper Chard dropped on the *Gelderland's* deck just as the Captain—a short, stout man—came puffing down from his bridge in a violent temper.

"Vat for you do that?" he demanded, pointing to the smashed funnel.

"Why didn't you stop when I ordered you?"

"Because I saw not any signal. The first thing I know is—plump!—and then vat

you call the chiminey is proken."

"You mean to say you didn't know I sent a shot over your bows?" demanded Chard incredulously.

"I see noddings," answered the Captain. "But you haff done big damages, and I will make you pay."

"Oh! will you, my son?" replied the other. "We'll see about that, but in the meantime I must see your papers."

The Captain promptly led the way to the chart-room and produced his papers with an alacrity that was calculated to disarm the most suspicious investigator. According to them, the *Gelderland* had cleared at Amsterdam for Boston with general cargo.

"H'm!" grunted Chard, as he looked at the papers. "How long have you been coming up the Channel?"

"Four or five days. I was hung up by fog."

"Well, the sooner you get out of it the better," answered Chard, turning to go. The ship's papers were in order, and therefore he had no right to detain the vessel further. As he was about to pass through the door his glance fell on a chart fastened to the table with drawing-pins. He paused for a moment and bent over it.

"Here!" he said in a different tone. "Come here!"

His forefinger was resting on the apex formed by two diagonal lines which had been ruled across the chart. This apex was just opposite Start Point, and the lines formed two sides of a triangle—one running parallel to the English coast as far as the Lizard, the other running south-west to a point just north of Ushant.

"Vell?" inquired the Captain, but there was a slight tremor in his voice.

"You'd better scuttle that Amsterdam yarn," replied Chard quietly. He laid his finger once more on the chart. "If this means anything," he went on, "it means that you've been cruising around between Start Point, Ushant and the Lizard, and that the clearance papers you showed me are just fakes. It's pretty certain that——No, you don't!" as the Captain made a swift movement with his right hand. "Keep your eye on this, my son," and Chard levelled an automatic pistol at the

other's head.

Then, still covering the Captain with his pistol, he hailed the *O47* through the open door of the chart-room.

"Mr. Lawless!"

"Aye, aye!" came the answer.

"Train the gun on this packet, and sweep her decks if the men show trouble. Then lower a couple of boats and come aboard for prisoners."

The Lieutenant gave the necessary orders to the gunner, after which he saw to the lowering of the boats. In the darkness and with a heavy sea running this last was a difficult and dangerous task, but it was accomplished safely. Meanwhile, Chard had insisted on some of the hatches being removed from the *Gelderland's* hold in order that he might judge of the contents. They consisted chiefly of cases, crates and barrels, some of which, on being opened, proved to contain earthenware.

"Vell, does that satisfy you?" asked the Captain triumphantly.

"Not by a damn sight," answered Chard bluntly. "There's a clear space at the bottom of the hold. Open one of the cases down there."

The Captain protested, but the other was adamant, and eventually a couple of men were despatched to carry out his demand. The first case was opened, and found to be packed with cans of petrol. Chard smiled grimly and ordered another to be opened; it contained a small quick-firer in pieces.

"A proper little arsenal, this," remarked Chard, with a grin. "Let's try another of your surprise packets."

A third case was broken open, displaying rows of neatly packed shells.

"I see; if any *U* boat happened to have damaged a gun or run short of ammunition, you can supply the goods," said Chard. "It's a fine idea."

The boats from the *O47* had come alongside, and the Lieutenant swung himself aboard. In a few words Chard explained the situation and told him that, as soon as the prisoners had been put aboard the trawler, he would be placed in charge of the *Gelderland* with a prize crew. This was carried out speedily, the Germans, as they really were, offering no resistance in view of the fact that the trawler's gun

was kept trained on them all the time.

Half a dozen men from the *O47* were placed on board the *Gelderland* as a prize crew, and Chard, before leaving, advised Lawless to make straight for Plymouth. Then he returned to the trawler and the two vessels slowly drew apart and were lost to each other in the darkness.

"Keep her nose to the west," Lawless told the quartermaster, and then dived into the chart-room to lay out his course for Plymouth. This done, he stepped out on to the bridge again and peered into the darkness. The Eddystone Light was not visible yet, and he was about to return, when there came a shout from the look-out on the fo'c'sle head.

"Light on the port bow, sir!"

The Lieutenant leaned over the bridge-rail and stared into the night, but could see nothing. He was about to hail the look-out man, when he saw a faint yellow glimmer appear for a second, and vanish, but this time it was on the starboard side.

"Queer," he murmured.

He started towards the other end of the bridge, and accidentally knocked his foot against something. Stooping down, he found it was a signal-lamp, but different to the one he had been used to handling. Thoughtlessly, he picked it up and tried the shutter; a beam of yellow light flashed out and was gone. Then, as if in answer to it, the mysterious light to starboard flicked twice and disappeared again.

"Oh-h!" murmured Lawless.

It had come upon him that the light was a signal from a submarine, and that, in moving the shutter of the signal-lamp, he had unwittingly answered it. Here, indeed, was a chance of recovering his reputation, for there could be no doubt that the submarine was a *U* boat. If only it could be captured or sunk!

He crossed to the bridge telegraph and rang down "Stop!" to the engine-room. The machinery ceased throbbing, and the *Gelderland*, losing way, began to roll in a nasty fashion. Then, out of the darkness, a voice hailed her in German. The Lieutenant shouted back some meaningless gibberish, trusting to the wind to make his voice indistinct. This done, he hurried on to the deck, flung a rope ladder over the taffrail, and whispered some instructions to the bos'n.

Leaning over the bulwarks, he saw the shadowy outline of a large submarine alongside, her deck awash, and with a man standing on the hatch-cover, clinging to an inadequate handrail. The man flung out a rope with a hook at the end, caught one of the rungs of the rope ladder, and drew it towards him. Clutching it, he allowed himself to swing off the hatch, and next moment was clambering over the bulwarks. Then, as he reached the deck, a couple of seamen sprang out of the shadows and bore him down before he could utter a cry.

"Well?" remarked the Lieutenant interrogatively, as the prisoner, with a sailor on each side of him, stood in the Captain's cabin.

The man from the submarine growled something beneath his breath. Evidently he had not yet recovered from his astonishment.

"Well?" repeated Lawless almost genially.

"This boat, is it not the *Gelderland*?" asked the prisoner in passable English.

"It is."

"Then why——"

"Take him aft to the wheelhouse and lock him in," interrupted the Lieutenant. The prisoner made an abrupt movement, which was checked at sight of a revolver which one of the seamen was holding. Then he was marched off.

It was not till then that Lawless realised the difficulties of the situation. He had no gun mounted wherewith to sink the enemy submarine; obviously he could not board her so that——

"I'll ram her!" he ejaculated aloud.

He returned to the bridge and saw that the huge whale-like form of the *U* boat was still alongside. Grabbing the telegraph, he rang down "Full speed ahead!" and then, thrusting the quartermaster aside, took the wheel and swung the vessel round so that she was bows-on to the submarine. At the same moment the latter's hatch opened and a man stepped out, evidently to try and find out what kept the other so long. But before he could realise what was happening, the *Gelderland* drove right into the low-lying hull; there was a terrific shock, and, as the steamer reeled under the force of the impact, a stifled cry from out of the blackness—and then silence.

Considerably elated, Lawless picked up the Eddystone light about an hour later. Then, having taken his bearings, he left Plymouth far away to starboard and headed down Channel, while, in obedience to his instructions, the quick-firer was taken out of the hold and mounted on deck and the damaged funnel repaired.

He had been the recipient of a brilliant inspiration.



"The young fool's been and got himself torpedoed, that's what he's done," said Skipper Chard in a tone of conviction.

He was seated with other patrol-boat skippers in the bar-parlour of a certain hostelry, and the conversation had turned on the mysterious disappearance of the *Gelderland* with her prize crew. A full week had elapsed since her capture by the *O47*, yet she had not been reported at Plymouth or any of the other western seaports.

"Skipper Trevail do say he saw she west of Lizard," remarked an old Cornishman.

Chard shook his head impatiently. He absolutely refused to credit the strange stories which, during the last few days, had been rife in the west. Patrol skippers had solemnly assured him that they had seen the *Gelderland* off the Cornish coast. One declared that, not knowing what she was, he had boarded her and seen her captain, a young man who could not speak a word of English; but, as her papers were in order, he had let her proceed without troubling to search her cargo. As day after day passed these stories were added to, or varied, until the *Gelderland* began to be regarded as a phantom ship, and was spoken of, not without awe, as the *Flying Dutchman*. The skipper of the *O47* alone maintained a sceptical attitude, and reiterated his belief that she had been either torpedoed or mined.

At last the Admiralty, awaking to the fact that a captured ship had disappeared, sent wireless instructions to the officers in command of the patrols to make a systematic search for the vessel. And so, from Start Point to the Lizard, cruiser, destroyer, and patrol-boat swept the seas.

On the afternoon of the very day that these instructions were sent out, Skipper

Chard stood in the wheelhouse of the *O47* and swept the horizon with his glasses. Suddenly he uttered a cry, for just visible against the skyline was the *Gelderland*.

"Whack her up all you can!" he yelled through the voice-pipe. "We've sighted her!"

The engineer did his best, and the deck-plates of the *O47* vibrated with the ponderous thumping of the machinery below. Chard leaned out of the wheelhouse with his binoculars glued to the missing prize, calling down maledictions upon himself and all his kin if he failed to lay her by the heels. But the *Gelderland* was making off as fast as her engines would carry her, and there ensued a long and stern chase which lasted until the *O47* was near enough to send a shot crashing through the *Gelderland's* chart-room. Then, and not till then, the *Gelderland* hove to.

"You'll be hanged for this, you ravin' lunatic!" shouted Chard as he boarded the recaptured prize; and then, as the Lieutenant, descending from the bridge, smiled in a sickly sort of fashion, he added: "You've been guilty of barratry, piracy, mutiny, and heaven knows what!"

Lawless was told to regard himself as a prisoner, and then the skipper, pursuing his investigations, was amazed to find some score of Germans in the hold, all of them belonging to the submarine service.

"Why—why, what the deuce does this mean?" he demanded.

"I had to sling some of the cargo overboard," answered the other apologetically, "or there wouldn't have been room for these chaps."

"But how the blazes did they get here?"

Then Lawless related his adventures since the stormy night when he was placed in charge of the *Gelderland*. He had argued that, if one enemy submarine had been deceived by the supply vessel, others might also be lured to destruction in the same way, and his argument had proved correct.

"I suppose I've been guilty of disobedience," he concluded, "but I've bagged four *U* boats, ramming one and sinking three with the gun we found in the hold. Most of the men in the submarines foundered with them, but we've managed to save about twenty. At first I wondered how they managed to identify the *Gelderland* in the dark, but I tumbled to it the first night. The masthead light, instead of

being on the foremast, was hung on the aftermast, and this, I suppose, was a pre-arranged signal. At any rate, I didn't alter it, and the scheme seemed to work."

"If you're not shot, you'll be made a blessed admiral!" the skipper remarked.

The court-martial which followed absolved the Lieutenant from the formal charges with which he had been indicted, and a few days later he was informed that, the *Knat* having arrived at Devonport, he was to return to her with rank of Lieutenant-Commander. And that evening Lawless, in the gladness of his heart, took from its case a battered banjo, and, lifting up his voice in song, declared in inharmonious accents that "Somewhere the sun is shining."



CHAPTER IV

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE

"I feel," said Lawless, addressing himself to Sub-lieutenant Trent as they stood together on the deck of the *Knat*, "as pleased as a pig with two tails."

He glanced around him appreciatively, lingering over each well-remembered object, from the quick-firer on the "bandstand" aft to the battered ventilating cowl each side of the for'a'd funnel.

"Even the old shipboard stink is fragrant in my nostrils," he went on, "and the awful profanity issuing from the galley yonder is like sweet music unto my ears."

"H'm," grunted Trent, "you don't seem to have been very happy in the air service."

The look of joyful appreciation faded from the Lieutenant's eyes.

"I've lost one thousand five hundred and five pounds since I left the *Knat*," he answered. "Or as good as lost it."

"Eh!" ejaculated the junior officer.

Whereupon Lawless confided to him the story of his uncle's unfortunate bet and the sad episode of the German spy who, after being rescued from the derelict steamer, had borrowed five pounds.

"When you've stopped braying, you jackass, I'll get below," snapped the Lieutenant, and, Trent having mastered his mirth, Lawless departed to his cabin.

The *Knat* was on her way to the Clyde, where, with two other destroyers, the *Arrow* and the *Kite*, she was to escort the recently launched battleship *Mars* round to Portsmouth. It was evening when the *Knat* arrived in the Clyde and took up moorings near the leviathan battleship, the existence of which was supposed to be known only to the Admiralty and those who had been engaged in her construction. As she was not to leave till noon on the following day, Lawless decided to take the opportunity of a run ashore, and accordingly, having arrayed

himself in mufti, stepped into the boat and waved farewell to his envious junior officer.

Now, on its way to the shore, the boat had to pass close by a very dirty coal-tramp, bearing on her stern the legend, "*Black Diamond*, Newcastle-on-Tyne." As they pulled near the stern in order to reach the quay, Lawless heard a certain order which made him prick up his ears and indulge in a few moments' very earnest thought. After a little reflection, however, he smiled at his suspicions, and dismissed the subject from his mind.

It was somewhat late when, after a visit to the only music-hall which the district boasted, the Lieutenant made his way down a side street to a certain little Continental restaurant which used to be patronised almost exclusively by foreigners.

His attention was attracted by two men attired in the uniform of Mercantile Marine officers who sat at a table opposite. They excited his curiosity, for, although they appeared to speak English perfectly, they were in uniform, and a British sea officer, like his naval confrère, hates above all things to be seen ashore in "regimentals."

So impressed was Lawless that when the two officers left the restaurant he followed at a respectful distance till they reached the quay alongside which the *Black Diamond* was lying. Here another thing struck him as being decidedly peculiar; for, instead of having an aged and rheumatic watchman aboard, as is the usual custom of British ships when in a home port, there was a man walking up and down in front of the gangway as if on sentry go. Then, more astonishing still, as the two officers went on board this man saluted them—an unheard-of ceremony on a British merchant vessel.

With a growing uneasiness concerning the real character of the *Black Diamond*, Lawless hailed a picket-boat, and was taken aboard the *Knat*. Here he detailed his adventures and expounded his suspicions to Trent, who, however, was not inclined to treat them very seriously.

"If you feel nervous about them, why don't you report to the captain of the *Mars*?" he asked.

"And probably be regarded as a lunatic for my pains!" retorted Lawless.

He remained in thought for some moments, then rose.

"P'r'aps you're right," he remarked drowsily. "Very likely they're only harmless Dagos after all. I'm going to turn in, so clear out!"

And a few moments later Lieutenant Lawless was sleeping.

On the following morning Lawless noticed that the *Black Diamond* left her berth and steamed down the river about an hour before the *Mars* and her escort were due to leave.

"Well, your nightmare's ship's gone now," remarked Trent. "One of the port officials told me she had cleared for Valencia with coals."

"Coals!" echoed Lawless. "Rum sort of place to ship coals for the Mediterranean! They could get it cheaper and quicker at Cardiff and Newport, besides saving about four days on the double trip."

Soon afterwards came the signal to get under way. The *Mars* was to proceed at about ten knots, with the *Arrow* and *Kite* astern on each side, and the *Knat* in front to act as scout and clear the way for her.

