THE PIRATE SUBMARINE

PERCY F. WESTERMAN
THE PIRATE SUBMARINE

Percy F. Westerman
THE PIRATE SUBMARINE

Original text by Percy F. Westerman and published in 1923.

PDF version 1.00 – 2016.

The characters, situations and events in this book are entirely fictitious and bear no relation to any real person or actual happening, except where otherwise the case. Any further resemblance is entirely coincidental, unless the resemblance was as such intended. Terms and names are according to the times and not meant to be disrespectful or derogatory.
CHAPTER 1
A PAIR OF ROGUES

‘That’s done it! Scrap brass has fallen another thirty shillings a ton, Pengelly. The slump has knocked the bottom out of the market. We’re in the soup.’

Thus spoke Tom Trevorrick, senior partner of the firm of Trevorrick, Pengelly & Co., shipbreakers, of Polkyl, near Falmouth. He was a tall, powerfully-built man, standing six feet two and a half inches in his socks, red-haired, florid featured, with a high though receding forehead and a heavy protruding jaw. His rich deep voice had a plausible ring about it — a compelling, masterful yet persuasive tone, that had largely influenced the shareholders of Trevorrick, Pengelly & Co. to part with their money with the absolute certainty of a pre-war ten percent return.

Paul Pengelly, aged thirty-three, or three years older than the senior partner, was of different build and temperament. Trevorrick represented the Celtic strain of Cornishmen; Pengelly had dark curly hair and sallow features — legacies of an Iberian ancestor, one of a handful of survivors from a vessel of the Spanish Armada that had been cast ashore on the rock-bound Lizard. History does not relate why the Cornish wreckers spared the lives of the olive-featured

· This tale is set c. 1924 in Great Britain.
mariners, but it does record that the shipwrecked Spaniards took wives of the Cornish maids, and lived and died in the country of their adoption.

Pengelly was slow of speech, stolid in action save when roused to anger. Of an argumentative nature, he acted as a foil to his partner’s exuberance. If Trevorrick suggested a certain course, Pengelly almost invariably went dead against it, not that he disapproved of the scheme, but simply as a matter of habit. He was secretive and cautious; but he never hesitated to do an underhand action if he felt reasonably secure from detection.

He was a man of many parts — a jack-of-all-trades and master of a few. Given to building castles in the air, he would soar to dizzy heights in planning fantastic schemes. Some of them might take definite shape; then, almost without warning, he would chuck his hand in and cast about for something else.

Eighteen months previously, Trevorrick and Pengelly had met for the first time. Trevorrick had just left the Royal Navy. He had been a lieutenant-commander attached to the Portsmouth submarine flotilla. He had not resigned under the favourable terms offered by My Lords to redundant officers; he had not been ‘axed’ under the Geddes Scheme. He had been court-martialled and dismissed from the Service under circumstances that could not be termed extenuating.

Trevorrick was at a loose end when he encountered Pengelly. He had a limited amount of capital. So had Pengelly. The latter’s latest scheme appealed to the ex-
lieutenant-commander. Just then, hundreds of ships of all sizes were being sold out of the Service for breaking-up purposes. There was money to be made out of the business, with very little capital required for plant, while surplus destroyers and submarines could be bought at a flat rate of one pound per ton, subject to the condition that they had to be broken up.

Of the hundreds, nay, thousands of people who patronise the little steamers plying between Falmouth and Truro — or Malpas, according to the state of the tide — few are likely to notice a small creek on the starboard hand of the picturesque river Fal. Fewer still know it by name.

Its entrance is narrow, between steeply rising, heavily wooded ground. Although barely twenty-five yards in width across its mouth, it carries nearly thirty feet of water at springs. Two hundred yards up, the creek widens out. One bank retains its precipitous, tree-clad nature. The other dips, forming a wide bay, with a flat belt of ground between the shore and the high ground beyond.

On this site, hidden from the Fal by a bend in the channel, stood a derelict shipyard. A century ago, when Falmouth was at the height of its prosperity as a packet-station, the shipyard teemed with activity. It enjoyed a brief and illusory spell of life during the Great War, when it again sank into obscurity and neglect. The two slipways were left to rot, two tidal docks were allowed to silt up. The buildings were ruinous and leaky. The whole concern was in the
hands of the Official Receiver.

To the delectable spot came Trevorrick and Pengelly. They looked at it. Trevorrick lost no time in declaring that it was the place; Pengelly asserted that it was not. The big man had his way, and thus the Polkyll Creek Shipbreaking Company came into being.

They started modestly upon their enterprise. The heaviest item for plant was the purchase of an oxygen-acetylene apparatus. At first, ten hands were engaged. Pengelly wanted to obtain them locally. Trevorrick, as usual, overruled him, and as a result inserted in a Plymouth paper an advertisement for ex-Naval and Mercantile Marine men. They received shoals of replies and could pick and choose, without having to pay Trade Union rates.

‘We’ll have unmarried men,’ declared the senior partner. ‘They won’t be wanting to run away home every five minutes.’

‘Married men are more likely to stick to their jobs,’ objected Pengelly.

‘No one but a born fool would chuck up a job nowadays,’ retorted Trevorrick. ‘They are none too plentiful.’

In due course, the shipbreaking yard began to function. A destroyer and a submarine were purchased at Devonport and towed round to Falmouth and up to the Fal to Polkyll. The scrap metal was sent up to Truro in barges and thence transferred to goods train for the Welsh smelting works. So profitable was the venture that three more vessels were bought for
demolition, twenty additional hands taken on, and the firm of Trevorrick and Pengelly became a limited liability company.

So far, things were going smoothly. The two principals got on amicably, which was rather to be wondered at, since Trevorrick was apt to boast that he had had heaps of friends and had never been able to keep one of them. No doubt, the totally dissimilar physical and mental characteristics of each kept them in a state of mutual docility; but already Pengelly was tiring of the monotonous work, and Trevorrick was scheming to get away to a livelier spot than the dead-and-alive Polkyl Creek.

Then, slowly but surely, came the slump. The shareholders had their first dividends — ten percent — paid out of the capital. Another dividend was shortly due and there was no possible chance of it being forthcoming, unless Trevorrick and Pengelly drew upon their capital — a step that each was firmly determined not to take.

‘Are we in the soup?’ asked Pengelly, in reply to his partner’s pessimistic declaration. ‘What do you suggest?’

‘Pack up and clear off,’ replied the senior partner. ‘Lay hands on all the ready money we can possibly get hold of, and make ourselves scarce.’

‘How about the shareholders?’ asked Pengelly.

Trevorrick shrugged his shoulders.

‘Shareholders have lost money before today,’ he remarked. ‘That’s their affair.’
‘That’s all right as far as we are concerned, if they take it lying down,’ objected the other. ‘S’posing they don’t? What then? We wouldn’t be safe for twenty-four hours in this country. We might try our luck abroad.’

It was Trevorrick’s turn to offer objections.

‘Don’t fancy the idea, especially with a warrant hanging over my head. Fellows who issue fraudulent balance sheets (Pengelly winced) get it in the neck pretty badly when they’re caught. I’ve no fancy for seven years behind prison bars. And there’s another thing. How long could either of us hang out abroad with what money we can lay our hands on? Six months. After that — phut!’

‘Then what do you suggest?’

‘Depends,’ replied Trevorrick. ‘Fifty thousand apiece and a snug hiding-place in one of the South American republics.’

‘Takes some doing.’

‘It can be done.’

‘How?’

The two men looked at each other, trying to fathom the depths to which either would be prepared to go.

‘How?’ asked Pengelly again. ‘Holding up a bank, for example?’

‘Try again.’

‘Highway robbery, perhaps?’

‘Sort of,’ admitted Trevorrick. ‘For “highway” substitute “high seas”, and you’ve got it.’

‘Piracy, by Jove!’ ejaculated Pengelly, with a gleam in his eyes. It was a case of blood will tell, and Pengellys
had in bygone days sailed under the Jolly Roger; more than one had made a public spectacle at Execution Dock.

‘That’s funny, deuced funny,’ he added, after a pause. ‘I’ve been thinking of that myself.’

‘It’ll require a jolly sight more than thinking,’ remarked Trevorrick grimly.

‘It’s risky.’

‘Course it is. So’s everything, if you go the wrong way about it. Take shipbreaking: you might get cut in two by a chunk of steel plate, or you might try the business end of an oxygen-acetylene flame. That’s happened before today.’

‘You — I mean, we — would probably be caught inside of a week,’ said Pengelly, resuming his habit of raising objections. ‘Aircraft and wireless don’t give a fellow much of a chance.’

‘Not if we played our cards properly.’

‘Don’t see how,’ rejoined the little man petulantly.

‘And when we’re collared — ’

He completed the sentence by a double gesture — a circular motion of his right hand in a horizontal plane followed by a rapid vertical movement.

‘Better that than seven years,’ said Trevorrick coolly. ‘But you’re showing the white feather already.’

‘Surely you’re joking about it?’

‘Never more serious in all my life,’ the senior partner hastened to assure him. ‘The audacity of the thing is in our favour. Ask any naval expert. He’ll tell you that piracy, except in the Red Sea and the China Station, is
as dead as Queen Anne. I’m going to show the blamed experts that they’re talking through their hats.’

‘But — ’

‘Don’t start butting in with your confounded “buts”,’ exclaimed Trevorrick, with a tinge of asperity. ‘You say you’ve been considering the matter. How far have you gone into the practical side of it? I can make a pretty shrewd guess. You haven’t even scratched the epidermis of the problem. I have. Cast your eyes over this.’

From his pocket-box, Trevorrick produced a leaf of a notebook. On it was written in small, carefully-formed letters, the following:

1. The vessel.
2. Crew.
5. Communication with shore.

‘Now,’ continued Trevorrick briskly, ‘I’ve gone deeply into the question. We’ll run over the various items. Then we can discuss details; but remember, I want constructive, not destructive criticism. Here I am trying to put you on to a get-rich-quick scheme. That’s the main idea. It’s for your benefit — and mine. First, the ship. I propose adopting R81.’

R81 was the Polkyll Creek Shipbreaking Company’s latest acquisition. She had been towed round from Devonport only a couple of days previously and had
been placed in the mud-dock alongside the rapidly-disintegrating hull of her former sister-submarine R67.

‘Bless my soul, man!’ interrupted Pengelly, heedless of the senior partner’s caution. ‘You’d never get her outside Falmouth Harbour.’

‘You’re bearing in mind the Admiralty inspector,’ declared Trevorrick, purposely refraining from showing displeasure at the interruption. ‘He’ll be here tomorrow or Friday. After that, it will be three months before he shows up again. Then I can manage him all right. No, I don’t intend to offer him half a crown to look the other way. But there’s not the slightest reason why we shouldn’t hoodwink him. The moment he goes after his next visit, we’ll start operations. R81 goes under the covered shed; R67 will be moved into R81’s berth. It’s not altogether a stroke of luck that we haven’t started cutting into R67’s hull below the waterline. When the inspector comes again he won’t see R67. She’ll be broken up entirely as far as he’s concerned. R67 will assume R81’s number. We’ll leave enough of the hull for that. The pirate submarine, ex-R81, will already be nearing completion well out of the sight of the official eye.’

‘Trevorrick, I always thought I had the bump of imagination,’ declared Pengelly. ‘I give you best.’

‘Imagination isn’t of much use, unless you put it to a practical purpose,’ rejoined the other. ‘What I’m proposing can be done; more, it’s going to be done.’

‘But — ’

‘There you go again,’ interrupted Trevorrick
tolerantly. ‘Carry on, then. Trot out your objections. We’ll argue all along the line as we go. What were you about to remark?’

‘We’ll assume that you’ve bamboozled the Admiralty Nosey Parker, whose business it is to bind us to our contract,’ said Pengelly. ‘You’ve got the submarine fit, more or less, for sea. You’d have to take her down the Fal on the surface. There’s not enough water to submerge. Day or night, you’d be spotted; and there’d be questions asked.’

‘Pengelly, your Christian name ought to be Thomas, not Paul,’ remarked Trevorrick, in a bantering tone. He could afford to try to be facetious. He knew enough of his partner by this time to realise that the greater the objections the latter raised, the more chance he, Trevorrick, had of gaining his case — as he almost invariably did.

‘I’m going to take her out of Falmouth as a surface ship. I’d defy anyone to think her to be otherwise than an old tramp without they actually came on board, which I don’t intend that they should. We’ve got the materials. In a couple of months we’ll build up a superstructure, rig dummy masts and funnels, and there you are. What have you to say against that?’

‘Top-hamper,’ declared Pengelly bluntly. ‘What do you propose doing when she dives? Ditch the lot? If you don’t, she’ll roll over when she’s submerged. And what speed do you expect you’ll get when running beneath the surface, assuming she doesn’t turn turtle?’

‘Top-hamper judiciously constructed will make no
difference to her stability when submerged,’ replied the other. ‘All that requires to be done is to see that the superstructure, taken as a whole, weighs the same as the quantity of water it displaces — fairly simple matter if we make use of air-tight tanks and compartments packed with cork. Speed under the surface doesn’t count for much in our case. Storage batteries are a nuisance at the best of times. No, I mean to submerge and rest on the bottom in the event of an attack. She’s built to withstand, with an ample margin of safety, a depth of twenty-five fathoms.’

‘Armament — guns and torpedoes — then,’ resumed Pengelly. ‘That’s going to knock you. Torpedoes don’t grow on blackberry bushes, and you can’t go trotting about with a six-inch quick-firer under your arm. Supposing Elswicks or Vickers did accept your order for a quick-firer, you’d have the police knocking you up to know what your little game is.’

‘Torpedoes are out of the question, I’m afraid,’ admitted Trevorrick. His fellow-partner grinned with satisfaction. It was one of those rare occasions when he scored a point with his objection. ‘It’s a pity; they might have come in handy, especially as they’ve left the tubes in the ship. Nothing like a “tinfish” to settle an argument. Guns — no difficulty there, I can buy a fifteen-point-two centimetre quick-firer of the latest pattern — that’s practically six-inch — at Liége and get it delivered afloat outside Dutch or Belgian territorial waters for a mere song, with as much ammunition as we’re likely to want. You see, I’ve made inquiries all
along the line already. Next item: Crew. I’ll skip that for the present; but, let me tell you, there was method in my madness when I was so mighty particular in the choice of the hands here. Maintenance — that’s easily disposed of. We’ll help ourselves, supplementing our store with purchases from the shore. Now, Cruising Limits. No need to go very far from home. West Coast of Europe between Finisterre and Bergen offers enough scope for our little stunt; but it’s in the Channel that I hope to play Cain. No, don’t get alarmed, Pengelly. I’m not out for British shipping unless I’m forced. Hoist German colours and capture a French vessel; collar a German and tell him we’re a Frenchman. Spin a yarn to a Dutchman while you’re going through his pockets. Bless my soul, man, we’ll have our fifty thousand apiece in no time. That brings me to the last item: Communication with the shore. We’ll have to lay by for a rainy day, Pengelly — show a clean pair of heels before it’s too late. We’ll have to travel light. Can’t carry a pantechnicon of booty with us. We must arrange to have it sent ashore and transferred to a trustworthy agent in South America. I know of at least half a dozen.’

‘How about the crew?’ asked Pengelly. ‘We can’t show up at some port with thirty fellows tacked on to us.’

‘No need,’ replied Trevorrick with a grin. ‘We’re not sentimentalists, nor philanthropists.’
On the following day, Mr. Chamfer, the Admiralty inspector, arrived.

He was a short, slim-built man with a totally disproportionate sense of his own importance. Thirty years of Civil Service life had got him into a rut. It mattered little how he performed his duties as long as he did them somehow: a monthly visit to the cashier’s office at Devonport Dockyard to draw his salary was an assured thing. At the end of every year his salary was subject to a fixed increase. Whether he earned it or not, whether he possessed higher or lower qualifications than his confrères mattered not at all — the annual rise came with unfailing certainty. Mr. Chamfer was a firm believer in the principle of following the line of least resistance, namely, to get through his perfunctory duties with the minimum of trouble. Provided he was treated with due deference to his position by the principals of the various shipbreaking firms with whom he had to deal, the former had no cause to complain of irritating demands on the part of the Admiralty inspector.

‘Ah, good morning, Mr. Trevorrick!’ he exclaimed. ‘Fine morning. Business going strong, I hope? Let me see: R81 arrived here this week. Started on her yet?’
‘No, sir,’ replied Trevorrick, with his tongue in his cheek. ‘We’re engaging ten additional hands for that job. Next time you pay us a visit you’ll find that there’s not very much left of her.’

‘And R67?’ inquired Mr. Chamfer, consulting an official form.

‘She’s practically demolished,’ was the reply. ‘Do you wish to make an inspection?’

The inspector gave a quick glance out of the office window. Eighty yards away lay the object under discussion, the gaunt skeleton of a mammoth, the steel ribs of which were being attacked by a swarm of workmen, who gave the onlooker the impression that they were Lilliputians clambering over Gulliver’s recumbent form.

‘No, thanks; I won’t trouble you,’ he hastened to reply, as he scribbled ‘R81 — work in hand; R67 — practically demolished’ in column six of the official document. ‘Well, since you suggest it, I will — just a nip. And soda, please. Well, Mr. Trevorrick, your good health and success to your work.’

Two minutes later, Mr. Chamfer’s car was tearing along the Tregony Road on its way back to Devonport. It would be three months at least before the official repeated the visit, and much was to happen at Polkyll Creek before those three months were up.

‘Fancy, that little worm draws as much pay as a full-blown captain!’ remarked Trevorrick to his partner. ‘You and I have to keep blighters of that sort. Well, thank goodness that’s over. We’ll have
the men up now.’

The yard-bell uttered its warning notes. Although it wanted half an hour to knock-off time, the thirty employees of the firm of Trevorrick, Pengelly & Co., promptly left their work and trooped up to the office, wondering whether the bell had been rung in mistake or whether something of an unusual nature was on the boards. There had been rumours, originating goodness only knows where, that the works might have to close down, and that prospect, with winter only a few weeks off, was a dismal one.

They trooped into the large office and found Mr. Trevorrick looking cheerful and self-possessed, with Mr. Pengelly, with a frown on his face, toying nervously with a paper-knife.

Trevorrick wasted no time in preliminaries.

‘Men!’ he began. ‘Present-day conditions of the metal market have forced us to make preparations for the closing-down of the works. If there were any indications of a recovery during the next three or four months we would hold on. Unfortunately, there are none.’

He paused, rapidly scanning the features of the dejected men. There was no doubt about their being downcast. He realised that figuratively he held them in the hollow of his hand.

‘However,’ he continued, ‘there is no reason why the amicable relations between us as employers and employees should not be maintained; but, let me hasten to remind you that amicable relations won’t fill
empty stomachs. Mr. Pengelly and myself are anxious to put our sincerity to a practical test. It rests with you whether you decide to take advantage of our offer.

‘Before going deeper into the matter, I can assure you of a constant job, paid for at the same rates that you are receiving at present with the addition of a bonus, which might be anything up to a couple of hundred pounds, at the termination of the first year’s work. It may entail discomfort, it is of a hazardous nature, although with due precautions there is no danger that cannot be avoided. There is one stipulation I must make — each and every man must be under the strictest pledge of secrecy.’

He paused again. The men shuffled uneasily. Several at the back of the room whispered hoarsely to each other.

‘Is the job straight and above-board, sir?’ inquired an anxious voice.

Trevorrick looked straight at the speaker.

‘Naturally,’ he replied.

His tone carried conviction. Had he said more in reply, the men might have smelt a rat.

‘Very good, sir; I’m in it,’ announced the cautious one. Others joined in accepting the decidedly indefinite offer.

‘Any one not wishing to sign on can go,’ exclaimed Trevorrick. ‘I won’t blame him for refusing a job about which he knows nothing, but there are other people’s interests to be safeguarded. What! All agreed? Excellent! Now, Mr. Pengelly, will you please read out
the declaration and obtain every man’s signature, please?’

The document binding each employee to secrecy was cleverly worded, concluding with the affirmative that each man admitted his liability to be summarily dismissed for insufficiency of work, bad workmanship, insubordination, turbulence, inebriety or other offence or misconduct contrary to the rules and regulations of the Posidon Salvage Company.

‘There you are, men,’ exclaimed Trevorrick, after the last signature had been obtained. ‘You now know what is the nature of the work — salvage. I will briefly relate the history of the Posidon. Eight or nine years ago — in nineteen-sixteen, to be exact — the Posidon, bound from Quebec for the United Kingdom with a cargo consisting mainly of copper and silver ingots, was torpedoed by a Hun submarine when about six miles south-south-west of the Lizard.

‘An attempt was made to beach her on Looe Bar, but she turned turtle and sank in fifteen fathoms. After the Armistice attempts were made to salvage the cargo. Divers went down, found the wreck lying over on her beam ends. There were a few bars of copper found, but of silver not a solitary ingot. The explosion of the torpedo had blown away one side of the strong-room. That discovery brought the salvage work to an abrupt termination.

‘Now then. This is where we come in. From a most trustworthy source, I found out what actually did happen to the ingots. The Posidon turned turtle and
sank, but between the two operations there was an interval. She drifted bottom-upwards for perhaps half an hour. In that position the weight of the copper burst open the hatches and nearly the whole lot was strewn on the bed of the sea. The silver, too, fell through the blown-in face of the strong-room. Consequently, when the ship did make her final plunge, she was two hundred yards away from the spot where she had dumped her precious cargo. Is that clear?’

A murmur of assent came from the interested listeners. Tales of sunken treasure waiting to be picked up from a veritable Tom Tiddler’s ground appeal to most people; and Trevorrick’s breezy, convincing manner did not fail to impress the simple-minded audience.

‘You know it’s there, sir?’ inquired one of the employees, an ex-seaman-diver.

‘Certainly, Hunt,’ replied Trevorrick. ‘I’ve seen it. I cannot produce better proof than that?’

‘Any difficulties, sir, in the way of other people being on the same lay?’ asked another.

‘The Admiralty, by whom the vessel was chartered, have abandoned her; the underwriters have settled up and written her off as a bad debt, although it may be possible that they might want to chip in. That’s why we must conduct our operations in secret. It’s all above-board, you’ll understand. I wouldn’t defraud anyone. I have taken counsel’s opinion and have been informed that we have a moral, legal and every other jolly old right to stick to what we can find. But we
must guard ourselves against others who may try to jump our claim.

‘How? I will tell you. As you know, the Admiralty inspector has just been here. I took the opportunity to sound him, and he assured me that there would be no objection on his part against our employing R81 as a salvage craft. Being fitted with air-locks, enabling a diver to leave and enter at will, she is an ideal proposition for the job. The only difficulty is getting her in and out of Falmouth Harbour. Officious busybodies might write to the Admiralty asking why she was being employed instead of being broken up. I mentioned this to Mr. Chamfer. He was most sympathetic and hinted — hinted, mind you — that if R81 could be sufficiently disguised, there ought to be no further difficulty. That, with your co-operation, I propose to do.’

The men’s enthusiasm was rapidly rising. Pengelly gave a glance of admiration at his partner. There was no doubt about it: Trevorrick held them in the palm of his hand.

‘There’s no time to be lost,’ continued the promoter. ‘We’ll start this afternoon. Carry on, men. Barnard and Marchant, will you remain, please?’

The workmen hurried gleefully out of the office, leaving the two foremen with whom the principals conferred over certain details in connection with the fitting out of the submarine.

At length Barnard and Marchant were dismissed, and Trevorrick and Pengelly found themselves alone.
‘Well?’ queried the former abruptly. ‘What do you think of the yarn I’ve just been pitching? That got ’em didn’t it?’

Pengelly nodded.

‘So far, I admit,’ he replied. ‘But — ’

‘Go on, man; get it off your chest,’ prompted the senior partner, now in high good humour.

‘S’posing we get R81 under way. How do you propose to switch over from salvaging to piracy? That’ll take some doing.’

‘Possibly,’ admitted Trevorrick. ‘But I’ll do it. You wait and see. By the bye,’ he continued, abruptly changing the subject. ‘What was that yarn you were telling me about Chamfer? Something about him coming into a pot of money.’

‘Yes, lucky bounder,’ replied Pengelly enviously.

‘Some misguided relative of his shuffled off this mortal coil about two years ago and left him thirty thousand pounds.’

‘Hanged if I’d stop in the Admiralty service with that little lot,’ remarked Trevorrick. ‘Even though he’s got a soft billet. I’d blow the lot in a couple of years. “Easy come, easy go” is my motto.’

‘He’s evidently of a different nature,’ said Pengelly. ‘But why do you ask?’

‘Nothing much,’ was the response. ‘Look here, Pengelly, we’ll have to throw dust in the eyes of the shareholders. Can we run to another five percent?’

‘It will cut into our capital.’

‘It’ll have to,’ decided Trevorrick. ‘We’ll declare a
half-yearly dividend. On the strength of that we might apply for extra capital. And another thing: you’d better run across to Penzance within the next few days and sound your pal, Port— what’s his name?’

‘Porthoustoc — Silas Porthoustoc.’

‘That’s the fellow. We’ll want him and his lugger. He’s sound, isn’t he?’

‘Do anything,’ replied Pengelly. ‘If he were put to it, he’d be a second King o’ Prussia.* Nod’s as good as a wink to him — at his price.’

‘I wouldn’t let him know too much,’ suggested Trevorrick. ‘At least, not at first. Once I get him in my power sufficiently, I can put a half-nelson over him in double-quick time. Then he daren’t open his mouth — price or no price.’

Pengelly eyed his companion dubiously.

‘You’re not going to try that game on me, I hope?’ he asked.

Trevorrick brought his huge hand heavily down on his partner’s shoulder.

‘Come now,’ he exclaimed. ‘You know the saying, “Honour amongst thieves”? Aren’t we sworn comrades under the Jolly Roger?’

* King of Prussia: soubriquet of John Carter, a noted Cornish smuggler, who in the latter part of the eighteenth century held and fortified Porth Leah, a few miles east of Marazion, as a smuggling base. On one occasion he fired the guns at a revenue cutter. On another he broke into the Custom House at Penzance and recovered various contraband goods which the Excise people had seized, taking only ‘his own’ and no more. Carter was a sort of Cornish maritime Robin Hood. Porth Leah is now called Prussia Cove in memory of this daring smuggler.
Pengelly nodded.

I’d like to remind him of another saw, he reflected. ‘When thieves fall out.’ But perhaps I’d better not.
That same afternoon, there being a full moon on the previous day, the spring tide was at its highest at about six o’clock. The conditions being favourable, R81 was moved into the covered-in slip, while the shell of R67 was placed in the berth vacated by her practically intact sister.

When employed as active units under the white ensign, these boats had a surface displacement of 420 tons; submerged, this displacement was increased to the extent of 80 tons. Their speed when on the surface was 15 knots; while submerged, this was reduced to nine. The propelling machinery consisted of semi-diesel engines for surface work, 13 tons of oil being carried for that purpose. In diving-trim this class relied upon electric motors, the ‘juice’ being kept in numbers of storage batteries that had frequently to be recharged.

In her present state, R81 retained her engines. To get these tuned up was not a difficult matter.

The batteries had deteriorated to such an extent as to be useless. Trevorrick decided to scrap them. He had no intention of driving R81 under the water. In the event of danger he could submerge and ‘lie doggo’ until he deemed it prudent to break surface. Thus, he
cut out an important item in the running costs.

Meanwhile, the roar of the oxygen-acetylene plant had given place to the rattle of riveting-hammers and drilling-machines. All hands worked with a zest, prompted by the hope that they were participators in a profit-sharing scheme. To guard against intruders, watchmen were posted by night, while a boom of timber was stretched across the mouth of Polkyll Creek, to which a notice-board was affixed with the intimation that: **THIS CREEK IS TEMPORARILY CLOSED TO NAVIGATION. DANGEROUS. BY ORDER.**

By whose order it was not stated. Few craft other than pleasure skiffs ever penetrated the secluded backwater, and the season was too late for picnic parties. Some of the local fishermen were up against the infringement of their rights, but a judicious expenditure on beer quickly removed their opposition to the temporary closing of the creek.

Quickly the task of disguising the submarine as a tramp steamer progressed. Vertical girders bolted to her bulging sides formed the framework for the side-plating. She was given a raised forecastle and poop; while amidships, by an ingenious arrangement, was a raised structure that could with little trouble be moved fore and aft. On the structure was the dummy chart-house with a funnel in its wake. Thus, by altering the position of the midship structure, the submarine would present the appearance of a ‘three island vessel’ or one of the coasting type with the funnel well aft. In addition, she was given a pair of stumpy masts with
derricks, so arranged to be lowered should occasion arise. Ventilating cowls were fixed to various positions on deck, each with a duplicate base, in order to alter the general appearance. Two boats were carried in davits, each constructed of sheet metal and fitted with valves that enabled them to be easily filled and emptied when the submarine dived or came to the surface as the case might be.

In two months from the time the work was first put in hand, R81, rechristened *Alerte* of London, was floated out and moored in the centre of Polkyll Creek. If necessary, her presence could be explained by saying that she was about to take a cargo of scrap metal round to Cardiff.

Even at close distance it would be almost impossible for the most practised eye to discover the fake, unless the observer actually went on board. With her black sides streaked with iron rust, her stumpy masts and buff funnel with a black top, she was like many a hundred tramps that nosed their way coastwise from Thurso to Penzance and from Wick to Falmouth.

To complete the deception, Pengelly, who was a skilful penman, made a fictitious certificate of registry and other necessary ship’s papers. Nor was he content with one of each. Six different sets, each in a different name, were prepared and placed on board.

At an early stage in the proceedings, Pengelly had gone over to Penzance in order to interview and enlist the services of that tough old salt Silas Porthoustoc. At the merest hint that he proposed to run a cargo, the
skipper of the lugger’s eyes gleamed.

‘What be’t, Maaster?’ he inquired. ‘Spirits, lace, or what not?’

‘Neither at present,’ was the reply. ‘But something highly contraband.’

‘So much the better, says I,’ grunted Silas. ‘Where be tu?’

‘What’s the size of your hold?’ asked Pengelly, without answering Porthoustoc’s question.

‘Say twelve feet by six an’ you’ll not be far adrift.’

‘That’s the hatch?’

‘Ay, of course,’ replied Silas. ‘Reckon as ’ow I could stow a twenty-five feet spar if I wur put to it.’

‘Good enough,’ agreed Pengelly. ‘Here are your orders: Three miles south-south-east of the North Hinder Light, between midnight and dawn on the seventeenth.’

‘Good,’ chuckled the old man. ‘Then ut be Schnapps after all?’

‘Sort of,’ admitted Pengelly. ‘You’ll find a motor cargo-boat waiting for you. She’ll show three long and three short flashes every half-hour, till you answer her by the prearranged signal. It’s all set down on this paper. Our rendezvous — ’

‘What’ll that be, Maaster?’ interrupted Silas.

‘Meeting-place,’ explained the other. ‘Will be ten miles sou’ by west of St. Alban’s Head. Recognition signals the same. Payment fifty pounds down and five percent, on all subsequent consignments — and we’ll keep you pretty busy. Not much risk, either, if you
know your job.’

‘Guess I knows my job, all right,’ chuckled Porthoustoc.

‘Good!’ ejaculated Pengelly. ‘If there’s much of a lop on outside you’d best run up the West Scheldt. You’ll find your cargo waiting for you off Neuzen. Know it?’

‘Find my way in blindfold,’ declared Silas. ‘I’d like to have a quid for every lil’ keg I’ve brought out o’ they parts. The Fairy ’ll be on the spot to time, blow high, blow low, Maaster.’

Having secured an ally, although Silas Porthoustoc was in ignorance of the real project of his employer, Pengelly returned to Polkyll Creek and reported progress.

‘We’ll slip our moorings on Saturday,’ declared Trevorrick. ‘She’s practically ready. We took in the last few tons of oil this morning. Men are full of beans, Pengelly, old son, it’s going to be simply IT and no mistake.’

In this optimistic state of mind, Trevorrick perched himself on the edge of a desk and lit a cigarette. From where he sat he could command two views: one over the creek on which the Alerte rode sedately at her moorings; the other along the narrow drive leading to the one and only entrance to the works from the landward side. Half-way down the drive lay a lorry laden with broken metal. It had been there for the last month — by design — to prevent would-be dealers and other callers from driving straight up to the office.

Suddenly Trevorrick rapped out an oath.
Pengelly started to his feet; not because his partner was not addicted to strong language, but because the vehemence of the other’s spontaneous delivery, following a phrase of self-satisfaction, warned him that something unusual had occurred.

‘That fool!’ hissed Trevorrick.

Pengelly hurried to the window. A car had stopped by the obstructing lorry, and from it walked a man whom Pengelly instantly recognised as Chamfer. The Admiralty inspector had arrived three weeks before he was due.

‘Confound the fellow!’ ejaculated Pengelly. ‘What’s to be done now?’

The spasm of rage evident in Trevorrick’s face had passed. He was smiling grimly.

‘Make yourself scarce,’ he ordered. ‘I’ll deal with him.’

Pengelly knew that tone. He went.

‘Stand by when I call you,’ called out his partner.

Left alone, Trevorrick preened himself and stood up to wait the uninvited visitor.

Briskly the little man came into the office. The two shook hands — Trevorrick cool and collected, towering a good seven inches over the self-important little Chamfer. A hawk confronting a cock-sparrow would have been an apt simile.

‘This is an unexpected visit, Mr. Trevorrick,’ began the inspector. ‘We officials like to have our little jokes, eh, what? Take you on the hop, eh? Ha, ha, ha! Not my fault, though. Another Admiralty minute — confound
'em. I’ve got to send in a report upon the condition of R81’s diesel engines. If disposed of, I must have the name and address of the purchaser.’

Trevorrick realised that he was in a fix. He could neither produce the machinery (unless he gave the show away by taking Chamfer on board the Alerté), nor could he offer his sales book for inspection, since there was no record of the engines being sold.

‘Rather unusual, isn’t it?’ he remarked, playing for time. Already a scheme was hatching in his ready brain. ‘We’ve bought R81, lock, stock and barrel.’

‘But you must bear in mind that the Admiralty has an undisputed right to supervise the breaking up of these craft until the clearing certificate has been granted.’

‘The engines have been removed,’ announced Trevorrick. ‘One minute; I’ll turn up the name of the purchaser.’

He went to a safe behind his desk. Mr. Chamfer went to the window overlooking the creek.

‘You haven’t wasted much time over her,’ he remarked, noting as he thought the meagre remains of R81.

After that, things were decidedly hazy as far as the Admiralty inspector was concerned. He was conscious of a powerful hand thrust over his face and a sickly, smelly object pressed tightly over his nose and mouth; a desperate attempt to breathe, a sort of wild resentment at being thrown off his balance. Then, oblivion.

‘Pengelly!’ shouted his partner.
'Good heavens, man!' exclaimed Pengelly, when he entered the room and stood aghast at Trevorrick's temerity. 'What have you done now! You’ve spoilt everything.’

'Spoilt nothing, except the train of this fellow’s thoughts,’ retorted Trevorrick coolly. ‘He’s our first haul. Thirty thousand you said — or was it fifty? We’ll get a tidy slice of that, Pengelly. We’ll take him on board. It will interfere with previous arrangements, I fear.’

‘How about the chauffeur? He’ll be suspicious.’

‘Leave him to me,’ replied Trevorrick, picking up his hat. ‘Stand by in case Chamfer wants to sit up and take nourishment. If he does, give him some more of this.’

He pointed to a bottle containing chloroform and ether.

Pengelly nodded. He was on the point of inquiring how his partner could explain Chamfer’s presence to the crew, but thought better of it.

Presently, Trevorrick returned humming one of the latest music-hall ditties.

‘That’s that,’ he remarked. ‘The fellow went off like a lamb. Pitched him a yarn that his master was going down to Falmouth with us in the launch, and that he was to pick him up by telephonic orders tomorrow or possibly the day after at Penzance. Now, Pengelly, sit down and write. Make out a medical certificate to the effect that “Mr. Jasper Chamfer is at present under my care, suffering from” — what shall we say? — “from influenza.” Put any old signature, with M.R.C.P. after
it. We’ll post it on to Devonport Dockyard. They won’t worry to look up the doctor’s name in the Medical Directory.’

‘How do we explain this to the men?’ asked Pengelly, pointing to the motionless figure on the coco-matting.

‘Send up Barnard,’ was Trevorrick’s only rejoinder. Presently the bo’sun — formerly foreman — came hurrying up. His eyes bulged as he caught sight of the unconscious representative of My Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty.

‘Do you know this man, Barnard?’ demanded Trevorrick.

‘Ay, ay, sir; ’tis th’ inspector. Chamfer’s his name.’

‘Then forget it,’ returned Trevorrick. ‘In future and for as long as I think necessary his name’s Jones. Got that?’

The bo’sun nodded.

‘The skunk has let us down,’ continued the senior partner in unruffled tones. ‘You’ll remember he agreed to let us recondition R81 as a salvage craft. After all our trouble, he went back on his word because we would not comply with his demand for a quarter share. He threatened to report the matter. The fool didn’t realise what he was up against. The question is, what’s to be done with him? Any suggestion, Barnard?’

‘Take him with us, sir.’

‘Smart idea that, Barnard; very smart. Don’t you think so, Pengelly? We’ll act on it. Cut off and tell the hands of what has occurred. Warn them that we must
at all costs weigh and proceed at tide-time.’

‘Ay, ay, sir; we’ll have to fill the fresh-water tank and ship the rest of the dry provisions. I’ll tell off a party to swing back the boom.’

‘And a couple of hands to carry this fellow aboard,’ added Trevorrick.

‘Now pack,’ he continued, addressing his partner. ‘We’ve none too much time. In a way it’s as well. It will afford a good excuse to go up-Channel instead of proceeding to the mythical wreck of the phantom ship Posidon. We needn’t worry ourselves about the newly-christened Jones. The crew will deal with him.’

‘What are you going to do with him when we get him on board?’ asked Pengelly. ‘Ditch him?’

‘Against my principles,’ laughed the other. ‘Sides, there’s money to be made out of him. You wait.’

Throughout the rest of the day the work of preparation proceeded. Amongst other things the wireless aerial was sent aloft. The installation was the original set belonging to R81, but for good reasons Trevorrick cut out the transmission gear. Communication by wireless was apt to be a two-edged sword. By its use the position of the pirate ship Alerte might be located to within a mile. Receiving was a different matter. It would enable the Alerte to gain valuable information regarding the presence of shipping in her vicinity.

Jasper Chamfer was soon carried off to the ship. Trevorrick’s invention of his cupidity and treachery was only too successful. At the thought that the
enterprise which was to make them rich was in jeopardy through the action of the double-dealing Admiralty official, the crew were ready to go to any length to muzzle him most effectually.

At eight o’clock on a rising tide, and with the seven-day-old moon well down in the west, the *Alerte* slipped her moorings.
― CHAPTER 4 —
THE FIRST HAUL

In spite of her premature departure, the *Alerte* was well found for her work. Everything that Trevorrick and Pengelly could provide had been placed on board, or had been arranged for at the earliest possible opportunity. Yet Trevorrick smiled grimly when he reflected that here was a modern pirate vessel proceeding to sea absolutely unarmed with the exception of a service revolver and fifty rounds of ammunition.

Pengelly, whose acquaintance with Falmouth Harbour and the river Fal was extensive, conned the ship from the bows, transmitting his orders to the quartermaster at the above-water steering apparatus. Trevorrick, in peaked cap, bridge coat and rubber boots, tramped up and down the temporary structure amidships. He was feeling rather anxious, not on account of his recently adopted profession, but as to whether the *Alerte* would clear St. Anthony Point without either grounding or being challenged by the Falmouth Customs officials. He was one of those devil-may-care fellows who never hesitate to take risks and face the consequences provided they have had a run for their money. Ignominious capture at this early stage of the proceedings would be the limit of bitter disappointment.
Slowly the *Alerte* smelt her way down the intricate channel of Polkyll Creek. Once her rounded bilge scraped the mud, but without losing way she dragged over the slippery obstruction. Ahead lay the dark, tree-clad hills of the right bank of the Fal.

‘Hard-a-starboard!’ shouted Pengelly, supplementing these instructions by ordering the port engine to go astern.

Even then, under the opposing action of the twin propellers the *Alerte* described a fairly wide turning circle. It was only by a hand’s-breadth that she avoided running her nose against the opposite bank.

‘Easy ahead both!’ bawled the navigating officer.

The dense wooded ground echoed and re-echoed to the explosions of the supposedly muffled exhausts. If this noise continued, Trevorrick realised that all attempt to disguise the means of propulsion of the *Alerte* was at an end. As far as he could judge, the distinctive sounds would be audible from Green Bank to St. Mawes.

Gradually the river opened out. Mylor Creek bore broad on the starboard beam. Now unchecked by the lofty and narrow banks the noise of the exhausts sensibly diminished, while the rising breeze, hitherto masked by the trees, served still further to stifle the oral evidence of the presence of the mysterious craft.

Then, like a galaxy of stars, the lights of the shipping and the town of Falmouth opened out. The next three miles would be the critical part of the run. At any moment the tricoloured lamp of one of the Customs’
launches might be seen bearing down upon the outgoing ‘tramp’.

‘Lugo Buoy on the port bow, sir!’

Now the gauntlet was all but run. Ahead loomed the rugged outlines of St. Anthony and Pendennis, with the narrow channel between them, still further contracted by the dangerous Black Rock.

‘Ahoy! What ship is that?’ hailed a voice out of the darkness. Unseen and unheard, a motor launch had swept alongside the pirate vessel’s port quarter.

‘Alerte of London!’ shouted Trevorrick.

‘Cargo?’

‘Light.‘

‘Where are you bound?’

‘Truro for Plymouth.’

‘All right. Heave us a line. I’ll see your papers.’

‘Ay, ay,’ replied Trevorrick.

His ready brain was working. If things came to the worst, the Customs’ launch could be stove in by the simple expedient of dropping a pig of iron into her. He might even take the crew prisoners; but, he reflected, there was no likelihood of obtaining a ransom for them. They would merely be useless mouths to feed.

‘Ease down!’ bawled the imperious voice.

‘Ay, ay,’ responded Trevorrick, but made no move towards putting the order into execution.

‘Stand by!’ he bawled, brandishing a coil of rope.

The Bowman of the launch caught the flake of the coil and took a turn. Directly the rope tautened Trevorrick cut it. The launch dropped astern, until
under extra throttle she again ran alongside.

It was a gain of a couple of minutes. By this time the Alerte was lifting to the fairly heavy rollers coming in from the English Channel. With her additional top-hamper she was rolling pretty heavily.

But by this time the Customs’ boatmen had thought better of it. Boarding an outward bound vessel was not such an imperative duty as examining one come foreign. It wasn’t worth the risk of having their boat stove-in and finding themselves in the ditch on a cold November night. A breaking sea sweeping clean over the canopy decided the question.

Without a word, the motor-launch’s helm was put hard over. Listing dangerously, she flung about and disappeared into the darkness.

Thoughtfully, Trevorrick put a stopper round a piece of pig-iron lying in the scuppers.

St. Anthony Light blinked knowingly away on the Alerte’s port quarter.

‘Well?’ inquired Pengelly, stamping aft. He had put Marchant on duty in the eyes of the ship, since there was now plenty of sea-room.

‘We’ll submerge off Helford,’ decided Trevorrick. ‘Wind’s off the land. It’ll give the crew a chance to exercise. Get the hands to stand by with the mast-lowering tackles.’

Twenty minutes later the Alerte, with masts and funnel lowered, slowed down a couple of miles due east of Mawnan Chair. A cast of the lead gave sufficient depth.
'Hands to diving stations!' roared Trevorrick, his words recalling incidents of long-past days when under better auspices he had held command of a submarine flying the white ensign.

Quickly the crew disappeared below. Giving a final glance round, Trevorrick followed Pengelly through the hatchway, which closed after them with a metallic clang.

The throb of the diesel engines ceased. The silence was profound, broken only by the top of the wavelets against the outer plating of the hull.

The electric lights gleamed upon the grave faces of the crew. With two exceptions they were new to submarine work. They had excuse to feel jumpy, but the sight of their cool and composed skipper gave them a certain amount of confidence.

A gurgling noise announced that the buoyancy tanks were being flooded. Slowly the disc of the depth indicator began to move. Once it started it never faltered until it stopped at eleven fathoms.

The *Alerte* was resting on the bed of Falmouth Bay.

‘All shipshape and Bristol fashion, my lads!’ exclaimed Trevorrick, turning away from the control station and drawing off his leather gauntlets. ‘No anchor watch to keep. We’re as snug as fleas in a rug.’

The men trooped forward for supper. Trevorrick and Pengelly retired to the diminutive ward-room amidships, where a repast was already spread upon the teak swing-table.

‘Tomorrow,’ remarked Trevorrick, in the course of
the meal, ‘Tomorrow, Tom Trevorrick ceases to exist as
such. Henceforward I am Captain Cain — “every
man’s hand against mine”, you know.’

‘Then you’re letting the hands know early?’

Trevorrick nodded.

‘And what am I, then?’ continued Pengelly. ‘Captain
what?’

Trevorrick laid down his knife and fork and looked
fixedly at his companion.

‘Captain Nothing,’ he replied. ‘There won’t be two
captains aboard this hooker. You can put that in your
pipe and smoke it.’

‘But we’re on equal terms?’

‘From a financial point of view, yes,’ agreed
Trevorrick. ‘But mark you, I’m in sole command.
There’s no getting away from that: not an earthly. You,
Pengelly, are second in command; to be consulted as
and when I think fit. You are to carry out my orders
unquestioningly. Have you got that? Good; then don’t
forget it.’

Then, having delivered his ultimatum, Trevorrick’s
mood changed. He went on with his interrupted
repast, chatting on topics that had no bearing upon the
subject of the great enterprise.

Presently he inquired casually, ‘Has Chamfer
recovered his senses yet?’

Pengelly shook his head.

‘I haven’t given him a thought,’ he replied.

The captain stretched out his hand and pressed a
button. Forward a bell tinkled shrilly. One of the crew,
tapping upon the door, entered.

‘See if Jones is stirring,’ ordered Trevorrick, glancing at the clock on the bulkhead, which showed that it was twenty minutes past one in the morning. ‘If he is, bring him along.’

In less than a couple of minutes the man returned, followed by the luckless Jasper Chamfer. The Admiralty inspector looked and probably felt an utter wreck. The after-effects of the anaesthetic, coupled with the confined atmosphere of his cell, would have capsized many a man of tougher fibre.

‘Stand there,’ ordered Trevorrick curtly, at the same time motioning to the seaman to make himself scarce. ‘Unaccustomed surroundings, eh?’

‘Where am I?’ inquired Chamfer tremulously.

‘As near as I can say, you’re between ten and eleven fathoms beneath the surface of Falmouth Bay,’ announced his captor grimly. ‘But I haven’t brought you here to ask me questions. I want information from you and — I’m — going — to — get — it.’

He paused to let his words sink in.

‘You poked your nose into our affairs. I’m going to probe into yours,’ continued Trevorrick.

‘It was my duty.’

‘That’s your affair. Now, tell me. I understand you’re worth about thirty thousand pounds. Is that so? Well, I won’t inquire, I’ll assume. They say silence means consent. That thirty thousand is an encumbrance. Already you’re self-supporting, drawing a fat salary and doing precious little to earn it
— doing it mighty badly, I might add. You’ll have to
disgorge: some of it, at least. How is that sum
invested?’

Chamfer shook his head.

‘I won’t tell you,’ he replied, with a faint show of
spirit, which his quivering form belied.

‘Disobliging blighter,’ commented the captain. ‘Very
well, then. There’s nothing more to be said at present.
You’ll go back to your cell. Tomorrow you will look
upon the sun for the last time.’

Without giving the Admiralty official another look,
Trevorrick touched the bell.

‘Remove Jones,’ he ordered.

‘By Jove, man!’ ejaculated Pengelly, after Chamfer
had been taken away. ‘He would have told. I could see
it on his face.’

‘I didn’t look,’ was the unconcerned response.
‘Tomorrow he’ll be as docile as a dove. And while I’m
about it,’ he added, ‘in future you will drop that tone
of familiarity you’ve been in the habit of using.
Remember, as your captain I am entitled to the word
“sir”. You’d better turn in now, Pengelly.’

Pengelly got up and went out without a word.

The door had hardly closed when the captain
recalled him.

‘Good-night, Pengelly.’
‘Good-night, sir!’

*Nothing like putting it across the prevaricating blighter,*
reflected Trevorrick. *Without proper respect all discipline
goes by the board.*
Pengelly, in his cabin, was indulging in different views.

‘If the swine thinks he’s going to ride the high horse with me, he’s mistaken,’ he muttered. ‘I’ll do him properly when I get the chance.’

The night passed uneventfully. At four bells the hands were roused and breakfast served out, every one being given a liberal tot of rum. The meal over and the traps cleared away and the mess-deck being cleaned up (Trevorrick was dead nuts on routine), the men were mustered in the fore-compartment that previously served as the bow torpedo-room and air-flask chamber.

To them came Trevorrick, rigged out in pea-jacket, gold braided cap, muffler, flannel trousers, and sea-boots. At his right hip was a holster, the flap of which was unfastened to display the butt of a revolver.

‘Men!’ he began. ‘Circumstances are against us: luck isn’t! That swine of an Admiralty inspector has to be held responsible. He has blown the gaff. Taking advantage of the confidence I placed in him, he has betrayed the secret of the Posidon’s cargo to the Admiralty. I understand a dockyard lighter with a diving party is already over the position of the ingots. That being so, our original plans are a wash-out. But little difficulties of that description, annoying though they be, don’t daunt me. Since Jones has caused the trouble, Jones must pay.

‘I’m going to take strong measures. I haven’t the
faintest doubt that they will attain the desired end. To be brief, I intend to squeeze him to the extent of twenty-thousand pounds. Of that sum, Mr. Pengelly and myself each take five-thousand. The remainder — ten-thousand pounds — will be divided between the hands in proportion to the wages you were receiving while in the employ of Trevorrick, Pengelly & Co. I have not yet worked out each man’s share, but on a rough calculation it varies between three-hundred and four-hundred apiece, which is considerably in excess of the sum originally offered in connection with the proposed, but now abandoned, salvage operations. Later on, I have other attractive propositions to bring forward, but for the present I’ll say no more.’

It might be owing to the strong spirit, it might be the vision of sudden and easily gotten wealth. Be that as it may, the captain’s speech roused the men to boisterous enthusiasm.

Trevorrick left them to discuss matters.

‘I said they’d eat out of my hand, Pengelly,’ he remarked. ‘One word from me and they’d cut the throats of the first crew of foreigners we came across. Not that that is my intention,’ he added.

As dawn was breaking, the Alerte was brought to the surface. Masts and funnel were set up, the motors started ahead at a modest five knots, a course was shaped to the south-south-east, which would take her well clear of the Cornish coast.

When twenty miles out in the Channel, Trevorrick
swept the horizon with his binoculars. Save for a large oil tanker well away beyond the Lizard, there was nothing in sight—which was precisely what Trevorrick had wanted.

‘Clear lower deck!’ was the order.

Up tumbled the hands. Under the captain’s directions a plank was brought out and placed with its heel resting on the deck amidships, and its outer end projecting five feet beyond the low bulwarks.

‘Fall in on your respective sides — port and starboard watch,’ shouted Trevorrick. ‘When Jones comes on deck howl at him. Put the wind up him for all you’re worth. I’m not going to carry my threat into execution. It won’t be necessary, and he’s not worth it. Bring up the prisoner.’

A combined yell like the howling of a pack of wolves greeted the trembling Jasper Chamfer. With quivering steps he was led to the foot of the slightly inclined plank. Here his eyes were bandaged and his arms lashed behind his back.

Trevorrick held up his hand for silence.

The uproar ceased immediately.

‘Now,’ began the captain in clear, measured tones, addressing the captive. ‘I will state our terms whereby you may gain your life and, under certain restrictions, your liberty. If within thirty seconds from the termination of my proposal you still refuse a perfectly reasonable demand — there’s the plank. You will sign an order on your bankers, authorising them to pay the person named in your letter of advice the sum of
twenty-thousand pounds. Having done that, you will be placed on board a vessel bound foreign, you giving the undertaking that you will not reveal your identity nor attempt to cancel your bond within the period of four months. Remember that, if you do, your life will not be worth a red cent. We belong to a powerful and widely scattered society, having agents in the principal ports all over the world. Conform to the conditions and you will be free to return at the expiration of the time limit mentioned. Refuse and your fate rests with you.’

In dead silence, Trevorrick pulled out his watch. The blindfolded man could hear the deliberate ticking of the timepiece.

‘Ten seconds,’ announced Trevorrick. ‘Twenty seconds, ten more to go. Stand by, you men.’

‘I agree!’ almost shrieked the tortured man, and with a groan he pitched forward. Trevorrick caught him as he fell.

‘The twenty thousand’s ours, lads!’ he announced. ‘Pipe down. Take him below.’

The assembled crew broke ranks and were about to disperse, when Trevorrick swung round on his heel.

‘Stand fast!’ he ordered.

Months, nay years, cannot destroy the deeply-rooted sense of discipline of the ex-naval man. Smartly the uniformed crew pulled themselves together and waited immovable, while two of their number took the unconscious Chamfer down below, lowering him through what was originally the fore torpedo hatch.
‘Men!’ exclaimed Trevorrick. ‘We may just as well understand each other. Already you have seen how I deal with those who thwart my purpose, especially when that purpose is to the advantage of those in my employ and under my command. You all know, only too well, what it is to be up against Fate. So do I. Since the chance of earning an honest living is denied us — honest according to the ideas of a certain class of society that has never to study the question of existence from our standpoint — there remains another alternative. You know the saying: “Heaven helps those who help themselves.” I mean to act upon that, on the firm belief that Providence will see us through. We’ve made an excellent start. You will naturally feel inclined to ask: How shall we help ourselves on future occasions? Already we have broken the law and incurred severe penalties by kidnapping a citizen of the realm and a government official to boot. All of us, remember.’

He paused in order to let his words sink in.

‘May as well be ’ung for a sheep as a lamb, sir,’ exclaimed one of the men. Several of his companions uttered expressions of assent.

‘That’s the spirit,’ said Trevorrick. ‘Exactly what I expected. Well, my lads, it’s my intention to arm this old hooker. Already arrangements have been completed to that end. Then we’ll stop the first likely French or German ship we fall in with and see what we can do to ease their pockets. Mind you, I’m not going to run needless risks. I have your interests as
well as my own at stake. It’s going to be a short cruise but a busy one. When we pay off there will be no doubt that each of you will have sufficient money to buy a comfortable pub and live the rest of your lives in simple luxury and ease. Think what you can do with, say, three thousand of the best to play with — probably more. Now then; any questions?’

Questions came; slowly at first, then rapidly. Trevorrick dealt with each at length, replying so suavely and convincingly, that his listeners were metaphorically lifted off their feet. They were not inquiries respecting the proposed methods by which they were to acquire wealth, nor did the questioners seem to trouble themselves over the possible consequences of their lawlessness. The subject that weighed most heavily on their minds was how were they to obtain guarantees that their shares would actually reach them?

‘Exactly the sort of question I should expect from an intelligent body of men,’ replied Trevorrick. ‘Naturally you look ahead. Your horizon isn’t six inches from your eyes. But you can see perfectly well that it would be impracticable to run ashore a cargo of booty valued, say, at fifteen thousand and divide it up like a sirloin of beef. We have to employ an agent — a middleman. One is already engaged — a thoroughly trustworthy Penzance man — and you know the word of a Penzance man is his bond. He will take off our loot and dispose of it. The profits of each transaction will be immediately apportioned. Each of you can either
have his share posted to any address he cares to give, or it can remain with the agent till called for in person. In the case of cash and jewellery, we will, if thought necessary, make the division on board.’

‘S’posin’ some of us loses the number of our mess, sir?’ asked a burly ex-stoker, ‘wot ’appens?’*

‘You lose it, I suppose,’ replied Trevorrick. ‘We will all do sooner or later. It will be all the same a hundred years hence.’

Several of the hands laughed at their skipper’s feeble joke.

‘But I know what you mean,’ he continued. ‘In bygone days, pirates used to regard the death of one of their number as a sort of windfall. It enhanced the value of the survivors’ shares. I have no intention of following that precedent. Every member of the crew can nominate a next-of-kin in the event of his losing his life — which I am anxious to avoid.’

‘You mentioned pirates, sir,’ remarked the bo’sun. ‘I take it we’re to sail under the Jolly Roger?’

There was an ominous silence. The sinister significance of the term had struck home.

‘Now you come to mention it, Mr. Barnard, I really think we are,’ replied Trevorrick lightly. ‘But there’s still time if there’s any white-livered blighter who wants to back out. Now, my lads!’ he continued in ringing tones, ‘all those who do not wish to carry on on my terms, two paces step forward — march!’

* To lose the number of one’s mess means to die, whether by violence or through natural causes.
Not a man moved as directed. Two or three shuffled and lowered their eyes under the stern gaze of the self-declared pirate captain. Possibly they would have taken advantage of the offer had it not been that the fear of ridicule was stronger than their inclination to keep within the law.

Trevorrick’s smile had given place to a look of grim determination. His shaggy eyebrows met in a continuous straight line; his aggressive jaw shot forward.

‘That’s settled, my lads!’ he exclaimed. ‘Now, there’s something more to remember. I am the captain of this craft. My orders you’ll carry out smartly, at the double, and unquestioningly. If they’re not, there’ll be trouble — but there won’t. In the future, you — and others — will know me as Captain Cain. Mr. Pengelly here is second in command; Mr. Barnard is bo’sun, and Mr. Marchant, gunner. These, under me, are your officers and must be treated with respect due to their rank. I insist upon perfect discipline, which alone will enable us to win through. If any man has a grievance against another, there must be no quarrelling. He must report the circumstances to me and abide by my decision. Mr. Marchant, before the men are piped down, serve out a tot of rum apiece and drink success to the *Alerte* and all who sail in her.’

For the last hour the motors had been stopped. There was no immediate hurry to reach the rendezvous, and Captain Cain was too prudent a man to use up oil in
aimlessly cruising up-Channel. Unless another craft came within sight, the *Alerte* could drift; but the pirate skipper realised the risk of his vessel wallowing in the long swell without carrying way. That would be in itself sufficient to excite the curiosity of any passing ship.

Presently, after a prolonged examination of the horizon, Captain Cain went below to his cabin, leaving Pengelly in charge of the deck. For certain reasons, the skipper did not desire the presence of his lieutenant.

He touched the bell and, on a man entering to enquire his pleasure, ordered Jones to be brought to him.

The wretched Jasper Chamfer, looking ill and horribly scared, was brusquely shown into Captain Cain’s cabin.

‘Good-morning,’ was the captain’s greeting, as genial as if he were dealing with Chamfer in his capacity of Admiralty inspector.

‘Good-morning,’ replied Chamfer, almost automatically. He was too bewildered to grasp the significance of his captor’s irony.

‘Sorry to trouble you,’ continued Captain Cain, ‘but there are a few formalities to be observed in the carrying out of our agreement. That twenty thousand; is it in shares?’

‘Government Four Percents, redeemable in nineteen-thirty-one,’ replied Chamfer. ‘Also Six Percents Royal Mail.’

‘Deposited with whom?’
'My bankers, Trevannion Brothers, Plymouth.'
'Manager a friend of yours?'
'I know him fairly well.'
'Good,' commented Captain Cain. 'Here are paper, pen and ink. First write out an order transferring twenty thousand pounds to my account — Thomas Trevorrick — payable to my bankers, Messrs. Grabaul, Yewgett and Co., Truro.'

For some minutes there was silence in the cabin. Somewhere forward a gramophone was blaring out that popular ditty: 'Then he knew he’d parted.'

Without a word, Chamfer handed over the order. The captain read it carefully.

'Ever heard that story about the Harley Street specialist, Mr. Chamfer?’ he inquired. 'Two of the brigands met in Oxford Street. Said one, “How much did you charge So-and-so for that operation?”’ “Seventy-eight pounds fifteen and sixpence,” was the reply. “Extra-ordinary amount,” commented the other. “Whatever made you fix that sum?” The specialist laughed. “I made him show me his pass-book,” he replied. Well, I’m not asking to see yours, Mr. Chamfer, nor am I lifting all your little pile. At the same time, I want to make sure of what I have got, so just write a friendly little covering letter to the manager of your bank.’

'What shall I say?' asked the victim wearily.

'Gracious, man! Haven’t you any imagination? Perhaps that qualification isn’t required of Admiralty civil servants. Tell him you’ve been unexpectedly
ordered a sea voyage by your medical adviser, and that before you go you must make certain adjustments in your finances. That’s right. I presume you won’t require a receipt?’

‘What are you going to do with me now?’ asked Jasper Chamfer, tremulously.

‘What I told you before,’ replied the pirate, with a grin. ‘A voyage to Jamaica or Pernambuco will do you a world of good. Broaden your outlook on life, Chamfer; enlarge your mental horizon. But, remember, for the next four mouths your name’s Jones. One hint to the contrary and, by Jove! your number’s up. ’Nough said!’

Placing both documents in his pocket-book, Captain Cain turned to go on deck.

‘You can amuse yourself as you like,’ he remarked. ‘You’ve got the run of the ship. There’s nothing to be afraid of provided you hold your tongue.’

It was blowing freshly from the west when Captain Cain rejoined his lieutenant. The Alerte, with a trysail bent to keep her steady, was steering south-east by south making about one knot. Well away eastwards a beaten-down trail of smoke betokened the presence of some sort of steam vessel. To the south half a dozen tanned sails indicated the position of one of the Cornish fishing fleets making for home.

‘Got it, sir?’ inquired Pengelly. By this time the ‘sir’ came with no noticeable hesitation, though the utterance caused the man to curse inwardly every time he had occasion to address his self constituted
superior officer.

‘Yes,’ replied Captain Cain. ‘He parted like a lamb. I’ve an order for the twenty thousand. I’ll have that transferred to Saldanha at Bahia. Useful man, Saldanha.’

· · ·

Late that afternoon, and after the sun had set beneath the misty waters of the English Channel, the *Alerte*, with smoke pouring from her funnel, rolled and lurched past Rame Head, rounded Penlee Point and brought up in the sheltered waters of Cawsand Bay. There was no attempt made to conceal her presence. An anchor-lamp shone brightly from the forestay. To all appearances she was just an ordinary tramp that had brought up outside Plymouth Breakwater while awaiting orders, and thus saving harbour dues which she would have incurred had she entered the Catwater.

‘I’m going on the beach, Mr. Pengelly,’ announced the skipper, loud enough for the watch on deck to hear. ‘Send a boat for me at ten-thirty.’

‘Ay, ay, sir,’ replied the second in command, following up by ordering one of the boats to be lowered.

· · ·

Ten minutes later Captain Cain, in shore-going rig, landed on the sandy beach at Cawsand. A few fishermen were lolling about in the narrow streets of the village. A member of the Coast Preventive Force was talking to the village policeman. Both glanced at
the stranger, merely by force of habit. It was not unusual for people to come ashore at Cawsand.

‘Can you tell me the nearest way to Plymouth?’ asked Captain Cain of the modern substitute of the old coastguardman, not because he did not know, but to give the man an opportunity of questioning him.

Captain Cain was a good walker. In quick time he covered the distance between Cawsand and Cremyll, crossed by means of the ferry to Devonport, and hastened along Union Street. Here he posted two missives: one in Chamfer’s handwriting, addressed to the local bank (that would bear the Plymouth postmark, which was no small advantage); the other to his own bankers, instructing them that on the receipt of securities to the extent of twenty thousand pounds they were to sell out and transfer the proceeds to the firm of Señor Paquita, Calle Rancagua, Copuapo, Chile.

‘Guess that fool Pengelly would look a bit sick if he knew,’ soliloquised Captain Cain, as he turned to retrace his steps. ‘It’s all in the game. If I don’t look after Number One, who else will?’
‘Sail on the starboard bow, sir!’

Captain Cain, binoculars slung round his neck, clambered up the almost vertical teak ladder to the temporary bridge.

It was in the forenoon watch — seven bells, to be exact — of the day following the pirate captain’s visit to Devonport. The Alerte, ploughing along at an easy five knots, was abeam and nearly five miles to the south of Bolt Tail. All that iron-bound coast betwixt Bolt Head and Bolt Tail stood out clearly in the sunlight. To the west the lower lying ground bordering Bigbury Bay was invisible, while to the east the Start was fading into the grey mists that sweep down when the cold Dartmoor air mingles with the warm atmosphere of the English Channel.

The mist was certainly spreading. Unless Captain Cain were very much mistaken, soon the granite cliffs of Devon would be blotted out by the watery vapour.

‘I’ll risk it,’ he decided.

At an aggregate speed of eleven knots, the Alerte and the strange vessel rapidly closed. Soon it was apparent that the latter was a collier; more, she was well down to Plimsoll mark. From the data Captain Cain drew the following conclusions: She was bound foreign.
Evidently she hailed from the Tyne, and since the Welsh coalfields supply the iron furnaces around Swansea with as much coal as they want, it was as futile for a Tyneside collier to carry coals to the Bristol Channel ports as it would be for her to carry that commodity to Newcastle. She was standing too far out to be shaping a course for Plymouth, while her size and draught indicated that she was not an ordinary coasting collier.

‘Make our number, Mr. Barnard!’ sang out the skipper.

The ‘number’, consisting of four flags of the International Code, was already toggled ready for instant use. The first letter was H, but the combination did not appear in the pages of the list of shipping; Captain Cain had seen to that.

The four-flag hoist had hardly reached the halyard block when the stranger replied with her number.

‘KJVT, sir,’ called out Mr. Barnard.

Reference to the list revealed the stranger to be the S.S. *Pickfast* of Newcastle, a subsequent signal, AXSR, indicating that she was bound for Kingston, Jamaica.

The *Alerte’s* next move was to hoist her code flag over the letter H, signifying ‘Bring-to, I have something important to communicate.’

To which the collier replied by the single flag C, indicating ‘Yes’, and at the same time altering helm and stopping her engines.

‘Lower away a boat, Mr. Pengelly,’ ordered Captain Cain. ‘A couple of hands below there and bring
Jones on deck.’

In two minutes the boat, steered by Pengelly and with Jasper Chamfer in the stern sheets, was bounding towards the collier *Pickfast*.

Without a word, the grim Northumbrian mate of the *Pickfast* caught the heaved bowline and took a turn. As the *Alerte*’s boat swung alongside, a rope ladder was lowered to the accompaniment of an invitation to come aboard.

The *Pickfast*’s Old Man had descended from the bridge and was awaiting his visitors. He was a short, thick-set Tynesider, with huge shoulders and bowed legs, a shrewd face and a taciturn manner.

‘Eh, lad!’ he exclaimed, addressing Pengelly. ‘What dost want?’

‘A passage to Jamaica for this man,’ replied Pengelly, feeling that it would be a waste of time to beat about the bush. ‘We’ll pay you fifty pounds in cash.’

The Old Man threw a quick comprehensive glance over the little Admiralty inspector. He noted also that the would-be passenger was without luggage.

‘I’ll ha’ nowt to do wi’ him,’ he declared bluntly. ‘I’ve no call for passengers myseen. Police after him?’

‘No, no,’ Pengelly hastened to reassure him. ‘All above-board, Captain. He came aboard us in a hurry, I’ll admit. We were bound for New Orleans, but had our orders countermanded at Falmouth. Jones is his name; ordered a long sea voyage for the benefit of his health. Come on, Captain. Fifty pounds easily earned.’

‘Coals an’ bananas: them’s my freight,’ remarked the
skipper of the Pickfast. ‘Passengers aren’t in my line. Still, it’s easy money if he’ll take things as he finds ’em. All right, Mr. Jones, I’ll take you.’

And with the air of a man who has conferred a great personal favour, the captain pocketed the notes and waddled in the direction of the bridge. With equal alacrity Pengelly clambered over the side and dropped into the waiting boat. The painter was cast off and the collier’s propeller began to churn the water.

Mr. Jasper Chamfer had started on his involuntary voyage to Jamaica.

Eight hours later the Alerte dropped anchor in Studland Bay. Here she was not likely to be disturbed, nor would her presence excite much attention. Since she flew no signal for a pilot, the pilots for Poole Harbour let her severely alone. A vessel might lie there for a week without attracting official notice, since that anchorage is frequently made use of by craft bound down-Channel. Provided the wind kept between sou’-sou’-west and north it was a secure berth, but should the wind fly round to any other point a heavy swell soon rolls into the bay, making it a matter of urgency for the vessels lying these to up-anchor and proceed.

The anchorage suited Captain Cain admirably. He was within a couple of hours’ run of his rendezvous with the Fairy, and by this time Captain Silas Porthoustoc ought to be on his way down-Channel with his cargo of arms and ammunition. Until the Alerte received the Fairy’s Belgian cargo little could be
done to augment the pirates’ treasury.

At length the evening fixed for the meeting of the pirate ship and her tender arrived. Seven in the evening, with neither moon nor stars to mitigate the darkness of a November night, the Alerte weighed, gave Old Harry Rocks a wide berth and shaped a course to carry her well clear of St. Alban’s Head.

At ten o’clock she was at the rendezvous. The pre-arranged signals were made, but no reassuring reply blinked through the darkness. Midnight came and went. At 4 a.m. the middle watch was relieved, but still no sign of the motor-lugger Fairy.

‘Old Porthoustoc’s let us down, Pengelly,’ declared Captain Cain petulantly. ‘He’s made a lash-up of things. Shouldn’t be surprised to hear that he’s under arrest either at Dover or Dunkirk.’

‘Not he, sir,’ replied Pengelly confidently.

Both men had remained on deck all night, in their eagerness to welcome the Fairy alongside. Every quarter of an hour the flashing signals from the Alerte stabbed the darkness, but not the suspicion of an answer was received.

There was practically no wind. It was a belated St. Martin’s summer. The air was warm and moist, with patches of haze sufficient to obscure the rays of Anvil Point light a bare twelve miles off.

‘Flashing light on our starboard quarter, sir!’ shouted one of the hands.

‘That’s her, then,’ declared Pengelly.

‘What’s the silly fool doing so far to the west?’
demanded Captain Cain, whose temper had not been improved by his long vigil. ‘Port twelve, Quarter-master. Watch for the next flash and keep her on that.’

A quarter of an hour later the two vessels met, the Fairy with her canvas stowed and her motor coughing noisily.

‘Sorry we’m late,’ said Silas apologetically, as the Fairy was made fast alongside her big consort. ‘Wind fell light up-along. Motor jibbed suddenlike. Never knewed ’un to play the fule afore. Tide carried us well loo’ard afore us could get un gwine agen.’

‘All right, I hope?’ asked Captain Cain.

‘Ay, an’ why not?’ rejoined Silas Porthoustoc, as if the question were unnecessary, and that running a cargo of munitions was a mere bagatelle. ‘I’ll come aboard. She’ll lie nicely there,’ he added, jerking his thumb in the direction of the Fairy, which was grinding softly against the fender-protected side of the Alerte.

Silas, who like many another of his fellow-fisher-folk would have related anecdotes of his wife’s sister’s husband’s cousin or other remote connection, kept up a running fire of family history. Without the slightest provocation, he would launch out details of relatives whom one never knew, never wanted to know and in all probability never did know. But when it came to what he had done he was almost as mute as an oyster. There was precious little Ego in Silas Porthoustoc’s Cosmos.

‘What’s the matter with your hand, Silas?’ asked Pengelly, noticing in the lamplight that the old man’s
left hand was encased in bloodstained bandages.

"'Urt 'un,' was the reply, surly and almost resentful, as if the skipper of the *Fairy* had been called upon to make a confession of professional incompetence.

He did not think it necessary to add that the injury had been sustained thirty-six hours previously, when, in a nasty lop off the Nord Hinder, the precious cargo consigned to Captain Cain was in danger of making a swift passage to the bed of the North Sea. Only Silas Porthoustoc’s prompt action in jamming the slipping sling had prevented the disaster; but it was at the expense of a crushed hand and a badly lacerated finger.

As soon as the *Fairy* was secured alongside the *Alerte*, the latter’s foremast derricks were swung outboard with the necessary tackle rove. There were cases of automatic pistols, each weapon concealed in an air-tight tin and packed in tallow. The tins bore the name of a well-known firm of tinned beef exporters and the cases were entered in the manifest as containing pressed beef. Three thousand rounds of small-arms ammunition followed, similarly disguised. Then came a crate with a card nailed to it, describing its contents as a sewing-machine. It was: ‘It sowed death broadcast’; for on the case being broken open there was revealed a machine-gun, firing the same calibre ammunition as that of the pistols, automatic in action and air-cooled. This had been ordered as an afterthought. As that class of article went it was cheap.

The mate and the boy of the lugger next set to work
to shovel aside a thick layer of coal in the *Fairy*'s hold. This done, they laid bare what appeared to be the lugger’s kelson, a long, rough-hewn piece of timber. Under this was passed wire slings. The eyes of the slings were engaged in the hook of the lower block of the *Alerte*'s derrick-purchase.

‘Handsomely now, my lad!’ cautioned Captain Cain, to the sailor manning the running part of the tackle. ‘Walk back with her — here she comes.’

Torn from its bed of coal the huge bunch of timber rose slowly. By means of grips one end was dipped sufficiently to allow the twenty-five feet of woodwork to clear the hatchway coamings. Higher and higher it rose, the *Fairy* listing acutely during the operation, while even the *Alerte* heeled under the strain on her masthead.

‘At that!’ shouted Captain Cain. ‘Swing her gently, lads!’

Inboard swung the derrick, its load swaying eight feet above the deck in spite of the efforts of the hands at the grips.

‘Ease away handsomely!’ exclaimed the pirate captain. ‘Stand from under!’

With a dull thud the baulk of timber was deposited upon the steel deck of the *Alerte*. The slings were cast off, and while some of the hands lowered and secured the derrick, others set to work seemingly to dismember the twenty-four feet of rough pine.

It was an easy task. Snugly hidden between the slabs was the much-wanted six-inch quick-firer. Its
mounting followed, and was immediately bolted down to the deck just abaft the rise of the forecastle.

‘Carry on, Cap’n Porthoustoc,’ exclaimed Cain, after the necessary exchange of banknotes had been effected. ‘Look out for us on the first, and we’ll have a rare cargo for you. Chenal du Four at sunset. It’ll be slack water at nine.’

‘Very good, Cap’n,’ replied Silas, touching his grizzled forelock. ‘Us’ll be there.’

The warps were cast off, the Fairy’s motor began to cough and splutter, and ten minutes later the lugger was lost to sight in the darkness.

But the night’s work was far from being accomplished as far as the Alerte’s crew were concerned. The six-inch quick-firer was mounted: it had to be concealed from outside observation. To attempt to screen the weapon from anyone on deck would have been a senseless task. The construction of the submarine prevented that. Even her conning-tower stood out gaunt and unashamed when viewed from the deck; but from another vessel that armoured structure seemed to be merged into the ’midship superstructure and bridge.

A cutter, hitherto carried abaft the amidship deckhouse, was man-handled forward. Unlike the other boats, it was clench-built of elm; but in order not to impede the Alerte’s diving capabilities, the garboard strakes had been cut away. It was a simple though lengthy task to saw through the timbers next the keel and cut through breast-hook and transom, with the
result that the cutter was longitudinally divided into two parts. Quick-release clips of gun-metal were then fitted to keep the two portions into some resemblance of a boat. The reunited parts were then placed keel uppermost over all to hide the missing garboards.

Throughout the long night the hands toiled, Captain Cain giving practical assistance besides directing operations. He worked his men hard — he believed in it — but he never spared himself.

It wanted an hour to dawn when the task of making all snug was completed. Dawn ought to reveal the *Alerte* as a harmless tramp, her powerful ordnance stowed away under the boat. But Captain Cain was not satisfied.

‘We’ll submerge before we stand easy, lads,’ he shouted. ‘Eighteen fathoms’ill find bottom. Diving stations, all hands!’

Down sank the *Alerte*, the tell-tale debris of splinters, shavings, and sawdust floating away as she submerged. She rested on the bottom in a very faint tideway, certainly not more than one knot. The crew piped to breakfast, completed the meal and expected a stand easy.

They were disappointed. The *Alerte* was to break surface before dawn, lest the operation be seen by a passing vessel. Then and only then, as she cruised towards the French coast, would the hard-worked men be allowed a brief spell of leisure.

‘Anything in sight, Mr. Pengelly?’ sang out the captain, as he slithered over the weed-encumbered
deck to the bridge-ladder.

The second in command was sweeping the horizon with his night-glasses. It was pitch dark — the period of intense darkness between the false and the true dawn.

‘Nothing in sight, sir!’ reported Pengelly.

The words were hardly out of his mouth — in fact, Captain Cain had not time to telegraph easy ahead, when a loud voice, coming from close alongside, hailed:

‘Ship ahoy! Throw us a line!’
'I must hand her over to her new owner before the end of the present month, Gerald,' declared Rollo Vyse, owner of the thirty-five-feet motor-yacht *Ibex*, to his chum Gerald Broadmayne. ‘If the worst comes to the worst, I must get professional assistance. You know what that means. Never could stick a paid hand. Be a sport and bear a hand.’