Slowly and majestically the marine monster—the latest triumph of death-dealing mechanism—swung down the river, her convoy of destroyers looking no larger than midges against her huge bulk. Evening was drawing in as they came abreast of the white light on Cambrae Island, and, although he had been keeping a careful look-out all the afternoon, Lawless had seen nothing of the mysterious *Black Diamond*.

"It's strange!" he mused. "I can't understand it."

An hour or two later, when darkness had set in, Lawless left Trent in charge and went below to snatch a little rest. He had hardly been in his bunk ten minutes, when a messenger knocked at the cabin door and informed him that he was wanted on the bridge.

"What's the trouble?" asked the Lieutenant, as he reached the bridge.

Trent withdrew his head from the hood-screen on the port side, and pointed to a couple of vertical red lights some distance ahead.

"Steamer broken down," he said; "thought it might be your bogey ship."

Lawless picked up the night glasses and gazed through them for some moments.

"It's the *Black Diamond*, right enough," he said. "Queer she should have a mishap right in our course, though!"

Trent laughed scornfully.

"I don't suppose they're hanging about there for fun," he observed. "If they were really up to any games, they wouldn't show the warning lights."

"That's just it," replied Lawless. "They know it would at once excite suspicion if they didn't show them." And he again studied the vessel through his glasses.

"Trent," he exclaimed suddenly, "did you see anything?"

The junior officer, although he had been gazing in the same direction as Lawless, had seen nothing of a startling character.

"No," he replied. "What was it?"

"I'll swear I saw something slipped overboard," said Lawless; "but it's so dark I couldn't see what it was even with these glasses. Look here," he added, with unusual gravity, "there's some mischief going on. I'm certain of it."

"Then we'd better have the searchlight on her," replied Trent; and was about to give an order when the Lieutenant stopped him.

"No," he said decisively, "that would only serve to warn them if they are up to any artful dodges."

"They wouldn't have lowered a mine, if that's what you're thinking about, because they know we should alter our course as soon as we saw a disabled steamer ahead."

"No, it was nothing of that sort. It looked more like a sort of cage as far as I could make out."

"Perhaps they're fishing for crabs," suggested Trent with a laugh. For the life of him he could not understand what Lawless was worrying about, since even the best-regulated steamers are apt to break down.

"Look here," said Lawless suddenly, "I'm not going to run the risk of being made a fool of by signalling to the *Mars*. I'm going to investigate this matter for myself." And, turning to a seaman, he told him to get one of the Berthon boats lowered alongside.

"But if you intend to pull out to her, we shall leave you behind," said Trent. "Besides, what can you do on your own?"

"I shall see," replied Lawless. "As to the rest, if you can't pick me up, I can pull back to the *Kite*, which by that time will be nearly abreast of me. I know her skipper, and he won't give me away."

Trent merely shrugged his shoulders. If his commander had a bee in his bonnet it was not his place, as a junior officer, to argue; so he held his peace and thought the more. The *Berthon* having been launched, Lawless dropped in and started to pull towards the apparently disabled steamer with powerful, noiseless strokes, having taken the precaution of muffling the oars. The distance between the *Knat* and the steamer having been considerably lessened by this time, it was not long before the Lieutenant reached her. He had rowed in a direct line with her stern, that he might not be observed by any possible look-out aboard, and at length he rested on his oars and turned round to make observations.

"Phew!" he whistled softly.

Floating on the water alongside the steamer, and screened by her hull from the observation of those on the war vessels, was a large waterplane. As far as he could make out, it had accommodation for two men, but what attracted his attention most was a machine, in appearance not unlike a very small inverted howitzer, and evidently designed for aiming bombs. There was no one in the waterplane, and for a moment Lawless thought of rowing with all speed to the *Mars* and warning her captain; but a moment's reflection told him that it was more than likely that she would have passed him before he could get near, and, in any case, the warning might by that time be too late.

"I'll have to trust to luck, that's all," he muttered.

How he was going to prevent the airmen from carrying out their plans, the nature of which he had very little difficulty in guessing, Lawless had no very clear idea; but, after a moment's consideration, he shipped his paddles, and slipped noiselessly into the water. A few strokes brought him alongside the steamer, and then, keeping well under the shadow of her hull, he continued swimming until he was able to reach one of the wire stays on the floating machine. So far he had escaped notice.

He had no sooner secured a firm hold on the waterplane than a man, suspended by a rope from one of the steamer's derricks, swung outboard and gently lowered

himself into the seat of the machine. Then another man followed, and, after an interchange of remarks in a language which Lawless had no difficulty in recognising, the two airmen took their seats, and the engines were set going. A second or two afterwards the waterplane began to glide off, and the Lieutenant found himself being dragged through the water.

The weight of his body, in addition to the resistance of the water, caused the thin steel wire to cut into his hands; and, in order to get a firmer and less painful grip, he threw his arms over the narrow end of the car. As he did so, the waterplane rose in the air, with the result that it dipped and swerved so violently owing to the sudden shifting of his weight that Lawless thought it was going to capsize. The pilot, however, righted it with wonderful skill, but at the same time his companion caught sight of the Lieutenant hanging on.

For a moment he stared in blank astonishment at the dark figure dangling beneath him, and then, evidently under the impression that it was one of his compatriots who had somehow contrived to get into this awkward position, he leant over and extended his hand. Lawless gripped it, and, with a tremendous effort, managed to lift himself up and throw his legs over the canoe-shaped body, so that he sat astride facing his unknown helper.

"Look here——" he began thoughtlessly, and then stopped. It occurred to him, too late, that his speech had betrayed his nationality, and therefore his motives.

The other seemed to grasp the situation in a flash, and, before he had time to consider what to do next, Lawless found himself looking straight into the barrel of a revolver. But the sight of the weapon had the same effect upon him as a douche of cold water has upon a swooning man. It restored his presence of mind, and his brain worked with lightning-like rapidity.

In the face of death no man could be calmer than the reckless Lieutenant. For a moment they stared at each other, the airman raised his pistol, and then, to his amazement, the Englishman laughed.

In all probability, it was this cynical laugh which saved his life, but defeated his immediate object. Lawless had realised that if the man fired at him it must inevitably attract the attention of those on board the *Mars*—for revolver shots in mid-air would be hardly likely to pass unnoticed—and they would at once open fire with the anti-aircraft guns. But the same thought had evidently occurred to the other, for, instead of firing, he slipped the revolver back into his pocket.

Lawless braced himself for the coming struggle, and twisted his legs round some wire guys to secure a firmer grip of the machine and leave his arms free. Giving a quick glance below, he saw the lights of the *Mars* and her attendant destroyers standing out like tiny specks in a gulf of unfathomable blackness. The two red lights of the *Black Diamond* were no longer visible, and he concluded that, having launched the waterplane, she had proceeded on her way. To the left he could see a searchlight, which he assumed to be operated from the *Knat*, rapidly sweeping the horizon in great semi-circles.

The whole panorama passed before his eyes like a flash, and a moment later he had come to grips with his antagonist.

With arms enlocked and faces almost touching, the combatants swayed gently to and fro, as though testing each other's strength. Then, loosening their hold, and drawing a little apart for a second, they closed again, and this time they wound their arms about each other like bands of steel, till the terrible pressure made their veins stand up like whipcord, and their breath came in short, choking gasps. But neither could get sufficient advantage over his adversary to swing him off, and more than once it seemed as if both of them must tumble into the sea beneath.

Had the pilot been able to come to the assistance of his companion, Lawless would not have stood a dog's chance; but, fortunately for him, the man had all he could do to maintain control of the machine and prevent it from capsizing under the constantly shifting weight of the opponents as they swayed dangerously from side to side.

Suddenly, from a point seemingly immediately beneath them, came a faint bellowing sound, which Lawless at once recognised as the *Mars'* syren.

Apparently his antagonist recognised it also, for, throwing caution to the winds, he flung his body forward, carrying the Lieutenant with him so that they both nearly went over the side with the sudden impetus.

Lawless was now underneath, his back resting on the narrow deck of the car, while the airman struggled to get a grip of his throat. Uppermost in the mind of each was the desire to kill. Hate gleamed from their bloodshot eyes, and they ground their teeth savagely. Having the advantage of position, the airman at last managed to get his fingers round the Lieutenant's throat, and the latter, in a desperate endeavour to free himself from the choking grip, relaxed his hold, and was swung over the side of the car. For a moment he remained head downwards,

suspended only by the steel wires into which he had twisted his legs. Then he began to slip, and a second later disappeared from sight into the yawning abyss beneath.

Quick as thought the airman leaned back, and, reaching the lever which operated the bomb-throwing machine, pulled it; but, as he did so, the waterplane gave a terrific lurch, and the bomb, instead of dropping on the *Mars*, which at that moment was directly underneath, fell into the water and exploded some distance astern of her. The cause of this failure was due to Lawless gripping in his fall one of the stays which held the rudder, and his weight, operating on the extreme end of the machine, had destroyed its balance, and therefore altered the course of the bomb.

Instantly the night was illuminated with the beams of searchlights, which, like huge phosphorescent feelers, swept the sky, until at last they were focussed on the waterplane. Then came a cracking sound from beneath, and shot after shot whizzed upwards from the anti-aircraft guns of the *Mars*, striking the car, smashing and splintering the slender wooden spars which supported the planes, and occasionally snapping a steel guy.

By a miracle Lawless had managed to retain his hold of the wire, though it cut through his flesh, and he knew that he must drop before many seconds elapsed, even if he was not struck by one of the shots from below. He was on the point of letting go through sheer pain and exhaustion, when the machine suddenly tilted, turned right over, and then swooped downwards with a velocity that made his brain reel.

The terrible sensation of falling from a tremendous height terminated abruptly, and next moment the Lieutenant felt the water close above his head, and he was sinking down, down, fathoms deep, it seemed to him, into the sea. Then came a feeling of agonising suffocation, a terrible pressure on his chest, a sensation as though his lungs were about to burst, and he rose to the surface, to find himself near some floating remnants of the wrecked waterplane.

Catching hold of one of the floats, Lawless endeavoured to draw himself up, but fell back in the water as a numbing pain shot through his left arm. He rose to the surface again in a semi-dazed condition, and made another feeble attempt to get on the floats; but his strength was exhausted, and he was suffering agonies from the injured arm. At this moment there came the sound of men's voices and the click of oars as they swung in the rowlocks; strong arms lifted him out of the

water, and then he lost consciousness.

When Lawless came to himself, he was lying in his bunk on board the *Knat*, and the absence of any movement told him that she must be at anchor in harbour. In a dreamy fashion he fell to wondering why he was lying there, with the sunlight streaming through the port-holes; he even made an effort to rise, but fell back as a pain shot from his left elbow to his shoulder.

That set him thinking, and gradually the events of the previous night—he supposed it was the previous night—came back to him. Recollections of the mysterious steamer, the fight in mid-air, his fall into the sea—all passed through his brain in a fragmentary, disjointed manner, like the confused memories of a dream. Then, as he was trying to sort them out, the cabin door opened, and Sub-Lieutenant Trent entered.

"Hallo! So you've come to at last!" he exclaimed. "How do you feel?"

"As if I'd had a beastly nightmare," answered Lawless. "Where are we?"

"In Portsmouth Harbour," replied Trent, as he seated himself on a locker beside the bunk and started to fill his pipe.

"I'm beginning to remember things a bit more clearly now," said the Lieutenant. "Tell me what happened after I left the *Knat*."

"There's not much to tell, so far as I'm concerned," answered Trent as he lit his pipe. "We kept our course, and just as we came abreast of your bogey ship she hauled down her signal lights and steamed away. Then——"

"Ah, that must have been immediately after the waterplane rose," interrupted Lawless. "I thought there wasn't much wrong with her machinery."

"Well, as I was saying, as soon as she steamed off I turned the searchlight on her, but could discover nothing of a suspicious nature," continued Trent. "Neither, for that matter, could I see anything of you, though we caught sight of the empty boat drifting. Nothing fresh happened till I heard a terrific explosion astern, and turned round just in time to see a ball of flame sink into the water near the *Mars*. I couldn't imagine what it was for a moment; but the *Mars* people got their searchlight going in less than a jiffy, and then we spotted an aeroplane directly overhead.

"That settled the mystery of the explosion, and the *Mars* began to pot at her with

the vertical guns, though at first it was impossible to tell whether any hits were made. But after a few shots, all doubts were set at rest, for she came tumbling down like a winged partridge. As soon as she struck the water, boats were lowered, and they rowed to the floating wreckage, where they found you and also the body of a man who had evidently been killed by one of the shots. As the heavier parts of the machine had sunk, we could not tell what sort of weapons she carried, or the number of the crew.

"After that, I went aboard the *Mars* and reported to the skipper what you had told me about your suspicions concerning the *Black Diamond*. He was precious ratty at not having been told before, and I got orders to chase the steamer and search her. We overhauled her in less than half an hour. She's now safely anchored near the Hard, and her crew are prisoners."

"It's pretty clear that the waterplane was carried aboard the steamer in sections," said Lawless after a pause. "No doubt they were put together after she left the quay. The whole thing was wonderfully engineered, I must say."

"But what about you?" asked Trent. "I imagine you must have had a rather exciting time."

"Exciting!" ejaculated the Lieutenant grimly, and then proceeded to relate all that had happened to him after he left the *Knat*.

"Well," said Trent at the conclusion, "you scored that time, anyway."

"I s'pose so," answered the other, with a sigh. "But if it had only been a Zep and I'd brought it down, there'd have been a cool thou.' waiting for me."



CHAPTER V

THE HOAX

A thin grey mist lay upon the waters, giving the impression of a silvery veil of gauze stretched from sea to sky. The evening was calm, with not a breath of wind stirring, and the sea was ruffled by long, undulating furrows that pursued their way across the surface like great ripples, with never a "cat's paw" nor a speck of foam to break the monotony of their green-grey hue.

Looking strangely impalpable and ghostlike by reason of the mist, the destroyer *Knat* slipped swiftly through the water, heaving gently to the ground-swell. Upon the bridge Lieutenant-Commander Lawless stood smoking a pipe, and near him Sub-Lieutenant Trent reclined against the searchlight, likewise absorbing tobacco smoke and ozone. No other vessel was in sight and the only sound to be heard was the soft whirr of the turbines.

"This is what I call balmy and peaceful," remarked Lawless, taking the pipe from his mouth and knocking it against the handrail. "One could almost sing 'A Life on the Ocean Wave.'"

"Huh!" grunted Trent; "then it would be balmy without being peaceful."

As Lawless made no reply, he looked up to see the Lieutenant staring hard through the mist at a vague, shapeless something which might have been a ship, or a cliff, viewed through the murky atmosphere.

"Something ahead of us on the starboard bow," he said.

Both officers riveted their gaze upon the nebulous object which, as the destroyer overhauled it, assumed the shape and appearance of a large steamer, while their ears caught the steady throb of engines.

"I'll give her a hail," said Lawless, picking up the megaphone.

But before he had time to raise it to his mouth the fog was split by a yellow streak of fire and a shell came whizzing over the *Knat's* bows.

"By the Lord, an enemy ship!" ejaculated the Lieutenant, and passed the word to

open fire with the machine guns. The quick-firer just below the bridge led off, but before the other guns had a chance to follow suit a heavy bank of fog rolled up and obliterated the steamer as completely as though a curtain had been lowered. Although invisible, the vessel's engines could still be heard and, guided by the sound, the *Knat* was kept on her trail, Lawless waiting only for the fog to lift in order to open fire again. While he was still expecting this to happen there came the notes of a bugle and at the sound the Lieutenant nearly tumbled down the bridge ladder in astonishment. For it was the dinner call as given on British ships:

"Officers' wives eat puddings and pies,
But soldiers' wives eat skilly."