‘When do you expect to be back?’ inquired Broadmayne.

His chum felt this was a decidedly encouraging question, notwithstanding the fact that the other had used the second person plural instead of the first.

‘Saturday evening, for an absolute cert,’ replied Vyse. ‘Glass is steady, sea calm. We’d make Southampton hands down by Friday morning, hand over the yacht and check the inventory, and catch the first train home on the following day.’

Gerald Broadmayne was a strapping fellow of six feet two inches. In point of age he was rising twenty-one. By profession, he was a sub-lieutenant in the Royal Navy, and having just completed a two years’ commission on the East Indian Station, was already beginning to be bored stiff with his little ‘drop o’ leaf’, to quote the lower deck vernacular for the sailor’s
equivalent for furlough.

Existence in Fowey, even with its mild climate, was apt to be a bit tedious in November, after a prolonged spell under the tropical sun. Yachting was his hobby, although circumstances prevented him from having a small craft of his own. Almost without exception his pals in Fowey had laid their yachts up, and there was not much fun knocking about in the harbour or spending comfortless hours in the Channel in an open or half-decked boat.

The exception was Rollo Vyse, a lad two years his junior, two inches shorter than the Sub, but with a decided excess of girth. His arms and legs were massive and muscular. In spite of his ponderous frame he carried not an ounce of superfluous flesh. His big frame, hardened by almost unlimited physical exercise, was destitute of fat. He would sprint well and run a mile without undue physical distress; swim like a South Sea Islander and dive like a duck. At school he was a terror with the gloves on. Twice in succession he was the champion athlete of the year of his school. Yet with all these accomplishments, he was far from being brilliant in educational subjects.

Fortunately, or unfortunately (that depended upon the future), Rollo had little to worry about. It was not necessary for him to earn his own living. He had an ample allowance, provided he kept within the bounds of prudence — which he generally did. In due course, Rollo Vyse would become head of a huge coal combine, when his sole responsibility consisted in
affixing his signature to the Annual Report.

Nineteen fellows out of twenty so situated would have gone to the dogs. Not so Rollo Vyse. A thorough sportsman, he had no use for companions whose chief aim was to ‘sow their wild oats’. He meant to enjoy himself — to make the very best out of his youth — and he did.

His favourite pastime was yachting. He did not take it up as a sport. Yacht racing did not appeal to him. It was the lure of the sea that held him. The greatest of the few outstanding disappointments of his early youth was his father’s refusal to let him go to sea, either in the Royal Navy through Dartmouth College, or in the Mercantile Marine through that strictly-disciplined yet withal happily-run training-ship, the Conway.

Vyse was a yachtsman of the modern school. He knew little about cutters, yawls, and ketches. Seamanship in such he was ignorant of. He never had to handle a craft under sail alone. He had never experienced the thrills of a short thresh windward with a weather-going tide.

His first craft was the Ibex, an out-and-out power boat. Thirty-five feet overall, with a beam of six feet and a maximum draught of three-feet-eight; the Ibex was propelled with a pair of petrol motors giving her a speed of about eleven knots.

Her accommodation consisted of a spacious forecastle with two pipe-rail cots; a saloon with settees on either side and a swinging table on the centre line;
abaft a small galley, separated from the engine-room by a steel bulkhead with a sliding door that was supposed to be water-tight. The engine-room was large in proportion to the size of the boat, being nearly nine feet in length, with a narrow, railed-off gangway between the twin motors. Abaft the motor-room was a sunken deck-house, containing the wheel and the engine-room controls. Right aft a large open cockpit with a short deck and coamings.

For nearly a twelvemonth the *Ibex* was Rollo Vyse’s pride and delight. She was a good seaboat, her engines had never once let her owner down. ‘Vyse’s luck’ was almost proverbial in Fowey. If he said he would return to harbour on a certain day, he always did so, although on some occasions the Polruan fishermen shook their heads as they climbed the hill and gazed towards the surf-swept Gribben. ‘That there moty-boat’ll drown ’un sure as sure,’ they would declare; but the sight of the *Ibex* pounding the heavy seas as she passed the rocky ledges around Punch’s Cross, and entered the land-locked harbour, compelled them to admit that for the present their cheerful prognostications were somewhat adrift.

But into Rollo Vyse’s Eden had arrived the serpent under the name of one Jim Vardo — a good fellow and all that sort of thing, according to Rollo’s admission. Vardo without the *Spitfire* was quite all right. It was Vardo with the *Spitfire* that upset Rollo.

Why? Simply because the *Spitfire* did twelve and a half knots to the *Ibex*’s eleven.
Vyse was not a racing man as far as marine motoring went, but when the *Spitfire* seemed to make a point of going almost everywhere the *Ibex* went, and over-hauled her every time, there was a supercilious, self-satisfied look upon Vardo’s face that made even easy-going Rollo Vyse squirm.

‘Wait till I get him out in a stiff sou’wester,’ muttered Rollo. ‘I’ll knock spots off his old orange-box.’

But that opportunity never came, for the simple reason that Vardo hadn’t the real love of the sea. He himself admitted that he was cautious; Rollo with characteristic bluntness declared that Vardo was white-livered. At any rate, the *Spitfire* never showed her nose beyond the mouth of Ready Money Cove when there were white horses in the Channel.

The fact that in smooth water the *Spitfire* could show her heels to the *Ibex* decided the latter’s fate. Vyse decided to sell her and purchase another motor-cruiser, larger, more powerfully-engined and capable of developing fifteen and a half knots. Then Jim Vardo’s loose-lipped, mealy-mouthed features wouldn’t wear that fatuous grin.

Accordingly, the *Ibex* was sold to a Southampton yachtsman, subject to delivery at that port; and now arose the problem how Vyse was to get her round.

It was late in the year. His chums rather jibbed at the suggestion that they should form a crew. Had it been Cowes week they would have clamoured for the vacant berth; for although the *Ibex* was arranged as a single-hander, and Rollo often had taken her out
alone, the passage between Fowey and the Wight was rather too long for a one-man show.

Rollo was getting jumpy. November was well advanced. No amateur help was forthcoming. He was about to take the unwelcome step of engaging a professional hand when a *deus ex machina* in the person of Sub-Lieutenant Gerald Broadmayne appeared upon the scene.

It did not take Broadmayne long to make up his mind. The ability to make a quick decision on points that require unerring judgment is a characteristic of the naval man who hopes to make a name for himself in his profession.

‘Right-o; I’ll come,’ he replied. ‘When do you get under way?’

‘In an hour’s time,’ said Vyse promptly, lest too prolonged an interval might afford his new shipmate an opportunity to change his mind. ‘Provisions and petrol are on board. I’ll have to lay in some fresh tack, though. Heaps of bedding, too. All you want is your kit.’

‘I’ll be at Whitehouse Steps in half an hour,’ declared the Sub. ‘Must slip off on my motor-bike and tell my people that Little Gerry is off on the high seas and pack up a few things.’

‘And I’ll do the same,’ added Rollo; ‘although my governor’s been expecting to hear that I’ve actually cleared every day for the last fortnight. You’re a real pal, old man. Thanks awfully.’
Prompt to time, the chums met at the pre-arranged spot. The Sub was rigged out in white sweater, grey flannel bags and rubber shoes. Across his shoulder was thrown a black pegamoid oilskin. A suit-case containing clothes of sufficient respectability to enable him to return by train lay at his feet.

Vyse appeared in a thick blue sweater, pilot coat and trousers, the bottoms of the latter garment being rolled over a pair of india-rubber sea-boots.

‘Rest of my gear’s already on board,’ he remarked as they descended the steps to the dinghy ‘We’re going to have a topping run if this weather holds. How about making an all-night run? We’d be inside the Wight before morning.’

‘I’m game,’ replied Broadmayne, dumping his suit-case in the stern sheets of the dinghy.

It was a short distance to row out to the moorings on which the *Ibex* lay. The motor yacht, riding to the first of the young flood, looked smart and seamanlike in the afternoon sunlight. From the short, slender mast fluttered the club burgee, hoisted for the last time on that particular craft. A loose-footed lugsail and small foresail formed the sum-total of the yacht’s canvas. Vyse rarely made use of the sails, since the motors never gave trouble. In the event of a mechanical breakdown, the *Ibex* might do four miles an hour with the wind abaft the beam; but with her light draught she would sag leeward like a barrel.

Rollo disappeared into the motor-room, leaving his chum to stow his gear and make the dinghy fast
along-side. Bitter experience in the shape of a painter getting hopelessly foul of one of the propellers had prompted this course. Not until the yacht was forging ahead would the dinghy be allowed to tow astern.

First one, then both of the motors began to purr rhythmically. Vyse appeared on deck, gave a perfunctory glance over the side to see that the circulating pumps were working, and nodded to his companion.

‘Let go!’ he exclaimed.

With a splash and a rattle of chain, the mooring buoy was dropped. Slowly the *Ibex* drifted upstream until Vyse from his post in the wheel-house could see the buoy bobbing twenty feet from the bows.

Putting the helm over, Rollo pulled both levers into the ahead position. Instantly the little craft shot forward, cleared her buoy and headed for the open sea.

‘Dinghy on deck?’ queried the Sub coming aft.

‘No, she’ll tow astern,’ was the reply. ‘There’s no sea to speak of outside. Give her plenty of painter.’

Broadmayne did so. This done, he took up a position slightly in the wake of the helmsman.

Neither spoke much. Both enjoyed the lift of the following waves as the keen bows of the *Ibex* cleft the dancing waters. They were afloat with a definite object in view. For the present, nothing else mattered.

Rollo Vyse was too good an engineer to attempt to run the motors all out. For one thing, it was bad for the bearings if the engines were run all out for any length
of time, and he wasn’t anxious to deliver the *Ibex* to her new owner with her anatomy resembling a box of chattering scrap iron. For another, he did not wish to cover the one hundred and thirty miles between Fowey and the Wight at such a speed that the *Ibex* would be in the narrow waters of the Solent before sunrise. What he aimed for, was to reach Southampton before noon, thus giving ample time to perform the necessary formalities connected with the handing over of the yacht.

The Start was abeam just as the sun was setting. The *Ibex* gave that dangerous headland with its treacherous overfalls a wide berth, and shaped a course to pass seven miles southwards of that nightmare to cautious mariners — Portland Bill.

It was a warm, almost balmy night. The thick clouds, acting as a blanket, totally obscured the stars, but kept the temperature remarkably high for the time of year. All the same, after having shared a meal on deck, the two chums were glad to don oilskins and mufflers before undertaking their long vigil.

‘Aren’t you funky of going into the motor-room with that?’ inquired Broadmayne, as Rollo appeared from an examination of the oil gauges of the automatic lubricators, his features glowing in the glare of a lighted cigarette.

‘Goodness — no,’ replied the other, with a laugh. ‘Haven’t you ever seen a fellow shove a lighted cigarette into a full tin of petrol?’

‘Haven’t and don’t want to,’ replied the cautious Sub.
‘Well, it’s not the petrol; it’s the petrol fumes that are the danger,’ continued Vyse. ‘There’s far more danger from the fumes in an empty petrol can than there is in a full one. The motor-room is well ventilated and there are trays to catch any drops from the carburettors, so you see I am careful. Aren’t the engines going beautifully? Eight hundred revs, and hardly any vibration.’

For the next two hours the two sat perched on the low bulkhead on the after side of the wheel-house, Vyse occasionally touching the wheel to correct the vessel’s slight tendency to fall off to starboard.

‘We ought to spot Portland Light very soon,’ he remarked. ‘That is, unless there’s local fog about.’

‘I’ll look,’ said Broadmayne, unstrapping his binoculars.

Steadying himself with legs set widely apart, the Sub stood erect upon the roof of the wheel-house.

‘Nothing in sight yet,’ he announced.

The next instant the _Ibex_ trembled under a violent shock. For the moment she seemed to lose way. Broadmayne, thrown off his balance, pitched forward, falling at full length upon the coach-roof over the motor-room. There he lay, grabbing at the low brass railing, until, feeling a bit dazed and shaken, he made his way aft.

‘What’s up?’ he inquired breathlessly.

‘Hit a bit of wreckage, I think,’ replied Rollo. ‘Gave her a bit of a biff. You’re not hurt? Good, I thought you’d stove-in your dead-lights, old man, by the way you fell.’
His anxiety relieved concerning his chum, Rollo Vyse’s next thoughts were for the yacht. As far as he knew, the *Ibex* had not fouled either of her propellers. Evidently her forefoot had thrust down the submerged object sufficiently to enable the cut-away stern to clear.

‘Hang on to the wheel a jiffy while I go below and have a look round,’ he said; and, picking up an electric torch from a rack in the wheel-house, he dived below.

He was gone some time — nearly a quarter of an hour. When he reappeared, he reported that the boat was not making any water beyond a slight trickle through the stern gland of the starboard propeller.

‘I think she must have given her prop a bash,’ he added. ‘There’s an unusual noise as if the shaft isn’t running true. You can’t hear it from here.’

‘There’s Portland Light!’ exclaimed Broadmayne, as four pin-pricks of white appeared on the port bow.

‘Rather close in, aren’t we?’

‘Indraught, perhaps,’ replied his chum. ‘We’ll stand out a bit. South eighty east will do.’

The Sub made the necessary alteration in helm. Midnight passed. Portland Light was drawing abeam. According to Vyse’s calculations, it ought to have been passed a couple of hours earlier.

‘Guess there’s a hot tide against us,’ he remarked. ‘Or, perhaps we aren’t doing nine knots. It’s all right so far; we’ve an ample margin.’

The sea had now grown distinctly agitated, although there was little or no wind. Rollo put it down to the
backwash from Portland Race, the roar of which was distinctly audible — a disconcerting noise on a dark night.

‘Now we’re closing the Shambles Lightship. We ought soon to pick up Anvil Point. I’ll have another look round below and then I’ll bring up some hot drinks.’

Instead of going down the engine-room hatchway, as before, Vyse made his way forward, gaining the saloon direct by means of another hatch. Above the gentle purr of the motors the loud buzzing of a Primus stove was borne to the Sub’s ears, a grateful and comforting sound that gave promise of something piping hot within the next ten minutes.

Glancing at his watch, Broadmayne was rather surprised to find that it was nearly two o’clock. By means of rough compass bearings he calculated that the Ibex was about eight miles south-west by west of St. Albans. A few minutes later the two powerful lights ashore were blotted out.

About that time a vessel showing white and green navigation lamps passed at not less than a mile away. It was too dark to see what she was like, but the muffled pulsations of an internal combustion engine were distinctly audible.

A dazzling light from the Ibex’s motor-room suddenly attracted the Sub’s attention. Peering down the half-open hatchway he expected to see Vyse doing inspection work with his electric torch.

To his surprise, he saw that the light came from
under the port engine — a steady flare of yellow light that was already licking the sides of the cylinders.

Before Broadmayne could utter a warning shout the steady flame developed into sheet of fire. A blast of hot air tinged with tongues of ruddy flame shot up through the open hatchway. Yet Vyse gave no indication that he was aware of the peril.

Quitting the wheel, the Sub dashed forward. He could see his chum, sublimely unconscious of the inferno raging the other side of the steel bulkhead, crouching over the sizzling frying-pan on the Primus stove.

‘Fire in the motor-room!’ shouted Broadmayne. ‘Where are the extinguishers?’

Even then Rollo showed no great haste until looking up he caught a glimpse of the Sub’s startled face.

‘All right!’ he bawled — shouting was the only means of making himself heard with the roar of the atmospheric gas stove. ‘All right. They’re in there. I’ll get them.’

With that he shot back the sliding door in the metal bulkhead. A blast of hot air and flames sent him backwards, half-dazed. Involuntarily he raised one hand to protect his eyes; then backing through the compartment next the seat of the fire, he gained the saloon.

He had left the bulkhead door open. A tongue of fire licked the panelled ceiling of the saloon. Madly he turned, swarmed up the ladder and gained the open air.
Seeing his chum safe, the Sub did the best possible thing. Descending into the saloon, he fought his way to the bulkhead and closed the door. Then emerging by the same way he had entered, he ran aft over the already excessively hot cabin top and closed the engine-room hatchway. There was a chance — a hundred to one chance — that the flames might die out through lack of oxygen.

‘Come aft!’ shouted Broadmayne.

Vyse, now gaining more control over himself, obeyed. By now the motors had ceased to function. The flames, igniting the petrol in the carburettors, had melted the unions of the petrol-pipes. Instead of the inflammable spirit mixing with air and exploding within the cylinders — as it ought to do, two steady streams were pouring direct from the tanks, to add fresh fuel to the flames.

‘Thirty gallons in the tanks!’ shouted Rollo in reply to his companion’s unspoken question. ‘I’ll go for’ard and turn off the taps. We’ll be blown sky-high if we don’t.’

He placed one foot on the coaming before hoisting himself over the roof of the wheel-house. As he did so, the motor-room skylight blew out with a loud report, sending a pillar of flame-tinged smoke a full thirty feet into the air, and throwing every part of the deck into bold relief by reason of the dazzling light.

‘That’s done it!’ shouted Rollo. ‘We can’t save her now. The dinghy, old man!’

At first the Sub could see no sign of the tender. He
fully expected to see her trailing astern, but as the burning *Ibex* had lost all way the dinghy had ranged up alongside the starboard side.

There was no time to save anything. Casting off the painter, Broadmayne shouted to his companion to look alive. Vyse leapt into the dinghy, the Sub followed, giving a vigorous push as he sat down and sending the little cockleshell clear of the floating inferno.

‘Where’s the other scull?’ demanded Broadmayne anxiously.

There was only one in the dinghy. By some means one had been lost overboard. How or when, they knew not; nor could they waste time in forming conjectures; and since there was no sculling-notch in the transom, the only way to propel the little craft was by paddling with alternate strokes on either side.

It was slow work; but not before the dinghy was fifty yards away from the burning *Ibex* did the Sub boat his oar.

‘Now what’s to be done?’ he inquired.

‘Wait and see the last of her,’ replied Vyse. ‘Luckily, she’s fully insured.’

‘You’ll be lucky if you are alive to draw the money,’ answered Broadmayne, for it was a most unenviable position to be in. Ten miles from land, and almost every foot of that land a frowning, surf-swept cliff, Portland Race to the west and St. Albans Race waiting for them if they attempted to close the land. Although the wind was light, almost a flat calm, there was a
steady swell, indicating a strong breeze, perhaps a gale, before very long. Overhead, save for the ruddy glare from the fiercely burning yacht, it was as black as pitch. Not a star was visible. It was only by remembering that the faint breeze came from the west (and it might back or veer at any time) could any sense of direction be maintained.

In silence the two chums watched the passing of the *Ibex*. Amidships, flames were pouring fifty feet into the air. The coach-roof and part of the top strakes had gone to feed the flames, the cracking of woodwork adding to the roar of the burning petrol. Sizzling embers were falling like sparks from a dying squib, hissing as they dropped into the water. It was a question as to what would happen first: whether the hull, burned to the water’s edge, would founder before the fire reached the fuel tanks.

Suddenly there was a terrific flash that, compared with the raging flames, was like an arc-lamp and a candle. Almost immediately after came a stupendous roar, like the discharge of a warship’s broadside. In the midst of the up-flung volcano of flame appeared the whole of the forepart of the cabin top. With apparent slowness it turned over and over until it fell with a loud splash within twenty yards of the dinghy. Then, with a hiss like the last defiant note of a dying viper, the last of the burning wreckage disappeared from view, leaving the dinghy tossing aimlessly on the heavy waters, surrounded by a pall of darkness that was rendered all the more opaque by the sudden
transition from the blazing light.

‘What’s the time?’ inquired Vyse, breaking the silence.

The Sub consulted the face of his luminous watch.

‘Half past two.’

‘And daylight’s not till about seven — four and a halt hours. Well, what’s the programme? What’s the coast like hereabouts?’

‘Precious few landing-places,’ replied the Sub. ‘Lulworth Cove, Chapman Pool and perhaps Warrborough Bay. Might make one of ’em; but the chances are we’d fetch up on Kimmeridge Ledges. The closer inshore we get, the more likely we are to encounter short steep seas. Best keep well out till dawn.’

‘Perishing cold job,’ grumbled Rollo, who, before going below for the last time had discarded his oilskin coat; whilst fortunately for him, the Sub still wore his pegamoid. ‘And it’s not much use talking about getting ashore. We can’t row ten miles with one scull.’

‘That’s so,’ agreed Broadmayne soberly. ‘I vote we paddle. Take quarter of an hour spells. That’ll keep us warm. The fellow who isn’t paddling can wear my oilskin coat. Wish we’d had our grub before we started on this little cruise in a tub.’

‘Luckily we have plenty to smoke,’ remarked Vyse. ‘Have a cigarette?’

The word cigarette brought the Sub’s thoughts back to the disaster.

‘Wonder how the fire started?’ he asked. ‘You
weren’t in the motor-room at all, were you?’
‘No,’ replied Rollo. ‘Not the last time. I meant to go
directly we’d had something to eat. It’s just possible
that when we bumped against that lump of wreckage
the jar might have started one of the petrol pipes. And
then it might be anything: short circuit of one of the
high tension wires, for example.’

Slowly — painfully slowly — the hours sped. In
spite of frequent spells at the scull Vyse felt the cold
acutely; more so than did his companion, for he had
been rather badly scorched about the face, and the
night air irritated rather than soothed the sting.

Once, when a gentle breeze sprang up, they thrust a
stretcher through the arms of the pegamoid coat and
lashed it to the oar, stepping the latter as a mast. For
about twenty minutes the dinghy maintained a steady
rate of progress. Broadmayne entertained hopes of
making either Swanage Bay or the sandy shore of
Bournemouth Bay. Then the wind died utterly away.

‘What’s the time?’ inquired Vyse, for the thirtieth
time at least.

‘Quarter past six,’ replied the Sub, without making
the least effort to stifle a prodigious yawn.

‘Another three-quarters of an hour before dawn,’
muttered Rollo. ‘There’s a light astern.’

Broadmayne looked.

‘Shambles Lightship,’ he declared. ‘It’s clearing a bit.
We haven’t made much progress. The tide must be
setting to the west. Hello, what’s that?’
‘What’s what?’ asked Vyse, following the direction of his companion’s outstretched arm. ‘Can’t see anything.’

‘There, about a hundred yards off. By Jove, it’s a ship.’

‘It is, by smoke!’ admitted Rollo.

‘No lights. She’s not making way,’ continued the Sub, speaking more to himself than to his chum. ‘Strange — decidedly so. Abandoned, perhaps.’

‘Listen!’ exclaimed Vyse. ‘Voices.’

Without replying, Broadmayne seized the paddle and commenced to propel the dinghy in the direction of the mysterious vessel. For mysterious she undoubtedly was. No ordinary craft would be lying without way and showing no riding-light. Smugglers, perhaps, but to Gerald Broadmayne it meant shelter — any port in a storm.

It was slow work. Ten minutes’ frantic work with the scull brought the dinghy close under the strange vessel’s starboard quarter.

‘Nothing in sight, sir!’ called a deep voice.

‘By Jove! She’ll be forging ahead in half a shake,’ exclaimed the Sub, and, throwing down his oar, he hailed the unknown craft:

‘Ship ahoy! Throw us a line!’
‘Sheer off!’ shouted Captain Cain, leaning over the bridge-rails and directing the full blast of his powerful voice upon the still unknown craft alongside. ‘Stand clear; we’re going full ahead in half a shake.’

‘Hang on a minute, Cap’n!’ replied Broadmayne. ‘There are only two of us — survivors of the yacht Ibex, burnt late last night. If you won’t take us on board you might give us some grub and water. We’re famished and horribly cold, you know.’

Captain Cain made a brief mental review of the situation, as far as he knew of the facts. He was not a soft-hearted man — far from it. There would be very little risk to the occupants of the boat if they remained adrift for a few hours longer. They were bound to be picked up by some of the up- and down-Channel traffic. He could provide them with a few provisions and then go ahead.

On the other hand, he was quite in the dark as to what the two men in the boat had seen or heard. It was much too early for the Alerte to reveal her true character, that of a submarine pirate craft. And it was very disconcerting when he, the captain, was congratulating himself that the Alerte had been armed and had gone through additional diving tests under
cover of darkness, to find a boat lying alongside with two persons in her who might be remarkably cute in spotting anything out of the ordinary at sea.

The simplest solution was to drop a pig of ballast through the bottom of the boat and leave the two men to their fate. They couldn’t keep afloat very long in the open Channel in November. On their own admission, they were cold and famished. They’d sink within five minutes.

But the suggestion was dismissed as quickly as it had been formed. Captain Cain was strongly opposed to taking life wantonly, whether it be man or beast. If occasion arose with sufficient justification for his point of view, the pirate captain would shoot down anyone in cold blood or otherwise. Again, he had pledged himself to his crew, and for the present it was policy to abide by his plighted word, that he was against performing any violent act against the crews of British ships, and were not these two men British survivors of a disaster?

And, judging by the tone of the man who had spoken, one of the survivors was someone of good, possibly high birth. In any case, the pair might prove useful additional hands to the *Alerte*’s complement. If they wouldn’t; well, he’d make them. There was also the chance that the distressed mariners might be people of social standing and wealth. Then there would be a good opportunity to demand ransom. Coming on top of the Chamfer incident, Captain Cain decided such a possibility seemed no probability. He
would be lucky, indeed, if he could repeat his previous success in that direction.

All this flashed through the ready brain of the pirate captain in a very few seconds. Quickly he made up his mind.

‘Come aboard!’ he said briefly.

One of the hands caught the dinghy’s painter. A rope ladder was lowered down the perpendicular side of the *Alerte*, and with a final effort to control their cramped limbs, Vyse and Broadmayne contrived to reach the deck of the pirate submarine.

‘Take them below!’ ordered Captain Cain from the height of the bridge. ‘Tell Davis to serve them with a good hot meal. They can berth for’ard.’

With his head swimming and his knees giving way under him, Rollo Vyse was glad to have the assistance of a couple of the crew to take him below. Broadmayne, although feeling decidedly groggy, still retained sufficient alertness of mind to take stock of his immediate surroundings as far as the first streaks of red dawn permitted.

The steel deck littered with kelp and seaweed was in itself suspicious, unless the vessel were a trawler and had just emptied her nets on deck. But there was not the peculiar smell that steam trawlers cannot get away from.

Directly the Sub found himself below, he knew.

‘By Jove!’ he soliloquised. ‘She’s a submarine.’

In spite of his hunger and fatigue, Broadmayne puzzled his brains over the strange situation. What
was a submarine, disguised as a surface ship, doing in
the Channel? Her officers and crew were not in naval
uniform, although several of them had unmistakable
indications of having served under the white ensign.
The owner, especially, had the cut of a pukka naval
man.

Perhaps she’s a new type of Q-ship, he thought. If the
manoeuvres were on, I could understand it. Won’t it be a
joke if she is a mystery ship; and won’t the owner feel a bit
sick when he finds he’s harbouring an inquisitive Sub on
board his hooker? Like his confounded cheek, though,
making us mess and berth for’ard.

Soon the two chums were sitting down to a hot,
substantial meal. They were not alone. The crew’s
quarters in which they were sheltering was occupied
by the best part of the watch below, about a dozen
rather smart and alert men, older than the usual run
of naval ratings. The Sub noticed that, without
exception, they looked a bit tired and fatigued,
consequently he was not surprised to find that his
attempts to broach a conversation were resolutely, yet
politely, rebuffed.

Foiled in that direction, Broadmayne tried to pick up
the threads of the scanty scraps of conversation. Again
he was foiled. Every sentence he overheard had no
bearing upon life on board. Shop-talk in the crew’s
quarters seemed to be taboo.

He glanced at Vyse. Rollo, having made a good
meal, was leaning back on the settee with his eyes
closed. The problem offered no difficulties to the
owner of the burnt-out *Ibex*, for the simple reason that he was comfortably dozing.

The Sub looked at the clock in the bulkhead. It was a quarter past eight. Although it was day, no natural light penetrated the interior of the hull. The submarine was running on the surface. The pulsation of the internal combustion engines proved that.

A man clad in blue cloth trousers, sweater and sea-boots entered the compartment and began to remove the empty plates.

‘Had a good tuck in, chum?’ he inquired. ‘All right — best turn in for a spell. There’s your bunks, blankets and all. Captain won’t want to see you afore three bells in the second dog.’

‘Thank you,’ replied Broadmayne. He, too, was feeling drowsy. Perhaps it was the heat of the confined space. He touched Vyse on the shoulder.

‘Turn in, old man!’ he exclaimed.

‘What for?’ demanded his chum rebelliously; then his desire to sleep dominated all other inclinations. Merely kicking off his rubber-boots, Vyse turned in all standing. The Sub followed his example, and a couple of minutes later both men were lost in heavy, dreamless slumber.

Meanwhile Captain Cain, whose almost unbounded energy could keep him going at high pressure for thirty-six hours without any desire for sleep, was standing on the bridge of the *Alerte* as she stood southward at eight knots.
He was at the wheel. With the exception of one mechanic standing by the diesel motors, all hands were enjoying a few hours’ well-earned rest. Shortly after the crew of the *Ibex* had been taken on board, a wireless message had been picked up that gave Captain Cain an inspiration upon which he determined to act.

The wireless message was from the Norddeutscher-Lloyd intermediate boat *Cap Hoorn*, to the Ushant signalling-station, reporting that she was ninety miles west by south of Ushant, homeward bound from Bremen.

Already the pirate captain had looked her up in the shipping register. He found that the *Cap Hoorn* was a vessel of 8,500 tons, with a speed of fifteen knots. Coming from Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro, she would be certain to have a valuable cargo. It was a risky business to hold her up, but Captain Cain, having weighed the pros and cons, decided to intercept her.

At noon the *Alerte*’s crew were roused. Preparations were immediately started to disguise the ship. The funnel was given a different coloured coat of paint; the masts, previously light brown with black above the hounds, were painted a uniform shade of dark grey. The bridge and funnel were bodily shifted twenty feet aft, and the position of the ventilating cowls altered. Finally, on both bows and astern the name *Alerte* was covered by strips of painted cloth bearing the name *Cimeterre*, and the French tricolour hoisted aft.
'I'm going to put the breeze up a Hun, my lads,' he announced. 'She's now on her way up-Channel. She's a lump of a boat, but we'll get her. Remember that for this occasion you're Frenchmen. When we board her, keep your mouths shut and let Mr. Pengelly grease his jaw-tackle. He can speak French like a native and German quite enough to make himself understood. I'm not going to hurt Fritz more than I can help. It depends upon himself. If she heaves to, as I expect she'll do, Mr. Pengelly will take half a dozen hands, all armed, and see what's of use to us —'

'Sail on the starboard beam, sir!' shouted the look-out man. 'Black hull, white top-hamper, two funnels all yellow.'

'That's our pigeon,' declared Pengelly; then noticing his partner glare, he hastened to add the previously omitted 'sir'.

'Very good, Mr. Pengelly,' sang out the captain. 'Tell off your boat's crew in readiness. Fall in, Q.F. numbers; signalman, stand by and hoist the ID.'

The *Alerte* and the *Cap Hoorn* were approaching almost at right angles to each other's course. As the positions of the ships went, the *Alerte* would bring the German's port side on her starboard bow, in which case, under the rules and regulations for preventing collisions at sea, the former had to give way.

Nearer and nearer came the huge Norddeutscher-Lloyd vessel, showing the bone in her jaw as she flung out a tremendous bow-wave. Unswervingly, both vessels held on. The *Cap Hoorn* blew a warning
blast on her siren.

‘Hard-a-starboard!’ ordered Captain Cain, at the same time motioning the alert signalman. Round swept the Alerte, until she was on a parallel course to that of her victim. The screens concealing the quick-firer were lowered and the muzzle of the weapon swung round. Simultaneously the signal ID (Heave-to, or I will fire into you) was hoisted; followed, without waiting for the Cap Hoorn’s reply, by LDA ZMX (Disconnect your wireless apparatus).

The two vessels were now roughly four hundred yards apart. Through his binoculars, Captain Cain observed with considerable satisfaction that the German officers and men were in a state of panic, while the passengers, guessing that something was amiss but ignorant of the true state of affairs, crowded to the side.

The pirate captain rang for full speed ahead. Almost immediately, the pulsations of the motors increased, and the Alerte quickly attained her maximum speed, equal to that of the Cap Hoorn.

Still the latter showed no sign of stopping her engines. From her bridge a three flag hoist went up.

‘WCX, sir!’ reported the Alerte’s signalman, as he rapidly turned over the pages of the code book, adding as he discovered the message, ‘Signals not understood, though flags are distinguished.’

‘More bluff!’ ejaculated Captain Cain. ‘I’ll send ’em a message that won’t bear misunderstanding. Mr. Marchant!’ he continued, raising his voice. ‘Give her
one above the waterline. Knock her rudder-head to smithereens.’

The quick-firer spat viciously. Considering the gunlayer had had no previous experience with that particular type of weapon, the result was highly creditable to his professional skill.

The projectile struck the *Cap Hoorn* about ten feet forward of the rudder and about four feet above the waterline. It made a clean hole where it entered, but of the devastating effect of the explosive shell there was little doubt. Splinters and slivers of metal flew high in the air. Flames and smoke poured from a jagged hole in the poop. The red, white and black ensign, its staff shattered by the explosion, was whisked fifty yards astern.

Twenty seconds later the *Cap Hoorn*’s propellers were going astern; but owing to the rudder-head being pulverised, the massive rudder swung hard over to starboard. Slowly her head began to pay off towards her antagonist. Men armed with fire extinguishers and hoses were seen running aft. With indecorous haste another German mercantile ensign was hoisted and as promptly lowered in token of surrender.

‘Look alive, Mr. Pengelly!’ exclaimed the pirate captain. ‘You know your orders?’

‘Ay, ay, sir,’ was the reply.

A boat was lowered. Into it went Pengelly and half a dozen men, all armed with automatic pistols. By this time Captain Cain had got way off his ship, the two vessels being now about a cable’s length apart.
The boat’s crew gave way with a will, their comrades, with the exception of the men at the quick-firer, crowding to the side to watch their progress.

‘Mr. Barnard!’ shouted Captain Cain.

The bo’s’un doubled aft and saluted.

‘What’s that man doing on deck?’ inquired the skipper angrily, pointing to Gerald Broadmayne, who, unobserved by the hands on deck, had come up from below and was watching the unusual sight.

‘Dunno, sir,’ replied Mr. Barnard helplessly. ‘Both of ’em were sound asleep when last I looked in.’

As a matter of fact, the bo’sun, in the excitement of the one-sided enjoyment, had completely forgotten about the presence of the two strangers on board. He had omitted to lock the door between the men’s quarters and the vestibule immediately underneath the base of the conning-tower.

‘All right, let him alone,’ decided Captain Cain, as he reflected grimly that now the cat was out of the bag, his involuntary guests would have to remain on board at all costs, until the termination of the cruise, wherever and whenever it might be.

So that’s the game, is it? thought the Sub. His searching eyes quickly took in the evidence of the criminating surroundings — the quick-firer trained abeam, with a still smoking shell-case lying close to the mounting; the French ensign floating over a vessel whose crew were British and, for the most part, West Country folk; the men all armed with automatic pistols; least and not last a boarding party on their
way to the disabled German liner. ‘Piracy — out and out piracy.’

Like those of the *Alerte’s* crew who remained on board, Broadmayne found his interest centred on the boat containing Pengelly and his armed companions.

Before the boat had ranged up alongside the *Cap Hoorn*, the German crew had lowered the accommodation-ladder.

Headed by Pengelly, the boarders ran up the ladder. At the gangway they were met by the captain and several of the officers of the captured vessel; while gathered at a respectful distance were about thirty of the crew and those of the passengers whose curiosity had overcome their timidity.

There was no sign of resistance. Pengelly, escorted by the German captain, disappeared from view, three of his men following him. The others, with the exception of the boat-keeper, drove the passengers and crew forward like a flock of sheep.

‘No guts!’ soliloquised Broadmayne scornfully. ‘Can you imagine a British ship with that sized crew chucking up the sponge? They’d rush the blighters even if they only had broomsticks.’

Presently one of the *Alerte’s* boarders at the head of the accommodation-ladder held up a small white flag. It was a pre-arranged signal. As long as it remained held aloft, it indicated that the looters were having things all their own way. Should the Germans turn upon their captors, the white flag would be dropped. Then, and only then, would the *Alerte’s* quick-firer
pump shell after shell into the huge target presented by the motionless *Cap Hoorn*.

Twice there came the dull report of an explosion. The crew of the quick-firer tautened, the captain of the gun looking inquiringly at the imperturbable figure on the *Alerte*’s bridge.

But Captain Cain gave no sign. The white hand-flag was still conspicuously displayed at the gangway of the prize. Occasionally he swept the horizon with his binoculars, ready at the first sign of an approaching craft to recall his merry men and seek safety in flight.

An hour and ten minutes after the boat had pushed off from the *Alerte*, Pengelly descended the *Cap Hoorn*’s accommodation-ladder. The boat, heavily laden, headed back to her degenerate parent and was hoisted up in davits.

‘Well?’ inquired Captain Cain laconically.

‘Skinned ’em, sir,’ replied Pengelly, with a broad grin.
Again the *Alerte* hoisted a signal. It was to give the *Cap Hoorn* permission to proceed.

Steering like a dray, since the destruction of the rudder-head had left her with only her twin screws to manoeuvre with, the German liner forged ahead, turned eight degrees to starboard and shaped a course for the invisible French coast.

The *Alerte*, without waiting for her prey to disappear from sight, worked up to a speed of eight knots, steering in a northerly direction, or towards the shores of England.

‘What happened?’ asked Captain Cain.

‘Went through the ship’s papers,’ replied the lieutenant. ‘Found that she’d eighteen million marks of specie in her strong-room. Blighters swore they hadn’t a key — trust Fritz for bluffing or attempting a bluff. So we had to blow off the lock. Then we had a round-up of the first-class passengers. By smoke! They shelled out like lambs. The proceeds are in that sack — ’ pointing to a well-filled canvas bag lying against the base of the conning-tower. ‘It was poor sport relieving a white-livered crowd like that. And the joke of the whole business is that the German skipper thought we were Frenchmen. I told him that
war had been declared between France and Germany, and that he was to proceed straight for Cherbourg. Warned him that if he attempted to run for it, or to use his wireless, there’d be considerable trouble. I’d like to see what happens when the *Cap Hoorn* gives herself up to the naval authorities at Cherbourg.’