"What the dickens does it mean?" he murmured, and then, raising his voice, hailed the mysterious steamer.

"Ahoy there, ahoy! Where away?" came the answer.

"On your port quarter."

"What ship is that?"

"British destroyer, *Knat*."

The fog lifted again, and this time Lawless could see the decks thronged with anxious passengers and the captain leaning over the port bridge-rail.

"What ship are you?" he shouted.

"The *Cotswold*, for Hull. Just sighted an enemy submarine and opened fire on her," came the answer.

"A submarine! How long ago?"

"About ten minutes. She was using her machine-gun."

"Why don't you provide your look-outs with spectacles?" answered Lawless wrathfully. "It was me you sighted, not a submarine!"

"I saw her periscope," answered the skipper of the *Cotswold*.

"Saw your grandmother! You opened fire on me and I replied."

"Then it was your business to hail me. Pity you haven't something better to do than take pot shots at passenger boats," answered the merchant skipper with some heat.

The latter was obviously in the wrong, but, as a matter of fact, during his voyage across the Atlantic he had been chased by two enemy submarines and only by skilful seamanship and unceasing vigilance had succeeded in eluding them and saving his ship. He was, therefore, a trifle "nervy" and apt to suspect every indistinguishable floating object he met of being a submarine. Possibly, seen dimly through the fog, the *Knat* looked something like a submarine awash and the captain of the *Cotswold* had been justified in opening fire on her. Lawless, however, was ignorant of this, and the skipper's last taunt made him almost dance with rage. Fortunately, perhaps, another fog bank rolled up at this moment and the two vessels were again hidden from each other.

For some moments Lawless growled to himself things which, had the captain of the *Cotswold* heard them, might have produced a resumption of hostilities. Suddenly he gave vent to an exclamation:

"I've got it!"

"Got what?" inquired Trent.

"An idea."

"Extraordinary phenomenon; I'll have to make a note of it in the log. 'Seven p.m. Commanding Officer seized——'"

"Don't try and be funny, it's too pathetic. What I'm going to do is to give that skipper the biggest shaking up he's ever had. If I don't get even with him you can call me Von Tirpitz and I'll turn the other cheek."

"It sounds exciting."

"You'll see," answered Lawless, and, leaving Trent in charge of the bridge, he disappeared down the companion ladder.

A few minutes later a sound of hammering reached the Sub-Lieutenant's ears, and this went on, at intervals, for nearly a quarter of an hour. Presently Lawless emerged upon the after-deck, followed by two seamen carrying a barrel with what looked like a piece of stove-pipe protruding from it.

"There," said Lawless, mounting the bridge again. "Isn't it a daisy?"

"What is it—a patent incubator?" inquired Trent.

"Pah! You've no imagination. That, my son, is an *idea*."

"H'm! I always thought your ideas were pretty heavy, but——"

"Shut up or I'll report you for insubordination."

"Sorry, but I don't quite follow the drift of this ponderous idea of yours."

"That's because yours is a stodgy, matter-of-fact, unromantic mind. But listen and I'll expound in words suitable to your infantine understanding. In the first place, I must tell you that one end of that barrel is weighted in such a manner that, when submerged in a suitable fluid, such as sea-water, it will float just below the surface. Secondly," continued Lawless, in the manner of one giving a lecture, "I would call your attention to a cylindrical object which, viewed at close range, somewhat resembles a drain-pipe. Nevertheless, my child, it is not a drain-pipe, but an invention of mine own constructed by the worthy artificer, yclept Bates. Lastly, a thin line of about six fathoms length, to the end of which is suspended a goodly lump of lead, is attached to the side of the said barrel."

Lawless stopped and waited for the applause.

"A very pretty conjuring trick," remarked Trent, as one humouring an amiable lunatic. "And what do you do now? Make it disappear up your sleeve or change it into a live rabbit?"

"Oh, you blithering ass!" exclaimed the Lieutenant impatiently. "Can't you see? This is the means I've devised for revenging myself on that wretched skipper."

"You're going to fill it with dynamite and explode it under his stern?"

"No, my child, I'm not. Instead, I'm going to fix that line to the stanchions against his rudder-post so that the steamer will tow this barrel, which, being weighted, will be submerged and show only the pipe in a vertical position above the surface. Furthermore, the worthy Bates having fashioned the top thereof in the likeness of a periscope, the victim will think he's being chased by an enemy submarine and have divers fits and spasms in consequence. Do you grasp the idea *now*?"

"It's pretty feeble, but I think I follow you," answered Trent. "Only you seem to

have forgotten one thing, which is that as soon as the fog lifts and the skipper spots your barrel he'll pot it with his quick-firer. Then we shall read a hair-raising account of how the captain of the *Cotswold* sank a *U* boat which had been following her all night."

"Not a bit of it, my son. They won't be able to hit that barrel in a month of Sundays, especially if we get a choppy sea by the morning."

Trent shrugged his shoulders, but made no further comment.

"And now," went on Lawless cheerfully, "it's time the plot thickened, so we'll proceed to drop the bean in the soup. Stand by the telegraph, for if we run our nose against the other fellow's counter the joke'll be on us."

He leant over the bridge-rail and peered through the fog for the steamer, but, though he could hear the latter's engines, the vessel herself was invisible. The manœuvre he proposed carrying out was, to put it mildly, risky, and no one but the feckless Lieutenant would have contemplated such a thing, much less have attempted to put it into execution. But no fear of possible consequences ruffled his serenity as, little by little, the *Knat* cautiously overhauled the *Cotswold*, the noise of whose machinery completely drowned the hum of the destroyer's turbines.

Some ten minutes elapsed, and then Lawless was able to make out the vessel's stern towering, dim and shadowy, above him. Then, taking the wheel from the hands of the quartermaster, he brought the *Knat's* bows right under the steamer's counter.

"Let her go," he said in a hoarse whisper.

The bos'n, who was balancing himself on the companion-ladder, sprang to the deck and, picking up the line attached to the barrel, ran with it on to the fo'c'sle head. Leaning as far over as he could he pitched the lump of lead, to which the other end of the line was fastened, against the *Cotswold's* stern-post in such a manner that it would fall over one of the iron supports extending from beneath the counter to the rudder-post. There was, of course, the danger of its being caught in the propellers, but he had to risk that. As it happened, the cast was successful, whereupon the bos'n called softly to a sailor, who at once flung the barrel into the sea, together with the slack line.

"All clear, sir," the bos'n reported to Lawless.

The latter rang down "half-speed astern," the *Knat* backed away into the fog, and the steamer was blotted out.

"There," murmured the Lieutenant, with a sigh of satisfaction, "when the skipper spots that in his wake he'll have about fifty fits right away. Now we'd better try and get back on our beat."

The *Knat* was supposed to be searching a certain prescribed area for an enemy mine-sower which had been active for several days past in this particular portion of the North Sea. Lawless, so far, had not had any luck; a fact which made him all the keener to meet with the enemy ship before she succeeded in getting safely back to port.

"I'm going below for a spell," he said to Trent. "Call me if anything happens."

About a couple of hours later, the Lieutenant was awakened by a bridge-messenger, who told him the fog was lifting and that a vessel had just been sighted.

"Looks to be the packet we picked up a little while back, sir," he said.

Lawless proceeded to the bridge and, catching sight of the steamer dimly visible ahead, chuckled softly.

"The fun'll start before long," he remarked to Trent. "Oh, to see the old man's face when the officer of the watch reports a submarine astern!"

"I've calculated that your precious joke's taken us about four miles out of our course," answered the junior officer gloomily.

"You'll meet with an early death, like all good young people, if you're not careful," retorted Lawless. "Virtue has its disadvantages remember."

A mild breeze had sprung up and was dissipating the fog rapidly while churning the water into cat's paws. Presently Trent, who had been watching the steamer through the night glasses, thrust them into the Lieutenant's hands.

"Take a squint at that packet," he said in a tone of suppressed excitement.

Lawless did so, and remained staring at the vessel ahead for such a long time that Trent became impatient.

"Well, what do you make of her?" he asked.

"She's not the *Cotswold*."

"No; and why is she steaming without lights?"

"We'll soon see," answered Lawless, and rang down full speed ahead.

In a few minutes the destroyer was broadside on to the strange vessel and Lawless shouted a demand to know what ship she was. A pause ensued, and then, by way of an answer, a tongue of flame leapt from the stranger's port side and a shell crashed into the *Knat's* funnel, just abaft the bridge. In a second the destroyer had swung round so as to present only her bows to the enemy and her machine-guns were hammering away as fast as they could be loaded. The duel lasted nearly ten minutes, the *Knat* trying to manœuvre into such a position that she could torpedo her adversary, the latter doing her utmost to frustrate this design. And all this time the two vessels were pounding away at each other with their machine-guns, circling around like two wrestlers before they come to grips. The enemy had the advantage in guns, which were far heavier than those carried by the destroyer, but the latter made up for this in speed and, being so small, proved an extraordinarily difficult target to hit.

At last Lawless saw his chance to launch a torpedo and gave the word. The glistening, fish-like weapon leapt from its tube and, at the same moment, the enemy vessel started to swing round in order to avoid the fast approaching engine of death. But the manœuvre had been carried out too late; the torpedo struck her just underneath the stern and there was a terrific explosion. The steamer heeled over on her starboard side, her bows lifted above the water, and then, with a roar of escaping steam, she dived stern foremost beneath the surface, and so to the bottom, fifty fathoms deep or more.

The *Knat's* boats had been launched immediately after the mine-sower was struck, and they at once proceeded to the spot where she had disappeared. But so swift had been the steamer's fate that not more than half a dozen survivors were picked up and, after pulling around for a while, the boats returned to the *Knat*.

Early in the afternoon of the following day the *Knat* put into Hull, and Lawless, having handed over his prisoners and written an official report of the engagement, went ashore with Trent.

"By the way," said the latter, as they made their way towards a certain hostelry much favoured by naval and merchant service officers, "did you notice the *Cotswold* moored just off the landing stage?"

"No, I was below making out my report."

His face expanded into a broad grin.

"Then the chances are ten to one that we meet her skipper before the day's out. And if I don't pull his blessed leg you can strafe me for a Hun."

As it happened they did meet this particular skipper, and in the very hostelry to which they were bound. He was in the smoking-room and, of course, did not recognise Lawless when he and Trent entered because, on the occasion of their exchanging courtesies, it had been too dark and foggy for either of them to identify the other. The Lieutenant, however, knew him at once by his voice, which was of a peculiarly hoarse quality.

"It's a fact," he was saying to a small group of interested auditors, "that infernal *U* boat was no farther from my stern than I am from that piano yonder. Well, I started steering a zig-zag course, at the same time opening fire on the submarine with my machine-gun. One of the first shots knocked her periscope to smithereens and then——"

He was interrupted by a burst of laughter, and, turning round, the narrator of this thrilling episode beheld a couple of officers almost doubled up with mirth.

"Oh, tell us some more, skipper!" cried Lawless, as soon as he could speak.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the other, his face scarlet with indignation.

"Then we'll say no more about it," answered the Lieutenant. "But surely you remember me? We met in the fog last night."

"What! Are you the blackguard who fired on me?"

"Well, you started shooting first, remember. But about that submarine yarn of yours, it's such a good one that I really haven't the heart to spoil it; so, if you'll stand drinks round, mum's the word as far as I'm concerned."

"Will you be good enough to tell me what the devil you're driving at?" inquired the skipper, glaring fiercely at Lawless.

"Then you won't accept my offer?"

"Sir, I'll see you in Hades first."

"Very well then, here goes," and Lawless proceeded to recount the trick he had

played on the skipper with the aid of a barrel and a tin cylinder. He was interrupted several times by bursts of uproarious mirth from the audience, but the victim himself neither smiled nor uttered a word until the Lieutenant had finished his story.

Then he spoke.

"So you claim that I haven't sunk an enemy submarine at all?" he asked, turning to Lawless.

"I'll wager a month's salary to a pinch of snuff that you never even saw one from the time we parted till you reached port."

"I accept the wager," answered the skipper, to everybody's surprise. "You see," he went on, addressing the company generally, "one reason why I collared that *U* boat so easily was that something fouled her propeller and she could neither get away nor attack me. This morning, when we put in here, the bos'n found a length of rope with a piece of lead attached, fastened to the vessel's stern. How the deuce it got there we couldn't make out, but now, thanks to this gentleman, we know. What's more, it must have been that rope and the old barrel at the end of it which fouled the German's propeller and did him in. As for proof"—he turned to an elderly gentleman seated in a corner—"there is Captain Barter, who took charge of the prisoners when they were landed, and he can tell you whether my story's true or not."

All eyes were turned inquiringly upon the unobtrusive gentleman with the four gold rings round his sleeves.

"Yes," he said quietly, "it's perfectly true. The three German officers of the submarine are now on their way to Donnington Hall and the men are in the temporary prison hulk moored up the river."

Before he returned to the *Knat* Lawless gloomily wrote a "chit" wherein he assigned to the skipper of the *Cotswold* his entire salary for the ensuing month.

CHAPTER VI

PRISONER OF WAR

One bright and cheerful summer morning Lawless sat in his favourite attitude on the bridge-rail of the *Knat* contemplating the distant coast-line with a far-away expression in his eyes. Despite the official regulations concerning the uniform to be worn by naval officers when on duty, his present attire left much to be desired. It consisted chiefly of blue serge trousers, a battered shooting cap, and a pink-striped pyjama jacket.

"I wonder," murmured the Lieutenant dreamily, "whether I could get short leave of absence. I'm just spoiling for a spell ashore and a mild bust-up."

Sub-Lieutenant Trent, who was standing near, volunteered no comment.

"I haven't been feeling very well lately," continued Lawless, "and I think I need a change."

"Rot!" ejaculated Trent rudely. "I never saw a man look in better health in my life. You're as fit as a fiddle."

Lawless slowly shook his head.

"I've been suffering from internal pains," he said gloomily. "Very likely you haven't noticed, but it's a fact all the same."

"Internal humbug," grumbled the unsympathetic junior. "And if you have," he added, "what can you expect after eating tinned lobster, Welsh rarebit, and cold pork for supper?"

"That," replied Lawless decisively, "wouldn't upset an infant. No, I shall put in an application for sick leave."

That same afternoon Lawless sat down in his little cabin and prepared to concoct a letter setting forth his ailments and the imperative necessity for a holiday in consequence. It took about two hours and a tremendous expenditure of ink and paper to write, and when finished was calculated to impress the reader with the belief that the unfortunate officer was suffering from every fatal malady known

to medical science. He had just concluded this literary effort and was re-reading it carefully in order to dot the i's, cross the t's, and make needed repairs to the spelling, when the door opened and Trent's head appeared in the aperture.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "still at it?"

"Do you spell 'conscious' with a *t*?" asked Lawless, ignoring the ironic inquiry.

"No, you ass, of course not."

"I'm afraid it's a bit smudgy," observed the author as he folded up the letter, "but I've explained that it was written in a choppy sea."

"When they look at the spelling I expect they'll think it was written in a hurricane," said the junior officer grimly.

Lawless took no notice of the jibe.

"That's done," he murmured with a sigh of relief. "If there's such a thing as humanity in the world, I shall get my leave."