‘Unfortunately — or, perhaps, fortunately — we cannot be present,’ rejoined Captain Cain; then addressing the quartermaster, he ordered the ship to turn fifteen points to port, or nearly in a reverse direction to the course she had been following.

‘Why?’ inquired Pengelly. ‘There’ll be half a dozen French torpedo craft on our track. Wouldn’t it be wiser to make ourselves scarce?’

‘I am keeping the rendezvous in the Chenal du Four,’ replied the captain. Being in a high good humour, he could afford to be affable to his querulous subordinate. ‘The news will be wirelessed everywhere within the next few hours that the *Cap Hoorn* was stopped and plundered by an unknown vessel masquerading as a French government auxiliary craft, which, when last sighted, was steering nor’ards. Consequently, every one responsible for hunting us will reason much as you did — that we’re off either to the English or Irish coasts. They won’t dream of looking for us in the neighbourhood of Ushant. *L’audace*, Pengelly, *toujours l’audace* — that’s the winning card. All right; carry on. Set the hands to work to remove our disguise. For the next day or so, the *Alerte* will be the *Alerte*. I’ll interview those
fellows we picked up this morning. Tell Marchant to bring one of them to my cabin. I won’t see them together.’

Captain Cain was on the point of descending the bridge-ladder, when he stopped and exclaimed in a voice loud enough for the watch on deck to hear:

‘We’ll make a partial division of the coin at one-bell, Mr. Pengelly. Pass the word to the hands.’

Going below to his cabin, the skipper began to make preparations to receive his involuntary guests. They had come aboard of their own free will, it was true, but already they had discovered that getting away from the *Alerte* was quite a different matter.

Presently the gunner knocked at the door.

‘Mr. Broadmayne, sir,’ he reported.

‘Take that chair, Mr. Broadmayne,’ said Captain Cain.

The Sub did so. Although giving away the slight advantage he possessed in height, he realised that it was decidedly uncomfortable having to be interviewed with his shoulders bent to prevent his head touching the sweating steel roof of the little cabin.

‘I suppose,’ resumed the pirate, with a slight tone of irony, ‘that you are already acquainted with the nature of the craft that has given you shelter?’

‘I’d be remarkably dense if I weren’t,’ replied Broadmayne.

‘And what, might I ask, is the result of your investigations?’ inquired Captain Cain suavely.

‘To put it bluntly,’ rejoined the Sub, ‘you’re a
filibuster — a pirate.’

‘That’s putting the case rather strong,’ protested Captain Cain. ‘The vessel we intercepted was a Hun. I was fighting Germans in the high seas when you were a child in arms, I imagine. I saw enough to make me vow I’d go bald-headed for one whenever I had a chance. That chance I took today.’

‘I won’t question your motives,’ remarked Broadmayne imperturbably. ‘But I take it you have no Admiralty warrant to act as a privateer in peacetime? Then, as I said before, you must be a pirate. Rather interesting, what? I was under the impression that gentlemen of that type were as extinct as the dodo.’

‘Who and what are you, Mr. Broadmayne?’ demanded Captain Cain.

‘Sub-lieutenant, Royal Navy.’

‘You are — or were?’

‘Am,’ declared Broadmayne, with a tone that indicated he was proud of his profession.

A look of disappointment flitted across the face of the pirate captain.

‘Then what were you doing on a private yacht?’

The Sub told him.

‘Vyse, did you say?’ interrupted Captain Cain. ‘Vyse? Any relation to the North Country magnate of that name?’

‘Son,’ replied Broadmayne.

The next instant he felt angry with himself for having divulged that part.
‘Really!’ exclaimed the other. ‘That’s most interesting. Well, Mr. Broadmayne, I’m afraid I must ask you and your friend to remain on board for the remainder of the cruise. It won’t be a protracted one, I assure you. You can have the run of the ship, except at such times when it will be necessary to order you below. Of course, considering we have saved your lives — your dinghy would have been swamped when the sea rose an hour after you were rescued — and that we have to feed you, a monetary payment is expected. But there is one alternative. I don’t suppose you’ll accept it first going off. That is, if you both care to join us in our enterprise — remember, we are not molesting a single British subject — then you will be entitled to a fair share of the proceeds, which I can assure you are far from being inconsiderable.’

Broadmayne made no reply. He was puzzling his brains, but not on account of the pirate’s seductive proposition. He had seen the man somewhere, but where? Suddenly he remembered.

‘I am more than surprised to find a former naval officer engaged on a stunt of this description,’ he remarked bluntly.

Captain Cain’s features went a dusky red under his tan. The pulses of his temples were throbbing like steam-pistons.

‘How do you know what I’ve been?’ he inquired harshly. There was a dominant note in his voice. Most men would have quailed before it. The Sub showed no sign of trepidation. On the contrary, he felt
considerably elated at having found a weak spot in his antagonist’s armour.

‘Some years ago,’ resumed Broadmayne, ‘I was one of a party of cadets who were taken round to Devonport from Dartmouth in a destroyer — the Calder, Lieutenant-Commander Sefton. It was one of the usual day instructional cruises, you know. On that occasion the cadets were shown over some of the submarines lying in the Hamoaze. There was a two-an-a-half striper who did the showing round. Some time later, he had to sever his connection with the Service — kicked out, in fact. No need to mention names.’

Captain Cain controlled his rage with an effort.

‘Quite correct,’ he rejoined. ‘However, Mr. Broadmayne, you will please remember that while you are on this craft you will keep that knowledge to yourself.’

‘I am not in the habit of trading on anyone’s past,’ replied the Sub. ‘But I have a strong objection to attempted intimidation. If circumstances warrant my making use of the information bearing on your former career, I’ll do so. And, let me add, I consider your offer that we should throw in our lot with your piratical crowd an insult. My answer, if an answer be required, is NO!’

Without another word, Captain Cain touched the bell-push.

*I’ll make this young puppy feel sorry for himself before I’ve done with him,* he thought to himself.

The gunner answered the summons.
‘Take Mr. Broadmayne on deck,’ ordered the pirate captain, ‘and bring Mr. Vyse to me.’

Presently Rollo Vyse appeared. He was sorry he had missed an opportunity of speaking to his chum, as he was entirely in the dark as to what had occurred. To him Captain Cain made a similar proposition, which he turned down even more forcibly than the Sub had done.

‘So that’s your attitude, is it?’ exclaimed the pirate, losing control of his temper. ‘Very well. Here are pens, ink and paper. You will write a letter to your wealthy parent, informing him that you are detained on board a certain ship and that you will be deprived of your liberty until the sum of one thousand pounds is paid to the person named therein. You will add that it is useless to set the police upon my agent. He knows nothing and is acting in all good faith. Now then, one thousand pounds in Bank of England notes, none of which is to exceed ten pounds.’

Lighting a cigarette and picking up a book, Captain Cain feigned to have lost interest in his victim.

For some moments Rollo sat quietly thinking.

*S’pose I’ll have to humour the silly ass,* he decided, and took up a pen.

For nearly twenty minutes Vyse was engaged upon the demand for ransom. He was not writing all the time. There were intervals when the rapid movement of the scratchy pen ceased, causing the pirate captain to glance inquiringly over his book.

‘How will that do?’ asked Rollo at last.
Captain Cain took the proffered paper and read:

DEAR FATHER,
This is a request to pay up. Broadmayne and I were rescued from the Ibex, which was burnt at sea. There’s no need to worry. We’re given every attention and are comfortable. But the captain of the ship we’re on is going to detain us till our expenses are paid. This, he states, is one thousand pounds. Sounds a preposterous sum, doesn’t it? However, that is the extent of his demand, so I hope you’ll settle and let us have our freedom. We’re in for a rough time otherwise. The money is to be in five and ten pound notes, payable to the person named below.

Your affectionate Son,
ROLLO VYSE.

‘Is that your usual signature?’ asked Captain Cain.
‘Certainly.’
‘Very good,’ continued the pirate, folding the sheet, putting it in an envelope and placing it carefully between the leaves of a blotter. ‘I’ll see that it’s forwarded to its proper destination. You may go.’

Vyse went. In the alleyway he gave a grim chuckle. His letter had been carefully composed. Several of the words were underlined. To a casual observer the lines would appear to be the lavish crossing of the letter ‘t’ in the line below. Captain Cain had not spotted it. The underlined words read: ‘Pay no attention to this preposterous demand.’ Rollo had no doubt that when
his father received the letter, his shrewdness would quickly enable him to read the camouflaged message.

He found Broadmayne pacing the poop. For the present, none of the crew were aft. The *Alerte* had resumed the features she possessed when she left Falmouth. No outside observer would have recognised her as the vessel that had stopped the *Cap Hoorn* earlier in the day.

‘Gerald, old thing!’ exclaimed Rollo, after a brief exchange of their experiences, ‘we’ve got to get clear of this craft. If we don’t, before very long we stand a hundred to one chance of being sent to Davy Jones’s locker. The skipper gave me the impression that he’s a hard case. I believe he’d sink her with all hands rather than surrender.’

‘From what I know of him, he is a hard case,’ agreed the Sub. ‘But the question is, how can we part company with this vessel? I’d attempt it like a shot if there were a ghost of a chance. The hands seem to be up to their job. They’ll keep a keen eye on us, I fancy. Our only hope, I think is to enlist the sympathies of some of the men. We’ll have to sound them carefully. No doubt we’ll find that one or two are fed-up already, and would do almost anything to save their precious necks.’

‘You mean to say we might be able to bribe them?’

‘Hardly,’ replied Broadmayne. ‘They seem to be coining money on this game. I believe there’s a share-out coming off very soon. No, it won’t be the lure of financial reward. We’ll have to play on their
feelings a bit.’

The thrilling notes of the bo’sun’s pipe brought all hands to the waist. A partial division of the spoil was about to take place.

The crew fell in according to their respective watches. The gunner and the bo’sun were standing on either side of a small sack of gold coins placed upon an upturned cask. A short distance away stood Captain Cain, with Pengelly at his elbow with a book in his hand.

‘My lads!’ began the pirate captain, ‘we have now made a rough calculation of the value of the loot from the German hooker. Of course, when the stuff is disposed of ashore, it may be of considerable more value than we have estimated. On the other hand, it may be less. Roughly, the share for each man before the mast is one hundred and ten pounds for this day’s work.’

He paused. A rousing cheer greeted the announcement. Hitherto the crew had to be content with promises. Now the sight of the bulging sack indicated that they believed in the old adage: ‘A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.’

Captain Cain held up his hand. Instantly the boisterous cheering ceased.

‘As your captain,’ he continued, ‘I naturally have your welfare at heart. Here is the money. I would point out the disadvantages of keeping such an amount on board. Some of you might be tempted to risk the loss of their shares at cards. What you do in the fo’c’sle
during your watch below is no affair of mine, but I should be sorry to learn that any man has had the ill-luck to lose his wealth — hard-earned or otherwise. Therefore, I would suggest that, should anyone wish to place his share in a place of absolute safety, I will be responsible for its keeping. In other words, I am sending the booty back to England in the Fairy. All money entrusted to me will be judiciously invested, and a receipt given for the same. On the other hand, any one who wishes to hold his share can do so. Mr. Barnard, call the roll!'

The bo’sun began his task. As each man’s name was called, he stepped forward to a chalk-line drawn on the deck. Here he stated what he wanted — either the actual coin or a receipt for the same. In the former case, Marchant, the gunner, counted out the coins and handed them to the man. In the latter, Pengelly wrote out a receipt.

About a dozen men took the cash. Of the remainder, a few allotted their share, receiving Pengelly’s form of acknowledgment; the others compromised by drawing a few pounds on account and leaving the balance with the captain.

All this was done in full view of Broadmayne and Vyse. The captain knew they were looking on. Perhaps he hoped that the sight of so much money might make the two men under detention alter their minds about signing-on.

The muster was about to be dismissed, when one of the men stepped forward.
‘Well?’ inquired Captain Cain laconically.

‘Us of the fo’c’sle wants to know what’s to be our attitude to’ards those blokes we picked up, sir,’ said the man. ‘Seein’ as ‘ow they messes an’ berths for’ard, ‘ow are we to treat ’em? Are they with us as part of the crew, sir?’

‘What are you driving at, Mathews?’ asked the captain.

The man hesitated.

‘Tes like this, sir,’ he continued, after a pause. ‘If they ain’t hands, then why are they berthed along o’ we? If they are, it ain’t fair on the rest of us that they don’t take part in the routine of the ship — slackin’ about while we are a-workin’ ’ard.’

It was then that Captain Cain made a serious mistake. Instead of ticking the man off for attempting to interfere with the captain’s plans — a grave breach of discipline — he temporised with the delegate.

‘The matter will receive my attention, Mathews,’ he replied.

‘Very good, sir,’ rejoined the man.

He saluted, turned and went back to the others. His comrades saw what the pirate captain could not — a self-satisfied look upon the man’s face at the thought that he had scored off the owner.

‘Pipe down!’ ordered Captain Cain.

A minute or so later, he beckoned to his captives. The Sub and his companion descended the poop ladder and approached the pirate skipper.

‘I can’t have idlers on board this craft,’ said Captain
Cain abruptly. ‘From now you will form part of the starboard watch, and stand your tricks like the rest of the hands. Understand that?’

‘Very good,’ replied the Sub coldly. ‘In the circumstances, we have no option. We are willing, under compulsion, to do our part towards working the ship, but in no case will we bear a hand at any work of piracy.’

‘We’ll see about that,’ retorted Captain Cain, with a sneering laugh. ‘Now, go and report to Mr. Barnard, the bo’sun. Tell him you’re placed in the starboard watch.’

Without replying, the two chums turned and went to carry out the captain’s orders. Purposely they omitted the salute. They expected to be recalled and made to give it; but Captain Cain feigned to take no notice of the omission.

‘I’ll break their spirits yet!’ he mused.

But Broadmayne and Vyse thought otherwise.
Just before sunset the *Alerte* entered the Chenal du Four, a dangerous and intricate passage between Ushant and the Brittany coast. Not only does the water on either side of the deep channel teem with jagged rocks — many of them submerged at various states of the tide — but both flood and ebb set at from six to seven knots, sometimes obliquely across the narrow passage. To complicate matters further, the rise and fall of the tide is twenty-four feet at springs and eighteen feet at neaps.

By taking advantage of certain states of the tides, a vessel bound for Brest and the Biscayan ports from the English Channel could save a long detour outside of Ushant by making use of the Four Passage, but, in any case, the utmost caution is necessary. Strangers are, in fact, warned that to attempt this channel without a pilot is entailing great risk.

To Captain Cain this hazardous locality presented no terrors. Many a time during his naval career he had taken submarines between Brest and Portsmouth, and had lurked in the Chenal du Four waiting to turn the tables on the U-boats that preyed on the shipping converging upon Ushant. Now he was going to put the knowledge that he had gained legitimately to a
perfectly illegal use.

‘Any sign of the Fairy, Mr. Pengelly?’ he inquired.
‘No sir.’
‘All right. I’ll carry on. Quartermaster, keep those two towers in line — south-five-east is the course. Mr. Pengelly, see that the anchor is clear and fifty fathoms cable ranged on deck ready to let go.’

The sun set in a vivid red sky. The lights of Kermorvan and St. Mathieu towers sent out their guiding beams. In a couple of hours the moon would rise.

Still the Alerte held on. Presently the look-out reported a sail on the starboard bow. Against the still strong afterglow in the western sky the intervening stretch of water appeared to be studded with rocky pinnacles.

‘That’s the Fairy,’ declared Captain Cain to Pengelly, who had rejoined him on the bridge. ‘She’s brought up in four fathoms off Beniguet Island. No, we won’t send out recognition signals. Hard-a-port, Quartermaster. Meet her! At that!’

The Alerte, her speed reduced to five knots, appeared to be heading straight for a saw-like reef. Another alteration of helm and she slipped past within half a cable’s length of this ridge of rocks, eeled her way between two half-tide rocks and settled down on a course south-south-west.

‘Stand by!’ shouted Captain Cain, ringing for the propellers to be declutched.

Gradually the Alerte lost way. A hoarse order from
the bridge was answered by the rattle of cable heaving through the hawsepipe. Snubbing gently at the tautened cable, the pirate submarine swung round head to tide within two hundred yards of the Falmouth lugger owned by the redoubtable Cap’n Silas Porthoustoc.

The *Fairy* had a riding-light on her forestay, but no hail came from her deck. The *Alerte*, having extinguished her navigation lamps, hoisted her anchor-light. To any observant Breton fisherman there was nothing to excite suspicion. Small craft bringing up to avoid a foul tide were fairly common objects in the vicinity of the Chenal du Four.

Since Broadmayne’s and Vyse’s ‘promotion’ to the starboard watch, the chums had spent much of their time on deck. Their new messmates, now that they recognised them as such, were apt to be either patronising or rudely inquisitive. They looked upon the two chums’ predicament — being forced to work without payment — as a huge joke, especially as Rollo and the Sub were obviously men of a different social standing. Hence it was not surprising that the late crew of the *Ibex* kept to themselves as much as possible.

The Sub knew roughly the position of the *Alerte*. Although he had never before been through the Four Passage, he realised from his previous knowledge of Ushant Light that the anchorage was between some of the islands off the westernmost part of the Brittany coast.
‘Wonder what that vessel is?’ he remarked, pointing to the *Fairy’s* riding-light. ‘If she’s a Breton fishing craft, we might swim off to her.’

‘Not in this tideway,’ objected Vyse, for the water was hissing and seething past the side of the *Alerte*. ‘We might when the tide eases off. It’s bound to just before high water. ‘Sides, the moon will be up soon.’

They waited and watched, conversing in low tones. The *Alerte’s* deck was practically deserted. There was a look-out man on the forecastle. Occasionally some of the hands would emerge from the close atmosphere of the crew’s quarters for a breath of fresh air. But no one seemed to take the slightest notice of the two chums.

Presently the moon rose behind the gaunt Brittany hills — a huge red disc, that soon appeared to diminish in size and assume a vivid yellowish hue. It was now one bell and the first watch.

‘That’s not a Frenchman,’ declared the Sub, as the slanting moonbeams fell athwart the bluff outlines of the Penzance boat. ‘She’s a West Country lugger, I’ll swear. Wonder what she’s doing here?’

‘Perhaps her skipper’s a pal of the pirate captain,’ suggested Vyse.

‘Not likely,’ objected Broadmayne. ‘They didn’t communicate with each other when we came in. I was looking out for that. ‘Sides, it’s hardly feasible that a sailing lugger, if she were acting as tender, would show up within a few miles of the great French naval port of Brest. It would be far safer to get in touch fifty miles from land.’
‘That’s so,’ agreed Vyse. ‘And that brings us back to our original proposition. How’s this for a scheme. The lugger’s now almost dead astern of us. The tide’s easing a bit. The *Alerte*’s look-out is for’ard, consequently he can’t see what’s going on aft. We can lower ourselves over the stern, swim off to the lugger and get aboard by her cable, if there’s nothing better. We’ll warn her master of the undesirable nature of the *Alerte* and offer him a hundred quid if he’ll weigh at once and give us a passage to England.’

‘Then the sooner the better,’ said the Sub briskly. ‘It will be another hour and a half before the look-out is relieved. If he misses us, he’ll probably think we’ve gone below. His relief will know we’re not.’

Their preparations were quickly and silently made. They sacrificed their footgear. Broadmayne took off his black oilskin, rolled it neatly and stowed it away under the platform of the sounding machine aft.

The next step was to drop the after-fall of one of the quarter-boats overboard. Had the *Alerte* been a genuine tramp steamer the fugitives would have to run the risk of being seen through the cavin scuttles, but her cabins being within the hull of the submarine, were artifically lighted.

Broadmayne gave a swift, comprehensive look forward. The look-out man was still in the forecastle. He was resting one leg on the low bulwark, and was gazing stolidly in the direction of St. Mathieu lighthouse. Evidently he considered his job a merely formal one, and was making the best of his trick by
indulging in fanciful speculations of what he would do with his rapidly increasing wealth.

Giving his companion a reassuring nod, the Sub cautiously slid over the rail, gripped the rope and lowered himself slowly.

‘Ugh!’ he mused. ‘Feet first — rotten way to take the water, I’ll bet it’s beastly cold.’

But to his surprise the sea was fairly warm. It made him shiver when the water rose above his ankles and knees, but directly he was immersed to his neck he felt no further discomfort.

It was true that the hot tide had slackened. It had decreased from six to about three knots, or a rate equal to that of a brisk walk. Still hanging on to the rope, he felt himself being swept aft until his feet were almost showing above the surface.

He dare not let go until Vyse was almost at the water’s edge, otherwise he would be swept far to leeward before his chum was ready to cast himself off. Keeping together for mutual encouragement was part of the pre-arranged plan.

Down came Vyse, hand over hand. The two chums were now up to their necks and still hanging on to the rope. Both realised that if they were swept past the lugger by some not unusual freak of the tidal current, they were as good as lost.

‘Ready?’ whispered Broadmayne. ‘Breast stroke; don’t speak.’

They released their hold and struck out. The towering hull of the *Alerte* seemed to be moving with
great rapidity. Almost before they realised it, they were clear of the shadow of the poop and were swimming strongly in the moonlit sea.

Now they could clearly discern the lugger as she strained and tugged at her tautened cable. The water was frothing against her stem-band. But for the cable, it looked as if she were forging ahead under power. Every now and again she would sheer madly, so that at one time the swimmers were heading straight for her; at another — it looked as if they would be swept half a dozen yards away from her.

By good luck, Broadmayne grasped the cable. With a jerk that well-nigh wrenched him away, his body swung round in the fierce current. The next instant, Vyse secured a hold.

Then the lugger commenced to sheer again. The cable dipped, dragging both men below the surface. Not daring to let go, they hung on, holding their breath until the iron chain tautened again, lifting them both waist high out of the water.

‘You go first,’ gurgled the Sub.

It was a hazardous business, clambering up on the underside of a vibrating chain at an angle of about forty-five degrees. Although it was not far to go, the difficulty increased as Vyse approached the vessel’s bows. There was a danger of being nipped between the cable and the small, iron-shod hawsepipe, with the additional possibility of his arm being jammed between the chain and the lugger’s stem-head.

Keeping clear of these dangers, Vyse hung on,
looking for a means of getting in over the bows. Suddenly he caught sight of a stout piece of line by which the chain bobstay had been triced up to prevent it being chafed by the cable. It might hold — it might not. At any rate, he decided, if it did carry away, he could make a grab at the bobstay.

Desperately, Rollo made the attempt. The rope gave slightly as he transferred his weight to it. The next instant he had thrown one leg over the massive bowsprit. It was then a fairly simple matter to haul himself up and across the heavy spar.

By this time, Broadmayne was attempting the ascent; water poured from his saturated clothing as he drew himself clear. He was breathing heavily, but the grinding of the cable and the rush of the tide completely drowned his laboured gasps. With less caution than his chum had shown, he allowed the knuckles of his right hand to be barked by the surge of the chain. Had it not been for Vyse’s prompt assistance, the Sub must have relinquished his hold.

For quite five minutes the two men crouched on the lugger’s fore-deck, too exhausted to move. There was no one of the crew on deck. A faint gleam was thrown obliquely from the half-closed fore-peak hatchway. Aft, the fluted glass skylight over the skipper’s cabin was illuminated from within.

‘Come aft,’ whispered Broadmayne.

In stockinged feet, they crept cautiously past the huge old-fashioned windlass, made their way along the narrow space between the tarpaulined hatch
covers, over the hold, and gained the small aperture leading to the cabin.

The Sub knocked softly upon the door.

‘That be you, Garge?’ demanded a deep, rolling voice. ‘Come in.’

Accepting the invitation given to the absent Garge, whoever he might be, Broadmayne opened the door. Had it not been for the voice, the Sub would have formed a first impression that the cabin was untenanted.

Under the skylight hung a swinging lamp, with a polished brass deflector. Immediately under the lamp was a table that at one time had been polished mahogany. Now it was scratched, tarnished and blackened, the captain evidently being in the habit of knocking out the glowing embers of his pipe upon the table.

At the after end of the cabin was a long bookcase above a settee. On either side were seats with lockers under, while above the seats were cavernous recesses with large sliding doors.

One of the latter was partly open, revealing a hairy-faced man lying fully dressed on a bunk, with a heap of blankets covering him from his feet to the point of his chin. Apparently he was still wanting additional warmth, for a coal fire blazed in a brass-lined fireplace — the skylight was shut, and, until Broadmayne opened it, also the door.

Cap’n Silas Porthoustoc’s astonishment at the sight of two saturated strangers was quite equal to that of
the Sub and his companion, when they caught a partial view of the old man stewing in the hot and unpleasantly close air.

‘Who are ye, an’ what you’ım wantin’?’ inquired Cap’n Silas, embellishing his inquiry with half a dozen totally different adjectives.

‘It’s all right, Captain,’ replied Broadmayne soothingly, ‘we’ve just swum off from the vessel brought up ahead of you.’

‘Desarters, eh?’

‘Sort of,’ admitted the Sub.

‘An’ you’ım thinkin’ the *Fairy* is a nursery for cut-an’-run sailormen?’ rejoined Captain Porthoustoc. ‘You’ım come tu wrong ship, you’ım have. Best swim back along fore there’s trouble.’

‘Look here, Captain,’ began Broadmayne firmly.

Before he could say more, the skipper of the *Fairy* thrust back the sliding-door of his bunk and rolled out, bringing with him an avalanche of blankets, a heavy pilot coat, and an oilskin.

‘Wot’s this?’ he demanded. ‘Threatenin’ me in my own cabin, aboard my very own ship?’

‘Not at all, Captain,’ said the Sub hurriedly. ‘We want your assistance. We’ll pay you well.’

‘Pay me well!’ echoed Captain Silas scornfully. ‘Can show the colour of your money, belike?’

‘We’ll give you a hundred pounds if you’Il put us ashore anywhere in England,’ said Broadmayne. ‘Possibly the Admiralty will pay you considerably more. The vessel we were on is a pirate.’

119
‘Slong’s she don’t do aught to we, I’m content,’ replied Captain Silas. ‘Howsomever, a hundred pun’ is worth a-pickin’ up. But if she be a pirate, as you say, what happens if so be she sends aboard us to look for ye?’

‘If you up-anchor and get under way at once she’ll be none the wiser,’ suggested the Sub. ‘If you think she’ll chase you across the Channel, there’s no reason why you shouldn’t run for Brest. You’ll get your money just the same.’

‘Can’t start afore the tide sets to south’ard,’ objected Captain Silas. ‘But I’ll tell you what: I’ll stow you away. You can lay your life on it, you’ll not be found. A hundred, you said?’

The Sub reiterated his promise.

Without another word the skipper of the Fairy kicked aside a narrow strip of coco-matting, fumbled at a small circular hole in one of the floor-boards, and at length raised a double-width plank about eighteen inches square.

The light of the cabin lamp revealed a cavernous space, with sloping sides and massive oaken timbers. Floor there was none, the narrow space above the kelson being packed with rusty iron bars. A cold and evil-smelling draught ascended, while with every roll of the lugger the bilge water sluiced and gurgled over the iron ballast.

‘Our clothes are wringing wet,’ observed Vyse, stating what was an obvious fact, for they were standing in puddles, while the heat of the closed-
down cabin caused the wet material to emit a regular haze of vapour.

‘Off wi’ ‘em, then,’ said Cap’n Silas shortly. ‘I’ll hide ‘em. Blanket apiece will serve till they’m dry.’

The two chums were in the final stages of disrobing when one of the hands tapped on the skylight.

‘She be hailin’ us to come alongside, Cap’n,’ he announced.

‘Pretty kettle o’ fish you’ve made,’ he exclaimed. ‘Pirate, you say she be. Well, ‘tain’t no use us kickin’. We’ll drop alongside of ‘er, an’ they can search till them’s tired. They’ll never find you. Down you go. Keep clear of yon propeller shaft.’

Gingerly the chums gathered the loaned blankets about them, toga-wise, and dropped down upon the ballast. The trap-door was replaced and the coco-matting relaid. In utter darkness the fugitives crouched, listening to the captain stamping about before going on deck.

Soon the Fairy’s motor started, but the shaft gave no sounds to indicate that it was revolving. Then came the clank of the pawls of the windlass, as the cable came home, link by link. The gentle purr of the engines increased to a loud, pulsating roar. The clutch was engaged, the propeller shaft began to revolve — perilously close to Vyse’s feet it sounded — and the lugger began to forge ahead.

She had not been under way for more than three minutes when the motor stopped and her stout hull quivered as she bumped alongside the Alerté.
‘Now what’s going to happen?’ thought Broadmayne. ‘The blighters are coming on board.’

There was a terrific din on deck. Men were stamping and running about, heavy weights were dumped down, the hatch-covers over the hold were thrown back.

The Sub could hear men’s voices as they shouted to each other, but the motor roar intervening between them and the fugitives prevented the Sub hearing what they were saying.

‘They’re making a pretty strict search,’ whispered Vyse.

‘Ssh!’ cautioned his companion. ‘There’s someone in the cabin. It’s Pengelly, by Jove!’

‘All in small packages — easily got ashore — he told you to do that? Look here, Silas, you’d better not — the cave behind your kitchen — we’ll arrange all that later — part brass rags within a fortnight — it’ll pay you far better — then that’s a deal?’

The Sub broke out in a gentle perspiration. From the scraps of conversation he had overheard, there could be but one explanation forthcoming. Pengelly and the master of the lugger were plotting — against whom? Captain Cain, without a doubt. That was interesting. But the disconcerting part was: what was the skipper of the Fairy’s attitude towards the two men hiding in the bilge? Would it pay him better to give them up, or to keep faith with them and so gain the promised hundred pounds?

‘Mr. Pengelly!’ shouted a voice, which Broadmayne
recognised as that of Captain Cain.

‘Ay, ay, sir!’ replied the second in command.

The fugitives heard the sound of Pengelly’s boots upon the ladder leading on deck. The Fairy’s skipper followed.

‘The old sinner,’ whispered Vyse. ‘I thought he was going to betray us.’

‘I don’t think so,’ replied the Sub. ‘The promise of a hundred pounds is our sheet anchor. By Jove! I can see some interesting developments before very long.’

‘What developments?’ inquired the other in a low tone.

Before Broadmayne could reply — it was quite safe to maintain a cautious conversation, since the uproar on deck would deaden every sound below — a minute shaft of yellow light played upon the Sub’s hand. He knew what that meant. The coco-matting had been removed, thus allowing the lamplight to enter the thumbhole in the covering to their place of concealment.

The next instant the trap hatch was thrown wide open. Standing close to the opening was Captain Cain, a revolver in his hand and a sardonic grin on his face. Behind him were four of the Alerte’s crew. Silas Porthoustoc, chuckling audibly, was stationed in the narrow doorway, while over his shoulders appeared the grinning faces of Pengelly and Barnard the boatswain.

‘Out of the frying-pan, eh?’ exclaimed Captain Cain mockingly. ‘You two have vastly underestimated the
intelligence of the Alerte’s ship’s company. I’ll deal faithfully with you for deserting, my lads. Now, out you come.’

Dejected and humiliated, Broadmayne and his companion emerged from the loathsome place of concealment. Their clothes had vanished. Clad in nothing but Cap’n Silas’s blankets, they beat an ignominious retreat, running the gauntlet of a fire of rude chaff from the Alerte’s crew as they hurriedly went below to their berths. In the eyes of the rest of the ship’s company they were nothing more or less than skulkers, who took every opportunity of dodging their share of work. And as such they had no sympathy from the piratical crew of the Alerte.
CHAPTER 10

BRUTE STRENGTH

Broadmayne and Vyse had not been more than five minutes in their bunks in the otherwise deserted crew’s quarters, when the bo’sun entered, storming and raging.

‘Skulking again!’ he shouted. ‘Here, you son of a horse-marine, show a leg! And you, you limb of Satan, it’s the like o’ you as gets the likes o’ me into trouble. On deck with you, an’ if you don’t work like blue blazes, there’ll be trouble.’

It was useless to refuse. Mildly, Vyse protested that their clothes had been taken away and that having to hold a blanket round one is apt to hamper a person’s activities.

‘Quite so,’ agreed Mr. Barnard, with a coarse laugh. ‘Bout time you did go into proper uniform.’

He went to the doorway.

‘Mathews!’ he shouted. ‘Get the key of the slop-chest and rig these skulking hounds out. Give you five minutes to fall in in the rig of the day,’ he added, ‘or, by smoke! you won’t get even bread and water for the next twenty-four hours.’

Well within the stipulated time the two chums went on deck, each dressed in rubber-boots, blue jersey and canvas jumper and trousers.
'Look lively there!' shouted the bo’sun. ‘Nip down the hold and bear a hand.’

The hold was almost empty. In one corner was a pile of iron-bound boxes and a number of small sacks, the mouths of which were secured with wire and sealed with discs of sealing-wax.

For some reason the derricks had not been brought into use. Each packet was handled separately, passed from one man to another, until by stages it reached the deck. Here a careful tally was made before the booty was transhipped to the lugger *Fairy*.

‘That’s the lot, Cap’n Silas,’ shouted Captain Cain. ‘You know your orders. Right-o; carry on and good luck!’

Quickly the dark brown canvas of the *Fairy* was set. She was riding head to wind alongside the *Alerte*, held only by a bow-and-stern warp.

‘All ready!’ shouted Porthoustoc. ‘Let go for’ard.’

A slight touch of the lugger’s tiller gave her sufficient sheer to allow the head sails to draw.

‘Let go aft!’ bawled Silas.

‘All gone!’ shouted one of the *Alerte*’s crew.

Then like a wraith the lugger drew ahead. There was no doubt about her speed and handiness. Without having recourse to her motor, she glided between the rocky pinnacles and was soon lost to sight in the gathering mist.

‘Eighteen hours stand easy, men!’ announced Captain Cain. ‘Clear away and hands to diving stations. We’ll lie here as comfortably as anyone could
wish till tomorrow evening. If all goes well, my lads, we’ll rake in another twenty thousand or so before this week’s out.’

Within twelve hours from the time when she cast off from alongside the *Alerte*, the *Fairy* was creeping past the Cornish coast, with the little fishing port of Mousehole bearing one point on her port bow, distant about one mile.

The *Fairy* had made a quick and uneventful passage, averaging seven and a half knots. Captain Silas Porthoustoc was almost shaking hands with himself.

‘Lawks!’ he muttered. ‘Yes a fair ole game. ‘Ere’s that there Cap’n Cain, as he calls hisself, a-tellin’ me to put the stuff in such an’ such a place until such times as they Lunnon men — fair sharks they be, drat ‘em — come down wi’ a moty car an’ take it away. Then there’s that Pengelly — I don’t like him much, but ‘e’s a sight better’n t’other un — says ‘e, “Don’t ‘ee du it, Silas. Hide the stuff in cave behind your kitchen, an’ we’ll share the profits.” Well, I dunno. There’s one thing, they girt swells from Lunnon won’t handle the stuff, or my name’s not Silas Porthoustoc; nor will that Cap’n Cain. An’ tes more’n likely as ‘ow Cap’n Cain an’ Mr. Pengelly ’ll row an’ finish by blowin’ holes in one another’s skulls. That bein’ so, I collar the lot.’

He interrupted his dreams of avarice by glancing skyward. The wind, hitherto strong, had died away, which was just what he wanted.

‘Garge!’ he shouted to his mate. ‘And that there
topsail. We’m not puttin’ into Newlyn — tide don’t serve. We’ll bring up inside Clement’s Island. She’ll be quite all right. If you an’ young Bill want a spell ashore, you can, ‘slongs you’m board come eight t’morrow morn.’

Garge jumped at the suggestion. His home was at Newlyn. It was an easy walk from Mousehole. Young Bill, Garge’s nephew, could go with him.

Accordingly the anchor was let go and the sails loosely stowed. The *Fairy*, being one of a type common to Mounts Bay, would excite no curiosity. She was registered as a fishing craft and, in fact, was one except when Captain Silas had undertakings of a more hazardous and withal more profitable nature in hand.

The mate hailed a passing boat, and uncle and nephew were readily given a passage ashore.

Left to himself, Cap’n Silas paced the deck till nightfall, relieving the monotony by exchanging bantering speech with the crews of the outward bound Mousehole fishing fleet, most of whom he knew.

After sunset he hoisted the riding-light, went below, and prepared and ate supper.

Shortly after midnight Silas went on deck. Everything was quiet. Softly he brought the dinghy alongside, muffled the rowlocks with cotton waste and then proceeded to load up with the precious cargo received from the *Alerte*.

Deeply laden, the dinghy was rowed shorewards, right into a small cave about a mile to the south of Mousehole village. Here the cargo was unloaded and
buried in the firm white sand forming the floor of the
cave, at fifty yards from its mouth.

Silas, when he worked, did work. Normally easy-
going and of a lazy disposition, he had the gift of
toiling with almost superhuman energy when
circumstances required. And this was one of them.

Ten times during the long December night did the
dinghy, well down in the water, make the double
passage between the *Fairy* and the cave.

At a quarter to eight, Silas, looking fresh as paint,
rowed ashore, this time to Mousehole to pick up his
crew. Two hours later the *Fairy* entered Newlyn
harbour, where her captain received the condolences
of the fisher-folk on the news that his trip had proved
to be singularly unfortunate. The *Fairy* had not
brought back so much as a solitary fish.

Captain Silas Porthoustoc, with his tongue in his
cheek, went home.

His cottage was situated on the hillside beyond
Mousehole. When ashore, he spent much of his time
gardening, and so poor is the Cornish soil that to grow
anything worth having the ground has to be plenti-
fully manured. Hence, it occasioned no comment
when Captain Silas toiled up the hill with a
wheelbarrow full of seaweed, since seaweed is an
excellent fertiliser. Had anyone, sufficiently curious
and daring to risk incurring the old skipper’s anger,
investigated what was under the seaweed the result
would have surprised them.

In three days, Silas made forty-eight trips with his
wheelbarrow. At the end of that time his garden still required more manure; but every ounce of the booty from the *Alerte* was snugly stowed away in the cave behind the kitchen of Silas Porthoustoc’s cottage.

Darkness had fallen when the *Alerte* rose to the surface, after her eighteen hours’ repose. Before the moon rose the crew had set up the funnel, masts and rigging, and by nine in the evening she was shaping a course slightly westward of the Casquets — that dangerous and frequently fog-bound ledge of rocks six miles west of Alderney.

Up to the present, Captain Cain had not put into execution his threat of punishing Broadmayne and his chum for their ‘desertion’. For one thing, he meant to make an example of them before the crew, and consequently waited until the men had had their greatly-wanted rest; for another, he believed in prolonging the agony, or delaying the actual punishment in order that the thought of it would prey upon the minds of the culprits.