For the first few days after the despatch of the epistle Lawless alternated between hope and despondency, but when a week passed and he received no reply, he made up his mind that the authorities had declined to consider his application. However, ten days later, when he was breakfasting with Trent, there arrived an official letter with the Admiralty stamp upon it.

"It's come!" cried the Lieutenant after he had hurriedly glanced through the contents. "I knew it would."

Trent's reply was such as no respectable printer would set up in type. He had been in the act of raising a cup of coffee to his lips when Lawless gave vent to his exultant shout, and it had so startled the Sub-Lieutenant that he let fall the cup and received the boiling contents down the front of his clothes.

"Why don't you look cheerful?" demanded Lawless. "What's a little coffee at a time like this?"

"Go to the devil!" retorted the other, vainly endeavouring to sop up the coffee from his waistcoat with a silk handkerchief. "It's your holiday, not mine. And, any way, you've got it under false pretences."

"Sub-Lieutenant Trent, are you aware of the fact that you're speaking

disrespectfully to your superior officer?" asked Lawless in a gently chiding tone.

"Holy Jerusalem!" suddenly yelled Trent, springing to his feet. He had just discovered from an abrupt rise in temperature about his person that the coffee had soaked through his shirt.

"I've a good mind to report you for insubordination and—and cheek," observed the Lieutenant, taking no pains to conceal his enjoyment of the other's misfortune.

"And I'll sue you for a new suit of duds, Lawless, you dismal idiot. It's all through you that I'm soaked to the skin with this confounded coffee."

A week later Lieutenant-Commander Lawless, bound for Cork *via* Plymouth, was reclining at his ease in the comfortable little smoking-room of the *Lake Killarney*, one of the miniature liners which carry passengers to and from Ireland. Lawless had decided to spend his holiday on the west coast of the Emerald Isle, and had provided himself with golf clubs, fishing rods, and other implements of innocent sport wherewith to while away his leisure. The only thing which troubled him was his customary want of cash, and when he thought of the thousand pounds waiting to be earned, he heaved a sigh of deep regret. If only he could have brought down another Zeppelin....

Now, Lawless, as those who have followed his turbulent career are aware, was one of those hapless individuals who seem to be marked out as the sport of destiny. On this particular occasion the mischievous planet under which the Lieutenant had first seen the light must have twinkled with more than its usual malignity, for, within twelve hours of setting forth on his pleasure trip, he was a prisoner in the hands of the Germans.

It came about in this manner. The *Lake Killarney* had barely left the Seven Stones Light on her port quarter when, not more than fifty yards away on her starboard bow, there arose the conning tower of a large German submarine. Before the captain of the steamer was aware of this unwelcome visitor the latter had sent a couple of shots across his bows as a peremptory signal to stop. The *Lake Killarney*, being a slow boat and unarmed withal, there was nothing for it but to obey, and accordingly she was hove-to.

The shots had awakened Lawless, at the time peacefully asleep in his bunk, and scrambling into his trousers he rushed upon deck to see what all the noise was about. Other passengers, in even lighter attire, also hastened on deck, where the

crew, in obedience to orders, were lowering the lifeboats. Lawless at once proceeded to help the women and children into them, and then, with the captain, got into the last one to leave the ship. As the boat pulled away from the *Lake Killarney* the German commander ordered her to come alongside the submarine; an order which, in view of the machine-gun on her for'a'd platform, it would have been unwise to ignore. Then the German officer proceeded to put the Captain through a pretty severe cross-examination concerning the whereabouts of various portions of the British Fleet and other matters which he desired to know. The Captain, however, was able to profess ignorance in nearly every case, and where he could not, lied like a Trojan.

"We've been trying to get at your wonderful fleet for the last eighteen months," said the German, "but it's managed to elude us so far. Still, we'll drag it out of its hiding place before long, and then *Guten Tag* to the British Navy."

"What's the good of unloading that piffling swank," exclaimed Lawless, unable to contain himself any longer. "We taught you a lesson at Heligoland, and when we do meet your High Canal Fleet there'll be another island in the North Sea—made of German scrap-iron."

"*Himmel!* I'll put a bullet through you, insolent English pig!" cried the German, at the same time producing an automatic pistol. "Who is this man?" he added, turning to the Captain.

"Lieut.-Commander Lawless, I believe," answered the latter unthinkingly.

"Ah, I have heard of you, Herr Lieutenant," said the German. "As a British Naval officer I shall take you prisoner. Be good enough to step aboard."

"You've done for me, skipper," said Lawless bitterly as he mounted the submarine's platform.

The Captain of the *Lake Killarney* realised his mistake only too well, but the mischief was done now.

"Cast off," said the Commander, "I am going to sink your vessel."

Half-a-dozen shots beneath the water-line sufficed to sink the steamer, and then the commander, with Lawless and the men on the gun platform, went below, the conning-tower hatch was closed and the boat dived beneath the surface.

Two days later Lawless was taken ashore at a certain German port under an

armed escort. He was domiciled temporarily in the local prison, and on the following morning an escort took him to another part of the building and ushered him into a sort of office where various uniformed individuals were gathered. There a careful record was made of his name, professional rank, place of birth, and many other private details of his life and habits. Then he was photographed.

This done, a sergeant stepped forward and, gripping the prisoner by the shoulders, began, with the assistance of a private, to feel in his trouser pockets. At this the Lieutenant's patience vanished and, before the sergeant had time to guess what was coming, he had been pitched head first into a large wastepaper basket and the private had taken a header into the coal scuttle. But before Lawless could perform any further athletic feats, he was seized by three soldiers and forced against the wall.

Then the search recommenced, and various articles, including a note from a tailor threatening legal proceedings unless he received a "remittance forthwith," were brought to light.

"Ach, what is this?" asked an officer looking at a crumpled piece of paper which the sergeant had handed to him with an air of triumph.

He carefully smoothed it out, and then, exhibiting it to the prisoner, repeated the question.

Lawless glanced at it, and then, despite the gravity of his position, burst into a hearty laugh, whereat the officer, the sergeant and the privates all scowled at him reprovingly. On one side of the paper were scrawled the following incriminating words:

"Conshus,
Contitious,
Concious."

On the other side were a number of strange-looking figures bearing some resemblance to a capital L.

"Why," said Lawless when he had recovered from his hilarity, "I was trying some days ago to spell 'conscious' and, not being quite sure about it, wrote it down different ways to see which looked right. Of course," he added confidently, "it was the last one."

"And these?" queried the officer, pointing to the straggling hieroglyphics.

"Oh, I was uncertain how to write a capital *q*—I don't often write that letter as a capital—and I experimented. Those are the experiments."

"They are a secret code," said the officer accusingly.

"Secret fiddlesticks!" ejaculated Lawless.

"You refuse to decipher it?"

"Confound it all, there's nothing to decipher."

"Very well," said the officer, making a note in a little book. He then waved his hand to indicate that the examination was at an end, and a couple of soldiers, with side-arms drawn, marched the prisoner back to the little room he occupied in the prison and there left him.

On the following morning he was again brought before his examiner and again declared that the scribble had nothing to do with any code.

"You will be sent to the fortress of Glatz," said the officer.

Now, Lawless had heard quite enough about that terrible fortress in Prussian Silesia to make it, in his opinion, a most undesirable residence, and he determined to make a bold effort at escape before he got there. Unhappily, there was no prospect of his getting the ghost of a chance to escape, for he was conducted to the railway station in charge of two privates, a corporal, and a commissioned officer. For some reason they did not travel by the direct route *via* Frankfurt, but went a roundabout way through Stettin, Damm and Posen. At the

last-named station they had to change trains and Lawless hoped for an opportunity to escape, but his guards never relaxed their vigilance and it was useless to try.

While they were standing on the platform waiting for the train, the Lieutenant caught sight of a man whose face seemed familiar to him. But for the life of him he could not recall where or when he had seen the owner of the face, though he cudgelled his brains all the way to Breslau. It was dark when they reached this town, and here they had to change into a local train for Glatz. Suddenly, while crossing a bridge to another platform, Lawless again caught sight of the strangely familiar face among the crowd of people hurrying to catch the train. It disappeared from view almost immediately, but a moment later the Lieutenant heard a voice whisper in his ear:

"Take your chance and follow me."

Lawless turned his head sharply and saw that the speaker was none other than the man whose face had been haunting him.

It was all very well to say "take your chance" but, so far as Lawless could see, there was no chance to take. Then suddenly there was a commotion among the people in front of him, a wild scramble as if someone had dropped a purse and everybody was fighting to obtain it. Both the prisoner and his guards were almost swept off their feet and then Lawless took his chance. Diving down, he simply butted a way through the mob, thanking his stars that he had once been centre forward in a county football team. At the end of the bridge he caught sight of his unknown friend descending the stairs and followed him as quickly as he could. Behind him he could hear the shouts of his guards and the angry expostulations of the people whom they were thrusting aside in their endeavour to catch the runaway. Fortunately he was wearing a civilian great-coat—one given him when he had been brought ashore from the submarine—and so there was nothing in his appearance to distinguish him from the other people with whom he mingled.

The man he was following passed through a door leading from the platform and Lawless, entering after him, found himself in a small office, evidently used by some of the railway officials. The stranger locked the door and then faced the Lieutenant.

"So we meet again," he said. "Last time it was in mid-ocean and now——" he shrugged his shoulders.

In a flash, Lawless remembered who the man was. He was the German-American spy who, with Cassidy's assistance, he had rescued from the torpedoed *Nimrod* and afterwards unwittingly allowed to escape with a loan of five pounds.

"You saved my life and gave me my liberty," went on the man, "though had you known who I was the result might have been different. However, the fact remains and now I am going to do my best to repay the debt. I——"

He was interrupted by a knocking at the door and voices without shouted something Lawless could not understand. His rescuer replied, the knocking ceased and he turned once more to the Lieutenant.

"That has put them off the track for a little while, at any rate," he said. "Now you see that window? Well, outside it is a large siding for goods trains. One is loading now for Stettin, and, if you are careful—and lucky—you can creep under a tarpaulin on one of the trucks and remain there till the train reaches its destination. There your real difficulties will begin, for you'll have to smuggle yourself aboard a Norwegian or Swedish steamer and get to a neutral port. I have done as much as lies in my power."

Lawless abruptly held out his hand.

"You're a white man," he said. "By Jove, I never expected it from a Hun!"

"And now you must get off before those fellows come buzzing round here again." He crossed to the window and opened it. "There's your road," he said, and at the same time pressed a wad of paper money into the Lieutenant's hand.

Lawless climbed over the sill and dropped gently to the ground, only a few feet below. Then the window above him was closed and he started to creep along under the shadow of the wall, for the yard was lit up by electric arc lamps. Then a new dilemma faced him. Instead of one goods train there were three, and, of course, he had no means of finding out which of them was bound for Stettin.

"Well, here goes," he murmured desperately, and selected the longest train as the one most likely to be bound for the Baltic port.

So, creeping under trucks, stealthily crossing lines and avoiding all brightly illuminated spots, he at last reached the train he had selected without attracting the attention of the workpeople, many of whom were women. Climbing into a truck, he drew the tarpaulin over his head and settled down on the edge of a packing case.

"Any way, I'm not going to Glatz this trip," he thought.

He must have been crouching there for about half an hour and was beginning to drop off into an uneasy doze, when there was a terrific jolt and his head came into contact with a cask. Then, as the jolts continued, gradually becoming less violent, he knew that the train was starting on its journey.

From speculating as to his probable destination, Lawless gradually dropped off to sleep, and was only awakened by another series of jolts and jerks. Cautiously lifting his head from under the tarpaulin he saw that the train had come to a standstill on some sidings and that it was nearly daylight. Realising that if he did not want to be discovered there was no time to lose in getting away, he clambered out of the truck and slipped across the sidings to a low fence, over which he climbed.

"Now where the devil am I?" he muttered.

He was standing on a narrow footpath situated, apparently, on the outskirts of a town, the lights of which he could see in the distance. The air was chill and he shivered, becoming aware at the same time that he was ravenously hungry. Then, from a field about half a mile away, he saw a column of smoke rising, and noticed what seemed to be two or three caravans drawn up in line. It occurred to him that this must be the temporary encampment of some nomad family who, in all probability, were preparing their morning meal before proceeding on their way. The idea held him.

"I've got to raise some grub somehow," he told himself.

He carefully considered the matter, and came to the conclusion that he would stand less chance of being betrayed by such wanderers as these—almost outlaws themselves—than by more virtuous and respectable folk. He thereupon proceeded towards the encampment and, as he approached, an appetising smell assailed his nostrils and made him feel still hungrier. Vaulting over a hedge, Lawless came upon a very dirty but very picturesque ruffian, attired in the manner of a musical-comedy bandit, who was engaged in taking a captured rabbit from a wire noose. At sight of the stranger, he sprang to his feet, but Lawless made pacific gesticulations and intimated, by the simple means of pointing first to his mouth and then to his stomach, that he was hungry. Thereupon the bandit person grinned affably, and made a sign indicating that his new acquaintance was to follow him.

On arriving at the camp Lawless discovered that the aroma which had so tickled his nostrils emanated from a large iron pot suspended over the fire. Round this were several ragged children heaping on sticks, and near the caravans a group of men and women putting the finishing touches to an extremely primitive *toilette*. The Lieutenant's guide went up to them, and for some moments they all talked at once in an uncomprehensible jargon, at the same time casting inquisitive and half-suspicious glances at the uninvited guest.

Eventually they seemed to accept him, and, seating themselves round the fire, signed the Lieutenant to do the same. These people, as a matter of fact, were Silesian gipsies and hereditary foes to law and order, wherefore perhaps they felt a certain sympathy towards the dishevelled and hungry stranger who was almost as dirty as themselves.

A few moments later Lawless was eating ravenously of a savoury mess out of a tin plate with his fingers—knives and forks, apparently, were regarded by these people as among the superfluities of life. When he had eaten his fill Lawless speculated as to where he was. There was no sign of any docks or shipping, and he began to doubt whether he had reached Stettin after all. He decided to try, by means of signs and gesticulations, to make these people understand that he wanted to know where he was.

It proved a long, wearisome, and almost hopeless task, but at last he succeeded.

"Glatz," said the man upon whom he had been experimenting.

"Glatz!"

The man nodded.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Lawless under his breath.

He had contrived to escape from his guards, elude recapture, stow himself away on a train—only to find himself in the very place he had risked so much to avoid.

"Damn!" he remarked aloud.

Then, realising that it might be dangerous to hang about in the open fields, he rose to his feet. Possibly he might come across some empty barn or building where he could lie concealed till nightfall. At any rate, since he had made his escape at Breslau, it was there that the authorities would concentrate their

search; certainly they would not suspect that he had gone on to Glatz. And then the question arose, how was he to reach Stettin?

He put his hand in his pocket, pulled out the notes which his mysterious friend had given him and handed one to the gipsy. Its equivalent in English currency was a little less than a pound, and his benefactor stared in open-mouthed astonishment, first at the note and then at him. For a minute Lawless thought that he had unwittingly insulted the man, but he was wrong there; neither pride nor sensitiveness are among the failings of the Silesian gipsies. The man merely thought that his guest was a benevolent lunatic.

So, after shaking hands and exchanging grins all round, Lawless departed and, taking chance as his guide, hurried off in the opposite direction to the town, carefully avoiding all footpaths. At last he came to a deserted windmill and, going inside, prepared to wait there till it was dark enough to make further investigations.

Throughout the whole of the day, which seemed like an eternity, Lawless did not see a single soul, though he frequently surveyed the landscape through the numerous apertures in his hiding-place. Long before it became dark he grew hungry again, and cursed his want of forethought in not having demanded some bread and cheese in exchange for the note he had handed over. Eventually, pressed by his inward pangs, he stealthily crept out of the ruin, and, foraging in the immediate neighbourhood, discovered a field of turnips. He pulled up several and returned with them to the mill; they were better than nothing, after all.

At last twilight came, and following that the night, dark and starless. Then the Lieutenant emerged from his hiding-place, and, standing in the middle of the field, wondered what direction he should take. He had no compass, of course, and the country around was an uncharted sea to him. Presently he noticed in the far distance a bright light shining, and, for no particular reason, set off in that direction. As he advanced the light suddenly disappeared nor did it blaze out again during the rest of his tramp.

"Funny," he murmured. "It wasn't a searchlight, and it couldn't very well be a signal."

After about an hour's walk, he found himself near a large enclosure with a long shed in the centre surrounded by a number of small huts. Also he caught sight of a dim figure pacing mechanically to and fro some distance in front of him and outside the enclosure—obviously a sentry. At first he thought it must be a prison

encampment and was about to move stealthily away again, when the bright light which had first attracted his attention, suddenly lit up the enclosure. It came from a large arc-lamp suspended from a high wooden erection, and in the glare Lawless recognised the shed as an aeroplane hangar. Evidently, therefore, this was an aviation station, and the light served as a guide to the homeward bound machines. This view was confirmed a few moments later when there came the sound of a distant hum which gradually grew louder and more distinct.

Lawless, impelled more by curiosity than anything else, crawled nearer to the enclosure and took "cover" behind a pile of wooden stakes which were being used in the repairing of the palisades. The sentry had ceased his monotonous pacing to and fro, and now stood, resting on his rifle, looking skywards in the direction of the approaching aeroplane. At last it came into view, flying rather low, and then the pilot volplaned to the ground, alighting within the enclosure and bringing his machine to a standstill not twenty yards from the spot where the Lieutenant was concealed. The aviator sprang out, followed by the observer, and they both hurried towards one of the huts, leaving the machine where it stood.

It was at this moment that a brilliant idea occurred to Lawless. Why shouldn't he commandeer the machine and make his escape that way? With him, to think was to act, so, not waiting to weigh the chances, he crept from his hiding-place, darted across the grass while the sentry's back was towards him, and climbed into the machine. He started the engines, the machine began to move with increasing speed along the level, and then rose into the air. So far he did not appear to have attracted the attention of the sentry, who, not having seen him get into the aeroplane, no doubt supposed that the pilot was off on another flight. But, as the machine rose, Lawless caught sight of the pilot emerging from the hut; nothing happened for fully a minute and then he heard the crack of a rifle. By this time, however, he was out of danger, and, though a searchlight waved frantically skywards it never once focussed itself upon him.

The distance from Glatz to Stettin is about two hundred miles as the crow flies, and, with the aid of the chart and compass he found in the machine, Lawless hoped to steer a fairly accurate course. He knew that machines would set off in pursuit, but their pilots had first to find and then to overtake him—and he already possessed a pretty good start. His chief anxiety now was that the petrol supply would run out before Stettin was reached, for the gauges were running low.

About an hour later he passed over a brilliantly lighted town, which he took to be

Leignitz, and, later on, another one which, according to the chart, should be Frankfurt-on-Oder. Then, when he was close upon Stettin, the petrol began to give out and there was nothing for it but to come down—an extremely difficult task to accomplish safely on a dark night and in an unknown tract of country.

At last he thought he could see a stretch of land free from obstructions and, deciding to venture, he made a volplane downwards. But as ill-luck would have it the machine collided with a tree and, turning turtle, pitched the daring aviator out. His fall, however, was broken by the branches, and he scrambled to his feet little the worse except for a few bruises and scratches. On the ground, a few yards away, lay the aeroplane a hopeless wreck.

"Rather a pity," he murmured as he glanced at the débris, "but it was smashed in a good cause."

He was about to move away in order to seek some place of concealment—for a light streak in the eastern sky warned him of approaching dawn—when his foot struck something. Stooping down he saw that it was a leather wallet, and concluded it must have formed part of the aeroplane's equipment. Thinking it might contain a map of the surrounding country, he picked it up and stuffed it in his pocket.

It was barely light when, by devious routes, he reached the docks and saw, among other vessels, a small steamer flying the Danish flag. Thinking that money might be useful at this juncture, he put his hand in his pocket expecting to find the remaining notes. But, to his astonishment, they were not there, nor could he find them on any other part of his person. The only possible conclusion was, that the hospitable gipsy, to whom he had given one of the notes, had picked his pocket of the remainder almost immediately afterwards. However, it was no use worrying now, and he decided to chance his luck. He succeeded in boarding the Danish steamer without attracting attention, and at once sought an interview with the skipper. The latter, happily for him, had served in the British Mercantile Marine and was a pronounced anti-German, so it did not take very long to settle matters to the satisfaction of both parties. In due course, therefore, Lawless reached Copenhagen, where, by the good offices of the friendly skipper, he was transferred to another vessel bound for London.

It was just a week after his capture that Lawless landed at the wharf just below London Bridge. Though he looked and felt more like a tramp than an officer of the British Navy, he made straight for Whitehall and, after a short but sharp

altercation with some minor officials, found himself in the presence of a certain admiral whose name is anathema to the whole German nation.

With extreme brevity the Lieutenant described his adventures since his capture by the submarine, and then laid before the admiral the contents of the wallet which had fallen out of the wrecked aeroplane. To the uninitiated the papers Lawless produced would have been meaningless, but to the admiral they were of the utmost value, containing, as they did, secret information concerning the enemy's naval plans.

A few days later Lawless, who had been ordered to rejoin the *Knat* pending further instructions, received an official communication from the Admiralty.

"This," he said complacently as he opened the envelope, "means promotion."

The letter, after the usual coldly-polite preliminaries, went on as follows:

"The Admiralty desire to commend Lieut.-Commander Lawless for having obtained the information duly placed before them. They cannot, however, grant any extension of leave under present conditions. Enclosed is a cheque for three shillings and sixpence (3s. 6d.), being the sum expended by him on victuals while in possession of the information above referred to, and, therefore, on Government service."

"Well, if that doesn't absolutely take the bun!" ejaculated Lawless, and passed the epistle on to Trent.

"H'm!" grunted the latter when he had perused it.

"They're not even going to make good the kit I lost when the *Lake Killarney* went down!"

"Still," said the sub-lieutenant, "virtue is its own reward, you know."

"Damn," said Lawless, and pitched the missive through the open port hole.

CHAPTER VII

THE RIDING LIGHT

The manners and customs of the Powers that Be may puzzle the ordinary man, but those whose duty it is to serve the said Powers know that their inconsistency is consistent—which is really not such a paradox as it sounds. Because of this and of the water-tight compartments into which the administrative body is divided, a number of destroyers was patrolling Irish waters at the same time that the High Olympians were, to all appearances, blandly unconscious of the German intrigue with certain Irish malcontents. Among this flotilla was the *Knat*, and her orders were to keep a sharp look-out for gun-runners, who, if rumour did not lie, were extremely busy about this time.

Nevertheless, although Lawless had been on duty for over a fortnight, not the ghost of a gun-runner had he, or any of his crew, seen, and the monotony of the work was becoming extremely irksome to all. One afternoon Lawless left Sub-Lieutenant Trent in charge of the bridge, and, going below, solaced himself with music and song till the bass string of his banjo snapped. It was at this moment that a bridge-messenger appeared with a "Beg parding, sir, but you're wanted on the bridge."

With a sigh of resignation, the Lieutenant flung his banjo on the settee and made his way to the bridge.

"Thought you'd like to have a squint at that Norwegian packet over there," said Trent, indicating a cargo steamer some distance off on the port bow with the Norwegian colours painted conspicuously on her hull amidships.

Lawless picked up the glasses and examined the approaching vessel.

"Signal her to stop," he said. "I'll board her myself and have a peep round; it'll be something to do."

The signal was made and the steamer immediately hove-to. Then a boat was lowered from the *Knat*, and, with Lawless in the stern-sheets, pulled towards the stranger.

"What ship are you?" called out the Lieutenant, as the boat came alongside.

"*Krajero*, Boston for Stavanger, with wheat," answered the officer on the bridge.

"I'm going to board you," said Lawless, whereupon the skipper of the *Krajero* obligingly lowered an accommodation-ladder over the side for the convenience of his visitor.

Upon examination, the ship's papers proved to be in order, but Lawless, determined to leave nothing to chance, ordered the hatch-covers to be removed. The captain complied, and the Lieutenant was permitted to look into the holds, both of which had loose grain up to the combings.

"You can proceed, Captain," said Lawless.

"Tanks, ver goot," answered the skipper, and, as soon as the Lieutenant had regained his boat, resumed his course.

"Nothin' doing," said Lawless, when he returned to the *Knat*. "Business is dull, Trent."

The junior officer agreed. He had hoped that the Norwegian might prove to be a gun-runner or a disguised German commerce destroyer, or anything, in fact, that might have afforded a little excitement and a chance for a run ashore.

"I s'pose we'll just keep on footling about here till the blooming war's over," he growled. "Then someone'll wake up suddenly and discover that there's an obsolete destroyer with a crew of greybeards beating about the Irish coast."

But he was wrong there, as events soon proved. A couple of hours after Lawless had boarded the Norwegian steamer, a wireless message was received from the Captain of the cruiser-scout, *Trojon*, inquiring if a vessel called the *Krajero* had been sighted.

"Tell him 'yes,' and that, after examining her papers and cargo, I allowed her to proceed," said Lawless to the operator.

The message was duly transmitted, and a few minutes later a reply came:

"Captain of *Trojon* to Commander of *Knat*. Have stopped steamer *Krajero*, and, on examination, found that beneath her cargo of grain was a large number of mines, which she intended sowing in the Channel."

"Well, I'm damned!" ejaculated Lawless when he had read the message.

"No promotion this trip," commented Trent grimly.

Lawless, who was almost dancing with rage, tore the paper into shreds and cast them to the four winds of heaven.

"It'll be the talk of the Fleet!" he cried. "Every mother's son from the stokers to the Admiral will be sniggering over it, curse them. It shan't happen again, though! I'll search every boat I meet, from a dinghy to a liner. Lord, to think I've been bamboozled by a swab of a make-believe Norwegian skipper with a six-inch grin across his mug!"

He continued in the same strain for some time, vowing vengeance on all skippers who should henceforth attempt to deceive him in any manner whatsoever. Trent had much ado to keep from laughing, but as he was of a smaller stature than Lawless he deemed it safer to maintain a serious aspect.

But worse was to follow. Other ships had picked up the *Trojon's* message, and their captains took advantage of this to send ironic messages of congratulation to the luckless commander of the *Knat*. For some time the wireless operator was kept busy receiving and transcribing such messages as:

"Well done, *Knat*!"

"Is it true that you've been promoted?"

"What is the difference between a bushel of wheat and a contact-mine, and if not why not?"

At last Lawless could stand it no longer and, almost foaming at the mouth, hurried to the operator's room.

"Look here!" he shouted, "if you take down any more of those infernal messages I'll have you put in irons. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," answered the operator meekly.

The Lieutenant savagely stamped down the little iron ladder and gazed wrathfully around to see if any of the men had the suspicion of a grin on his face. But the men's countenances were almost preternaturally serious as they busied themselves with little odd jobs about the deck.

"What's the matter with the men, bos'n?" he growled. "They look like a company of funeral mutes."

"Oh, they're quite cheerful, sir," answered the bos'n apologetically. "I think the weather's a bit oppressive, sir."

Lawless went back to his cabin and found Trent on the settee, doubled up with laughter.

"Hullo, what's the matter with you?" he snapped.

"Read this," answered the Sub-Lieutenant, handing him a piece of paper; "it came just as you went on deck."

Lawless took the paper and read:

"*Kite to Knat*. When is a mine most to be feared? Answer: when it goes against the grain."

"Trent, I'll——," began the victim, but the junior officer had bolted on deck before the threat was finished.

To complete the Lieutenant's discomfiture, a message was received that night from the officer commanding the flotilla censuring Lawless for allowing the *Krajero* to proceed on her way without having thoroughly overhauled her cargo.

"That puts the lid on it," groaned the unhappy Lieutenant as he turned-in to try and forget his sorrows in sleep.

The result of all this was that, during the next few days, Lawless became the best-hated man in those waters. Not a ship came within sight but she was stopped and her cargo examined with irritating minuteness while the skipper stood by, helpless, but vowing to deluge the Admiralty with complaints. In his zeal Lawless as good as accused quite innocent passengers of being disguised Germans, much to the indignation of the parties concerned, who promised that the authorities should hear about his "unwarrantable officiousness and insulting behaviour," with much more to the same effect. And the worst of it was that he never once came across a trace of contraband for all his trouble.

But one evening, about a week after the *Krajero* episode, something did occur to break the monotony of searching harmless vessels and listening to the deep-throated profanities of outraged skippers. Lawless, being on the bridge scanning

the horizon with his glasses, caught sight of a large motor fishing smack in the distance and, close alongside her, something which looked remarkably like the conning tower of a submarine. In another moment he had altered the course and was bearing down on her at full speed, the men standing by their guns, delighted at the prospect of a "scrap."

"It's a *U* boat sure enough," said Lawless, handing the binoculars to Trent.

"Yes, and she's holding up that fishing boat; trying to get information, I suppose."

Unfortunately, the submarine was well under the lee of the smack, and a shot at that distance was as likely to hit one as the other.

"Better hold your fire till you get a bit nearer, Trent," said Lawless reluctantly.

As the distance lessened, a puff of smoke issued from the vicinity of the submarine and a shell whistled over the *Knat's* bridge.

"Plant one in her conning tower," shouted Lawless to the chief gunner, who stood by the quick-firer just below the bridge. If the smack were hit it couldn't be helped; the risk must be taken.

There was a deafening report and, when the smoke cleared away the submarine had entirely disappeared. The inference was that she had submerged without suffering injury, for had the shot struck her she would certainly not have sunk as rapidly as all that.

"She's given us the slip all right," muttered the Lieutenant bitterly, and the gunner below the bridge echoed his remark in more pungent terms.

As the destroyer came up, a man on the smack's deck—obviously the skipper—hailed her.

"Can ye give us a tow?" he shouted.

"Cast a line aboard as we pass you," answered Lawless, for he knew better than to stop and parley while an enemy submarine was around waiting for a chance to discharge a torpedo.

Accordingly, a line attached to a towing rope was thrown from the smack to the destroyer as the latter surged past, and a minute or two later the fishing boat was heeling along in her wake. The skipper, standing in the bows, yelled the

information that he had been held up by the submarine while trying to repair a defect in his engines. The *U* boat commander, after seizing his small stock of petrol, was questioning him concerning the whereabouts of a British cruiser known to be in these waters, when the *Knat* appeared. At sight of her the German officer jumped back on board his boat and, after firing one shot, closed the conning tower hatch. He, the skipper of the smack, could not say whether the destroyer's shot had taken effect, but was inclined to think that it had not.

With the derelict boat still in tow, Lawless put into the harbour of a small fishing village between Clonakilty and Castle-townsend, just as it was getting dark. There the tow rope was cast off and the skipper was told to come aboard the *Knat* as soon as he had dropped anchor some thirty yards or so distant.