From information obtained through the medium of Captain Silas Porthoustoc, the pirate skipper of the *Alerte* knew that a small French steamer, the *Surcouf*, was leaving St. Malo for the French islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon, lying off Newfoundland. Amongst other items, she carried the sum of five hundred thousand francs for the treasury of these Gallic dependencies and a quantity of valuable silver plate, the private property of one of the chief
officials of St. Pierre.

An hour before sunrise the *Alerte* stopped her engines. She was then nine miles west-north-west of the Casquets. By means of her wireless she learnt that the *Surcouf* would not clear St. Malo earlier than ten o’clock, or two hours before high water.

That interval gave Captain Cain his opportunity to carry out his threat to the Sub and Vyse.

All hands were mustered on deck. Seized by a couple of the crew, Rollo Vyse was hauled to the upturned boat that formed the screen for the quick-firer. Although boiling with rage, Vyse kept his feelings under control. Resistance was useless. He might easily fell his two captors, but he could not hope to defy the whole crew successfully. At one moment he harboured a scheme to break loose and hurl himself upon the pirate captain; but to do so, he would have to run the gauntlet of a dozen active and strongly-built men. So, in the circumstances, he made up his mind to take his gruelling with as much fortitude as possible.

Stripped to the waist, Vyse was secured to the boat, his arms over the keel and his ankles lashed to one of the gunwales.

‘All ready, sir,’ reported the bo’sun, who held a formidable-looking whip of plaited sennet, terminating in a triple leather thong.

‘Give him a dozen to start with, Mr. Barnard,’ ordered Captain Cain. ‘We’ll see how he likes that.’

The bo’sun drew his fingers caressingly through the thongs, spat upon his palm after the manner of horny-
handed sailormen, and prepared to enjoy himself.

‘Belay there!’ exclaimed the captain. ‘Where’s the other skulker? Bring him on deck.’

‘I am here!’ announced Broadmayne, stepping forward from the wake of the conning-tower. ‘I don’t suppose it’s any use protesting — ’

‘It isn’t,’ interrupted Captain Cain grimly.

The crew roared with merriment.

‘Then I won’t,’ continued the Sub. ‘But I will point out that you’re exacting the penalty before trial. We haven’t had a chance to defend ourselves. Now, Captain Cain, I’ll make a sporting offer. I don’t suppose you have boxing-gloves on board, so I’ll challenge any man in the ship, yourself included, to a five-round contest with bare fists. If I win, then my friend goes unpunished. I don’t ask for any favour on my own behalf. In any case, the hands will see a sight worth seeing.’

‘Good lad!’ shouted one of the crew, and about half a dozen others applauded. The proposition appealed to their love of sport. They were ready to witness the comparatively tame spectacle of a man being flogged; but they vastly preferred to enjoy a fight with the gloves off.

‘Silence!’ roared the captain.

‘Garn! Be a sport!’ retorted another of the crew brazenly.

Captain Cain strode towards the delinquent. Three steps did he take, then he stopped abruptly. Perhaps for the first time he realised that maintaining
discipline over a crowd of rogues — rogues of his own making — was a different matter to that of the old days, when his authority was backed by the King’s Commission. The early successes of the cruise had turned the men’s heads. Between themselves, they held the creed that ‘Jack’s as good as his master’, but as yet they dare not profess it openly. Nevertheless, Captain Cain felt that he was playing with a volcano.

‘Good idea, my lads!’ he exclaimed, without betraying his suspicions. ‘Who’ll uphold the reputation of the ship to the extent of five rounds?’

There was a long pause. Several of the men, great, deep-chested fellows who were good at a rough and tumble, were thinking about accepting the challenge, but the sight of the tall, well-built Broadmayne, who in addition had youth on his side, made them think twice — or more.

‘Blime!’ ejaculated a bull-necked, bullet-headed fellow, ‘wot are we all a-hangin’ on to the slack for? ‘Ere goes, ole sport. I’ll take you on.’

The speaker looked, and undoubtedly was, a tough proposition. An ex-first-class stoker, he had been employed as a coal-heaver at Millbay Docks until, after a term of unemployment, he had been engaged at the Polkyl Creek Shipbreaking Company as a hammerman. In spite of being nearly forty years of age, he was in the pink of condition and as hard as nails. Three inches shorter than Broadmayne, he was certainly heavier and possessed the doubtful advantage of three inches of girth. The muscles of his
arms stood up like egg-shaped stones under his firm flesh. The sinews of his chest were like whipcord. But there was one defect that the Sub was quick to notice. Like many a man of his build, the ex-stoker was disproportionately weak in the lower limbs.

All the same, Broadmayne realised that he had a heavy task in front of him. If he were to more than hold his own, he must avoid a direct blow of the other’s shoulder-of-mutton fists, and trust to science and agility to counteract the fellow’s super-abundant reserve of brute force.

‘My chum’s my second,’ declared Broadmayne. ‘Cast him loose.’

Somewhat to his surprise the men did so, Captain Cain raising no objection.

‘Whatever happens,’ whispered the Sub, ‘you’re free for the time. That’s something.’

‘Be careful,’ cautioned Vyse. ‘Try tiring him out.’

‘I mean to,’ rejoined Broadmayne.

Already the rough preparations for the contest were complete. The slightly curving steel deck made a sorry ring, destitute of matting. Two ropes had been stretched from rail to rail, two others crossing them at right angles.

Pengelly was appointed referee. Barnard, the bo’sun, acted as timekeeper, conspicuously displaying a handsome gold watch, lately the property of the captain of the Cap Hoorn. Captain Cain, perched upon the up-turned keel of the quick-firer’s screen, watched the proceedings at a distance of about five yards; but
the crew, squatting on deck, crowded close to the ropes, determined not to miss the advantage of the front row seats.

The ex-stoker opened the proceedings by making a bull-like rush at his antagonist. Broadmayne avoided the onslaught with comparative ease, but could not resist the temptation of delivering a left at the side of the other’s head. Adroitly ducking, the man avoided the blow and retaliated with a jab intended for the Sub’s ribs in the region of the heart. It was not a vicious blow. The ex-stoker, thinking he was bound to win, was loath to make an early finish. A spectacular display to delight his comrades was what he wanted. The knock-out, he decided, would come in the fifth round — not before.

Nevertheless, the jab jolted Broadmayne severely. It taught him a lesson. For the rest of the round he was strictly on the defensive, trusting to footwork to avoid further punishment.

The second round was much on the same principle. It ended with Broadmayne feeling none the worse, but the ex-stoker somewhat blown and perspiring freely. The spectators, disappointed at the tameness of the contest, blew off steam by shouting to their champion to get to work, and jeering at the Sub’s wary and seemingly faint-hearted tactics.

Goaded by the exhortations of his messmates, the ex-stoker warmed to his work in the third round. More than once he drove Broadmayne against the ropes, where only by dexterity did he escape a disastrous
clinch. Once the Sub got home with a smashing blow between his antagonist’s eyes. It would have knocked out any ordinary man, but the fellow, beyond recoiling, seemed none the worse. Quickly he had his revenge by delivering a straight left on Broadmayne’s left cheek, which had the effect of sobering him completely for the rest of the round.

‘Fourth round — seconds out of the ring!’

Broadmayne left his corner feeling far from comfortable. The ex-stoker, with blood trickling from his nose, grinned disdainfully at him, then ducking, rushed headlong at his adversary.

For a brief instant the Sub stood his ground, then stepped nimbly aside. The ex-stoker’s massive fist grazed his left ear, the impetus of the blow throwing the fellow forward. Before he could recover his balance, Broadmayne, putting every ounce into it, delivered a right, followed by a hook with his left.

Of what happened after that he had only a hazy idea. Like in a mist he saw the powerful figure of his antagonist collapse. He appeared to fall neither forward nor backward, but to subside as his knees gave way. To Broadmayne it seemed a full minute that this continued; then, as his knees touched the steel deck the ex-stoker rolled over on his side.

‘One — two — three — ’

The man made an effort to rise. Broadmayne stepped forward, ready to finish the business; but there was no need. Gasping like a stranded fish, the ex-stoker rolled over again.
‘— eight — nine — ten.’

Down and out!

Still a bit dazed, Broadmayne went back to his corner and leant heavily against his chum. The men were cheering like mad. It dawned upon him that they were cheering him. Tough, desperate ruffians they might be, but they were sportsmen, members of a nation that produces the best winners and the best losers in the world.

Pengelly congratulated him; so did Barnard, Marchant and most of the crew. But Captain Cain held aloof. He was furious with himself for having allowed the contest to take place. His authority had been wrecked. The crew’s attitude towards his captives had undergone a complete change. He bitterly regretted having taken them on board.

Yet, short of committing murder, he could not get rid of them. Had he been sure of his crew, he might even have taken that step, although he was loath to do so. He could not set them ashore: they knew too much. Besides, he still hoped to rake in a substantial sum for their ransom.

‘Sail on the starboard bow, sir!’

Instantly Captain Cain cast aside his train of disturbing thoughts. Hurrying to the bridge he levelled his binoculars.

‘It’s the Frenchman, my lads!’ he shouted. ‘All hands to quarters! She’s ours, my hearties!’
— CHAPTER 11 —
THE FIGHT WITH THE SURCOUF

The *Surcouf*, for such she was, was approaching at twelve knots. She was a two-funnelled craft of about 3,000 tons, painted black with white upperworks. Occasionally visible between the eddying clouds of smoke from her funnels fluttered the tricolour from her ensign-staff; while at her foremost truck was displayed a white diamond on a red ground, bearing the letters MM.

From the *Alerte*’s bridge, Captain Cain scanned the horizon. There was no other vessel in sight. Even the upper part of the Casquets Lighthouse, now twelve miles away, was invisible. Everything seemed propitious for the coming venture.

Quickly the crew went to stations. All the slackness and resentment to discipline seemed to have gone by the board. Orders were carried out with the utmost alacrity, until —

‘Wot you got there, Charlie?’ demanded one of the hands of a messmate who was making his way aft with a red, white and black flag under his arm.

‘German ensign,’ replied the other. ‘Cap’n’s orders.’

‘Blowed if I’ll fight under that rag,’ declared the first speaker hotly. ‘I’m an Englishman, I am. Don’t mind the French tricolour, mark you, but the Hun ensign —
no, thank you. What say you, chum?'

‘I draws the line at that,’ replied the third man, and his protest was taken up by several of the others.

‘What are you men jawing about?’ shouted Mr. Marchant, the gunner. ‘Look alive and get that ensign made up ready to break out.’

To him the seamen voiced their protest. Even the gunner had his views upon the matter. He went to the captain and protested, stating that all hands were against using the German flag.

‘Curse them!’ exclaimed Captain Cain angrily. ‘What does that matter?’

‘Matters a lot to them, sir,’ replied the gunner sturdily.

‘All right then,’ conceded the pirate. ‘Hoist any flag you jolly well like. If this business is bungled, don’t blame me. Signalman, stand by to hoist the ID. Gunner’s mate, if I give the word to open fire, knock away her foremast. We’ll have to stop her wirelessing at any cost if she won’t give in tamely.’

Throughout these preparations, Rollo Vyse and the Sub had been inactive. They point-blank refused to bear a hand, and the crew, now respecting their principles, let them severely alone. Captain Cain was quick to notice the change of attitude, and from fear of causing further discontent affected to be ignorant of the presence of the two chums.

The *Surcouf* had approached to within half a mile, when Captain Cain ordered the *Alerte* to be turned sixteen points to starboard. This had the effect of
bringing her on a parallel course to that of the Frenchmen, although the distance between them when abreast was increased by the diameter of the pirate submarine’s turning circle.

Up ran the two-flag hoist, the signal to heave to under penalty of being fired upon; simultaneously, the six-inch quick-firer was unmasked and trained upon the Surcouf.

The next instant Captain Cain experienced one of the worst surprises in his life — and he had had a few in his time.

A livid flash leapt from under the Surcouf’s bridge, followed almost immediately by a sharp report. Before anyone on board the Alerte realised what had happened a seven-pounder shell burst against the dummy superstructure amidships, ripped a jagged hole in the funnel and cut away the mainstay, with the result that the mainmast, wrenching away the steel tabernacle, crashed heavily upon the poop.

Captain Cain was one of the first to grasp the situation. With all his faults, he was not lacking in courage when under fire. A sliver of metal had grazed his forehead, laying open the frontal bone; but in the excitement he did not heed the burning pain.

‘Let ’em have it on the waterline, Mr. Marchant,’ he shouted, countermanding his previous order to destroy the Frenchman’s wireless gear.

Since he could not effect the capture of the Surcouf without resistance, he determined to sink her. It meant the loss of the expected booty, but the Alerte could not
run the risk of a prolonged action. There was little
danger of the hull of the submarine being perforated
by the Frenchman’s light quick-firer. Even if the outer
skin were holed the inner plating would successfully
impede the progress of the projectile. The dominating
factor was the absence of any repairing base to which
the Alerte could retire to heal her wounds. Whatever
damage was received had to be made good on the
high seas, and a badly battered craft would naturally
be the object of interest, if not of suspicion.

The gun’s crew of the Alerte’s quick-firer rose to the
occasion. As fast as the breech-block could be opened
and snapped to, the powerful weapon spoke. Empty
cartridge-shells clattering on the steel deck punctuated
the sharp bark of the weapon, while shell after shell at
point-blank range crashed into the Surcouf’s hull.

But the Frenchman, in spite of the disproportionate
odds in the matter of ordnance, maintained a steady
fire, not only from the gun under the bridge, but from
a similar weapon mounted aft. She then began to go
astem, until the Alerte’s quick-firer was masked by the
stanchions of her bridge.

By this time the Surcouf’s hull was holed in twenty
places. A fire had broken out amidships, smoke was
pouring in volumes from a dozen jagged apertures;
yet not a single shell had hit her ‘twixt wind and
water.

For nearly a minute the Alerte was raked aft without
being able to reply. Two of the hands rushed towards
the poop with the machine-gun. Before they reached
their goal both were struck down by splinters of shell from a missile that had exploded against one of the cowls.

‘Port eight, Quartermaster!’ shouted Captain Cain. ‘Now, lads, let her have it!’

But even as the *Alerte* swung to starboard the *Surcouf* put her helm hard over. She was not out to sink a pirate, or be sunk herself. Her duty lay in saving her precious cargo.

A dense pall of smoke hid her from sight. Even Captain Cain was at first under the impression that she had sunk suddenly; but when the thick cloud dispersed the *Surcouf* was sighted steaming away at full speed in the direction of Guernsey.

Pursuit was useless. To attempt to do so would only bring the pirate submarine closer to the French coast, and there were in all probability several torpedo boats at St. Malo. Certainly there were plenty at Brest and Cherbourg, and by following the *Surcouf* the *Alerte* would run the grave risk of being trapped in the deep bay between Cape de la Hague and Ushant, where the rocky and uneven bottom combined with violent currents made it a dangerous place for a submarine to rest on the bed of the sea.

The situation was a dangerous one. The *Surcouf* had got away. Already her wireless was sending out appeals for aid, and warnings that she had been fired upon by a mysterious craft.

Previously, the French authorities had been sceptical about the story of the *Cap Hoorn*. That craft had, in
accordance to orders from their captors, proceeded lamely into Cherbourg, only to find that hostilities had not broken out between France and Germany. There was the evidence afforded by her shattered rudder-head, but the French Admiralty officials, beyond disclaiming responsibility, declined to investigate the damage. Four hours later the *Cap Hoorn* left Cherbourg for Hamburg in tow of an ocean-going Dutch tug.

Nevertheless, the incident could not be entirely ignored. Some vessel had evidently run amok in the Channel. In consequence, the *Surcouf* was one of several merchantmen to be hurriedly armed against the aggressions of the mysterious filibuster. And now the *Surcouf* had reported the attack, and already the news had been transmitted, not only to the French naval bases, but to the British Admiralty. On both sides of the Channel and along the coast of Ireland swift destroyers were raising steam to engage in hunting down the modern pirate craft.

‘Look alive, my lads!’ exclaimed Captain Cain. ‘If we’re to get out of this with whole necks, we must waste no time. How many casualties, Mr. Pengelly?’

‘Seven, sir; four serious, three light.’

‘Get ’em below,’ continued the skipper.

‘They are already, sir,’ replied the second in command. ‘Parkins and Brown — the two who tried to get aft with the machine-gun — are the worst hit. Broadmayne and Vyse carried them below under fire.’

‘Did they?’ commented Captain Cain. Under his breath he muttered, ‘And a pity they hadn’t lost the
number of their mess.’

Quickly all available hands got to work. The dummy funnel was lowered and preparations made to patch the gaping rent and repaint the ‘smoke-stack’ a different colour. The gashes in the upperworks were hidden by means of oval metal plates, one inside, one out, drawn together by a butterfly nut and thread. The tabernacle of the mainmast was rebedded and a new mainstay prepared ready to set the ‘stick’ up again.

The while a most anxious and careful watch was kept on the horizon and on the sky, since it was quite possible that units of the French aviation service might co-operate in the search.

Three-quarters of an hour after breaking off the engagement with the *Surcouf* a liner appeared in sight, bound up-Channel. The *Alerte* could have avoided her by altering helm, but Captain Cain decided upon a bold display of bluff. He held on.

‘Union Castle Liner, Mr. Pengelly,’ he remarked. ‘We’ll signal her.’

‘What for?’ demanded the astonished Pengelly. ‘Surely we’ve had enough for the present. Besides, she’s British.’

‘Exactly,’ concurred the pirate skipper. ‘I’m going to ask her to take charge of our badly wounded cases. Signalman, hoist the NC.’

The letters NC, signifying ‘In distress, need immediate assistance’, are never purposely ignored. Corresponding to the wireless S.O.S., they would divert the largest liner or the humblest tramp.
Promptly the liner altered helm and slowed down. Passengers crowded to her side to look at the apparently battered tramp.

Standing upon the roof of the chart-house, the Alerte’s signalman began to semaphore:

‘Alerte of London, Grimsby for Corunna. Have been fired upon by vessel, nationality unknown, lat. 49° 50’ N., long. 3° 20’ W., at 10.30 a.m. today. Vessel disappeared steering W.S.W. Please report. Can you receive four badly wounded men?’

To this the liner replied by semaphore that she would wireless the information, and that she would send a boat to transfer the Alerte’s casualties.

‘Many thanks,’ responded Captain Cain, through the medium of the semaphore. ‘No need to lower boat; ours is available.’

Captain Cain had already sent below to warn the wounded of his intentions. They were not sorry to be clear of the pirate submarine. Their chief anxiety was the thought that they might be deprived of their share of booty, but the wily captain reassured them on that point. He knew they would keep their mouths shut — at least for a period sufficiently long for his purpose. He was also ridding himself of the trouble of having useless men on board — men who would have to be fed and given a certain amount of attention and yet be totally unable to assist in working or fighting the ship.

By refusing the liner’s offer to send a boat, Captain Cain had scored again. Not only did it prevent the mail boat’s officer having a look round, but it obviated
the risk of Broadmayne and his companion making a
dash for freedom.

But the signal success of his ruse lay in the fact that
the liner was already wirelessing the account of an
imaginary attack upon the S.S. *Alerte*. The message
was picked up by three destroyers from Cherbourg,
which were then in a course that would bring them on
the track of the fugitive. Immediately on receipt of this
misleading report the French destroyers altered helm
in the direction the mythical filibuster was stated to
have taken.

The four wounded men were safely transhipped, the
operation being performed under the fire of at least
fifty cameras — much to Pengelly’s disgust. He had no
immediate ambition to figure in the limelight of the
illustrated press; nor did Captain Cain show any
enthusiasm, when through his binoculars he observed
the liner’s passengers taking snapshots of the *Alerte*.
He wished he had set up the mainmast before meeting
the liner. Should a photograph of the *Alerte* in her
present condition reach the French authorities — as it
was fairly certain to do — there would be a lot of
explanation to prove that the *Surcouf*’s assailant and
the *Alerte* were not one and the same vessel.

‘Do you want any further assistance?’ inquired the
captain of the liner.

‘No, sir,’ answered Pengelly from the boat alongside.
‘We’re putting back to Falmouth for repairs. We can do
the run under our own steam.’

‘Well, good luck to you,’ was the response, as the
Alerte’s boat pushed off.

Then, with a mutual dipping of ensigns, the liner and the tramp parted — the former to Southampton, the latter anywhere where she might obtain immunity from the pressing attentions of the swift, vengeful destroyers.
‘Here’s a fine lash-up!’ remarked Broadmayne to his chum. ‘We look like getting it in the neck. I won’t give much for our chances if our destroyers take up the chase. Cain, or whatever his name is, may be a very clever and cunning rogue, but he’s bitten off more than he can chew.’

‘It’s rough luck on us,’ rejoined Vyse. ‘I don’t hanker after the idea of being sent to Davy Jones’s locker by a British destroyer.’

‘Pro bono publico,’ quoted the Sub. ‘However, we must make the best of things and trust to luck. Give me half a chance and my name’s Johnny Walker as far as this hooker is concerned.’

The chums were having a breather on deck before turning in. Seven miles to the northwest the Wolf Light was sending out its red and white flashes. The Alerte, most of her scars patched, was making towards the Scillies; but whether Captain Cain intended to use one of the numerous and secluded channels between the islands as a hiding-place, was a matter for speculation as far as Broadmayne and his companion were concerned.

Gerald and Rollo had worked hard during the day. That, no one could deny. During the action with the
Surcouf they had remained passive spectators, taking refuge behind the conning-tower when the Frenchman’s shells began to rip the *Alerte’s* upper-works. But when they saw the two men with the machine-gun topple headlong, they had made a simultaneous rush to the assistance of the badly-wounded men. This they did with a clear conscience. There was nothing in the act that could be construed as aiding and abetting the pirates in an unlawful act.

Nor did they hesitate to tend the other wounded members of the crew. Strangely enough, with all his elaborate preparations, Captain Cain had either neglected or purposely omitted to provide adequate surgical and medical stores, and in consequence the less severely wounded suffered terribly through lack of instruments and ether-chloroform. It was a painful business both to the wounded men and their unqualified surgeons to have to extract jagged slivers of metal without even the application of local anaesthetics. All the Sub and his companion could do was to cleanse the wounds with warm water and iodine, and bind them with rough-and-ready bandages that from an antiseptic point of view would have made a medical man shudder.

Broadmayne had completed his self-imposed task and was going on deck, when he encountered his late antagonist. The ex-stoker’s battered features wore a broad grin. Extending a huge hand, he greeted the Sub with a hearty shake.

‘Put it there, chum!’ he exclaimed. ‘I was whacked
proper. I’d like to know where you learnt that punch! An’ don’t you forget it: if ever you wants a friend, ’sides the one you’ve got already, Jim Soames — Slogger Soames — is the man.’

‘We’re getting on,’ observed Broadmayne, when he related the incident to Vyse. ‘That fellow isn’t a bad sort. Wonder how he came to row on this galley. And several of the crew seem quite well disposed towards us. We might work it.’

‘Work what?’ asked Rollo.

‘Induce some of them to put us ashore,’ replied the Sub.

‘Bit risky,’ observed his chum. ‘Not on our account,’ he added. ‘That I don’t mind. It would be hard on those fellows if they were found out. Cain seems a bit of a tartar.’

‘He may be,’ admitted Broadmayne. ‘But he hasn’t much of a hold over his men. And I fancy, although I’m not sure, that Pengelly and he are parting brass rags. That conversation we overheard — about the cave behind a kitchen somewhere — struck me as if Cain and his lieutenant don’t hit it off together.’

‘Well, Cain won’t truss us up for a flogging after the licking you gave Soames,’ remarked Vyse. ‘I don’t mind admitting I felt a bit on the scared-stiff side when the bo’sun began playing with his cat-o’-nine-tails. And Cain hasn’t turned us into pirates yet.’

‘And never will,’ added the Sub. ‘Hello, we’re altering course. What’s the game now?’

The *Alerte* was no longer heading towards the
Scillies. She had ported helm and was now making in the direction of Land’s End. She was showing her proper navigation lights and was fussing along just like any tramp bound up-Channel.

It was a dark and clear night. Although the sky was overcast and no stars were visible, there was a total absence of fog. It was easy to pick up the numerous lights marking the Chops of the Channel. Even the flash of the Lizard — thirty miles away — could be observed, although under ordinary conditions its visibility extends over a radius of twenty-one miles only.

‘There’ll be a gale before very long,’ declared the Sub. ‘The excessive clearness of the lower atmosphere is a sure sign of that. The Alerte will have to seek shelter somewhere. How about turning in? I’m dog-tired. It’s no use remaining on deck.’

To this suggestion Vyse readily agreed. He, too, was very sleepy. Not since they left Fowey had they had a good night’s rest.

On the bridge were Captain Cain, Pengelly, and a couple of hands. Another was at the wheel, while the customary look-out was stationed forward. All the rest of the crew were below.

Both the captain and his lieutenant were well conversant with this part of the dangerous Cornish coast. In fact, although there was a chart on the chart-room table, neither of the two officers took the trouble to consult it.
Presently Captain Cain turned to one of the hands and ordered him to lower the masthead lamp. It was the pirate skipper’s intention to take the narrow, intricate channel between Land’s End and the Longships; the absence of the masthead lamp would give the lighthouse-keeper the impression that the *Alerte* was a small sailing craft. Thus he hoped to weather Cape Cornwall and seek refuge on the bed of St. Ives Bay until the threatened gale had blown itself out.

Giving the dangerous Brisons a wide berth, the *Alerte* opened out Pendeen Light. So far so good. It was now close on low water and no vessel would be entering or leaving St. Ives harbour for the next four hours.

‘Vessel dead ahead, sir!’ reported the look-out.

Captain Cain uttered an oath. He wanted to arrive at the desired position he had chosen for purposes of submersion without meeting craft of any description. Here were the red, white and green lights of a steam vessel almost bows on to the *Alerte*.

He ported his helm. The other vessel did likewise. Each now showed the other red and white navigation lamps, for on rounding Cape Cornwall the *Alerte* had rehoisted hers. There was no danger of collision, but the two would pass far too close to Captain Cain’s liking.

Suddenly the dazzling beam of a searchlight leapt from the stranger’s bridge. For fifteen seconds — no more — it played upon the *Alerte*, throwing masts,
funnel and upperworks into strong relief. Then it vanished.

‘Destroyer!’ exclaimed Pengelly.

‘Let’s hope she’s satisfied,’ rejoined Captain Cain grimly, as he blinked at the sudden transition from the brilliant electric light to the darkness of the night. ‘No, curse her! She’s turning.’

A flashing-lamp began its preparatory blinks from the destroyer’s bridge.

‘What ship is that?’ it inquired.

‘Reply Memnon of Bristol,’ ordered Cain, addressing the signalman, who with ready presence of mind had fetched the Aldis flashing lamp from the chart-room.

The destroyer’s response was a curt invitation to stop. ‘I’ll send a boat to examine your papers,’ added the message.

‘By thunder you won’t!’ muttered Captain Cain, ringing the engine-room telegraph for stop. ‘All hands below as sharp as greased lightning,’ he ordered. ‘Mr. Pengelly, warn the duty men to prepare for diving stations. I’ll be with you in a brace of shakes.’

Both the destroyer and the supposed tramp were losing way; the former, owing to her heavier displacement and narrow beam, having to reverse her engines in order to prevent herself overrunning the Alerte.

Captain Cain could hear the squeaking of blocks as the destroyer’s boat was being lowered. He was rather dubious about the step he proposed taking. He estimated, although he had not taken soundings, that
the *Alerte* was in eleven fathoms, with a sandy bottom. In the absence of electrically propelled motors, the submarine had either to go up or go down. She could not maintain a midway depth, for although fitted with compensating tanks, these alone, without the assistance of the horizontal rudders — which were useless unless the submarine were making way — would fail to keep her at a constant depth. Should the soundings prove much greater than he expected, the *Alerte*’s hull might be unable to withstand the enormous pressure of water. If, on the other hand, the depth were considerably less, then the *Alerte*’s mastheads would show above the surface, since there was no time to lower them before submerging.

The creaking of oars announced that the destroyer’s boat had pushed off and was heading for the supposed *Memnon*. Again the dazzling searchlight was unscreened. There was no time to be lost.

Descending the bridge at breakneck speed, Captain Cain ran to the after-end of the conning-tower. Here, stowed in an air-tight box, was the smoke-producing apparatus used in conjunction with the dummy funnel to give the effect of a vessel with steam-propelled engines. In the same compartment were several explosive rockets.

Disconnecting the pipe that conveyed the smoke to the base of the funnel, the pirate captain laid the nozzle on the deck. Then, hastily securing one of the rockets to a stanchion, he ignited the touch-paper.

The moment the detonator exploded, Captain Cain
released the smoke cloud, descending the hatchway, and closed the water-tight cover.

‘Flood ballast tanks!’ he shouted.

Three minutes later, the *Alerte* sank on practically an even keel to the bed of St. Ives Bay. The depth gauge registered eleven and a quarter fathoms, which meant that at high tide she would be lying in eighty-seven feet — sufficient to immerse the trucks of the masts to a depth of twenty-eight feet.

‘That’s done them!’ exclaimed Captain Cain exultantly to his second in command.

‘Unless they depth-charge us,’ added Pengelly gloomily.

‘They won’t — why should they?’ rejoined the skipper. ‘They don’t know but that we blew a hole in the old hooker and sank her for good and all.’

‘Perhaps they’ll send a diver down to report.’

‘Not before daylight,’ declared Cain. ‘And then, if I am any judge of the weather, it’ll be too choppy for that.’

For some minutes everyone kept silent. Although the watch below were almost overwhelmed with curiosity to know what had occurred, the captain gave strict orders that no conversation was to be permitted.

He was confident enough; Pengelly was showing signs of nervousness. Submarine work was not in his line. He was good enough for surface work — in fact, he was a good seaman — but he lacked the cold, calculating and resourceful courage of his chief.

‘What’s that?’ he ejaculated, as a dull rasping sound
penetrated the hull of the submarine. ‘They’re sweeping for us.’

‘Shut up!’ exclaimed Captain Cain sternly.

The grinding noise continued for fifteen long-drawn-out seconds. Then it ceased as abruptly as it had commenced. Shortly afterwards, the muffled thud of the destroyer’s engines were heard, loud at first then gradually diminishing.

‘She’s off,’ declared Captain Cain. ‘What we heard just now was the sinker of a mark-buoy. She’s probably making for Falmouth for shelter — or else under the lee of Lundy. They’ve done us out of a comfortable berth, Pengelly; we’ve got to shift.’

‘Now?’ asked Pengelly dubiously.

‘Not until an hour before high water,’ decided the other. ‘We’ll break surface and drift, using our engines only if absolutely necessary. With the set of the flood tide we ought to be swept through the Sound midway between Godrevy Island and the Stones. There’s a minimum of fifty feet at high water.’

‘How about the lighthouse-keepers?’ objected Pengelly. ‘Ten to one they’ve been warned.’

‘Any more objections?’ asked Captain Cain, losing his temper. ‘Stow it, man. Why didn’t you go in for gardening? That’s more in your line, I think.’

With that Captain Cain went to his cabin, and after warning one of the men to call him at six bells in the middle watch, calmly went to sleep.

At the appointed hour the skipper was roused. Fresh
as paint, he began preparations for bringing the *Alerte* to the surface.

Absolute caution was essential. The destroyer might not have gone: she might be anchored in the bay. The atmosphere might be still clear, the stars might be shining brightly. Until the submarine broke surface, there were no means of ascertaining what the above-water conditions were. And even with the periscope extended to its greatest height, the masts would be well above the surface before the eye-piece gave any indication of what was in the vicinity.

At length the *Alerte*, shedding tons of water through the scuppers in the superstructure, broke surface. Eagerly the captain threw open the hatch and came on deck. It was raining heavily. There was little or no wind. A heavy ground swell was setting in from the Atlantic. All these conditions supported Cain’s declaration that there was a severe storm approaching.

Shouting to the watch on deck to turn out, the captain hurried to the bridge and took rapid bearings by the standard compass. To the south, the harbour lights of Hayle bore South 22° West; St. Ives red light, South 70° West; while Godrevy lighthouse was on a bearing South 88° East. Transferring these data to the chart, Cain found the *Alerte*’s position to be favourable for his project — to allow her to drift through the narrow passage known as the Sound into deeper water under the lee of an extensive shoal of half-tide rocks known as the Stones.

A sailor dashed up the bridge-ladder.
'We’ve brought up a mark-buoy with us, sir,' he reported. ‘What are we to do with it?’

There was no hesitation in the skipper’s reply. In a trice he had considered and decided upon what was to be done. If the buoy were thrown overboard, it would serve as a guide to the destroyer’s operations for examining the supposed wreck. If it were not there, then a vast area of the bay would have to be swept before the naval officers discovered that the ‘wreck’ was no longer in the bay. The longer they took to make this discovery, the better the chances of the *Alerte* getting safely away.

‘Cut the rope and unstrand the ends,’ he ordered, ‘then heave the buoy overboard.’

By so doing, it would give the impression that the buoy rope had parted in rough weather. In all probability the coast watchers would find the buoy pounding against the rocks off Godrevy Point.

Almost imperceptibly the *Alerte* continued to drift. Every half-minute Captain Cain took angles with his sextant, while Pengelly attended to the compass bearings. Although the shore lights were visible, it was an impossible matter to distinguish the outlines of the coast. Conversely, no one ashore — not even the lightkeepers of Godrevy lighthouse — could discern the black hull of the *Alerte* as she was borne with all lights extinguished towards the gateway to safety. Even at a hundred yards the steady downpour of rain was sufficient to obliterate her from watching eyes.

Presently, the *Alerte* entered the red sector of the
lower Godrevy Light. She was now in the danger zone. There was quite a nasty tide-rip, while the thunder of the breakers across the Stones on one hand and upon the rock-bound Godrevy Island on the other, were indications that spelt disaster to any vessel that missed the passage of the Sound.

It was an anxious time. More than once Captain Cain grasped the handle of the engine-room telegraph, fearing that the ship was drifting too close to the breakers. Then with remarkable suddenness the *Alerte* passed beyond the warning red sector.

‘All clear, Pengelly!’ exclaimed the skipper. ‘We’re through. Pass the word to the hands to lower masts and funnel and make all snug. Smartly, but with no unnecessary noise. Keep the lead going, there.’

In ten minutes the work of snuggling was completed. The soundings gave a depth of ten fathoms.

Captain Cain descended from the bridge — slowly this time.

‘Hands to diving stations!’ he ordered.

For the second time that night the buoyancy tanks were flooded. The *Alerte*, two and a half miles east by north of her previous and enforced resting place, lay snug and sound to await the passing of the threatened storm.
Lieutenant-Commander Ralph Raxworthy, D.S.O., officer commanding H.M. Destroyer *Windrush*, leant over the after end of the bridge stanchion-rails to give final instructions to his sub-lieutenant.

‘She’s the one we want,’ he shouted, in order to make himself heard above the hiss of escaping steam. ‘Mind how you close her. Examine her papers, and if you find anything of the slightest suspicious nature, put her under arrest.’

‘Very good, sir,’ replied Sub-Lieutenant Allerton, instinctively patting his revolver-holster before dropping into the waiting boat. ‘Shove off for’ard. Give way, lads!’

The boat, with the armed boarding-party, was soon speeding through the black water in the direction of the supposed *Memnon*, which lay rolling sluggishly in the full glare of the destroyer’s searchlight.

Allerton, too, had his suspicions. Expecting to find a crowd of curious and perhaps amused seamen peering at the *Windrush*’s boat, he was considerably puzzled to see only one man on the tramp’s bridge and her deck absolutely deserted.

Even as he looked, a flash, followed by a roar, came from the *Memnon*’s deck. A cloud of black smoke, its
edges tinted with silver and the rays of the searchlight, rose sullenly in the faint breeze.

For some moments Allerton was undecided what to do. At first, under the impression that the mysterious vessel had opened fire, he altered helm in order to prevent the boat masking the destroyer’s reply. Even as he did so, he noticed that the tramp was much lower in the water.

‘The blighters have scuttled her, by Jove!’ he exclaimed. ‘Lay on your oars, lads. We don’t want to be carried down with her.’

Without the faintest doubt, the would-be prize was sinking fast. That was undeniable evidence of her guilt. No law-abiding merchant vessel would voluntarily destroy herself simply because she was about to be boarded by a party from a British man-of-war.

With great rapidity the Memnon sank. She did not heel or even roll. She disappeared amid a smother of foam, throwing out a swell that tossed the Windrush’s boat like a cork.

An oval patch of silvery light from the destroyer’s searchlight marked the spot where the mysterious vessel had plunged to the bed of St. Ives Bay.

‘Give way, lads!’ ordered Allerton. ‘We may find some of them in the ditch.’

For a quarter of an hour the boat hovered around the spot. There were no signs of survivors — not even of debris. A little oil, floating in iridescent patches, alone marked the place, and even that was drifting sullenly
with the weak tidal current.

At dead slow ahead the Windrush closed her boat. A mark-buoy and sinker were dropped overboard, the searchlight was switched off and the boat hoisted up and swung inboard.

‘Good enough,’ declared the lieutenant-commander as his sub gained the bridge and reported. ‘We haven’t made a capture, worse luck; but we’ve done the next best thing. We’ve scuppered this pirate-johnny, whoever he may be. Right-o, Sub, carry on, please, while I write out my report.’

The Windrush had that morning left Devonport under orders to patrol the coast between Hartland and Pendeen Points. Another destroyer was assigned a beat between Hartland and Worms Head, while a third cruised between Swansea Bay and Milford Haven. All outward and homeward bound shipping were to be spoken to, and, in the event of any suspicion, to be boarded and have the papers examined.

This was in execution of a general Admiralty order embracing the whole of the West and South Coast of England and the South Coast of Ireland, but it was hardly expected that the mysterious pirate would be found in the approach to the Bristol Channel.

It was a piece of sheer good luck that had caused the Windrush to intercept the self-styled Memnon. Had the latter been half an hour or even twenty minutes later in rounding Pendeen Head, the destroyer would have turned and been on her way back to Hartland.
Two hours later, the Commander-in-Chief at Devonport was awakened by his secretary.
‘They’ve got her, sir!’ exclaimed the latter, brandishing a signal-pad.
‘Got who?’ demanded the still drowsy admiral.
‘The pirate, sir; a message has just come through from the Windrush.’
The Commander-in-Chief took the pad and read:


R. RAXWORTHY, Lieut-Commdr.

‘That looks like business, sir,’ remarked the secretary. ‘I suppose she is the same craft that held up the Cap Hoorn and got a mauling from the Surcouf?’
‘She hasn’t lost much time in going round the Land,’ rejoined the Commander-in-Chief. ‘I wonder what in the name of blazes she was doing over this side? All right, Symington. Transmit the signal to the Admiralty, please; and reply to Windrush. She’s to put into Milford Haven until the weather moderates. We’ll send a
dockyard tug and a couple of lighters with a diving party round as soon as practicable. That’s all; good-night.’

The Admiralty report was made public at 4 p.m. of the same day, but two hours earlier the London evening papers brought out special editions with double-headed headlines announcing the destruction of the pirate vessel that had commenced to play havoc on the French side of the Channel. Every newspaper brought out a different account. For the most part, what they lacked in actual detail they made up for by drawing upon their imagination.

One, very wide of the mark, reported that the pirate had been sunk off Cherbourg, in action with a French cruiser; another declared that the filibuster had been rammed and sunk by a British light cruiser off Beachey Head. A third, that the mysterious vessel had been driven ashore in Mounts Bay and that the crew had been taken prisoners and were already on their way to London. A fourth, much nearer the mark, had contrived to obtain information from St. Ives to the effect that the destroyer *Windrush* had sunk the pirate vessel *Memnon* off Trevose Head. Not one in half a dozen separate reports mentioned the important fact that the corsair had sunk herself.

That same afternoon a westerly gale of force ten — or with a velocity of sixty-five miles an hour — was blowing in the English Channel and off the north coast of Cornwall. At Tresco, Scilly, the anemometer even
registered one hundred and twenty miles. For three
days it blew with unabated violence, finally veering to
the north-north-west, leaving in its wake a trail of
disaster. For nearly a week after, a heavy tumbling sea
was sweeping in from the Atlantic, rendering
investigation of the wreck of the Memnon impracticable.

At length the sea moderated sufficiently to enable
the dockyard tug and the two lighters to leave Ply-
mouth Sound. They had not cleared the breakwater
more than an hour when the Devonport wireless
station received the following startling message:

S.S. Broadstone making for Falmouth, towing Spanish
oil-tanker Mendez Nunez, attacked, pillaged and
disabled by vessel, nationality unknown, in lat. 47° 20’
N., long. 9° 15’ W.

‘Then there must have been a pair of ‘em,’ exclaimed
the Commander-in-Chief.

‘Unless the original one got away,’ suggested his
flag-lieutenant.

‘What do you mean?’ demanded the admiral. ‘Didn’t
the Windrush report her sunk?’

‘Strange things happen at sea, sir,’ remarked the
admiral’s secretary.

‘But there are limits,’ rejoined the Commander-in-
Chief. ‘Well, the diving-party will get to work early
tomorrow if the weather holds. I’m willing to bet a
bottle of ‘14 Champagne to a Corona Corona that
they’ll find the wreck of the Memnon within three working days.’

‘Done, sir!’ replied the secretary promptly.

The admiral lost. In calm weather, divers descended and discovered the sinker of the buoy dropped by the Windrush. A couple of drifters swept a wide area without encountering any obstruction resembling wreckage. A naval seaplane assisted in the search, but without success.

Reluctantly the authorities had to admit that the operation was a complete failure. The sunken Memnon had vanished as completely as if she had been swallowed up by a fathomless quicksand. But since no quicksand existed in the neighbourhood of St. Ives Bay, that theory was knocked on the head. Remained the question: What had happened to her?
— CHAPTER 14 —
A BROKEN REED

Throughout the three days during which the sea was raging furiously in the grip of the terrific gale, the *Alerte* remained submerged. Occasionally the giant seas sweeping over the Stones rocked her ever so slightly. The noise of shingle carried windwards over the rocky ledge could be distinctly heard like a continuous roll of distant thunder, but as far as actual danger went the *Alerte* was as safe as if she had been lying at heavy moorings in the most sheltered berth in Falmouth harbour.

The difficulty of maintaining a constant supply of pure air was overcome by means of chemicals; so much so, that there was a slight excess of oxygen that had a peculiarly exhilarating effect upon the crew. Even the usually morbid and pessimistic Pengelly began by attempting feeble jokes. He next became boisterous and excitable, while on the third day even the light-hearted crew looked askance at him, so erratic was his behaviour.

Several of the hands showed signs of excessive excitability. The epidemic was spreading. Had the *Alerte* remained submerged very much longer, all hands might have gone mad under the influence of the super-oxygen charged atmosphere.
Fortunately for them, Captain Cain noticed the symptoms. He decided to break surface and remain with the hatchways open for at least an hour, even at the risk of the heavy seas pouring inboard.

At two in the morning of the fourth day the *Alerte* was brought to the surface. Greatly to her skipper’s surprise — for the glass had risen far too rapidly to prognosticate fine weather — the storm had blown itself out. Crested waves were surging over the Stones and thundering upon Godrevy Island, but the pirate submarine was in comparatively sheltered water, rolling sluggishly to the long Atlantic swell.

Captain Cain’s chief anxiety was now on account of the oil fuel. The gauges showed that there was only one ton left in the tank. By some means he must get into communication with Captain Silas Porthoustoc and arrange for the *Fairy* to proceed to a rendezvous with a cargo of liquid fuel.

For the present the *Alerte* rode to a single anchor, double watches being set to give the alarm should a vessel be sighted, although the position of the pirate submarine was well out of the way of traffic, owing to the proximity of the reef known as the Stones. At a few seconds’ notice the *Alerte* could submerge. Meanwhile, the hull of the submarine was being swept by a current of pure, ozone-laden air.

‘Mr. Pengelly!’ shouted the skipper.

The second in command hurried along the alleyway, performing a fantastic two-step.

‘Pull yourself together, man,’ exclaimed Captain
Cain sternly. ‘We’re in a bit of a fix.’

Pengelly’s light-hearted demeanour fell from him like a shredded garment.

‘What is it now, sir?’ he inquired anxiously.

‘Precious little oil-fuel left,’ replied the captain. ‘Look here: do you know Portreath? What sort of a harbour is it?’

‘Not enough water for us,’ replied Pengelly. ‘You’re surely not going to take the ship into port?’

‘No fear,’ responded Cain grimly. ‘But I want to send a boat ashore. You’d better take her. We must arrange with Porthoustoc to supply us with oil. While you are ashore, you might get hold of a batch of newspapers. We don’t appear to be getting much information by wireless.’

‘There’ll be a heavy breaking sea across the mouth of Portreath harbour,’ objected Pengelly.

‘A chance for you to display your seamanship,’ added Cain, with grim humour. ‘We’ll run up along before daybreak and then retrace our course. People ashore will think we’re outward bound. Pick your crew. I’ll write a letter to Old Silas, giving him instructions.’

Just before dawn the Alerte brought St. Agnes’ Head broad on the starboard beam. Then she turned and ran leisurely down the coast, bringing up off the little harbour of Portreath just as the sun appeared above the gaunt and rugged Cornish hills.

To the coast-watching station she made a signal announcing herself as the S.S. Eldorado of Sunderland.
from Bristol to Whitby, following up with a request to know whether it was practicable to send a boat ashore.

Portreath station replied that it could be done, but care was necessary on account of the disturbed state of the bar.

‘Carry on, Mr. Pengelly,’ ordered the inexorable Captain Cain.

The boat made the harbour safely. Pengelly, on stepping ashore, was met by one of the Customs men.

‘Hello!’ remarked the latter. ‘Rather unusual you coming in here, isn’t it?’

‘I have to post important letters,’ replied Pengelly.

‘Lucky you didn’t bring up off here a week or so ago,’ commented the official. ‘We’d have to have searched you.’

‘What for?’ asked the Alerte’s second in command, with well-feigned innocence.

‘Cause of that pirate what was knocking about. Well, she’s gone, thank goodness! I wasn’t none too keen myself, putting off to a vessel that might have been manned by cut-throats.’

‘We heard something about it,’ remarked Pengelly. ‘Rumours, of course. What did happen?’

‘She blew herself up over t’other side of Godrevy Island,’ announced the man, with a sweep of his hand in the direction of St. Ives Bay. ‘Just as the Windrush — destroyer, she be — was about to nab her. They’ll be starting salvage operations when the swell settles — maybe tomorrow.’

‘That’s something to be thankful for,’ said Pengelly
sententiously. ‘Not that they’d have got much out of the old Eldorado out yonder. There are enough risks at sea without the chance of being scuppered by a bloomin’ pirate. Where’s the post office, mate?’

The Customs man gave the required information. Pengelly walked away, posted Silas Porthoustoc’s instructions and purchased a quantity of provisions and a big budget of newspapers.

He returned to the harbour and found that none of the boat’s crew had deserted. He would not have been greatly surprised if some of them had made themselves scarce. He himself felt tempted to clear out when his feet touched honest Cornish soil. It would be an easy matter to make his way to Penzance and arrange with Old Silas to share the plunder. But there were difficulties. He might betray Cain and obtain King’s pardon, but what would happen to the booty then? Its secret hiding-place would be divulged. He would not be a penny the better. And, if Cain evaded capture, his — Pengelly’s — life would not be worth a moment’s purchase. Possibly, similar fears had exercised a restraining influence on the boat’s crew. Once in the swim it was a difficult matter to escape the whirlpool.

‘Better look alive,’ cautioned the Customs man, looking down from the lofty quay-side. ‘There’s a nasty sea-fog banking up.’

The boat shipped a considerable amount of water in clearing the harbour, and by the time she ran alongside the Alerte the fog was so thick that the shore
was entirely blotted out.

‘Well, what’s the news?’ demanded Captain Cain.

‘Haven’t looked, sir,’ replied Pengelly, tossing the bundle from the boat to the deck of the Alert. ‘From what I’ve heard, they think us properly scuppered.’

The boat was hoisted up and secured. At slow speed the pirate submarine nosed her way through the fog, intending to make for a certain secluded ‘sound’ in the Scillies, there to await the arrival of the Fairy with the oil.

Having given the quartermaster the course, Cain selected a couple of newspapers and told the bo’sun to pass a number of them forward for the hands not on duty.

One of the newspapers was the Western Gazette. This the captain handed to Pengelly, knowing that the latter would derive interesting local information from it. The Times Cain retained and figuratively proceeded to devour with the avidity of a man who has for days been cut off from all accounts of the world’s doings.

‘Hello, Pengelly!’ he exclaimed, ‘we’re fugitives from justice.’

‘I know that,’ rejoined Pengelly, with a show of asperity.

‘“Tany rate,’ resumed Cain, ‘there’s a warrant out for the arrest of Thomas Trevorrick and Paul Pengelly for fraud in connection with the Polkyl Creek Shipbreaking Company. We’re assumed to have absconded and to be hiding on the Continent. There’s two hundred pounds reward.’
Both men smiled grimly at each other. Evidently there was no connection in the minds of the authorities between Trevorrick and the pirate Captain Cain.

‘And the Memnon is officially reported as being destroyed,’ continued Captain Cain. ‘The Admiralty state emphatically that she is the vessel that attacked the Cap Hoorn. They weren’t far out there, Pengelly, but listen! This is a gem! “In consequence of the destruction of the Memnon, all danger to shipping through piratical action is now considered at an end. Accordingly orders have been issued to the naval patrols engaged in hunting down the pirate to return to their respective bases.” Well, that’s given us a new lease of life. Wait till we replenish our fuel tanks and we’ll give My Lords a nasty eye-opener.’

This time both men laughed boisterously. Fickle Fortune was treating them with lavish favour.

For some minutes there was silence, each reader deep in his paper.

‘By Jove!’ suddenly ejaculated Pengelly. ‘Listen to this, sir: “An inquest was held —”’

‘Don’t want to hear about inquests,’ interrupted Captain Cain. ‘Don’t suppose mine will worry me. Why should I trouble about other people’s?’

‘You will about this one,’ persisted Pengelly doggedly. ‘It’s Silas Porthoustoc. He was found dead in his garden. Heart disease, they say. The inquest was held in the Keigwin Arms last Monday.’

‘Confound the fellow!’ almost shouted Captain Cain angrily. ‘What possessed him to shuffle off this mortal
coil at this time above all others, and to leave us in the
lurch? Ten thousand thunders! Think of the oil-fuel
we’ll have to whistle for!"
‘And I’ve only just posted his orders,’ added
Pengelly. ‘What did you tell him? Will that give us
away?’
‘No, it won’t,’ declared the skipper. ‘It will convey
nothing to outsiders. “Scilly blooms” and “Jersey
potatoes” won’t give them a clue. Trust me for that. All
the same, it’s infernally annoying.’
‘It is,’ agreed Pengelly.
Both men relapsed into silence.
‘I hope Porthoustoc got that Abrahams fellow down
from London to dispose of the booty before he turned
up his toes?’ mused Cain.

_Wonder if Silas hid the stuff where I told him to?_ thought
Pengelly. _Well, it’s all or nothing as far as I am concerned._
CHAPTER 15
THE OIL-TANKER

For two hours more the Alerte held on a westerly course through a blinding fog before Captain Cain resolved upon a plan of action. Generally capable of forming a swift and workable decision, he was now beset with so many perplexities that for once at least his ready resource failed him.

Against one outstanding asset — the Admiralty declaration that the patrolling destroyers had been withdrawn — was a more than counterbalancing debit. Cap’n Silas Porthoustoc’s sudden demise had not only deprived the pirate of a necessary confederate — it had handicapped him severely in the important matter of refilling the almost empty fuel tanks.

It was impossible for the Alerte to enter any commercial harbour and obtain oil from the storage tanks without certain detection. Equally impossible was it for the same reason to receive supplies from an oil-tanker on the high seas, unless the pirate resorted to force. British vessels he had resolved to leave severely alone. There were American tankers to be met with, but Captain Cain was chary in that respect. Although he had no love for citizens of ‘the greatest republic on earth’, he had a wholesome regard for the physical and mental powers of the officers and crews.
of ships flying the Stars and Stripes. Men of the Latin races were excitable and easily intimidated, according to his estimation. A German could be blurted, provided he could be made to realise the argument of brute force. But an American strongly resembled a Briton, both in courage, resource and stubbornness.

No, United States tankers were not to be meddled with, he decided. Apparently the only course open to him was to operate on the French side of the Channel upon any likely craft using liquid fuel — and during the last few years King Coal was being seriously threatened by King Oil in the mercantile fleet, both of the Old and New Worlds.

Porthoustoc’s death had affected the situation in another way. The *Alerte* had no means of sending her unlawful booty to England. In future she must be her own store-carrier, unless she found a secluded and safe base of operations. It was too hazardous an enterprise to attempt to approach any of the little-frequented Cornish coves under cover of night and land the spoil by means of boats. Besides, the moment the news reached the Admiralty that the same or another pirate ship was out, all the previous destroyer activities would be resumed with increasing zest. It was more than likely that orders would be given to depth-charge the pirate vessel if she sank herself under similar circumstances to that of the *Memnon* in St. Ives Bay. Captain Cain had a wholesome respect for the Royal Navy and its methods in dealing with submarine operations.
The only solution Captain Cain could find, lay in deserting home waters for less frequented seas. There were safe hiding-places off the African coast, ideal spots for burying the pirate’s booty, until such times as the master villain could remove the spoil and cheat his partners in crime. But there again cropped up the baffling problem. Without sufficient oil-fuel, how was the *Alerte* to cover the sixteen hundred odd miles between Land’s End and the African coast? Was it possible to intercept the first oil-burning vessel they met, British or otherwise, and help themselves to the precious commodity? Would a monetary payment in the case of a vessel flying the red ensign smooth over matters and at the same time absolve Cain from his promise to his crew and also remove their scruples?

Picking up the copy of the *Times*, Captain Cain looked through the list of shipping as reported by Lloyds. Suddenly he gave a chuckle of satisfaction. Amongst the names appeared that of the S.S. *Mendez Nunez*, owned by the Bilboa Oil Company, which left Cadiz on the ninth instant bound for Swansea.

Hurrying to the chart-room, Captain Cain found and unrolled a chart of the west coast of Europe from Finisterre to Cape Clear. Assuming the speed of the Spanish tanker to be eleven knots, he arrived at the conclusion that the *Alerte* ought to fall in with her within twenty-four hours at about fifty miles south-south-west of the Bishop Rock.

It was a daring proposition. Apart from the risk of missing the Spanish tanker altogether, the position
given was not far from the junction of the traffic routes for shipping to and from the Straits and the West Coast of Africa bound to and from the English and Bristol Channel ports, the Bishop Light being the first one sighted by homeward bound vessels approaching Land’s End. In the event of the Mendez Nunez being sighted, could the capture be effected without the risk of other vessels coming to the Spaniard’s aid?

Leaving Pengelly in charge of the bridge, Captain Cain called the gunner and the bo’sun to his cabin and put the case before them. He meant to ignore Pengelly altogether in the matter. Instinctively he knew that his second in command would strongly protest against the idea of an African base. Pengelly was all right up to a certain point in home waters, but not once but many times had he expressed his fears about proceeding far from his native Cornwall.

Both Barnard and Marchant fell in with the captain’s suggestion. Already had they come to the conclusion that piracy, even with the assistance of a submarine craft, was too risky a game to be prosecuted for any length of time in British and French waters.

‘You see the idea?’ said Cain. ‘A couple of good hauls of shipping homeward bound from Senegal, the Congo, and other French and Belgian colonies, and our fortunes are made. We’ll cache the booty, make our way home, charter a vessel all above-board, recover the stuff, and there you are. It’s as simple as ABC. Our first business is with the Spanish tanker. Pass the word for’ard, Mr. Barnard. There’s a double
share to the first man who sights the *Mendez Nunez.*’

Ten miles to the west of the Scillies, the *Alerte* ran out of the bank of fog into a clear expanse of water under a cloudless sky. The sea had moderated considerably, although there was a long, sullen swell that caused the pirate vessel to roll until her scuppers were under water. In these circumstances, should the *Mendez Nunez* be captured, making fast alongside the prize would be a manoeuvre fraught with danger.

Captain Cain had made a correct guess with reference to the sighting of the Spanish tanker. A wisp of smoke away to the south-south-west indicated the presence of a vessel. Half an hour later, two masts and funnel showed above the horizon.

Glass in hand, the captain went aloft. From his elevated perch he quickly ascertained that the oncoming craft was a tanker. Although end on, the vessel’s build and rig confirmed his surmise. She was long, low-lying, with a funnel right aft. The only break between the funnel and the bows was a small structure crowned by the bridge and chart-house. She was flying no colours, but the yellow and red bands round her funnel were sufficient to proclaim her nationality.

Rapidly the distance between the two vessels decreased. Giving a rapid glance to reassure himself that there were no other craft in sight, Captain Cain descended from the cross-trees to the deck and thence to the bridge.

‘Port a bit!’ he ordered.
By so doing the _Alerte_ was merely conforming to the usual custom by which vessels meeting nearly end on ported helm. The action served its purpose. Quite in ignorance of the danger that menaced her, the _Mendez Nunez_ followed suit, intending to pass the supposed tramp at not less than two cables’ distance.

Already the _Alerte_’s quick-firer was cleared for action, but was hidden from the Spaniard by the rise of the former’s forecastle. The moment the pirate vessel was in a position to enable the gun to bear, a shell was fired across the tanker’s bows, instantly followed by the signal to heave to.

Signs were not lacking that this peremptory action had thrown the Spaniards into a state of panic. Apart from the threat of being sunk, they realised what the dire result would be of a shell exploding the highly inflammable cargo. Some of the crew rushed to lower the boats. The captain and some of his officers on the tanker’s bridge were beside themselves with terror.

‘Stop instantly,’ signalled the pirate.

Someone on board the _Mendez Nunez_ — certainly it was not the captain — rang down for the engines to be reversed. The tanker soon lost way, and was presently lying head to wind in the long Atlantic swell.

With her machine-gun mounted on the bridge and trained upon the Spaniard, and with every available man conspicuously displaying his automatic pistol, the _Alerte_ was cautiously manoeuvred to come alongside the prize. There was very little risk to the submarine’s hull. Her false upperworks might be stove
in. The danger lay in the fact that the *Alerte* might fracture the light steel hull-plates of the tanker, in which case the former would have to do without the precious oil.

‘Get your fenders out!’ shouted Captain Cain to the still dumbfounded crew of the *Mendez Nunez*.

Apparently some of the Spaniards understood English, or else they realised the intentions of the approaching *Alerte*. Three large fenders made of faggots bound with wire rope were lowered over the starboard side.

With a heavy jar, the pirate craft and the *Mendez Nunez* came together. One of the fenders nipped as the two craft ground each other’s sides and was flattened like a pancake. Another carried away. The partially lowered boat was crushed to matchwood. Rolling a full fifteen degrees, the huge tanker stove in ten feet of the *Alerte*’s bulwarks and buckled the stanchions at one end of her bridge.

‘An hour of this and we won’t have a shred of upperworks left,’ expostulated Pengelly. ‘Sheer off, sir, while we have the chance.’

For a wonder, Captain Cain concurred. With her port screw going full astern, the *Alerte* drew clear of her prey.

It was no intention on the part of the pirate captain to abandon the attempt. Easing down a cable’s length to leeward, he signalled HNT (Smooth sea by pouring oil on it).

In a few minutes the pumps of the *Mendez Nunez* got
to work. Volumes of crude oil were released, spreading in vast iridescent patches to leeward of the tanker. Although the swell still continued, it lost its dangerous aspect.

‘That’s the ticket!’ exclaimed Captain Cain to his second in command. ‘Well, it’s their oil they’re using, not mine. Steady on your helm — port a bit — meet her at that.’

Again the Alerte closed her prey, this time on the port side. Held by hawsers and springs fore and aft, the two vessels no longer ground against each other with any danger of violence.

At the head of fifteen armed men, Captain Cain boarded the prize. No resistance was offered. The Spanish captain and all his officers, with the exception of two engineers, were ordered forward and locked in the forepeak with the rest of the crew. Two of the tanker’s ejector pumps were led to the Alerte’s tanks and the work of refuelling the pirate submarine began.

While this business was in progress, the boarding party were by no means idle. A systematic search of the officers’ quarters yielded a little booty. The ship’s stores and provision rooms were pillaged, and anything likely to be of service to the pirates removed.

Then the wireless gear was rendered useless, the operator of the Mendez Nunez having previously been ordered to produce a record of messages sent and received during the last four hours. None had been sent since the Alerte fired a warning shot across the tanker’s bows, the operator having deserted his post in
the general panic that ensued.

Meanwhile, Marchant, the gunner, with a couple of hands, went below to the tanker’s engine-room. Breaking open the tunnel of the main shaft, they fractured the propeller shaft by means of a slab of guncotton.

Within the space of fifty minutes Captain Cain had accomplished his task. He had replenished the Alerte’s fuel supply, plundered the tanker, and had left her helpless in the Atlantic, with no means of summoning assistance other than by visual signalling.

‘Recall the hands, Mr. Marchant,’ ordered Captain Cain, when the gunner returned on deck and reported the fracturing of the propeller shaft.

A shrill whistle had the immediate effect of bringing the boarding-party to the side.

‘All correct, sir,’ reported the gunner, after the men had numbered off. ‘How about those chaps, sir?’ he added, pointing in the direction of the forepeak. ‘Do we let ’em out?’

‘No,’ replied Cain, with a sardonic smile. ‘Let ’em batter the hatch down when they find we’re gone. A little extra damage won’t signify.’

Returning to the Alerte, the pirate captain signed to the two engineers of the tanker to cast off the hawsers; then, backing clear of the Mendez Nunez, the Alerte made off at full speed in a northeasterly direction, towards the Irish coast.

Forty-five minutes later, having dropped the tanker beneath the horizon, the pirate submarine altered her
course for the distant African shore, secure in the knowledge that when assistance did come to the disabled tanker, the Spaniards would declare that their attacker was making in a direction far different to the course she eventually took.

Just before eight bells in the first dog watch, the bo’sun came up to Pengelly, who was in charge of the bridge.

‘Two men missing, sir,’ he reported.

‘Who are they?’

‘Broadmayne and Vyse, sir.’

‘Then make a search for them. They didn’t smuggle themselves on board yon tanker by any chance?’

‘Oh no, sir,’ declared Barnard. ‘They were seen some time after we sheered off.’

But the bo’sun had made a genuine mistake. At that precise moment Broadmayne and his chum were having a very lively time on board the Spanish tanker Mendez Nunez.
'Look here!' exclaimed Broadmayne, in a low voice, 'are you game? Now's our chance.'

He pointed to the Mendez Nunez.

'Steady on,' replied Vyse cautiously. 'Supposing we get on board without being spotted; what then? Can you speak Spanish; I can't. The blighters will take us for pirates — I don't blame them if they do — and there'd be a deuce of a rumpus before we could explain. They'd probably knife us out of hand.'

The two chums were standing close to the poop-ladder while the plundering of the tanker was in progress. Their passive resistance was now tolerated without any interference on the part of the pirate captain. Provided they stood their trick in the ordinary work of the ship, they were not called upon to take any part in actual acts of piracy. They certainly earned their keep. Captain Cain had not to pay them.

On the other hand, he still hoped to get a substantial sum for their ransom. On that account, coupled with the fact that already they knew too much to be released, they were retained on board the Alerte.

'Risk that,' rejoined the Sub laconically. 'It's better than being sent to the bottom for good and all, and that's what will happen if we don't clear out.'
‘Right-o,’ agreed Rollo Vyse. ‘Wait till old Pengelly’s looking the other way and then shift like greased lightning.’

‘And get spotted directly we gain her deck,’ objected the Sub. ‘No; our best way is to drop overboard, swim round under her stern, and hang on to the falls of the boat they tried to lower. As soon as the Alerte backs clear, then up we shin.’

‘Beastly dirty job,’ remarked Vyse, objecting in turn, as he glanced at the oil-smothered water. ‘All right. Lead on, Macduff!’

Awaiting their opportunity, for Pengelly was kept fairly busy in shouting orders to the men tending the warps and transferring the plunder to the Alerte, the chums made their way under the bridge. Here, secure from observation, unless any of the crew of the quick-firer came aft, they clambered through the gap in the stove-in bulwarks and dropped into the sea.

For the first time they realised the extreme difficulty in swimming in oil-covered water. It was a hard struggle to keep their heads above the surface, and quite a strenuous effort to make progress. To add to the peril, they were liable to be crushed by the hull of the ship as she drifted to leeward, while when they reached the windward side they might find that the drift was so considerable that they would be unable to keep pace with it.

‘Dog-stroke,’ gasped Broadmayne. ‘Better than breast-stroke in this muck. We’re all right.’

It seemed a fearfully long time swimming under the
tanker’s squat counter. Then foot by foot they struggled along the Spanish vessel’s starboard quarter to where the jagged timbers of the crushed boat still hung from the forward falls.

With a gasp of relief the Sub stretched out his hand and grasped the debris. He waited until Vyse had obtained a hand-fast and then cautiously hoisted himself out of the water and gained a temporary refuge by sitting on the edge of the boat’s bow-thwart, where his chum soon joined him.

So far so good. They were roughly fifteen feet below the tanker’s stanchion-rail. The boat’s bows were practically intact as far as the second thwart, and hanging in a vertical position formed a screen from the sight of any one who happened to look over the tanker’s side. But their plight was far from enviable, owing to the swell, the wreckage of the boat was thudding steadily against the tanker’s side and turning dizzily as the falls twisted and untwisted. The chums were smothered with black oil from head to foot. Some of the vile stuff had found its way into Rollo’s eyes, making them smart exceedingly. Yet in spite of the various discomforts he could not refrain from remarking that they looked like a pair of blackbirds in a cage.

‘There’s the recall,’ exclaimed the Sub, as above the hiss of escaping vapour from the Mendez Nunez’s steam-pipe came the shrill notes of a whistle.

For a few minutes longer the chums listened intently. They could hear nothing more to indicate that the pirate submarine had parted company with her prize.
‘Don’t move,’ cautioned Vyse suddenly. ‘Look!’

The stern of the _Alerte_ was beginning to be visible as the vessel backed. If she carried sternway much farther, the fragments of the boat with the two fugitives clinging to it would be exposed to the view of the pirate crew.

More and more of the after-part of the pirate submarine’s hull showed until the end of the main-mast derricks came into view. Then, at first almost imperceptibly, the sternway movement diminished. A smother of oily foam from _Alerte_’s twin propellers was flung astern. Her engines were going ahead. For a brief instant the relative position of the pirate craft and her prize remained unchanged; then, gathering way, the _Alerte_ forged ahead and disappeared from the view of the two chums.

‘Think she’ll be put about if we’re missed?’ asked Vyse anxiously.

‘Might,’ admitted Broadmayne. ‘Perhaps they’re so taken up with their success that they’ve forgotten all about us. ’T any rate, up we go. We’ll lie doggo as long as we possibly can, in case Cain has a fancy to renew our acquaintance.’

It was no easy matter to swarm up that fifteen feet or so of trebled, twisted rope. Their hands, smothered in thick oil, had great difficulty to obtain a steady grip, while, to make matters worse, the tanker was again rolling badly. With every roll the falls with their human burdens bumped heavily against the ship’s side.
At last the Sub reached the stanchion-rail. Crouching, he edged sideways to enable his companion to gain a place of safety. Then he gave a quick glance along the tanker’s deck.

It was deserted. The two engineers, having completed their forced task of casting off the Alerte’s warps, had gone below to obtain tools to effect the release of the rest of the crew, who, knowing that the pirate had sheered off, were clamouring loudly for help. Doubtless they were under the mistaken though by no means unfounded idea that their vessel was being scuttled, and that they were in peril of being drowned like rats in a trap.

Broadmayne’s next thought was for the Alerte. A roll of the tanker raised the side sufficiently to enable the Sub to see right across her deck to the expanse of sea beyond. There was the pirate submarine, stern-on, legging it as hard as she could go in a northerly direction. Already she was between a mile and a half and two miles away and momentarily increasing the distance at the rate of a mile every four minutes.

‘All clear,’ reported the Sub. ‘Keep down as much as you can in case Cain and Co. are using their binoculars. Now then, we’ve got to find a place to stow ourselves.’

‘Not in these trousers,’ rejoined his chum. ‘We’re shedding a trail of oil. Deck isn’t any too clean, I admit, but look there! A wash and brush up and a change of clothing is what we want.’

‘And likely to want,’ added Broadmayne. ‘Look
alive; let’s go aft and see what we can find. I agree as to the clothes. They’re not respectable and are decidedly uncomfortable.’

The engine-room and officers’ cabins on board the Mendez Nunez were right aft under the poop, which, in her case, was flush with the part corresponding to the waist, except for the deck-house abaft the funnel.

A glance down the engine-room hatchway in passing revealed the fact that the place was deserted. Down the companion-ladder Broadmayne crept, his chum close at his heels, their progress marked by a double trail of oil.

‘No one at home,’ remarked Vyse, stopping outside the open door of a cabin marked with a brass plate EL CAPITAÑO. ‘Looks as if our late shipmates have been here before us.’

‘So much the better as far as we are concerned,’ added the Sub. ‘We’ll borrow from the Old Man’s wardrobe. Quick! Off with your gear. We can sling our discarded rags through the scuttle.’

They stripped, borrowed the curtains over the scuttles to remove as much as possible of their coating of oil and then rummaged amongst the lockers under the bunk.

Vyse had spoken truly when he remarked that someone had been there before them, but apparently the pirates were sufficiently well found in the matter of clothing to trouble to steal the Spanish skipper’s wardrobe.

In a few minutes the two chums were ‘arrayed’ in
garments of sufficient girth, but sadly lacking in length. Evidently El Capitán was a short and very fat individual, for the Sub found himself wearing a pair of trousers that reached half-way between his ankles and his knees, displaying an expanse of pale blue shirt between the top of the ‘bags’ and the hem of a coat somewhat resembling a monkey-jacket.

Nor was Vyse much better off. He had to content himself with a ridiculously short pair of knee-breeches — part of the Spanish captain’s shore-going plain clothes — and a blue dressing-gown edged with scarlet silk.

‘Look alive!’ exclaimed Broadmayne. ‘They are let loose for’ard. This way!’

Stopping at what was obviously the officers’ pantry and picking up a couple of small-sized loaves from a few that the pirates had considered beneath their notice, the Sub led the way to a narrow hatchway whence a steep iron ladder gave access to the steerage flats.

It was Broadmayne’s intention to seek shelter in the triangular space traversed by the propeller shaft, but as he lifted the steel flap a waft of acrid-smelling smoke drifted up.

‘No place for us,’ he exclaimed.

‘Have the blighters started a fire?’ asked Rollo.

‘No. At least, I think not,’ replied the Sub; ‘They have probably been monkeying with the shaft. Hist!’

They listened. Footsteps sounded overhead. The stowaways’ retreat was cut off.
The compartment was in semi-darkness. A very subdued light filtered through the still-open hatchway. The floor was either level with or just below the waterline, while the walls forming part of the ‘run-aft’ of the ship were unpierced by scuttles.

Groping, Broadmayne discovered that at one side was a large tank. It was rectangular and not shaped to fit the wing-plates, consequently there was a fair space between it and the curved side sufficient for several people to squeeze into.

It was a freshwater tank. The Sub could make out a couple of pipes leading upwards — one for filling, the other communicating with a pump in the officers’ pantry.

The trap-hatch fell with a loud clang. The Spaniard who had come aft had narrowly escaped falling through the aperture. Without troubling to look down he had merely slammed the metal plate into position.

‘That’s good,’ said Vyse, in a low tone. ‘Cuts off most sounds. We can talk if we want to.’

‘So we can,’ added a husky voice, coming from behind the water-tank. ‘It’s all right, chums; it’s only me — Slogger Soames.’

‘Bless my soul, Soames!’ ejaculated Broadmayne, ‘what are you doing here?’

‘Thought it about time I ’opped it,’ explained the ex-stoker. ‘Things were goin’ a bit too strong on board the old hooker, even for me. I spotted you two slippin’ over the side an’ swimming round this ’ere vessel’s stern. Says I to myself sudden-like, “Well, ’ere goes.
They’ll want someone to bear a hand afore they’re out of this ‘ere mess.” An’ I knows you won’t give me away when we gets on the beach. Plymouth gasworks’ll suit me down to the ground after this little spree, I give you my word.’

‘How did you get aboard?’ asked the Sub.

‘I was givin’ a hand shiftin’ cargo, in a manner o’ speaking,’ replied Soames. ‘In plain English, we wur pinchin’ the bloomin’ Dagoes’ duds. Then Marchant yells out for a sledge-’ammer. I fetches it aft, gives a look over the side to see you wur all right — you didn’t spot me, but I saw you a-hangin’ on to the nose of that there boat — and then I nips down ‘ere. An’ ’ere I be.’

There were now sounds of great activity all over the ship. Judging by the tone of their voices, the officers were rapidly becoming acquainted with the disordered state of their looted cabins. From the engine-room came indications that the staff were preparing to get the machinery in motion.

A bell clanged loudly. A few seconds later the pistons began to move. The engines raced madly, while a disconcerting, rasping, groaning sound immediately underneath the fugitives’ hiding-place told its own tale.

‘Cain fractured the shaft before he left,’ declared Broadmayne. ‘I had an idea that’s what it was.’

For some minutes the terrific clatter continued, the deck-officers being unaware that anything was wrong, until they noticed that the ship was not gathering way.
Then a renewed outburst with the engine-room telegraph gong was followed by the engineers shutting off steam. The discordant metallic clamour ceased, but a babel of excited voices all shouting at once arose in its place.

Crouching behind the water-tank, the three stowaways waited. They had not long to wait. The hatch was thrown open and a couple of dungaree-clad men carrying electric inspection-lamps descended the ladder. The dazzling glare seemed to penetrate every recess of that confined space, especially while the newcomers were still on the upper rungs of the ladder. But the Spanish engineers did not waste time. They both disappeared through the manhole in the floor, a pair of wavering intermittent beams of light flung upwards through the aperture as they scrambled over the tunnel of the shaft.

Presently, talking rapidly and angrily, the two Spaniards retraced their way. Nothing could be done with the shaft until the *Mendez Nunez* was dry-docked. Meanwhile the tanker was drifting helplessly, unable to send out a wireless call for assistance.

For the three men hiding in the steerage-flat the time passed very slowly indeed. They could talk in low tones; they were able to leave their cramped quarters behind the tank and stretch their benumbed limbs. They had food of a kind; for liquid refreshment they had to content themselves with the steady drip from a leaky joint, the tank being covered in with a steel lid that could only be removed by the aid of a spanner.
They were in Cimmerian darkness, for with the closing of the overhead hatch even the subdued light that had previously been filtering in was entirely cut off. The air, too, was none too pure, mingled as it was with the stench from the bilges, the still present odour of burnt guncotton, and a penetrating reek of garlic.

Broadmayne and his companions had no idea of the time. Their watches had long since disappeared. Occasionally they heard the bells struck, but the Spaniards’ method of keeping ship’s time appeared to differ radically with that of British-owned vessels. And since the flat was in utter darkness, the fugitives were at a loss to know whether it were day or night.

‘Think it’s safe to go on deck?’ inquired Vyse.

‘No, I don’t,’ replied Broadmayne, emphatically. ‘The crew have quieted down a bit; but the sight of us would probably be like that of a red rag to a bull. We couldn’t explain; they wouldn’t listen, if we could. No; we must stick it. The tanker’s bound to be picked up and towed into port, and from her position it’s an eighty percent chance in favour of a British port.’

Not very long after there were unmistakable signs that the Mendez Nunez was being taken in tow. The sluggish rolling motion gave place to a succession of jerks. The water no longer splashed against the hull plating. It gurgled as it ran past the rudder, while the clanking of the steam-steering gear announced that the tanker was again using her helm.

‘That’s good!’ commented Broadmayne. ‘Who’s for a
caulk? I’ll keep watch if you would like to have a snooze.’

This suggestion was acted upon, Soames relieving the Sub at the end of about two hours, as nearly as he was able to guess the passing of time. Then Vyse took on, and at the end of his trick all three finished up the remains of the last loaf.

They were feeling ravenous again when they felt the tanker’s hull bump against something, and heard the crew running along the deck and the dull thud of wire-hawsers being brought to the winches.

‘We’re alongside,’ exclaimed Broadmayne. ‘Listen!’

Placing their ears to the hull plating, they could hear the sound of an engine shunting trucks, then — to their unbounded satisfaction — a voice shouting, ‘All fast! Look alive with that brow, lads!’

‘Time we shifted,’ declared Broadmayne, kicking out to work the muscles of his cramped legs. ‘We’ve got to slip ashore quietly and without any of the crew spotting us.’

Mounting a few rungs of the ladder, the Sub, with a powerful thrust, threw back the hatch-cover. There was no one in the alleyway. A cloud of steam issuing through the engine-room fidley cut off the view of the deck; but it was sunlight, not artificial light, that played upon the oil-reeking vapour.