The order having been carried out, the skipper duly came aboard and was invited into the cabin. Here he proceeded to give a fuller version of his encounter with the submarine. The German commander, he said, had given him and his crew three minutes in which to leave the smack, and they were about to get their boat out when the *Knat* arrived on the scene and saved the situation.

"Well, skipper, you'd better stay and have some dinner with us," said Lawless, when the skipper had finished his story.

"'Tis meself that'll be delighted to do that same, ye'r honour," answered the fisherman—an elderly man with twinkling grey eyes.

He proved to be a most interesting, if somewhat unpolished, guest, and kept the two officers in an almost continual state of mirth with his quaint anecdotes and stories. Not only that, but he was amazingly frank and cheerfully confessed that, in the early days of the National Volunteer movement, he had been profitably engaged in smuggling arms into Munster.

"And now?" queried Lawless.

The old man shook his head knowingly.

"Shure, you fellows have spoilt the game entoirely," he answered. "The risk is too great and, be the same token, I'm getting too old for that business."

"But you know something about it," suggested the Lieutenant.

The skipper winked.

"Now look here," went on Lawless, "I don't ask you to betray your friends, but just give me a hint—you understand?—and if it leads to anything I'll see that you lose nothing by it."

"Is it afther timpting me ye'd be, sorr?" asked the skipper with seeming indignation.

"I'm merely suggesting you should give me a hint."

"An' phwat 'ud become of me if the bhoys got wind of it, will ye tell me?"

"There's no reason why they should. You may be sure I shall never breathe a word."

After a few moments' reflection the skipper looked cautiously round the cabin and then leant over the table to Lawless.

"Have ye iver heard tell av Mike Mahoney, sorr?" he asked in a whisper.

"Rather! He's supposed to be the cleverest gun-runner in the south of Ireland."

"Ye may say so, an' he's a black-hearted son av Satan; he is that. He's owed me three pounds since St. Patrick's Day two years gone, and it's meself that's niver loikely to see the colour av it. Now I'd be glad to have ye take a rise out of that blackguard."

"Tell me where he's to be found."

"Has ye'r honour heard tell av a little fishing village be the name av Ballyoon betwixt here and Mizzen Head?"

"No, but I'll soon find it."

"Then it's there that Mahoney—may the divil get his sowl—has his headquarters. Many's the noight that he's crept up past Sherkin Island an' into Roaringwather Bay wid a cargo of rifles and ammunition."

"Then it's his regular port of call, so to speak?"

"Indade it is. Divil a wan, save the bhoys, suspect it, least av all the Rivinue people, and it's a nice little fortune Mike's been piling up for himself, so it is. More'n wance he's said to me, 'Pat Rossan,' he's said, 'ye're an old hand at the game. Phwy don't ye jine in wid me and the rist av the bhoys?' But I'm too old for that now, as I tould him, and I don't want to ind me days wid me back against

a wall."

"Thanks very much, Mr. Rossan," said Lawless. "I'll see that you lose nothing by this."

"Indade I shall be glad av any little hilp ye can give me, sorr, for phwat wid submarines and restrictions there's moighty little profit to be got out of the fishing these days."

As the skipper was about to leave, Trent drew Lawless aside.

"I'd keep an eye on that old buffer if I were you," he whispered. "Ten to one he'll try to creep out to-night and warn this same Mike Mahoney."

"Good idea," answered the Lieutenant, and turned to his visitor.

"I must ask you to hoist a riding-light when you get aboard your hooker, Mr. Rossan, and keep it burning all night," he said.

"To be sure if ye'r honour wishes it," replied the skipper, and then, after shaking hands with both officers, slipped into his dinghy alongside and pulled back to his smack.

As soon as he had gone Lawless gave orders that a constant watch was to be kept on the smack's riding-light throughout the night. If it was extinguished or was seen to move towards the harbour mouth the fact was to be reported to him immediately.

It was between three and four o'clock on the following morning when the Lieutenant was wakened from a sound sleep by Trent.

"Hullo, what's the row?" he asked, drowsily.

"That blessed smack has skedaddled during the night."

"What!" ejaculated the Lieutenant, now fully awake.

"It's a fact."

Lawless sprang out of his bunk and began hurriedly to pull on his garments.

"I gave strict orders that she was to be watched all night," he said. "How is it they've been disobeyed?"

"They haven't; come on deck and see for yourself," answered Trent.

On reaching the deck Lawless saw at a glance how he had been outwitted. On the spot where the smack had been anchored floated a barrel with a tall spar stuck in it and, at the top of this, glowing dimly in the morning light, was a lantern.

"I see," he murmured.

Taking advantage of the darkness—for there had been no moon—the skipper of the smack had fixed up this dummy riding-light in order to deceive the watchers aboard the destroyer and then extinguished the real one. This done, he must have got a row-boat with muffled oars to tow him out of the harbour, thus obviating the necessity for using the engines and so warning the *Knat's* men of his manœuvres. It was an ingenious trick, cleverly carried out.

"We must get under way at once," said Lawless. "We may catch up with the rascal and collar his pal Mahoney before he has time to warn him. Evidently that's his dodge."

Half an hour later the *Knat* was steaming in a westerly direction with the Lieutenant on the bridge, scanning the coast-line through his glasses. Presently a smudge was seen against the horizon and this gradually resolved itself into a destroyer steaming at full speed towards them. As she approached the *Knat* a signal hoist broke at her masthead, and when within hailing distance the two vessels slowed down. The newcomer was the *Kite* and her commander stood on the bridge with a megaphone in his hands.

"D'you happen to have sighted a fishing smack, ketch-rigged?" he inquired.

"Seen a whole fleet of them," answered Lawless.

"The one I'm after had her number painted out and when last seen was using a brown mainsail and a staysail half brown and half white."

"Phew!" whistled Trent softly and added in a whisper to Lawless, "it's the hooker that slipped her cable last night."

The Lieutenant nodded.

"What about her?" he asked, addressing the commander of the *Kite*.

"Why she's a gun-runner skippered by a ruffian called Mike Mahoney. We've

just learnt that she took on a cargo of guns and ammunition from a German submarine yesterday and landed them early this morning in some creek near Galley Head."

"And got clear away?" asked Lawless in well-simulated astonishment.

"Yes; that chap's the most slippery cuss in all Ireland."

"I'll keep a look-out for her," answered Lawless. "Wish you luck."

And, waving his hand in farewell to the *Kite*, the Lieutenant rang down "full-speed" and was off before the other could ask any more inconvenient questions.

"Thank the Lord he suspected nothing," said Lawless as the *Kite* faded away in the distance. "If it came out that I'd actually towed that Mahoney blackguard and his cargo of contraband into harbour and then let him go, there'd be the very deuce to pay."

"And to think," chuckled Trent, "that you entertained Mr. Mahoney *alias* Rossan to dinner! I'll bet he chortled when—"

"Mr. Trent, attend to your duties," snapped Lawless and left the bridge.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BELL BUOY

Above the inky surface of the North Sea, battalion after battalion of low-lying, black clouds rolled across the moonless sky, driven by a southerly wind that frequently lashed itself into gusts and squalls of short-lived violence. Like a shadow riding the white-capped rollers, the long, low form of the *Knat* plunged and reeled southwards in the teeth of the rising gale, her high bows throwing up cascades of ghostly white foam each time she met the full force of an on-coming wave. Upon the quivering bridge towering above the narrow, sea-washed decks stood Lawless wrapped in a hooded "lammy" suit, which had once been white but was now the colour of a coal-sack. In front of him a quartermaster, similarly attired, gripped the little steering-wheel and gazed alternately at the illuminated compass and the tiny light at the bows that showed which way the vessel was heading.

"Ease her a couple of points," said the Lieutenant, recovering his balance after a sudden lurch which had thrown him against the searchlight apparatus.

The quartermaster gave the wheel a twist, but his answering call was driven back in his teeth by a gust of rain which swept down upon the sea.

"Ell!" he muttered, and again fixed his smarting eyes upon the tossing, swaying, illusive glimmer of light on the bows.

Lawless glanced over the man's shoulder at the compass-card and then started to walk—or rather stagger—up and down the bridge in order to exercise his cramped muscles. Each time he reached the end of the bridge he grasped the rail and tried to pierce the surrounding blackness for any sign of a vessel, friendly or otherwise, but without success, because it was impossible to see more than a few yards ahead even between the rain squalls. Presently he bent down, glanced at the illuminated dial of his wrist-watch, and swore softly. There was still another half hour before his junior officer was due to relieve him on the bridge.

But at last there came the sound of a bell, and before it had died away a muffled figure crawled up through a hatchway aft and proceeded to stumble and slither along the deck in the direction of the bridge. Its progress was slow and

precarious, and the remarks which emerged from beneath the hood were such as will not be found in a dictionary of nautical terms. Eventually it reached the perpendicular iron ladder leading to the bridge and, mounting it, was assisted on to the platform by an unexpected lurch which landed it somewhere in the vicinity of the quartermaster's sea-boots.

"That you, Trent?" inquired the Lieutenant, gazing down upon the recumbent bundle of clothes within which was concealed the person of Sub-Lieutenant Trent.

The figure slowly scrambled into an upright position, but without ceasing to emit curses upon the universe in general and the weather in particular.

"When you've quite finished offering up praise for having been born a sailor bold I'll leave you in charge," said Lawless. "Keep a southerly course and look out for submarines."

"Submarines!" snorted the junior officer. "Why not aeroplanes as well? It'd be as easy to see one as the other a night like this."

"Well, keep a bright look-out."

"A bright look-out——" the Sub-Lieutenant's reply was drowned by another squall, and Lawless, with a sigh of relief, descended to the deck. Seeing the door of the galley open, he stepped in and demanded of the cook a mug of hot cocoa. With this between his hands the Lieutenant perched himself upon the locker and, in defiance of the rules of conduct towards subordinates as laid down by my Lords of the Admiralty, swapped weather anecdotes with the cook. Then, having finished his cocoa, he slid off the locker and started to scramble aft towards the hatch which gave entrance to his cabin. But he had not covered more than half the distance when out of the darkness came the sound of a shot.

The Lieutenant swung round, and as he did so the white beam of the *Knat's* searchlight suddenly flashed out and, after waving about like some gigantic feeler, finally came to rest at a point about fifty yards astern. Beneath its glare could be seen a small patrol steamer and alongside her with platform awash, a German submarine with *U77* painted on her conning tower.

Forgetting all about his much-needed rest, Lawless hastened back to the bridge. From the fact that the submarine had not torpedoed the patrol boat, he concluded that the German commander had boarded her in the hope of obtaining some

information from the skipper concerning the movements of the fleet. The conning tower hatch was open and a machine-gun on the for'ard platform was trained on the boat.

As he reached the bridge, the Lieutenant leant over the rail towards the gunner in charge of the quick-firer on the forecastle.

"Blot her out!" he yelled.

The long muzzle of the machine-gun swung round, tilted up and down once or twice, and then emitted a yellow flame followed by a deep boom.

"Damn!" ejaculated Lawless, and his comment was fervently echoed by the gunner. The shot, aimed a trifle too low, had struck the water some ten yards in front of the submarine, an inaccuracy pardonable enough considering how the destroyer was pitching.

Before the gunner could elevate his weapon and while the machine-gun on the "bandstand" aft was opening fire, three men were seen to scramble over the patrol boat's bulwarks and drop on to the platform of the submarine. But thinking, probably, that the loss of three men was better than the loss of the whole crew, the commander had closed the hatch and the submarine disappeared beneath the surface as the sailors alighted on her platform. Next moment they disappeared also, dragged down by the suction of the submerging vessel.

"To think we might have bagged that swine!" growled Lawless as he proceeded to leave the bridge once more. "Just my infernal rotten luck."

His comment was echoed in varied terms by the Sub-Lieutenant, the gunner and other members of the *Knat's* crew. It was, to say the very least, extremely annoying.

"Stand by with life-buoys!" shouted Lawless, as he reached the deck. He wanted to rescue the Germans if possible, partly from humanitarian motives and partly because he hoped to glean some information from them.

While Trent was bringing the destroyer round to the patrol boat, the gunner still stood behind his quick-firer, cursing his luck and calling upon all the gods to witness that he would have sunk "the blighter" (*i.e.*, the submarine) with his next shot, and Lawless leant over the deck-rail trying to catch a glimpse of the men who had vainly endeavoured to regain the submarine before she sank. He was still trying to penetrate the gloom, when a shadowy figure was swept towards

him and, leaning over the rail, he made a grab at it. In doing so he overbalanced and next moment found himself amidst the dark swirl of waters striking out with one hand while with the other he clutched the jacket of the man whose life he had attempted to save.

The German, he soon discovered, was not a strong swimmer, but with a vague idea that he was rightfully his prisoner and must not be allowed to escape, Lawless still retained his hold on the fellow's jacket. He soon found that his efforts to keep afloat and assist the other to do the same were taxing his strength to the utmost. Had he abandoned the German to his fate, the Lieutenant would have stood an infinitely better chance, but such a thought never entered his mind even when he began to realise that his strength was almost spent. The patrol boat and the destroyer had disappeared from view, and not even the searchlight was visible, from which Lawless deduced that he and his companion must have been carried astern in a very strong current, which still further minimised their chances of being picked up.

At last, when it appeared hopeless to struggle any longer and he had almost resigned himself to his fate, Lawless thought he heard a harsh, guttural voice hailing him through the darkness. With his last remaining strength he struck out in the direction from which the voice had seemed to come, and a moment later he and his companion were dragged out of the water and over a curved, slippery surface.

"*Gott im Himmel!*" exclaimed someone, and Lawless, raising his head, found himself sprawling upon the platform of a large submarine—the same one, he felt sure, which he had recently attempted to sink. Then the man who had given vent to the ejaculation, asked him something in German.

"Don't understand your lingo," answered the Lieutenant, dragging himself into a sitting posture and observing that his questioner was a tall man clad in oilskins and sea-boots.

"Who are you?" demanded the other, this time in fairly good English.

"Lieutenant-Commander Lawless of the British destroyer *Knat*. Who are you?"

"Commander Carl von Ranheim of the German Navy," answered the man, and added, somewhat unnecessarily, "you are my prisoner."

Lawless, now somewhat recovered, gripped a handrail and dragged himself upon

his feet. Two sailors, he observed, were assisting the man for whom he had risked his life through the conning tower hatch. Then, looking over his shoulder, he saw the distant beam of the *Knat's* searchlight still focussed upon the patrol boat; evidently no one had seen him fall overboard nor had he yet been missed.

"Well," he remarked turning to the Commander of the submarine, "what are you going to do with me?"

"I have a good mind to send you back where you came from," answered the German officer, jerking his head in the direction of the water.

"As a reward for saving one of your men, I suppose," replied Lawless. "Well, as you seem to be afraid of even one Englishman, perhaps it is the best thing you can do."

"Afraid!" repeated the other. "*Ach!* but suppose I take you down below you learn our secrets, eh?"

"We've captured so many of your boats that I don't think there are many secrets left for us to learn."

"*Schweinehunden*——" began the German angrily, but was interrupted by another man, presumably an officer also, who emerged from the hatch. The two remained in conversation for some moments, and then the Commander again addressed his prisoner.

"I shall put you where, for a time at least, you can do no harm," he said. "The rest will depend on yourself."