Keeping together, the trio made their way forward. Just abaft the mainmast they could see the inboard end of a brow inclined at a steep angle. Close to it stood two of the Spanish officers and a couple of civilians.
Several of the crew were at the guard-rails looking down at the crowd of sight-seers on the quay-side.

‘Now!’ whispered Broadmayne.

The three made a mad rush for the gangway. One of the Spanish officers started when he saw two weirdly-garbed men followed by a third in strange rig making for the brow. Too astonished to attempt to bar their way, he could only shout and gesticulate to the Spanish seamen standing by.

One of the latter did endeavour to stop the fugitives. Broadmayne charged him, sending him crashing against a second Spaniard. In a trice the three Englishmen were running down the steeply-inclined brow.

‘Hey — there!’ shouted one of the two civilians who were conferring with the Spanish captain. ‘Stop those men!’

None of the crowd showed any inclination to obey the peremptory request of the individual who, Broadmayne subsequently discovered, was one of the Spanish Consulate staff. It was not on account of the powerful physique of the three fugitives that the crowd made way. Perhaps they guessed that the hurrying trio were in some connected with the pirate crew who had held up the Spanish tanker. At all events, the sympathies of the onlookers were with the fugitives, not the foreigners. Had Broadmayne and his companions wished, they could have got clean away.

But this was not their intention. Apart from cutting ridiculous figures by careering through the streets in
garments that, like parallel lines, would never meet on their bulky frames, Broadmayne and Vyse had no cause for flight or concealment now that they were safely on British soil.

‘It’s quite all right,’ shouted the Sub reassuringly. ‘We are not going to take to our heels. Is there a policeman about? Will someone please fetch a taxi?’

He had no occasion to ask what port they had arrived at. He knew the place well. It was Falmouth. The Mendez Nunez was berthed alongside the quay, almost under the shadow of Pendennis Castle.

A policeman hurried up and produced a notebook.

‘What’s all this?’ he demanded, looking askance at the nondescript pair.

‘Pirates! That’s what they are!’ shouted the consular official from the tanker’s gangway.

The policeman put away his notebook and measured the bulk of the two oddly-attired men with his own size. He was a stalwart specimen of the Force, but not to be compared in height and weight with his would-be prisoners.

‘In the name of the law!’ he exclaimed. ‘I warn you. Any statement you may make will be used in evidence against you. Now, are you coming quietly?’

‘Yes,’ replied Broadmayne. ‘In a taxi?’

He looked round to see where the ex-stoker was, but saw him not. Slogger Soames had quietly walked off and was well on his way towards the town — the first stage of his journey back to his native Plymouth.
At four o’clock in the afternoon of the same day on which the *Mendez Nunez* was towed into Falmouth harbour, Gerald Broadmayne, clothed and in his right mind (to be precise, he had bathed, shaved and shifted into naval uniform) passed through the wicket-gate of Devonport Dockyard on his way to interview the Commander-in-Chief.

Rollo Vyse had gone home to assure his parents that he was not drowned, and that, if Mr. Vyse had ignored Captain Cain’s demands for ransom, he might with perfect confidence continue to do so.

The chums’ detention had been of short duration. At the police-station they had asked the inspector to send for two local residents whom they knew well, and who were ready to give their assurances that the two suspects could with safety be released. In the interval, ready-made and ill-fitting suits were sent to the station to replace the borrowed garments belonging to El Capitán José Lopez.

A powerful car was hired and brought round to the police-station. To it Broadmayne and Vyse were escorted between crowds of curious spectators and followed by a knot of eager pressmen, who vainly sought an interview with either or both of the
Englishmen who had come ashore from the Spanish tanker.

At Fowey the chums parted, Rollo to his home, the Sub to his, whence after a bath, a change into the uniform of a sub-lieutenant, and a square meal, Broadmayne resumed his car journey to Devonport Dockyard.

With mixed emotions the Sub traversed the familiar cobblestones of the dockyard, past the gigantic figureheads that served in a measure to remind the New Navy of the deeds of the Old, and ascended the steps of the Georgian portico of the admiral’s official residence.

It was hard for the Sub to realise all that had occurred during the comparatively brief interval from the time the luckless *Ibex* left Fowey harbour. He was in a rather unenviable position. Captain Cain had undoubtedly saved his life and that of his companion. That, in Broadmayne’s opinion, outweighed the pirate’s cavalier treatment of his involuntary guests. In spite of his threats, Cain had respected their scruples and had not compelled them to perform any act amounting to piracy. And, with reference to the threatened flogging, the Sub was none too sure that the pirate captain would have proceeded to extremes.

And now Broadmayne had been officially called upon to give evidence against Captain Cain and his rascally crew. Ought he, he wondered, to reveal everything, even the secret of Cain’s former association with the Senior Service as a commissioned officer?
Cain was a pirate, a freebooter, an absconding swindler; but there was this in his favour — he had never molested a British ship, and he had not been guilty of murder, for even in the engagement with the *Surcouf* he had given directions controlling the fire, so that although the Frenchman had been badly mauled, none of her crew had been slain, the casualties, as subsequently given out, amounting to five men wounded.

It was a perplexing problem for Sub-Lieutenant Broadmayne. More than likely, from his intimate knowledge of the *Alerte*, he would be appointed to some vessel detailed to accomplish either her capture or her destruction. He did not hanker after the job; but he decided, if it were to be his mission, he would do his utmost to carry it to a successful conclusion. With Broadmayne, Duty, spelt with a capital D, was the one object of his life as far as the Service was concerned.

Then his thoughts turned to Pengelly. It did not take long to dismiss him. Pengelly, he decided, was a mealy-mouthed, double-faced blighter, hand in glove with Cain, speaking fair to his face and yet never scrupling to cheat him out of his ill-gotten gains behind his back. No, he had not the faintest sympathy for Paul Pengelly.

There was that other character, Silas Something. Broadmayne did not remember his surname, but he knew the number and name of his lugger. So did Vyse, who had overheard the plotting conversation between
Silas and Pengelly. Very well, then. Rollo Vyse could
tackle that part of the business. It would be something
for him to do. Broadmayne had not the detective
instinct; Vyse had.

Giving his name to a messenger, Broadmayne was
taken with little delay into the Commander-in-Chief’s
private office. Here, in addition to the admiral, his
secretary and flag-lieutenant, were several lieutenant-
commanders, including Raxworthy of the destroyer
*Windrush*. A couple of civilian shorthand writers
completed the gathering.

‘Now, Mr. Broadmayne,’ said the admiral, after a few
preliminaries, ‘we want your story. Take your time and
don’t omit details. They may seem unimportant, but in
the long-run they may be of great service. Now, fire
away.’

The Sub did so, keeping nothing back, with the
exception of his knowledge of Captain Cain’s previous
history. By the time he had finished, both the
shorthand writers, although they worked in relays,
were visibly fatigued; but the naval officers showed no
signs other than those of intense interest.

Broadmayne was then subjected to a lengthy string
of questions. Charts were produced and studied, plans
of condemned submarines, and lists of when and
where they were sold for breaking-up purposes were
consulted. Notwithstanding the fact that the admiral
usually dined at seven-thirty, it was nearly nine
o’clock before the ‘levee’ broke up, Broadmayne
being ‘requested’ — otherwise ordered — to report at
the Commander-in-Chief’s office at nine-thirty the following morning.

Broadmayne was putting on his greatcoat when Raxworthy, breaking off a conversation with another officer, came across the vestibule to him.

‘Where are you putting up?’ inquired the lieutenant-commander.

‘At the Club, sir,’ replied the Sub.

‘So am I,’ rejoined Raxworthy ‘I’d like to have a powwow with you over this business.’

‘Very good, sir.’

The two left the dockyard together, hired a taxi, and were soon bowling along Union Street to a residential club frequented by naval officers when sleeping ashore.

‘You’re dog-tired,’ remarked Raxworthy, noting the strained look in the other’s eyes. ‘We’ll have a meal and then you had better turn in. We’ll defer our private conference till the morning.’

‘Better get it over now, sir,’ said Broadmayne, with a laugh. ‘Probably I’ll be as fat-headed as an owl in the morning. And I’ve to see the Commander-in-Chief.’

‘Well, look here,’ said Raxworthy, ‘this is a sort of private tip; the admiral’s going to have you appointed to one of the destroyers told off to hunt the Alerte. Any objection if I apply for you?’

‘No, sir,’ replied Broadmayne. Since he was to be one of the hunters, it did not matter which ship he was appointed to. ‘Only I’d like to point out that, with his previous experience, Cain isn’t likely to be caught
napping by a destroyer again.

‘We’d fix him by directional wireless.’

‘I’ve never known him to send out a message,’ declared the Sub. ‘He’ll receive them gladly if they gave him an indication of the approach of a possible prize.’

‘How about the co-operation of a seaplane or flying-boat.’

‘Might, if the water’s clear enough,’ admitted Broadmayne. ‘But there’s one way — if I might suggest — ’

‘Carry on,’ urged Raxworthy.

‘Do the old Q-boat stunt, sir. A tramp well armed with concealed Q.F.’s and disguised as a French or Belgian African cargo boat.’

‘By Jove, the very thing!’ exclaimed the lieutenant-commander. ‘I’ll mention the suggestion to the admiral, tell him that the credit of it belongs to you, and try and get him to give me command. He’ll probably start with ticking me off and finish up with doing his level best to get me the appointment. Of course, you’ll be willing to serve with me?’

‘Well, sir,’ replied Broadmayne, ‘you did your level best to send me to Davy Jones’s. I’ll return good for evil and try to help you pull off the little stunt. We want to capture her, I presume?’ he added anxiously.

‘To capture,’ confirmed the lieutenant-commander gravely. ‘It will probably mean a hanging job for Cain and Pengelly. The others would certainly get a term of penal servitude. Failing capture — that is, if we fall in
with the *Alerte* — we’ll have to destroy her.’

At the appointed hour Broadmayne reported to the admiral. This time it was a fairly short interview, but none the less important. Not only did the Commander-in-Chief promise to apply to the Admiralty for the Sub’s appointment, but he approved warmly of the suggestion that a disguised and armed tramp should be employed as a decoy ship.

‘There’s another matter I want to mention,’ said the Commander-in-Chief. ‘I think you stated that a Silas Somebody was acting as a sort of intermediary, and that he was going to hide part of the pirates’ booty to the benefit of himself and — let me see, who is it?’ He broke off to refer to a type-written report of the previous evening’s evidence. ‘Ah, Pengelly; that’s the man. You’ve no idea where the place is?’

‘My friend Vyse might be able to give you additional information, sir.’

‘Then I’ll have a wire sent to him,’ decided the admiral. ‘Perhaps he would be able to assist us while you are on particular service afloat.’

‘I think he’d be delighted to do so, sir,’ replied Broadmayne.

‘Very well, then. You can carry on with your leave for a few days, but I wish you to be present when Mr. Vyse is here. We have your address?’

At two the same afternoon, Broadmayne was rung up from the dockyard, the message stating that Mr.
Vyse had arranged to call at Admiralty House at three; would Mr. Broadmayne be present?

Rollo Vyse was able to give some important information, namely, the number of the *Fairy* — PZ4452b. Communicating by telephone with the Registrar of Shipping at Penzance, it was found that the owner’s name was Silas Porthoustoc, and that he lived just outside the village of Mousehole. The registrar also added the somewhat disconcerting information that the individual under discussion was dead and buried, and that his house was to be sold by public auction on the following Monday.

‘But I don’t suppose, sir,’ he concluded, ‘that that will interest you.’

‘Won’t it, by Jove!’ exclaimed the Commander-in-Chief, when Penzance exchange had rung off. ‘It will. It rather simplifies matters. If we can lay our hands on the specie or bullion without the public getting wind of it, so much the better for us, and so much the worse for that scoundrel Pengelly. By the bye, the Captain Cain, as he calls himself, do you know by any chance what his name is? Is it Trevorrick?’

‘I’ve never heard him called by that name, sir,’ replied Broadmayne, while Vyse replied in a similar strain.

‘Because,’ continued the admiral, ‘if it were Trevorrick, then we’ve fixed the precious pair. They ran a ship-breaking concern on the river Fal. Of course, it is only a surmise. There are heaps of Pengellys in the West Country. I know several, and
they are men of unimpeachable character. Very well, Mr. Vyse; if you’ll be so kind as to put your services at the Admiralty’s disposal, I think you’ll see the end of the Porthoustoc business.’

This was on a Wednesday. Since the sale of Old Silas’s cottage was fixed for the following Monday, there was little time to be lost. The matter of recovering the booty could, of course, be managed by the use of a search-warrant, but for certain reasons the Commander-in-Chief decided to deal with it without invoking the aid of the law. Once the booty were taken possession of, then the Admiralty Courts could take up the case and restore the plunder to its lawful owners — the Norddeutscher-Lloyd Company.

The complicated machinery of Whitehall was set in motion at high pressure, with the result that early on Friday morning the Commander-in-Chief at Devonport was given authority to purchase the cottage without a limit being placed upon the amount to be paid.

Two hours later the admiral sent for a retired boatswain named Primmer, an honest, reliable and discreet old man, who had previously served three commissions under the Commander-in-Chief before the latter attained Flag rank.

‘Primmer,’ began the Admiral brusquely, ‘I want you to buy a house.’

The ex-bo’sun looked considerably surprised.

‘Very good, sir,’ he replied. ‘But I beg leave to state,
sir, I’ve already a little house at Mutley.’

‘Buy a house at Mousehole, near Penzance, and live in it,’ continued the Commander-in-Chief. ‘But only for a month — perhaps less than that. You’ll have all expenses paid and fifty pounds in addition. Change of air will do you a world of good, Primmer. Take the missus and a vanload of furniture and you’ll have quite an interesting holiday.’

‘Very good, sir,’ said the pensioner again.

Then the admiral explained matters and introduced Rollo Vyse as a supposed paying-guest.

‘You two can work together splendidly,’ declared the admiral. ‘If you require additional assistance, wire at once.’

The sale by auction was at eleven. At two o’clock came a wire from Primmer addressed in a precautionary measure to a private address at Plymouth — that of one of the Commander-in-Chief’s staff. The telegram was to the effect that Primmer had secured the house and had paid the necessary deposit to Messrs. Jeremiah Built & Co., Auctioneers and Surveyors, of Penzance.

Directly Primmer reported that his furniture had arrived and that his temporary abode was ready to receive his guest, Rollo Vyse took train to Penzance.

After making arrangements for his luggage to be sent on, Vyse set out to walk to Mousehole.

His role was that of an artist wishing to make seascapes under winter conditions. There were, he
knew, swarms of artists in Newlyn and Mousehole, so that by making out that he was one of them, his presence amongst a strictly conservative body of fisherfolk would not attract so much attention as otherwise.

It was a pleasant walk. Although December was well advanced, the air was mild. The bay looked a perfect picture in the slanting rays of the sun.

‘Wonder where Silas’s former abode is?’ he asked himself as he rounded a bend in the cliff path and saw the secluded little harbour of Mousehole nestling under the cliffs. ‘I’ll ask. It may save my having to retrace my steps.’

The first man he met after the decision was a tall bronzed man wearing fisherman’s rig, including thigh boots.

‘Up-along, Maaster,’ was the reply. ‘You’m see chimbly over atop o’ yon wall.’

Vyse thanked him and went on.

‘I’ve seen that fellow before,’ he soliloquised. ‘Where? Dash it! That’s done it. He’s the mate of the Fairy. I thought he looked a bit straight at me. If he’s spotted who I am, then there’s trouble ahead.’

The recognition had been mutual, and the former mate of the lugger was considerably perturbed at finding Vyse on his way to the cottage where Porthoustoc lived.

‘Wot be ‘is game, us ’ud like to know?’ he muttered.

Since Silas’s death, the former mate had become the master and owner of the lugger Fairy, his share on the
various nefarious transactions undertaken by Porthoustoc enabling him to find the purchase-money. The new owner was hoping to continue in the former skipper’s business. Reticent and apparently slow-witted, he had formed a shrewd idea of the nature of the *Alerte*’s activities; but the difficulty that confronted him lay in the fact that he did not know the medium of communication between Captain Cain and his agent. He was willing to become Porthoustoc’s successor in the business; Cain would have been only too glad of his services. But the connecting had snapped, hence a complete deadlock.

‘Welcome, sir, welcome!’ exclaimed Mr. Primmer, on Vyse’s arrival.

‘Well, how goes it?’ asked Rollo.

‘Terrible queer place, this, sir,’ replied the ex-bo’sun. ‘People hereabouts tell you everything you don’t want to know. If you do want to know anything they are as tight as the intercepted thread of the breech-block of a fifteen-inch gun, if you understan’ my meanin’. I’m taboo — sort of leper amongst this little lot. They don’t take to newcomers.’

‘Well, I hope we shan’t be here long, Mr. Primmer,’ said Rollo. ‘I’d like to get away before Christmas.’

‘Same ’ere, sir,’ agreed the new owner cordially. ‘We’ll get to work soon as you like. I’ve got crowbar, picks and spades an’ such-like. An’ I brought a sack of cement up from Plymouth. Thought it ’ud make ’em think if I got it hereabouts.’

‘I’ll change, and then we’ll have a look at the
kitchen,’ decided Rollo. ‘It’ll make a bit of a mess, I fancy.’

‘My missus she don’t mind,’ said Mr. Primmer reassuringly. ‘Fact is, we’ve been doin’ all the cooking in the spare room — proper sort o’ galley it makes.’

Having completed the necessary change of clothing, Rollo, accompanied by his host, went to the room under discussion. It was about twenty feet in length and fifteen in breadth, stone walled and stone floored. A doorway gave direct access to the garden; another into the livingroom. There were two narrow windows, which gave the place a look of perpetual gloom. One wall was blank, the kitchen having been partly let into the steep hillside at the back of the cottage.

‘That’s our task,’ declared Rollo, pointing to the blank wall.

‘I’ve been a-lookin’ at it, sir,’ said the ex-bo’sun. ‘Wall’s made of stone set in cement. It don’t look as if it’s been touched come these fifty year — maybe longer.’

‘I’ll get a torch,’ said Rollo. ‘It’s too dark to see much without artificial light. We’ll have to curtain those windows pretty heavily when we work at night. Anyone coming along that path — it’s a public one, I take it? — can see right in if we don’t screen the windows.’

Throwing the rays of his electric torch upon the mass of masonry, Vyse saw that the ex-bo’sun had good reason for his statement. The stones were black with smoke, the cement as hard as iron. Further
examination showed that there was a small rectangular aperture in the roof close to the wall. Evidently the former occupants were in the habit of kindling a fire on the open hearth adjoining the wall and allowing the smoke to escape through the hole in the roof.

‘‘Fraid the Admiralty have made another bad bargain, sir,’ remarked Mr. Primmer.

‘It looks like it,’ admitted Rollo, scraping the cement with the back of the blade of his pen-knife. ‘I suppose the cave does exist? Wonder if the entrance is under these flagstones?’

‘We’ll soon find that out, sir,’ declared the other. ‘I’ve a pick and a crowbar close handy.’

It was a long and difficult task chipping away the mortar between the flagstones. As Rollo toiled and sweated, he wondered what it would be like having to loosen cement. Mortar was hard enough.

At length, one stone was eased from its setting. With the aid of the crowbar it was lifted. Underneath was soft soil mingled with rock. Obviously that mixture would not hold over the mouth of a cave.

‘Done there,’ admitted Vyse. ‘I’ll swear old Porthoustoc said “behind the kitchen”, not under it; but there’s no reason why the entrance should or should not be in the centre. We’ll try at one side and work right along.’

Rollo had not been scraping more than five minutes when he gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

‘This is new cement, Mr. Primmer!’ he exclaimed.
‘Look: it’s quite clean underneath the surface. Silas has been doing a bit of camouflage; rubbing soot over the joints. The stuff hasn’t penetrated the cement like it has elsewhere. However, we’ve done enough for the present. We’ll start again tomorrow morning. I don’t think we’ll have much difficulty now.’

That night Rollo slept heavily. He had had a strenuous day. Accustomed to plenty of fresh air, he invariably slept with the bedroom window wide open.

Suddenly he awoke with a start to find the room full of moist vapour. A sea-fog, banking up after a warm, humid day, had swept inland.

It was not the fog that had aroused him. A curious horripilation, such as he had never before experienced, gripped him. For some moments he lay with wide-open eyes fixed upon the dark grey rectangular patch of open window.

Something prompted him to get out of bed and go to the window. He did so. Above the fogbank, which perhaps was less than fifty feet from the ground, the stars were shining. The fleecy pall of vapour was moving, curling, and alternately diminishing and increasing in volume as it was urged landwards by the faint breeze. The fog, catching at his throat, made him cough slightly. As he did so, he distinctly heard the sound of footsteps moving rapidly and stealthily away.

His bedroom window was less than ten feet from the ground, the house being low. On his left was the front
of the kitchen — a one-storeyed building. It was from that direction that the sound of the mysterious footsteps came.

Rollo’s first impulse was to drop to the ground and go in pursuit, but calmer counsel prevailed. He was at an obvious disadvantage. He was not at all acquainted with the ground surrounding the house. He was barefooted and in pyjamas. There was also the question of arousing Primmer and his wife, since if he jumped from the window he could not regain his room except by the door, which was barred and locked. Besides, by this time the intruder had gone a considerable distance, for his footsteps were no longer audible.

‘Well, I think I scared him,’ he mused. ‘In future, while I’m here I think I’ll have a bed made up in the old kitchen. Then, if any one tries to break in he’ll feel sorry for himself.’

Next morning Vyse related what had occurred. Examination of the kitchen door showed that no attempt had been made to force it. Apparently the nocturnal visitor had either been disturbed before he could get to work, or either he had contented himself with flashing a lantern through the window, which was too narrow even for a slim man to squeeze through.

The forenoon Rollo spent in pottering around the village and harbour with his easel and palette, simply to sustain his role of a painter. At the same time he
kept a sharp look-out for the *Fairy’s* new owner, but in this direction he was disappointed.

After the midday meal, Vyse and his assistant got to work. They were on the right track this time. Three hours’ strenuous toil resulted in the removal of a couple of large stones set in very hard cement. Through the small aperture thus formed, they could discern a cavern of generous proportions.

It had taken Silas Porthoustoc half a day to build up the mouth of the cave, working single-handed. Eight hours intermittent toil on the part of Rollo and Primmer resulted in a hole big enough for them to crawl through.

Armed with a torch, Rollo led the way. It was a matter of about a three-feet drop to the floor of the cave, the natural mouth of which was of oval section, seven feet in height and four in width. In length it went back nearly eighty yards, the width and height increasing at ten feet or so from the entrance.

There was the booty, packed as it was when it was transhipped from the *Alerte* to the *Fairy*, with the exception of one or two sacks which had been opened by Old Silas, either for present use purposes or else to enable him to satisfy himself of the nature of their contents.

Working at high pressure, Vyse and his companion removed all the booty from the cave and stored it in one of the rooms. They then proceeded to wall up the cave, carefully discolouring the cement in order to impart the appearance of age.
At the same time, the new owner and master of the lugger *Fairy* was composing an anonymous letter to the chief officer of the Water Guard at Penzance.

Rollo had another disturbed night. With an automatic pistol ready to hand, he slept on a camp-bed by the side of the large pile of booty; but although he kept waking and tiptoeing to the window, somewhat to his surprise there were no signs of the intruder of the previous evening. As soon as the post office opened, a telegram was dispatched to Devonport asking for a van to be sent to remove the ‘furniture’; while to allay suspicion on the part of his neighbours, Primmer spread the yarn that his recently-acquired cottage was haunted, that his wife refused to remain there another night, and that he had arranged to clear out that very day.

Just before noon a motor pantechnicon bearing the name of a well-known firm of furniture removers, but driven by a naval artificer in mufti and accompanied by four stalwart marines in civilian clothes (unfortunately their soldierly bearing discounted their role of furniture-packers), arrived at the late Porthoustoc’s former abode.

Primmer’s goods and chattels, together with the carefully-covered boxes and sacks of bullion and specie, were stowed in the van. His wife had previously gone on to Penzance station. Vyse and the ex-bo’sun were taking a final look round before locking up the cottage when a policeman
walked up to the door.

‘You haven’t made a long stay,’ he remarked, addressing Mr. Primmer. ‘Seems to me you’re taking away a sight more stuff than ye brought in a day or so back. D’ye mind if I have a look at some of those boxes?’

The ex-bo’sun, taken aback, glanced appealingly at Rollo, who merely shrugged his shoulders. In his part of an artist he could not very well assume any responsibility without giving himself away.

‘Sure I do mind,’ replied Primmer, at a loss to say anything else.

‘Then,’ continued the representative of law and order, ‘it is my duty to — ’

He broke off suddenly, possibly thinking that the odds were too great for him to tackle single-handed. He gave a sharp blast on his whistle. From behind the stone wall appeared half a dozen men in the uniform of His Majesty’s Water Guard.

‘Contraband!’ exclaimed the policeman, waving his hand in the direction of the loaded pantechnicon. ‘Caught red-handed you be!’
CHAPTER 18

THE DESTROYER AND THE DESTROYED

Exactly three weeks after the capture of the Mendez Nunez the Alerte arrived off the mouth of the Wad-el-Abaum, a small river flowing into the Atlantic a few miles south of Cape Bojador.

The estuary formed an ideal base for Captain Cain’s new sphere of operations. Nominally within the limits of Río de Oro — Spain’s extensive, unproductive and loosely-held dependency, stretching from Morocco on the north to French Senegal on the south — the Wad-el-Abaum was hardly ever visited by vessels, except Moorish coasters and fishing craft.

The entrance to the river was a difficult one, a bar on which the surf broke heavily, extending practically right across it, although well on the starboard hand was a narrow channel carrying twenty feet at high water and protected by a long, narrow rocky island that not only served as a breakwater, but also effectively screened the estuary when viewed from seaward.

Within the bar the depth increased to sixty feet, with a bottom of firm white sand. Farther up, the bed was composed of mud that became more objectionable as the width of the river decreased. The banks were almost destitute of vegetation, consisting of sand with
a few palms and a scanty scrub that afforded meagre food for goats belonging to the inhabitants. There were four or five small villages, that had long resisted any attempt at subjection on the part of the Spanish troops stationed at Villa Cisneros and other fortified posts of Río de Oro.

Within two hundred miles lay the Canary Islands, with Funchal, the favourite port of call for ships running between Europe and the west and south coasts of Africa. Farther southwards was Teneriffe, with Las Palmas, another frequented coaling-station. Both these were within the Alerte’s wireless radius, so that the pirates hoped to obtain a fairly complete report of all vessels passing within striking distance of their proposed base.

‘I suppose we haven’t made a mistake,’ remarked Pengelly, as the Alerte slowly approached the land. ‘I can’t see any sign of an estuary.’

‘It must be there,’ replied Cain, after consulting the latest but far from reliable chart of this part of the coast. ‘We’ll stand in a bit more. If there’s any doubt about it, we’ll send a boat and take soundings. The sailing directions state that the island is hardly distinguishable from the mainland except at short distance.’

He levelled his binoculars for the twentieth time during the last hour.

‘By thunder!’ he exclaimed. ‘Hanged if there isn’t a sail coming round the point. Native craft, by the cut of her.’
‘That’s awkward,’ remarked the second in command. ‘We don’t want company of that sort. She’s heading towards us.’

‘Let her,’ said Cain, with his characteristic grim smile. ‘Let her. Mr. Marchant, serve out the small arms. Get up the machine-gun, but keep it out of sight until it might be wanted. We’ll nab that fellow and make the crew pilot us in.’

Little guessing what reception awaited her, the boat approached. She was a roughly-built craft of about thirty feet in length, bluff bowed and with a high, ungainly stern. Her rig resembled that of a felucca, but with a boom in place of the loose-furled sail usually affected by craft of the type to be met with in the Mediterranean. It could be seen that there were three men on board. One, dressed in a loose garment of white, including a burnous, was at the long, curved tiller. The others, darker skinned, wore loincloths only.

While the *Alerte* was yet a quarter of a mile from her, the felucca parted helm, close-hauled, and stood off in a nor’ nor’-westerly direction.

‘What’s her little game, I wonder?’ remarked Pengelly. ‘I thought she was coming off to us.’

‘So did I,’ agreed Captain Cain. ‘But now I think she’s a Moorish fishing vessel homeward bound. She had to stand out towards us to avoid running on the shoals. We’ll collar her, Pengelly. If the old boy in the cotton nightgown is reasonable we’ll pay him and let him go when he’s piloted us in.’
In obedience to an order from the bridge, the *Alerte*’s diesel engines slowed down, till at a modest three and a half knots the pirate submarine gained a position between the felucca and the shore. Having thus cut off the latter’s retreat, the *Alerte* starboarded helm and, working up to twelve knots, began to overhaul the native craft with ease.

A cast of the lead gave nine fathoms, and since the chart showed that the sounding were remarkably even on this course, Captain Cain had no apprehensions of running his vessel aground.

The crew of the felucca seemed quite apathetic when they saw the *Alerte* in pursuit. At a sign from the white-robed Moor the two blacks lowered the sails, one of them standing by to heave a line.

Declutching her propellers, the pirate submarine gradually lost way, coming to a dead stop alongside the felucca.

By means of a conversation conducted chiefly by signs, Captain Cain imparted his request for a pilot, and without the faintest display of hesitancy the Moor scrambled on board the *Alerte*, leaving his two men to drop the felucca astern. Nor did he betray any sign of fear when he saw the pirate crew armed with automatic pistols. Calmly, and in a dignified manner, he proceeded to find out the draught of the ship. This he did by producing a piece of cord about a yard in length and then drawing the rough profile of a steam vessel. With a much smaller piece of string he then measured off the draught on his plan, and then
pointing first to the longer cord and then to the *Alerte* he managed to make his meaning clear.

Captain Cain replied by indicating the longer cord and then holding up six fingers. The Moor nodded gravely and motioned to the pirate skipper to order the ship to forge ahead.

Slowly the *Alerte* made her way inside the island, and thence through the channel over the bar. The while the lead was kept going, Pengelly and the bo’sun taking bearings and noting how the channel bore for future occasions.

‘Stand by and let go!’ roared Cain as the *Alerte* arrived at her anchorage. ‘Is the buoy streamed, Mr. Barnard?’

‘Ay, ay, sir!’ replied the bo’sun. ‘Then let go!’

With the rattle of chain tearing through the hawse-pipe, the anchor plunged to the bed of the Wad-el-Abuam.

Pengelly turned to his captain.

‘Snug little crib, this, sir,’ he remarked. ‘What about our pilot? Are we going to overhaul his boat in case there’s anything useful? The blighter might have been pearling. One never knows.’

‘Certainly not,’ replied Cane, with a deep frown of disgust. ‘The fellow did us a good turn. Only an ungrateful, low-down swine would suggest such a thing.’

Turning to the Moor, who was standing a couple of paces off, the pirate captain handed him a gold coin.
The pilot took the piece of money, made an elaborate salaam, and went to the side, the felucca having been brought to the gangway. Already the two men were hoisting sail. With another salaam, the Moor boarded his own craft, the ropes were cast off, and the felucca headed for the open sea.

Directly the intervening island hid the anchorage, the hitherto grave features of the pilot were suffused with a broad grin.

‘Start up the motor, Tom!’ he exclaimed in English. ‘George, send the aerial aloft. By Jove! I had the wind up when that pirate bloke suggested overhauling the boat’

In quick time the aerial was spread between the two masts and the lead-in connected to a powerful wireless set concealed between double bulkheads at the after end of the little forecastle. A message was then dispatched in code to the Officer Commanding H.M.S. Canvey, giving the position of the pirate submarine’s new base.

It was a smart bit of work. The Canvey, formerly a tramp steamer, had been fitted out by the Admiralty as a decoy-ship, and now disguised as the Belgian passenger and cargo boat Candid, supposed to be running between Borna, in the Belgian Congo, and Antwerp. Commanded by Lieutenant-Commander Ralph Raxworthy, D.S.O, she was armed with six six-inch guns and two submerged torpedo tubes, while for scouting purposes she carried in her hold two of
the latest type of small flying boats fitted with folding wings. These aircraft could be hoisted out and ready to ascend within the space of twelve minutes.

But in order to locate the _Alerte_’s base without exciting suspicion or giving any indication of her presence in the offing, Raxworthy had applied for seven boats of a type in use on this part of the coast. Each of these was fitted with a paraffin motor and a wireless installation, and was placed in charge of either a junior commissioned officer or else a warrant officer. For crew, seamen from the West Indian Station with a good knowledge of being able to manage a boat under sail, were transferred for temporary service, two or three being told off to each boat.

It was a job that Sub-Lieutenant Gerald Broadmayne would have given much to have undertaken; but in his case the risk was too great. Not on account of possible personal danger was he turned down. In spite of a skilful disguise he might be recognised by Captain Cain, should the two meet. In that case the pirate would realise that a British warship was hard on his heels and would take precautions accordingly.

Well before sunset the seven tenders, recalled by wireless, returned to their parent ship. Almost the first to arrive was the boat commanded by Sub-Lieutenant Allerton, who had served under Raxworthy in the _Windrush_ when she claimed to have sunk the _Alerte_ in St. Ives’ Bay.

Allerton was in high feather. It was he who had ‘trailed the tail of his coat’ across the path of the pirate
submarine and had piloted her into the estuary of the Wad-el-Abuam.

‘Cain, as he calls himself, is rather a sport,’ he declared to his rather envious brother-officers. ‘But that fellow Pengelly is an out-and-out rotter — a cross between a broken-down mummer and pickpocket. You know the type I mean.’

‘How is Cain a sport?’ inquired the torpedo-lieutenant.

‘He ticked the mealy-mouthed blighter off when he suggested helping himself to whatever he could find in the boat,’ replied Allerton. ‘Cain jumped on him properly, and gave me a German ten-mark gold-piece as a sort of backsheesh. He’d probably pinched it. I didn’t ask questions. I’ll have the thing made into a brooch when we get home.’

Lieutenant-Commander Raxworthy did not receive the information of the pirate submarine’s base with any degree of enthusiasm. In fact, he was rather down in the mouth about it. He had hoped that the *Alerte* would seek shelter in an obscure port in Morocco. Then the *Canvey* could go in and settle with her. The fact that the Wad-el-Abuam was in Spanish territory, however loosely held, complicated matters considerably. Without violating international law he could do nothing unless the Spanish Government agreed to allow the British warship a free hand.

Accordingly, the *Canvey* put into Teneriffe and reported to the Admiralty by cable lest a lengthy dispatch by wireless, even though it were in code,
should alarm the pirates and prompt them to change their base.

For the next few days the decoy ship steamed to and fro between the Canaries and St. Vincent sending out fictitious messages *en clair* in the hope that the *Alerte* would emerge from her retreat and come outside the three-mile limit in order to seize a likely prey. But no *Alerte* put in an appearance.

Meanwhile, the Spanish Government had refused to accede to the British Admiralty’s request. Since the pirate vessel had made use of a harbour in a Spanish colony, it was up to Spain to avenge the insult to her national dignity. Accordingly the destroyer *Villamil* was ordered to leave Cartagena and proceed to Wad-el-Abuaum to destroy the *Alerte*.

The *Villamil* was an old vessel of three hundred and sixty tons, with a speed of twenty-eight knots. Her armament consisted of four six-pounders, of which two could fire ahead and two on the beam. In addition, she carried two torpedo tubes.

While the Spanish destroyer was speeding south, the *Alerte* remained riding to her anchors in Wad-el-Abuaum. It was not owing to inclination on the part of Captain Cain that she did not put to sea. Wireless messages were frequently being intercepted from vessels bound to and from the French and Belgian colonies on the west coast of Africa. Tempting prizes they appeared to be. But the *Alerte* had developed a leak where the post of the vertical rudder passes through the trunk. A gland had given out. It would
have been a fairly simple business to effect repairs could the submarine be dry-docked. In present circumstances it was a tedious and difficult process, and until it were completed the *Alerte* would be unable to submerge without the almost certain result of being flooded. While on the surface the leak could be kept under control; but at any great depth the hydrostatic pressure would be irresistible.

While this work was in progress, Captain Cain had not allowed other matters to slide. One of his first steps was to establish a signal station on the rocky island guarding and screening the *Alerte*’s anchorage. Day and night armed men were on watch at the station, ready to signal to the pirate vessel the moment any sail appeared over the horizon.

Just before noon one morning, Captain Cain was informed that a craft looking like a destroyer was approaching from the north and steaming a course parallel to the coast.

Although fully conscious of the danger the *Alerte* was incurring by being caught in a disabled state, Captain Cain showed no sign of panic. He was trapped. He knew it. Unable to submerge, unable to ascend the river more than a few miles with a draught that considerably exceeded that of a destroyer, he realised that the only thing to be done short of scuttling the *Alerte* and chancing a doubtful refuge ashore in a barren country inhabited by fierce natives, was to fight it out.

In hot haste six men with the machine-gun were sent
off in a boat to the island with instructions to keep under cover and not to open fire until the approaching destroyer came within a hundred yards of the rock, which she must do by reason of the tortuous course of the deep-water channel.

The *Alerte* was swung athwart the river to enable her six-inch quick-firer to bear. With the exception of the captain, Mr. Marchant and the gun’s crew, all the rest of the hands were ordered below to be ready to replace casualties amongst the men working the quick-firer.

Presently a signal came through from the island: ‘Destroyer holding on. Is flying Spanish colours.’

‘In that case we needn’t worry much, my lads,’ exclaimed Cain. ‘She’s probably going down the coast. If she isn’t, then we’re more than her match. There’s not a single destroyer belonging to the Spanish Navy with a gun anything approaching our six-inch. We’ll give it her in the neck if she tries conclusions with us.’

After a brief interval, another message came through: ‘Destroyer turned eight point to port and is making for the bar.’

‘Good enough, my hearties!’ declared Cain in his ringing, convincing voice. ‘Let her have it directly she pokes her nose round the bluff. What’s the opening range, Mr. Marchant?’

‘Two thousand yards, sir,’ replied the gunner.

Under the captain’s orders one of the crew ran off with a bundle under his arm. Presently a flag was hoisted at the ensign staff. For the first time the *Alerte*
was showing her true colours: the Jolly Roger.

Alone on the bridge, Cain stood calm and confident. There was not the slightest tremor in his large, powerful hands as he grasped his binoculars ready to bring them to bear upon the as yet invisible enemy.