A moment later Lawless felt the throb of the submarine's oil-engines and the vessel, still awash, started to plunge forward. Soaked to the skin and shivering, for the water was cold despite the fact of its being a very warm night, he hoped that the commander would offer him something hot if nothing else, but the German appeared to have no such intention. He had mounted the platform on the conning tower, where, apparently, he was giving orders to the steersman. The fact that the English officer was clinging to the handrail on the for'ard deck and almost waist-deep in water, did not seem to trouble him in the least.

The vessel surged along through the darkness, and presently Lawless became aware of a familiar sound—the weird and melancholy clang of a bell-buoy. He now knew that the submarine was heading towards the coast, and was amazed at the German Commander's temerity in venturing so near when, at any moment,

the searchlight of a passing warship or patrol boat might suddenly flash out upon him. And now the mournful clang of the bell-buoy grew louder, and a fanciful idea occurred to Lawless that it was tolling for the hundreds of men who had perished in the North Sea by mine and submarine. The *U* boat passed within twenty-five yards of it, then slowed down and came alongside a cage-buoy, round whose iron pillar one of the German sailors cast the bight of a rope.

"Now," said the Commander from his platform, "you can disembark."

"What?" inquired the Lieutenant, not quite grasping the situation.

"You must get on that buoy," answered the German. "If you're not washed off before morning you'll probably be rescued by one of your own ships."

Lawless, as he gazed at the plunging buoy, felt his heart sink. Tired out as he was, he strongly doubted his ability to cling on to the buoy for an hour, let alone a whole night.

"Look here," he said, "you'd much better have chucked me overboard and done with it."

"Oh no, we Germans don't murder our prisoners," replied the other sardonically. "If you get washed away, that's not my fault. As you English say, 'It's up to you.'"

"Hanged if I'll ever try to save the life of a German again," said Lawless bitterly.

"Come now, Herr Lieutenant, I can't stay here all night!" cried the Commander.

There was nothing for it but to obey, and so Lawless, with the aid of the rope, managed to reach the small, oscillating platform and grip the iron stanchion which supported the spherical cage. Then a man on the submarine gave the rope a jerk, it slipped off the buoy, and the *U* boat stole away in the darkness.

It did not take Lawless very long to realise the full gravity of his position. He calculated that at least six hours must elapse before it became light enough for him to see, or be seen by, passing ships, and by that time he would probably be dead. As for making signals in the darkness, that was impossible, for he had nothing to make them with—not even a revolver. There was, of course, a faint chance that the *Knat* might make a search for him and perhaps discover him before it was too late, but it was far more likely that, assuming he had been drowned, Trent would proceed southwards.

Still, although he felt almost hopeless, the Lieutenant clung with grim tenacity to the iron standard, but for which he would have been washed off the slippery platform in a few moments, while across the wild waste of black waters came the dismal knell of the bell-buoy. The sound did not cheer him—in fact, it struck him as being unpleasantly prophetic.

"I wish," he murmured, "I could silence that damned thing."

Then he had an inspiration. If he could manage to swim to the bell-buoy and muffle the clapper some of the patrol boats in the neighbourhood would be bound to notice its silence and proceed to investigate the cause. The sound of the bell was of such importance to navigation in these waters that it would be missed almost immediately.

"Blowed if I don't try it," thought Lawless.

The chances of rescue by such a device might not be very brilliant, but it seemed the only thing left for him to do unless he were content to remain passively on the cage-buoy till he had to release his hold through sheer exhaustion.

The bell-buoy, he knew, was about a hundred yards distant, and in the daylight with a calm sea the swim would have amounted to nothing at all. But now the conditions were very different; he could not see the buoy and would have to guide himself entirely by the sound of the bell—added to which, the sea was rough, and he was still feeling exhausted from his recent struggle in the water. But, having decided that this was his sole remaining chance, Lawless did not hesitate and, first divesting himself of his heavy "lammys," slid into the water. The current dragged him right under the buoy, but after a struggle he managed to swim clear of it, and then struck out in the direction whence came the sound of the bell. At first he had little difficulty in making headway despite the choppy sea, but presently his stroke grew weaker, the muscles of his shoulders seemed as if they were on the point of cracking, and he found himself swallowing mouthfuls of salt water. A feeling akin to panic seized him, and he began to "dog-paddle" furiously, conscious only of a frantic desire to keep his head above the inky waves which descended upon him in an unending succession. For a moment or two he experienced all the horrors of approaching death by suffocation, and then, with a gigantic effort of will, threw off the numbing horror and struck out again with slow but steady strokes.

At last he caught sight of a dim, towering mass from whence came a harsh clang. He swam round it, and was lucky enough to encounter a large iron ring in the

base, with the assistance of which he succeeded in dragging himself upon the narrow platform of the buoy. Here he remained for some moments lying on his chest, too exhausted to move. After a while, however, he recovered somewhat, though almost deafened by the clangour of the huge bell above his head. Tearing the woollen comforter from round his neck he climbed up to the bell and managed to wrap it round the clapper, thus effectually muffling it. This done, he slid down again and prepared to await whatever might happen.

It seemed to him that he had sat there for hours interminable, drenched by the waves and in peril of being washed off every moment, when he became aware of something grinding against his boots. He could not see what it was, but bending down felt with one hand and discovered a chain, which appeared to be attached to one of the ring-bolts round the base of the buoy.

"Now what the dickens is this for?" he asked himself.

A buoy, as he knew, is moored by chains attached to the bottom and not to the side, which would cause it to float askew. Besides, the chain grating against his boots was much too light to hold in position a mass weighing several tons and in weather such as this would have snapped like a thread. Therefore it was certainly not a mooring chain.

At the risk of slipping off the platform, Lawless twisted his legs round the pillar supporting the bell and, leaning forward, caught hold of the chain and tugged at it with both hands. It came in quite easily at first, and then stopped with an abruptness that nearly jerked the Lieutenant into the sea. He could see nothing, but passing one hand down the chain he felt something at the end—something large and buoyant, with sharp square edges like a box or a tank. Also he knew by the feel that it was metal.

Lawless forgot his own sufferings in contemplation of this puzzling discovery. What on earth, he asked himself, was the object of having a floating or submerged tank attached to this buoy? What did it contain? He pondered the matter for some minutes, and then, for the second time that night, had an inspiration.

It must be a secret petrol tank for the use of German submarines!

In a flash he divined the whole scheme. The bell-buoy, being such a well-known navigating mark, could not be mistaken for any other buoy in its vicinity. It was close to the English coast, and the tank attached to it could be replenished either

by submarine petrol boats or by secret agents ashore—probably the former. On a dark night, such as this for instance, an enemy submarine could easily take on a fresh supply of petrol from the tank, while the latter, being submerged several feet below the surface, would not be seen in daylight. Doubtless, also, it was provided with an automatic arrangement whereby, when emptied of petrol, it became filled with sea-water, thus preventing it from floating on the surface and becoming visible. It was a most ingenious device, quite simple and, no doubt, an inestimable boon to belated enemy submarines which were running out of petrol. But the point was, having discovered this, how could he make use of it to the best advantage?

Lawless was so engrossed by this problem that he forgot to wonder whether his scheme of muffling the bell would lead to his rescue until the sound of engines in the darkness aroused him from his contemplations. Then, realising that a boat of some sort was at hand, he shouted as loud as he could. There came an answering hail out of the darkness, and next moment the Lieutenant was momentarily blinded by the dazzling rays of a searchlight turned full upon him.

"Ship ahoy!" he shouted.

"Hullo there!" came the answer. "What the devil are you doing?"

He recognised the voice of Sub-Lieutenant Trent and knew that it was the *Knat's* searchlight which was dazzling him. Then, as the destroyer drew nearer, Trent, in his turn, recognised the soaked and huddled-up figure clinging to the platform of the buoy as that of his senior officer.

"Stand by to jump aboard!" he yelled.

With considerable skill he brought the destroyer round the buoy so close that her side grated against it, and Lawless, clutching at the deck-rail, swung himself on board.

"Trent," he said, catching his astonished junior by the arm, "come with me into the chart-room, but first of all tell the steward to send me up a cup of hot coffee and rum."

When they were in the chart-room together, and Lawless was imbibing the stimulating beverage, he related between gulps his amazing adventures since falling overboard, as well as a plan for trapping submarines.

"I'm almost convinced," he concluded with cheery optimism, "that everything

happens for the best after all."

"But supposing your tank theory is right," said Trent, who secretly doubted the accuracy of the Lieutenant's deductions, "how d'you know any *U* boat will tap your tank to-night? Seems to me the best thing would be to wait till morning and then sink the thing."

"And lose the chance of doing in at least one enemy submarine!"

"Or we could tie up to the buoy and plug any *U* boat that came up to the surface."

"Why, you fathead!" exclaimed Lawless, "if we tied up to the buoy the bally submarine might come up immediately under our keel. And if she didn't, how are we to spot her on a pitch-black night like this? You might turn on the bull's eye, but they'd spot the light through their periscope and either torpedo us or do a bunk. No, you must stick to my plan."

"H'm, perhaps you're right."

"And there'd be no sport your way."

"As to sport——" began Trent, but the Lieutenant cut him short.

"You'll carry out my instructions," he said, curtly. "Now bear down on that buoy again."

The destroyer approached the bell-buoy once more, and Lawless, having provided himself with a loaded revolver, prepared to resume his former uncomfortable post on the tiny, wave-washed platform.

"Remember," he said, when about to spring on to the buoy, "you've got to start operations before the sound of my shot dies away, otherwise we draw a blank."

He swung himself over the deck-rail, reached the buoy safely, and next moment the searchlight was switched off and the *Knat* disappeared in the darkness. The first thing Lawless did was to remove his muffler from the bell-clapper so that the sound should serve as a guide to any enemy submarines that might be searching for the secret supply tank. This done, he settled down to wait, with what patience he could muster, for the arrival of his hoped-for victims.

For over an hour he remained there, half-drowned, cold and nearly deafened by the bell. Presently he began to wonder whether, after all, he might not have made

a mistake in his deductions concerning the tank. It also occurred to him that if this proved to be the case and he captured nothing but a severe attack of rheumatism, he would become the laughing-stock of the Fleet. He could imagine how the story would be passed from ship to ship with suitable elaborations. "Heard about that silly ass, Lawless? Spent the whole night lashed to a bell-buoy, fishing for German submarines with a bent pin and a petrol tank for bait!"

He was still considering what steps he could take to prevent the tale of his adventures being spread abroad, when something very black and solid arose out of the water only a few yards away. Although, considering the darkness, it was quite unnecessary, he crawled round to the other side of the buoy in order to take advantage of the "cover" afforded by the pillar supporting the bell, for he knew that black object must be the conning tower of a submarine rising to the surface. Then he heard voices, and at the same moment the chain attached to the tank began to slide over his boots, showing that the Germans were hauling it alongside their vessel. The moment for action had come.

Drawing his revolver he fired it in the air, and before the report had died away the buoy and the submarine were lit up by the brilliant beam of the *Knat's* searchlight. The Germans, of whom there were several on the *U* boat's platform, made a simultaneous rush for the open hatch, for all the world like startled rabbits diving into their burrows. But before they disappeared inside a yellow flame flashed out from the vicinity of the searchlight, followed by a dull roar. Another and another followed in quick succession; the submarine suddenly tilted up, gave a lurch, and then disappeared for ever beneath the waters of the North Sea.



"Pity you plugged that petrol tank as well," remarked Lawless as he and Trent sat at breakfast in the *Knat's* cabin. "We might have used it for bait quite a number of times."

"Couldn't be helped under the circumstances. However, I suppose this'll mean promotion for you and paragraphs in the papers headed 'Naval Officer's Amazing Ruse. How a German submarine was sunk.'"

"There's my official report," said the Lieutenant, handing the other a paper.

Trent glanced through it and looked up with a puzzled expression.

"You don't mention the bell-buoy," he said.

"Trent, do you consider that, in a stand-up scrap, I could lick you?"

The Sub-Lieutenant regarded Lawless in amazement.

"Why," he answered at last, "I suppose you could. You're nearly double my weight, and you've got a longer reach."

"Because," went on Lawless, "if you ever breathe a word about the way in which I collared that submarine I'll pound you so that your most devoted aunt won't recognise her dear sailor nephew."

He rose from the table.

"Sitting on a bell-buoy catching submarines with a bent pin! Why, it'd haunt me to my dying day," he murmured as he left the cabin.



CHAPTER IX

ABANDON SHIP!

"Ah me!" sighed Lawless as he gazed at a small heap of documents which lay before him on the cabin table. "It's a weary world, my masters, and full of creditors."

"What's the matter now?" asked Trent, glancing up from a letter he was reading.

"The same as always—viz., 'Dear Sir, We beg to call your attention to the fact that your account is long overdue and that, unless it is settled immediately, we shall be reluctantly compelled'—and so on and so on. What I don't like about these chaps is their infernal priggishness, 'it-hurts-me-more-than-it-hurts-you' tone. Their reluctance to summons me is nothing to my reluctance to be summonsed."

"Buck up! Nelson was dunned, you remember," said Trent.

"Oh, shut up," growled the Lieutenant. "If I happen to have a go of toothache it doesn't do me any good to reflect that Julius Cæsar probably had it before me."

"Try a cup of coffee, it'll soothe you."

"And to think," went on Lawless, ignoring the suggestion, "that there's a thousand pounds waiting for me if only I could pot a Zep."

"Why not write to your creditors and say that as soon as you've brought down a Zeppelin you will settle their accounts in full? Appeal to their patriotism."

"I shan't write at all; let 'em do their worst," answered Lawless, as he rose from the table. "They're a measly lot of bounders, anyway."

He went on deck and, although a white mist was creeping over the sea from the east, gave orders to get under way. Soon the *Knat* was threading her way out of the Humber towards her allotted beat "somewhere" in the North Sea. Later, when off Spurm Head, instructions were received by wireless to keep a look-out for German warships, as there was a report to the effect that several were steaming in a westerly direction.

"All jolly well to talk about keeping a look-out, but one couldn't see a liner a cable's length away in this fog," grumbled the Lieutenant when he had perused the message.

He looked anxiously into the thick white mist which was closing around them. The *Knat* was steaming at half speed and in every direction syrens were screeching and bellowing, some close at hand, others far away in the distance. It was, in fact, just the sort of weather that the Germans love when contemplating a raid on some defenceless east-coast port, since they can take advantage of the mist to escape when threatened with the arrival of British warships

"I feel I could just do with a scrap; it would be a sort of tonic," said Lawless as Trent joined him on the bridge. "Demands for money always make me hopping mad."

"I know," replied the junior officer, feelingly.

After several rather narrow escapes from collision with other vessels—which did not tend to improve the Lieutenant's temper—the *Knat* drew out of the shipping track, greatly to the relief of all on board.

"Thank heaven for a little peace and quietness," said Lawless. "Now we can _____"

He stopped abruptly as a dull boom, like a distant clap of thunder, came over the fog-ridden water. The Lieutenant's experienced ears told him that it was not thunder but the sound of heavy guns. Either there was an engagement taking place or else the Germans had crept up through the mist and were bombarding some coast town. Owing to the direction of the wind in relation to the sound, he inclined to the latter supposition.

The dull reverberations of the guns continued and the crew of the *Knat*, having been piped to quarters, she steamed in the direction from which the firing seemed to come. Still, the wind was light and variable, which made it difficult to determine even approximately the locality of the sounds. The fog, too, was a serious handicap, for, should a warship be sighted, the difficulty of deciding whether she was a friend or an enemy would be enormously increased. War vessels, seen at a distance even on a clear day, look much alike, and in a thick atmosphere it is practically impossible even for an expert to distinguish friend from foe. A wireless message of inquiry, though sent in code, would, of course, defeat its own object should the vessel receiving it be an enemy. Under such

circumstances as these, therefore, commanders of small craft like destroyers and submarines are under a grave disadvantage and have to proceed with the utmost caution or run the risk of making a ghastly error.

After proceeding slowly for some little time, Lawless came to the conclusion that the firing was taking place somewhere to the north-west, and he accordingly steered in that direction. As the *Knat* slowly felt her way through the fog the sound of the guns grew louder and more distinct, thereby confirming the Lieutenant in his decision. He was leaning over the bridge-rail, trying to penetrate the opaque white curtain in front of him, when there came a shout from the deck below.

"Zep, sir, right over'ead, sir!" cried a man.

Lawless looked up and saw, just above the low-lying mist, the dim outline of an enormous object moving slowly in the opposite direction.

"A scouting Zeppelin," he muttered. "If only I had an Archie aboard I'd put a few plugs in her belly."

But, unfortunately, the *Knat* carried no anti-aircraft guns, and by no possible exercise of ingenuity could the machine-guns, mounted as they were, be made to fire in a vertical direction. So Lawless had to gnash his teeth and watch the airship floating overhead within easy range, yet as safe, so far as he was concerned, as though she were five miles up.

"There goes my thousand quid, so close that I could almost touch her," he said bitterly to Trent. "Isn't it just my luck?"

"Pity we didn't think to rig up one of our Q.F's vertically," remarked the Sub-Lieutenant. "We could easily have done it."

Lawless turned his back on him in disgust. It was quite true that they might have done as Trent suggested, but the idea had not previously occurred to him. It was too late now, for it would take at least half a day to accomplish, and the Zeppelin could hardly be expected to wait complacently while those below made ready for her destruction.

Suddenly there was a loud explosion just to starboard of the destroyer, and a column of water arose so close that, in subsiding, it washed over the deck.

"By Jove, she's dropping bombs!" exclaimed Lawless, at the same time ringing

down "Full-speed" to the engine-room.

However, in a few moments they had passed out of danger, and the airship was lost in the mist. The firing to the north-west still continued, though with decreasing vigour, as if fewer ships were engaged. This suggested to Lawless that some of the enemy vessels were drawing off, in which case he might possibly meet one or more on their flight back to the fastnesses of Heligoland.

"This is where we keep our eyes skinned and stand-by for trouble," said the Lieutenant as he reduced speed again. "See anything, Trent?"

"Not yet," answered the latter, who was straining his eyes in an endeavour to penetrate the fog.

About ten minutes afterwards there came the heavy thud of ship's engines going at full speed, though as yet nothing could be seen of the ship itself. The situation for those on board the *Knat* was one of infinite peril, for they did not know from one moment to another when, from out of the enveloping fog, a great towering mass might hurl itself upon their frail craft and send it to the bottom. Yet for obvious reasons Lawless dared not make any signal or betray his presence to the unknown monster advancing at, probably, between thirty or forty knots an hour.

Suddenly the fog seemed to be thrust aside by a huge bulk, black and solid against the impalpable curtain of mist. For a moment it looked as if the destroyer must inevitably be crushed beneath the ocean Juggernaut advancing upon her.

"Hard a port!" shouted Lawless, and instinctively gripped the bridge-rail as if bracing himself for a terrific shock.

"Hard a port 'tis, sir," echoed the quartermaster, and sent the little wheel spinning round.

Had the Lieutenant hesitated for the fraction of a second before giving the order the *Knat* would have been cut in twain like a rotten log. But, as it was, the destroyer swerved to starboard in the nick of time, her side almost grazing the bows of the unknown ship as she passed.

"A narrow squeak that," murmured Trent under his breath.

"Could you make anything of her?" asked Lawless as the fog once more closed in on them and hid the other vessel from sight, though her engines could still be heard.

"No," answered the junior officer; "she might be British, German or Dutch for all I can tell."

"Then I think we'll keep on her track for a bit," said the Lieutenant. "Something'll give her away sooner or later."

By this time the sound of firing had died away save for an occasional distant boom, and as it would be useless to try and locate the scene of action now, Lawless did the best thing possible in following the ship which had so nearly run him down. If she were a British cruiser no harm would be done; while, were she German—well, there would be some exciting moments in store for both.

So far, however, her nationality could not be ascertained, and so Lawless, guided by the sound of her engines, kept abreast of her as near as he could judge. While the fog lasted he could not hope to identify her by sight, but a chance occurrence, such as a bugle call, a loud order given on deck, or a call on the pipe, might afford a clue. Meanwhile it was necessary to prevent those on board from suspecting the presence of a destroyer so close at hand, for, should the *Knat* be sighted, the chances were a hundred to one that, friend or foe, the strange vessel would open fire on her without waiting to make inquiries.

For nearly an hour the two vessels continued to pound along in a south-easterly direction, each hidden from the other by the enveloping fog.

"Something's got to be done," said Lawless at last. "In my opinion she's a German, for she's certainly laying a course towards Heligoland, and if we're not mighty careful we'll find ourselves in a trap. Point is, how the devil are we to make the skipper give himself away?"

"Send a wireless in English. If he's——"

"No good," broke in the Lieutenant. "If he's a German he'd savvy the dodge and play up to us."

The fog was now beginning to show signs of clearing overhead, though it still lay thick upon the sea. There was every prospect of its soon disappearing altogether, and then, perhaps, the mystery of the unknown vessel would be solved and her fate—or that of the *Knat*—decided.

"Look!" shouted Trent abruptly, but before Lawless could follow the upward direction of his gaze something fell in the water just astern and then came the sound of a loud explosion. Others followed in quick succession, some of the

bombs falling so close to the destroyer that the men standing by the torpedo tubes were drenched by the water they threw up. There was no need to inquire as to the cause of these unpleasant phenomena, they were due to a Zeppelin hovering above—probably the same one which had been encountered earlier in the day.

"That settles it," said Lawless. "We're in company with a German cruiser and her guardian angel."

He had only just finished speaking when there was a deafening boom on the port side and a volley of shells went hurtling over the destroyer, one of them snapping her wireless mast in two like a twig. Obviously the Zeppelin, having sighted the *Knat* and notified the fact in the usual way with bombs, had warned her sea consort of the destroyer's proximity by wireless, and the cruiser had answered by firing more or less haphazard into the fog. In fact, she came very near sinking her unseen enemy and would have probably succeeded had not her guns been trained at too high an angle.

Lawless, now that his doubts were at rest, lost no more time, all the men were at their stations in readiness and there was no further reason to delay an action. His object now was to creep up abreast of the cruiser until he could launch a torpedo with a fair chance of its getting "home." This manœuvre, however, was not by any means easy, for it necessitated exposing the *Knat* to the enemy's fire, and if only one shot made good it would almost certainly mean an end of the adventure so far as the destroyer and her crew were concerned. Moreover, the airship was still dropping bombs and keeping her consort informed as to the enemy's position.

The first two attempts to torpedo the German proved unsuccessful, and in both cases the *Knat* was driven off with the loss of several men killed and wounded, while the machine-gun aft on the bandstand had been wrecked by the only air-bomb which, up to the present, had struck the vessel. With such odds against him, Lawless would have been quite justified in drawing off; but to retire before a superior foe is not one of the ways they have in the Navy. Therefore the Lieutenant prepared for a third attempt, which, as the mist had begun to clear, was likely to prove the last whatever the issue might be.

"We've got to pull it off this time or go to the bottom," he said.

"Ten days' leave or good-bye all," commented Trent grimly.

The *Knat*, which had fallen a little astern of her hoped-for victim, darted forward at full speed and, as she came up on the cruiser's starboard quarter, was met by a terrific fire. The two fore'a'd funnels were reduced to the condition of sieves, the wireless room was smashed to splinters, and Lawless himself narrowly escaped death from a shell which burst just above the bridge. The quartermaster was killed on the spot, but as he fell Lawless sprang to the wheel and took charge of it himself.

"Stand by!" he roared to the men at the torpedo tubes, and then as the *Knat*, reeling under the blast of fire, came abreast of the cruiser, he shouted "Fire!"

The shining messenger of death leapt from the port tube and, as it did so, a shell struck the destroyer amidships. There was a loud explosion; from the engine-room gratings there issued clouds of smoke and scalding steam; the shrieks of wounded and scalded men arose above the din, and the *Knat*, struck in a vital spot, canted over on her port side and began to settle. She, at any rate, had fought her last fight.

"Pipe all hands stand by to abandon ship!" roared the Lieutenant, and somewhere amid the drifting grey fog there came the sound of another explosion.

The destroyer gave another lurch and the water came swirling over her decks.

"Abandon ship! Every man for himself!"

The men sprang into the sea, and not a moment too soon. As Lawless gave his last order there came the sound of another explosion in the engine-room and, before the steam from the shattered boilers had cleared away, nothing remained of the gallant little vessel but a mass of crumpled metal at the bottom of the North Sea and some wreckage floating upon the surface.

Lawless, who was still at the wheel when the *Knat* took her final plunge, was drawn down by the suction of the sinking vessel. Instinctively he struck out as soon as the waves closed above his head, but it seemed to him that he must be miles and miles below the surface. A horrible feeling of impending suffocation and an almost intolerable pressure on his lungs oppressed him as he struck upwards. At last, when his chest felt as if it were about to burst, he reached the surface and trod water while he sucked in deep breaths of air. Then, through the thin veil of mist, he caught sight of what looked like the hull of a vessel or, at any rate, something solid and capable of affording support. He started to swim towards it, hoping it might be some ship which had arrived on the scene since

the fight, and not caring much whether it proved to be a friend or an enemy.

In a few minutes he was alongside, and had caught hold of some tackle hanging from a spar. Hauling himself up, he managed to get astride the spar, and then realised that the vessel had a heavy list to port. Too dazed to draw any significant deductions from this, he worked his way along the spar till he found himself looking down upon a slanting deck, littered with wreckage and apparently deserted. Then, and not till then, he realised where he was.

He had unwittingly climbed aboard the German cruiser, which was sinking and had been abandoned by her crew. Obviously, therefore, his last torpedo had found its billet, and the cruiser had been hit at the moment when victory seemed hers—it was a great consolation.

The Lieutenant's first thought was to dive back into the sea, and he was about to do this when a noise above his head made him look up. A Zeppelin, no doubt the same one which had been piloting the cruiser, was hovering above, evidently with the object of ascertaining what had happened to the combatants.

"Lord, if I could only bring that thing down," reflected Lawless, forgetting his own peril for the moment.

His eye wandered over the deserted decks, and then he gave a sudden whoop of joy. Not twenty yards from where he stood were a couple of anti-aircraft guns, and, without stopping to weigh the consequences, he crossed to one of them, found it was loaded, and at once trained the muzzle on the ponderous mass hovering overhead. Then he fired.

A shell went whistling up, and passing through or over the gondola—he could not be sure which—exploded immediately beneath the gas envelope. There was a flash of flame and the sound of an explosion, but before the smoke had cleared away Lawless had trained the second gun on the airship and fired again. Then, without waiting to ascertain the result of his shots, he took a header into the sea and, on reaching the surface, swam as hard as he could towards a piece of floating wreckage. He threw an arm over this and, thus supported, turned round to see what was happening.

The sight which met his astonished gaze was tragic and terrible in the extreme. Piled upon the tilting side of the German cruiser was a great flaming mass sending up a cloud of smoke and sparks—all that remained of the great airship. Only for a second or two was Lawless able to gaze at this fearful spectacle of

calamity heaped upon calamity to which sea and air had each contributed a quota, for, with a quivering lurch, the cruiser rolled completely over and disappeared beneath the waters, dragging the burning remains of the Zeppelin with it.

"Congratulations! You'll be able to stand me a dinner at the Savoy now."

Lawless turned his head and saw Trent a few yards away clinging to an empty water beaker and looking quite abnormally cheerful. But the Lieutenant was still oppressed by the tragedy he had witnessed, and the junior's flippant remark jarred upon him.

"Shut up," he growled.

"Oh, all right," answered Trent, in an injured tone; "but I should have thought that the prospect of handling that thousand quid would have made you more amiable."

As a matter of fact it had not occurred to Lawless until that moment that he had won his uncle's wager and was, therefore, entitled to the thousand pounds. But now, strange to say, he did not feel elated in the least degree; the triple tragedy in which the *Knat*, the German cruiser and the Zeppelin had been involved, together with, probably, the loss of several hundred men, dwarfed everything else for the time being.

"How many of our men have gone under do you think?" he asked.

"Can't say, though I'm afraid we've lost between twenty and thirty. But that's nothing compared with the enemy's losses."

As he spoke, Trent pointed to various small groups of figures swimming about or hanging on to pieces of wreckage. Some were survivors of the *Knat*, some of the German cruiser, and in several cases men who less than a quarter of an hour ago had been endeavouring to kill one another were now rendering each other mutual help—such are the uncertainties of war.

"Even now," went on the Sub-Lieutenant, "the chances are that we shall all be drowned before——"

He was interrupted by a shout from Lawless and, looking round, saw a couple of destroyers approaching at full speed, followed by several patrol boats.

"Saved!" he ejaculated.

A few minutes later the destroyers had arrived on the scene and lowered boats to pick up the survivors, friend and foe alike. Among the last to be rescued were Lawless and his junior officer, and when the boats had returned to the destroyers the latter made off at full speed towards the land, leaving nothing but a few masses of floating *débris* as witnesses of that memorable fight.



"It's all right," said Lawless, looking up from a letter as he and Trent sat at breakfast in a certain old-fashioned hostelry off the East Coast. "The old boy's dubbed up."

"You mean he's handed over the boodle?" asked Trent with interest.

"Yes; he sent a cheque to the major yesterday, who's paid it into my account."

"Lucky pig, you."

"And that's not all," went on Lawless. "Seen to-day's paper?"

"Not yet."

"Well, then, look at this."

The Lieutenant handed over the paper and placed his finger on "Naval Appointments." Trent leaned forward and read: "Lieutenant-Commander F. H. Lawless, H.M.S. *Knat*, promoted to Commander."

"Congrats!" he cried. "You'll be an admiral some day if you are not very careful."

"Don't mention it. If you persevere in your profession and cultivate habits of cleanliness and sobriety, you may become even as I, my son."

"Returning to that little matter of the thousand pounds," said Trent, "don't you think you might pay that half-quid you've owed me for the last eighteen months?"

"Great Scot, I thought you'd forgotten it. 'Pon my soul you have a tenacious memory, Trent," answered Lawless. "However," he went on condescendingly,

"I'll see what I can do for you. What with the super-tax, the increased duty on motor-cars, and other drains on a fellow's income——"

He broke off abruptly, crossed to the window and stood watching a patrol boat which had just come fussily into harbour. When Trent joined him there he was puzzled to find his senior plunged in gloom.

"Well, for a fellow who's just come into money——" he remarked in disgust.

"Do you remember," asked Lawless dreamily, "how gallantly she behaved in that scrap with the *Lansitz* and her attendant destroyers?"

Trent stared for a moment.

"Oh, you're thinking of the old *Knat*," he said, a light breaking in on him.

"And again in that storm off the coast of Northumberland?"

Trent nodded; he, too, was sobered now.

"Well," said Lawless with passion, "she had a glorious end; but do you think I can exult over a paltry thousand pounds when she's at the bottom of the sea? I wouldn't have lost her, no, not for——"

The sentence remained unfinished and Lawless stared moodily out to sea again.

THE END.

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