From his elevated position he gave a rapid glance at the gun’s crew. The men had closed up round their weapon, the gunlayer bending as he peered through the sights. In the rear crouched the loading-party, each with his hands on a hundred-pound projectile, ready the moment the breech-block was opened to thrust the shell into the still smoking breech. And somehow Cain’s thoughts flew back to a similar scene in the presence of an enemy. Then, he was fighting for a just cause under the glorious white ensign. Now, he was fighting for no cause but his own, his hand against every man’s, and under the shadow of that emblem of dishonour — the skull and cross-bones.

Round the precipitous face of the island appeared the lean bows of the Spanish destroyer. Then her round bridge, mast and funnels came into view. Through his glasses Cain saw that her guns were manned by crews of white-clad, swarthy-faced men.

There was a deafening crash as the Alerte’s six-inch sent the hundred-pound projectile hurtling on its way. Even as he looked, Cain saw a vivid flash immediately in front of the destroyer’s bridge — a cloud of smoke torn by diverging blasts of air. The smoke dispersed, or rather the destroyer’s speed carried her through it.

The crew of her fore six-pounder had dispersed, too;
with them the gun and its mounting. The bridge didn’t look the same as it had a few seconds previously — a bit lopsided. Flames were pouring from a heap of debris in the wake of the foremast.

At two thousand yards the appalling noise caused by the explosion of the *Alerte*'s first shell was inaudible to the solitary watcher on her bridge. The scene brought within a very short distance through the lenses of the powerful binoculars resembled a close-up picture on the cinematograph — unrealistic by reason of the absence of sound.

Two vivid flashes leapt from the Spanish destroyer’s deck, one on the port side, the other to starboard. They were her reply to the destructive ‘sighting shot’ from the pirate submarine.

The *Villamil* had received a rough awakening. Her crew, not one of whom had previously been under fire, were lacking in the courage and tenacity that marks experienced seamen. Appalled by the havoc wrought on the forecastle, the gunlayers of the remaining weapons that could be brought to bear certainly did make reply. Their aim was bad. One shell whizzed high above the *Alerte*'s masts, shrieking as it sped to bury itself harmlessly in the sand three miles away. The other, striking the water a hundred yards short of its objective, ricocheted and hurtled through the air full fifty yards astern.

Cain paid no attention to either. His interest was centred upon his attacker. He could hear the rapid crashes of the *Alerte*’s quick-firer. He could see the
results by the frequent lurid bursts of flame and the showers of debris as shell after shell struck the luckless Spaniard.

Still she came on, leaving an eddying trail of smoke. One of her six-pounders was firing spasmodically. She was reeling like a drunken man.

Suddenly Cain put aside his glasses and made a spring for the telegraph indicator, moving the starboard lever to full ahead. His quick eye had discerned a glistening object curving over the Villamil’s side. A torpedo was already on its way, travelling at the speed of a train in the direction of the pirate submarine.

Well before the action, the Alerte’s oil-engines had been started with the clutches in neutral position. It was a precaution that was justified in its results. Under the action of one propeller only the Alerte forged ahead, her stern swinging round as she overran her anchors.

Cain had no occasion now to use his binoculars. The double diverging wake of the submerged locomotive torpedo was plainly visible to the naked eye. It was approaching very rapidly; the ship was swinging very slowly — too slowly, it seemed.

For ten seconds the captain held his breath. Looking aft, the rise of the poop intercepted the wake of the torpedo. It seemed as if the Alerte was doomed.

But no explosion tore her asunder. By less than a couple of yards the deadly missile cleared her stern, to detonate harmlessly against the steep bank of the river
half a mile away.

The *Alerte*'s quick-firer was now silent. The manoeuvre that had saved her from the torpedo had brought her almost bows-on to the *Villamil*, with the result that the former’s forecastle masked her line of fire.

By this time the Spanish destroyer had closed to about a thousand yards. She was yawing badly. Possibly her steam-steering gear had been demolished and she was being conned from aft. Nevertheless, she was keeping to the channel which at this particular time brought her almost abeam. Her decks were a shambles, two of her funnels had disappeared. The rest of the bridge that had survived the *Alerte*'s first shell had collapsed. One gun well aft alone was spitting defiance. Either she meant to ram her anchored opponent, or else she was manoeuvring for a position favourable for the release of a second torpedo.

Again the *Alerte*'s engine-room telegraph bell clanged. With the port propeller going hard astern, and her cables tautened like harp-strings, she began to swing into her former position.

For the first time since the action commenced Captain Cain spoke. Leaning over the bridge-rail he shouted to the gunlayer to aim for the Spaniard’s aft torpedo-tube.

The *Villamil* was well down by the head and had a pronounced list to starboard. Her speed had appreciably fallen off. The menace of being rammed was now hardly worth taking into account; but the
torpedo — at that range, if the Spanish torpedo-
gunner knew his job, it was almost a matter of
impossibility to miss.

Cain could see four or five grimy figures bringing
the loading cage to the after-end of the tube. The
torpedo was launched home. He could see the convex
metal cover swing into the closing position — the
torpedo coxswain was getting astride the tube — in
another three or four seconds —

A deafening crash told the anxious skipper of the
Alerte that the six-inch was again at work. At a range
of six hundred yards the shell got home. A terrific
flash — it was far too vivid for the explosion of a shell
— leapt from the destroyer. An enormous cloud of
smoke was hurled skywards, completely obliterating
the Villamil from Cain’s vision. A blast of hot air swept
over the superstructure of the submarine. Pieces of
metal tinkled on her steel deck. Heavier pieces were
falling with a succession of splashes into the smoke-
enshrouded water.

Slowly the pall of acrid-smelling vapour dispersed.
Where the destroyer had been was an expanse of
agitated water surrounding a broad and steadily-
growing patch of black oil. Of the eighty men who
formed her crew, not one survived.

The only casualty on board the Alerte was № 3 of the
gun’s crew, and he had been knocked out only after
the Villamil had been destroyed. A fragment of steel
descending with terrific force had struck him on the
head, killing him instantly.
The action over, Captain Cain brought the rest of the hands on deck.

‘My lads!’ he exclaimed, ‘if we were out for glory, we’ve got it. It wasn’t of our seeking. It’s riches, not glory, we’re after. Now, lads, although there’s no one of our opponents left to tell the tale, we’ll have to get a move on. One more good capture and we pay off. With luck we’ll finish repairs by nightfall. Tomorrow I hope our aims will be realised. There’s a Belgian vessel due to leave St. Vincent at dawn tomorrow. She’s ours for the asking. I propose to capture her and bring her in here until we can unload everything of value. All then that remains to be done is to hide the booty, make our way home and come out again as quite above-board West Coast traders. That’s all I have to say, lads. No hanging on to the slack, but plenty of beef into your work for the next few hours and everything will be plain sailing. Pipe down!’
The decoy-ship Canvey lay at anchor off St. Vincent, whither she had gone to replenish her oil-fuel tanks. Both officers and men were growing tired of the seemingly interminable stunt of steaming to and fro between the Cape Verde Islands and Teneriffe, vainly inviting Captain Cain to ‘tread on the tail of my coat’. They wanted to cut into Wad-el-Abuam and settle the matter once and for all. It was galling to have to keep in the offing, while the Spanish destroyer Villamil was at liberty to enter the estuary and destroy the pirates’ lair.

Day after day passed without untoward incident. Although the Spanish Government had expressed its intention of keeping the British Admiralty well informed as to the progress of operations, no message was received by the Canvey from London, or in fact from anywhere that had any bearing upon the all-important subject of the destruction of the pirate submarine.

And for a very good reason. No wireless message from the Villamil was received by the Spanish naval authorities after a brief report that the destroyer was about to enter the Wad-el-Abuam to attack the Alertè. From that time the movements of the destroyer were
shrouded in mystery.

Presently it occurred to the Spanish Admiralty that all was not well with the Villamil. There was something decidedly ominous about the prolonged silence. The weather had been unusually quiet, so her disappearance could not be attributed to a sudden tempest. It seemed incredible that a unit of Spain’s navy had been vanquished by a contemptible pirate ship. But at last that supposition had to be regarded as a fact.

About that time serious riots broke out in Barcelona. Every available Spanish destroyer was dispatched to that port to assist in quelling the disorder. Unable to police her territorial waters of Río de Oro, the Spanish Government, putting its pride in its pocket, made a request to the British Admiralty that the destruction of the pirate submarine should be undertaken by the Royal Navy.

The Canvey received her wireless instructions to this effect at noon. Without delay the awnings were furled, steam raised for seventeen knots, and the anchor weighed. The knowledge that the destroyers Complex and Calyx were under orders to leave Gibraltar for the Río de Oro coast was no small factor in determining the Canvey’s hurried departure.

No longer need she to steam slowly, with a red ensign fluttering aft, and her officers and crew rigged out like members of the humble but all-important Mercantile Marine. With her hitherto concealed guns showing their teeth and the white ensign streaming
proudly to the breeze, she could dash into the estuary of the Wad-el-Abuam, summon the *Alerte* to surrender, and in default send her to the bottom for all time. But she must be first upon the scene. Should her friendly rivals, the heavily-armed *Complex* and *Calyx*, forestall her, then the *Canvey*'s motto would be the single word, Ichabod.

Two hours after leaving St. Vincent, Lieutenant-Commander Raxworthy was conferring with Broadmayne, who happened to be officer of the watch, when the leading telegraphist approached, saluted, and tendered a signal-pad.

The owner read the message. The corners of his mouth dropped.

‘We’re done out of a job, Broadmayne,’ he remarked.

‘The *Alerte*’s settled with.’

‘Our destroyers, sir?’

Raxworthy shook his head.

‘Not an Andrew job this time,’ replied the lieutenant-commander. ‘Read this.’

The message was a wireless signal *en clair* as follows:


*ADAMS, Master.*
'That Yankee’s in luck,’ observed Lieutenant-Commander Raxworthy. ‘He stands to rake in thirty thousand pounds. Carry on,’ he added, addressing the leading telegraphist. ‘Copies to ward-room, gun-room, and mess-deck.’

In a few minutes the ‘buzz’ was all over the ship. The feeling of disappointment had a consoling feature. The Canvey would be ordered home to be put out of commission, and that meant the bluejackets’ highly-prized privilege — paying off leave, or ‘leaf’ as the ‘matloe’ insists on calling it.

To settle the matter, an Admiralty wireless was received announcing that operations against the pirate submarine were to cease forthwith: vessels concerned were to proceed to their respective bases.
‘There’s that Candide asking for trouble, sir,’ replied Pengelly, as he entered the captain’s cabin. ‘We’ve just intercepted a message saying she’s leaving St. Vincent today.’

‘She’s been reporting her movements long enough,’ said Captain Cain. ‘We’ll see what we can do. We’ll have to shift from here in any case. We’ll find a suitable cubby-hole somewhere down the coast, even if we have to try the Nigerian back-water. One good haul, Pengelly, and we’ll pack up and share the proceeds.’

‘We’ve done nothing much to write home about since we came south,’ grumbled the second in command. ‘Sending a Spanish destroyer to the bottom doesn’t put shot in our locker.’

‘Quite so,’ agreed Cain. ‘That’s why I’m anxious to nab the Candide. Pass the word to Mr. Barnard that I want to be under way in an hour’s time — just before high water.’

When Cain came on deck all preparations were complete, except for breaking out the anchor. The Alerte was riding to the flood tide. The mud flats on either side of the estuary were covered. The air was hot, sultry and still. Outside, the surf thundered..."
heavily on the bar.

At five knots the *Alerte* headed seawards, scraping past the submerged wreckage of the *Villamil* to starboard and the island to port, where the now-abandoned signal-station alone remained as a visible reminder of the pirate submarine’s brief and financially disappointing sojourn in the estuary of the Wad-el-Abuam.

Just before two bells in the afternoon watch, smoke was observed on the southern horizon. Twenty minutes later the dark grey hull of a fairly big steamer emerged from the patches of haze.

‘She’s the *Candide* right enough,’ declared Cain. ‘Clear away the gun, my lads. One more hooker and our job’s done. No colours yet, Mr. Barnard. We’ll let ’em have a good sight of the Jolly Roger in a brace of shakes. Pick your boarding-party, Mr. Pengelly. See that everything’s ready in the boat.’

The two vessels were approaching on their respective courses which, if adhered to, would enable the stranger to pass a good half-mile on the *Alerte*’s port side. The pirate submarine held on in order to avoid arousing suspicion on the part of the stranger.

Suddenly Pengelly, who had been keeping the approaching craft under observation through a pair of powerful binoculars, turned to his superior.

‘She’s a Yankee, by Jove!’ he exclaimed. ‘She’s flying the Stars and Stripes.’

‘Ay,’ agreed Cain, with a grin. ‘And there’s the name *Bronx City* on her bows as large as life. Yankee colours
and Yankee name don’t turn a Belgian tramp into a United States hooker. I’m too old a bird to be caught with chaff — starboard a bit, Quartermaster — at that!’

The eyes of the signalman, the gun’s crew and the seamen standing aft with the rolled-up Jolly Roger already toggled to the halyards, were all fixed expectantly upon the skipper of the pirate submarine as he stood at the extreme end of the port side of the bridge.

Captain Cain raised his right hand. At the signal the black flag was broken out, the ID hoisted at the fore, while an instant later a shot whizzed across the stranger’s bows.

The warning was promptly acted upon. The intercepted craft reversed engines, lost way and then came to a stop. The Stars and Stripes remained fluttering in the faint breeze.

Promptly Pengelly and his men pushed off to the prize, under cover of the Alerte’s six-inch gun. Before the boat ran alongside the stranger, the latter’s accommodation-ladder had been lowered.

Pistol in hand, Pengelly, followed by his men, swarmed up the swaying ladder. At the gangway, supported by several officers and crew stood a tall, hatchet-faced man in white drill uniform and with his peaked cap tilted well over his left eye.

‘What in the name of tarnation thunder do you want?’ he demanded. ‘Cocktails, lime-juice or milk? If you do, you won’t get — so quit.’

Pengelly realised that Cain had made a mistake. The
vessel was not the *Candide* disguised, but the *Bronx City*, registered and owned in the United States. But having boarded her, Pengelly had no intention of returning ignominiously to the *Alerte*.

‘No quitting this time, skipper,’ he replied firmly. ‘I’m not here to argue — this is my persuader.’

He touched the barrel of his automatic with his left hand and then pointed to the *Alerte*, which was still closing the prize.

‘Guess you’ll swing for this,’ exclaimed the captain of the *Bronx City*.

‘More ways than one of killing a cat,’ retorted Pengelly. ‘Now, you — officers and men — for’ard you go and keep quiet, or it’ll be the worse for you.’

Shepherded by half a dozen of the *Alerte’s* armed boarding-party, the crew of the *Bronx City* were made to go forward. Pengelly turned to the Old Man.

‘I don’t know your tally,’ he remarked.

‘Cap’n Hiram Adams is my name,’ replied the skipper of the *Bronx City*. ‘Guess people know me from Quebec round the Horn and up Seattle and on this side of the herring-pond, too, I reckon. Hope you’re wiser.’

‘I am,’ rejoined Pengelly curtly. ‘Now let me see your papers.’

Accompanied by the prize-master and followed by two of the *Alerte*’s hands, Captain Adams went to his cabin, unlocked a safe and produced the necessary documents.

Pengelly’s eyes opened with astonished satisfaction.
The *Bronx City*, a twin-screwed boat, had a rich cargo. She had come from Beira with a heavy consignment of gold for Lisbon. At Accra she had picked up a thousand barrels of palm oil. Amongst other articles enumerated on her manifest were ivory and ostrich feathers. In addition to her cargo, she carried nine Portuguese passengers — residents of Beira and Quelimane — on their way to Lisbon.

Unable to decide what was to be done, Pengelly ordered one of the hands to semaphore the *Alerte* and inform Captain Cain of the identity of the prize and the nature of her cargo. Back came the reply:

‘Stand fast. Am coming on board.’

Cain lost no time in so doing. He was far more perturbed than was his second in command. He had gone against his resolution not to molest a United States ship. He had done so in all good faith — if such a term can be applied to rank piracy — but the fact remained that he had fired upon a vessel flying the Stars and Stripes.

Long before the *Alerte*’s second cutter came alongside the *Bronx City*, Cain had made up his mind as to the course to pursue.

Ascending the accommodation-ladder, he made his way to the bridge where Captain Hiram Adams was standing under guard.

‘I am sorry, Cap’n Adams,’ said Cain, after he had requested Pengelly to introduce him; ‘there’s been a mistake on my part.’

‘Sure thing,’ replied the skipper. ‘But I calculate there
ain’t no darned mistake about that.’

He pointed to the skull and cross-bones flying from the *Alerte’s* ensign-staff.

‘There isn’t,’ agreed Cain, with a disarming smile. ‘The mistake was entirely upon my part. I took you for the *Candide*. S’pose you haven’t spoken her?’

‘Nope.’

‘She’s doubtless skulking at St. Vincent, scared stiff and afraid to meet me,’ continued the pirate. ‘Well, Cap’n Adams, I’m not going to do you any harm. I’m not going to touch an ounce of your cargo — ’

‘But, sir,’ interrupted Pengelly, holding out the ship’s papers. ‘Look here.’

Cain gave a quick glance through their contents. Most of the cargo, including the gold, was Portuguese property. It was a great temptation.

‘I know my business, Mr. Pengelly,’ he said sternly. ‘Now, Cap’n Adams, to resume. You’ll be free to resume your voyage in a few days. In my own interests I am reluctantly compelled to employ you for my own protection. If you give no trouble you’ll receive none. Is that clear?’

Captain Hiram Adams nodded. A grim smile spread over his lean features. After all, he was coming out lightly. His ship was not to be sunk; his cargo was to remain intact.

‘Guess it’s your funeral — not mine,’ he replied. ‘Get busy!’

Cain proceeded to get busy. His first step was to send for the *Bronx City’s* wireless operator.
As soon as the fictitious message announcing the ramming and sinking of the Alerte had been sent out, Cain ordered the operator below, locked the door of the wireless cabin, and placed an armed guard outside.

‘Gee! Guess you’re some lineal descendant of Ananias, Cap’n!’ exclaimed the master of the Bronx City admiringly. ‘Reckon you’d make a pile in Wall Street in next to no time.’

Cain’s next step was to place Pengelly with five men in charge of the Bronx City, and to order the chief and second officers of the latter on board the Alerte.

‘Just as a matter of form, Cap’n Adams,’ he remarked, ‘It will save a heavy strain on your steward’s department. Now, Mr. Pengelly, keep station four cables astern of me, if you please; speed twelve knots. Under no consideration, should we sight another craft, will the Bronx City communicate.’

The pirate captain returned to the Alerte. If the misleading wireless message went down, then the Alerte had yet another lease of life and activity. The possible presence of British and foreign warships off Río de Oro was a danger which he fully appreciated. Once the coast was clear of that type of craft he could prey on merchantmen during the next few weeks with comparative impunity. He was very keen to snap up the hitherto much-advertised Candide.

He felt considerably elated over the Bronx City affair. His magnanimity would be an asset in his favour. His discrimination in refusing to plunder a cargo carried
under the Stars and Stripes would show that he was not a wild dog at large. Altogether, he was very pleased with himself.

For the rest of the day the *Alerte*, with the *Bronx City* keeping demurely in her wake, kept a southerly course. As night fell she stood in towards the coast, sighting land soon after dawn. Ahead lay the Bahia Arenas, an enclosed anchorage nearly ten miles in length and averaging one in breadth, with an extreme depth of fourteen fathoms. Separated from the Atlantic by a long, low, sandy island, it received the Faltuba River, a fairly deep stream meandering between banks of mangroves and bounded for miles by miasmatic swamps.

Years ago the Portuguese had attempted to convert Bahia Arenas into a commercial port. They built a stone fort, wharves and huts. The experiment was a failure. They had reckoned without the deadly climate. It was healthy enough for vessels lying at anchor in the sandy bay, but no European could for any length of time withstand the pestilential air that rose from the mangroves. The fort fell into decay, the wharves rotted. When in course of time the French took over the country between Cape Blanco and British Gambia, they sedulously avoided any scheme to open out the Faltuba River, and consequently no shipping had occasion to use Bahia Arenas for commercial purposes.

The entrance was an easy one. Even at low springs there were eighteen feet of water on the bar, with an
additional height of twelve feet at high water.

Once inside, the *Alerte* signalled to the *Bronx City* to heave to. Captain Cain boarded the American and took charge of the bridge.

‘I am going to run your ship aground, Cap’n,’ he announced to the skipper. ‘You’ll come to no harm. The mud’s soft. You’ll come off before next springs — say in a week’s time. By then, we shall be miles away.’

Captain Hiram Adams made no audible comment. He merely put his tongue in his cheek.

Two miles up the river and hidden from the sea by a spur of high ground thickly covered with coco-palms, Captain Cain ordered the quartermaster of the *Bronx City* to put her helm hard-a-port.

At a speed of about five knots, the ship ran aground on the starboard side of the river, ploughing through the soft mud for quite her own length before coming to a dead stop. There she lay, on an even keel, with her bows within a hundred yards of the bluff of hard ground.

‘You’re lying nicely, Cap’n,’ observed Cain, as he prepared to withdraw the prize-crew. ‘I’ve taken the liberty to remove certain essentials of your wireless; but I’ll do my level best to send the stuff along to your nearest agents.’

Returning on board the *Alerte*, Cain’s first act was to send for her wireless operator.

‘Any signals from the *Candide*?’ he inquired.

‘None, sir,’ was the reply. ‘I’ve had the ’phones on almost continuous-like since midnight.’
‘Well, carry on,’ rejoined the captain, paying no heed to the man’s carefully-worded complaint.
‘Unfeeling swine!’ muttered the operator, as he made his way back to the wireless cabin. ‘Me carry on after sixteen hours’ trick? Not much.’
‘She’s safe enough, Pengelly,’ remarked Cain, indicating the stranded *Bronx City*. ‘Any trouble?’

‘None whatever, sir,’ replied his subordinate. ‘Old Adams was as good as gold after you had explained matters.’

‘Fraid we’ve missed the *Candide*, curse her,’ said the pirate captain. ‘We’ll have to keep a look-out for something else. I’ve warned the operator. Well, take over now, Pengelly. I’m going to have a few hours’ sleep. Call me if anything occurs.’

‘Ay, ay, sir,’ replied Pengelly.

Cain went to his cabin, locked the door, and with the exception of kicking off his shoes, turned in all standing.

He had had a fairly strenuous time of late. He did not spare his crew, nor did he spare himself, but he forgot the important fact that he could go for long periods without rest and sleep, whereas most of the hands could not.

In less than a minute he was sound asleep.

— CHAPTER 21 —

MUTINY

A quarter of an hour later, Pengelly, accompanied by a couple of men, tiptoed to the door. He listened. Cain was breathing heavily in a sound slumber. The second
in command bent down and peered through the keyhole. The electric light was burning. He could see nothing of the captain, since his range of vision was limited by the smallness of the keyhole. Above the door was a lowered ventilator. Cautiously, Pengelly stopped the opening with a damp cloth. Then he signed to one of the men.

The fellow applied a rubber tube to the keyhole. At the other end of the tube was a bag containing chloroform. For several minutes the suffocating fumes were being pumped into the cabin.

“Nough, if you don’t want to snuff him out,” declared the man.

‘Sure he’s insensible?’ asked Pengelly anxiously.

‘Like a noo-born babby,’ replied the fellow confidently.

‘Good enough,’ was the response. ‘Down with the door. Got lashings ready?’

The two seamen put their shoulders to the steel panel. It gave slightly, but the lock held in spite of reiterated efforts.

‘Get a sledge-hammer,’ ordered Pengelly impatiently, as he toyed with a belaying-pin.

A few blows with the hammer shattered the lock. Pengelly, followed by more of the crew, rushed in. Cain, with a dazed look on his face, and making a gurgling sound as he strove for breath, was sitting up in his bunk with a revolver in his hand.

Without a word the captain levelled the weapon and pressed the trigger. There was a deafening report. The
bullet, missing Pengelly’s head by an inch, flattened itself against the steel bulkhead.

Before Cain could fire again, Pengelly sprang forward and brought the belaying-pin down upon the pirate captain’s skull.

‘Turn on the ventilating fan, one of you,’ ordered the chief mutineer. ‘Carry him on deck. He’s not dead. He’ll be more useful to us alive. Pass a lashing round his ankles, and when he comes to, see that he’s properly lashed-up.’

They bore the body of the unconscious Cain on deck, where the rest of the crew were assembled.

Of the two men — Cain and Pengelly — the hands preferred Cain. He possessed certain qualities that appealed to the crowd of lawless rascals. Pengelly did not. But it was the affair of the Bronx City that had enabled Pengelly to prevail upon the crew to mutiny. They could not understand why Cain refrained from looting her valuable cargo; why he should waste precious time in bringing the prize into Bahia Arenas when the Candide was somewhere south of Las Palmas and likely to fall an easy prey to the Alerte. The chance of capturing the Candide had gone, they decided. The Bronx City remained.

‘We’ll have the gold,’ declared Pengelly to the mustered crew. ‘We’ll take it up the river and bury it. Then all that remains to be done is to take the Alerte to within a few miles of St. Louis — or Bathurst, if more are in favour of it — scuttle her and take to the boats. We’ll pitch a plausible yarn and get sent home as
shipwrecked mariners. Then, in due course, we recover the gold and share out.’

‘How about the ransom for that Admiralty inspector bloke we kidnapped?’ demanded one of the crew.

‘And the Cap Hoorn loot?’ added another.

Pengelly assured them that they would all have equal shares in the plunder. In his own mind he felt certain that they would not. Already he counted upon getting hold of the booty entrusted to the late Captain Silas Porthoustoc. He wasn’t altogether too sure about Jasper Chamfer’s ransom. For a considerable time he had harboured a suspicion that Cain was feathering his own nest with the money.

‘Man and arm boats,’ he ordered. ‘We’ll want every available hand for this job. We’ve got to gut the Yankee hooker and bury the stuff before dawn.’

Into the boats tumbled the swarm of ruffians. Discipline had gone by the board. During Cain’s régime every evolution had been performed with man-of-war smartness. Now jack was as good as his master.

Alongside the stranded Bronx City ran the boats. Armed men, cursing and frantically brandishing their automatic pistols, swarmed up her sides. Without any ceremony, Captain Hiram Adams was made to hand over the keys of the strong-room. The American crew were driven forward and secured in the forepeak. Then the work of looting began. There was no method about the procedure. The pirates rifled
indiscriminately. The strong-room door was forced and the gold-dust taken on deck, but not before a large quantity of the precious metal had found its way into the pockets of individual members of the Alerte’s crew. The ivory being in bulk and too large to be conveniently hidden by the finders, was dumped into the boats. The American officers’ quarters were invaded and their belongings either stolen or strewn all over the deck. The passengers were insulted, threatened and robbed; while, to make matters worse, the pirates broached several casks of rum, and having drunk as much as they could carry — and more — they wantonly allowed the rest of the spirit to run to waste.

‘Best batten the Yanks down and fire the ship,’ suggested one drunken rascal. ‘Dead men tell no tales. How about it, Cap’n Pengelly?’

Pengelly objected. He shrank from work of that kind, not because he possessed any strong degrees of humanity, but because he feared the consequences.

‘They gave us no trouble,’ he said. ‘The ship’s hard and fast aground. She can’t signal to any vessel in the offing. Let her alone. We’ll get the stuff up the river and hide it.’

Unsteadily, the besotted pirates dropped into the two deeply-laden boats and rowed back to the Alerte.

Cain, who had been left in charge of Barnard and a couple of hands, had recovered consciousness. Pengelly, after giving one furtive glance at his former partner, ascended the bridge ladder.
‘Look alive, lads!’ he shouted. ‘Get the booty aboard!’

‘What for?’ bawled one of the crew. ‘If we’ve got to land the swag what’s the use of unloading the boats and loading ’em up again? Useless work, I calls it.’

Instead of insisting upon his orders being carried out, Pengelly began to explain the reason.

‘Don’t you see that the people of the Bronx City are watching us?’ he replied. ‘If they see that we are towing the loaded boats up the river, they’ll guess we’re hiding the plunder ashore. Whip it aboard. It’s worth the extra work.’

‘Then do it yourself,’ retorted the mutineer. ‘We’ve had enough back-breaking jobs lately. ‘Sides, what odds if the Yanks do spot us?’

His protest was upheld by several others. Marchant and half a dozen of the hands who were not so drunk as the rest tried to convince them of the soundness of Pengelly’s order.

For some moments the dispute threatened to develop into a free fight, until Pengelly, fearful lest the objectors should gain the upper hand in a physical contest, bade the gunner pass the boats astern to be taken in tow.

The anchor was weighed and at four knots — more speed would have resulted in the swamping of the heavily-laden boats — the Alerte ascended the river.

Almost as soon as the pirate submarine had disappeared from view, the imprisoned officers and
crew of the *Bronx City* were released by the Portuguese passengers.

Captain Hiram Adams’ first step was to assure himself that his ship had not been crippled beyond being run aground. To his delight he found that beyond the damage caused by the looters in their work of plunder and the removal of certain wireless essentials, the *Bronx City* was unharmed. He had given a shrewd and correct guess as to the reason of the pirates’ return visit. He had summed up Cain as a man of his word, who was in consequence not responsible for the orgy of plunder. Therefore, he concluded, that there had been an ‘almighty bust-up,’ and that Cain had been supplanted by the loose-lipped, spineless Pengelly.

Captain Adams had made several trips up the Mississippi as far as Memphis. He had had many experiences of running aground the soft mud-banks that fringe the frequently-shifting channel of that enormous waterway. He was now going to put that knowledge to practical use.

‘Say, how long will it take for a full head of steam?’ he inquired of the chief engineer.

‘I guess an hour,’ replied that worthy, knowing that the fires had not been drawn when the ship took the ground. ‘Mebbe less.’

‘Then get busy,’ rejoined the Yankee skipper.

The chief went below with his assistant and firemen. Presently volumes of smoke poured from the *Bronx City’s* smoke-stack.
While steam was being raised, Captain Hiram Adams ordered a kedge-anchor to be laid out in the stream, and the stout wire hawser attached to it to be led aft, so that the angle made by the keel of the ship and the wire was roughly forty-five degrees.

As soon as the chief engineer reported that the pressure gauges registered a sufficient head of steam, the skipper telegraphed for full-speed ahead with the port engine.

Completely mystified, the chief obeyed, wondering what possessed the Old Man to go full ahead with one engine that would tend to drive the ship farther into the mud-bank.

Nor was the chief the only one puzzled. In fact, some of the crew wondered whether recent events had not touched the skipper’s brain. And their wonderment increased when Captain Hiram Adams, with a huge cigar jutting at an acute angle from the corner of his mouth, descended from the bridge.

‘Guess those darned cargo-lifters won’t be comin’ down before morning, Mr. Kelly,’ he remarked to his chief officer. ‘We’ll be quit before then. Set an anchor-watch and inform me if anything happens.’

‘And the engines?’ inquired Mr. Kelly.

‘Full ahead all the time,’ replied the skipper, and without offering any explanation, he went to his cabin to snatch a few hours’ sleep.

All the rest of that day and throughout the night the port engine kept up its tireless task. The massive propeller in going ahead was constantly throwing aft
volumes of water with quantities of mud held in suspension. Slowly but surely the soft slime was being sucked away from the vessel’s port bilge, thus making a trench into which, when the time came, the *Bronx City* would slide sideways.

Just before the first streaks of the brief tropical dawn appeared over the dark outlines of the mangroves, Captain Hiram Adams appeared on deck.

It was now close on high water. Although the tide was still making, there was a considerable quantity of turgid water coming downstream.

Giving instructions to the chief officer to bring a strain upon the wire hawser, the skipper telegraphed for the port engines to stop and the starboard for full astern. The hull of the *Bronx City* quivered. For a brief, anxious period her fate hung in the balance. Then, with a squelching sound as tons of slimy black mud were shifted bodily, the vessel slithered into the trench and began to gather sternway in midstream, held only by the stern kedge.

With the least possible delay the wire hawser was hove taut and the kedge broken out. Then, at easy ahead, the *Bronx City* made for the open sea.

Meanwhile the *Alerte* had gone upstream, arriving well before nightfall at an anchorage five miles above the spot where she had left her latest capture. Here Pengelly, accompanied by two of the hands, went ashore, the new captain taking with him a prismatic compass.
Selecting a suitable spot, he took bearings on three conspicuous objects, making the necessary data in his pocket-book. His assistants watched the operation with semi-torpid interest. They had a vague idea of what he was about, which was what Pengelly wanted.

Returning on board, he mustered the crew. They crowded round in a disorderly mob — a striking contrast to the orderly way in which they fell in under Captain Cain’s orders.

‘I’ve fixed the spot for burying the booty, my lads!’ he announced. ‘The sooner we get to work the quicker we’ll be able to make ourselves scarce. In a week the place will be overgrown — ’

‘Then ’ow the blazes are we to find it again?’ interrupted one of the audience.

‘Quite a natural, intelligent question,’ rejoined Pengelly. ‘I’ve taken a three-point bearing. With either a sextant or a compass it will be as easy as winking to fix the spot to a yard. This is a mutual concern, my lads, so I’ll chalk up the angles so that you can make a note of them in case anything happens to me. That’s fair enough, isn’t it? Now, fall in half a dozen of you with spades, nip ashore and begin digging like Hades. Yes, the ivory won’t hurt if it’s well covered with canvas.’

The digging party landed, while others, still under the effect of the rum, proceeded to unload the booty from the boats. While the operation was in progress, Pengelly chalked the required information on the bulkhead of the dummy forecastle — only the
bearings he wrote down for the information of the crew differed materially from those he had noted in his pocket-book.

Then he went ashore to watch the progress of the work of burying the loot.

‘Wot abaht these ’ere austridge feathers?’ inquired one of the men, holding up a bunch for inspection.

‘Share them out,’ replied Pengelly. ‘When we make port they’ll fetch a tidy price. They won’t keep here. Pile the earth up, men. It’s bound to sink a bit. Look alive. It’s not healthy to be hanging about ashore with this mist rising.’

While the new captain was superintending operations on the river bank, Barnard, who with two men had been detailed to keep an eye on the deposed skipper, came across to where Cain was lying on deck under the bridge:

‘I wouldn’t that this happened for worlds, sir,’ he remarked to his former chief. ‘I couldn’t warn you. They’d have let daylight into me if I had. And these two men — Davidge and Cross — they are proper jonnick. If we’ve the rope’s end of a chance to get you out of this mess, sir, we’ll do it.’

Cain smiled grimly. The effects of the chloroform, never very heavy, had worn off, but the blow with the belaying-pin had weakened him considerably.

‘I see they’ve looted the Bronx City,’ he remarked bitterly. ‘That’s the limit as far as they are concerned. Look here, Barnard. Do you think you three can get
me into a boat to-night and row down to the Bronx City? I’d give myself up if only to turn the tables on that double-faced Pengelly.’

The bo’sun shook his head.

‘Can’t be done, sir,’ he replied. ‘Ten to one Pengelly would search her, and where would we be then? ‘Sides, I’ve no liking to run the risk of shoving my head through a noose when there’s a chance of steering clear of it. Never fear, sir; the hands’ll be wanting you back in command afore long. Pengelly, he’s got no hold on them. ‘Sides, he’s no deep-sea navigator. He’s all right in home waters, I’ll allow, but here — ’

Mr. Barnard concluded his opinion with an expressive gesture.

‘And he knows little or nothing about submarine work,’ added Cain.

‘He thinks he does, sir,’ said the bo’sun. ‘To hear him talk about what he can do with the Alerte submerged, you’d thing he’d been at it nearly all his life.’

‘I wouldn’t care to trust him to take the Alerte down,’ declared Cain. ‘And I doubt whether there are others on board who would.’

‘Must be moving, sir,’ interrupted the bo’sun. ‘The boats are coming off from the beach. I’ll sound some of the hands. There ought to be enough of us to scupper that skunk Pengelly, but it’s no use trying to talk sense to them while they’re three sheets in the wind.’

As soon as the new pirate captain came over the side, he gave orders for the boats to be hoisted and
watches set for the night, explaining that the latter precaution was necessary owing to the possibility of the ship swinging on to the mud when the tide changed. He then had Cain taken below and placed in the compartment previously occupied by Jasper Chamfer. The ex-skipper’s bonds were removed, food and drink were placed in his cell, together with a mattress and bedding.

Pengelly was considerably anxious concerning his treatment of Cain. He feared him even though the late skipper was safely under lock and key. There was always a chance of the hands turning against him, Pengelly, and demanding that Cain should again assume command. While the deciding factor that prompted Pengelly to keep his captive on board was the fact that Cain alone knew how to control the Alerte when submerged.

At dawn the hands were turned out and piped to breakfast. Most of them had slept off the brutish effect of unlimited quantities of rum. One or two were in a happy state, others inclined to be quarrelsome and pugnacious. But on the whole they were in fair possession of their faculties and were only too ready to get under way.

As soon as the motors were started up and the anchor out, the Alerte was headed downstream, Pengelly being on the bridge and Marchant, the gunner, conning the ship from the bows as she threaded her way down the intricate and tortuous channel.
Presently Pengelly leant over the bridge-rails.

‘Mr. Barnard,’ he exclaimed, loud enough for the watch on deck to hear. ‘Bring up the prisoner, and place him under the poop in charge of a couple of hands. Take all precautions. I hold you responsible for his safe custody.’

Taking Davidge and Cross, the men who had signified their readiness to stand by the ex-captain, the bo’sun went below and unlocked the door of Cain’s cell.

‘My orders are to take you on deck, Cap’n Cain,’ he announced. ‘S’pose you don’t want to jump overboard?’

‘Not under present conditions,’ replied the pirate.

‘Nor to give any trouble?’

‘There’ll be enough before long, without my having to cause any,’ rejoined Cain grimly. ‘Why do you ask?’

‘Pengelly’s orders were that I’m responsible for you,’ replied Barnard. ‘I must lash your hands, sir. A mere matter of form. I won’t give your wrists a tight nip, and if anything happens as renders it necessary, sir, I’ll set you free in a brace o’ shakes.’

‘That’s all right, Barnard,’ said the ex-captain reassuringly. ‘I won’t kick: for the present I’ll knuckle under.’

Meekly he submitted to have his wrists secured behind his back, then preceded by Davidge and followed by Cross, with the bo’sun bringing up the rear, Cain made his way to the conning-tower hatchway.
Pengelly watched him furtively. Cain gave no glance in the direction of the bridge. Several of the men on deck stood to attention, a compliment that Pengelly did not fail to notice. None of the hands paid that mark of deference to him, he recalled.

At that moment the *Alerte* was rounding the last bend in the river between her and the spot where the *Bronx City* had been run aground.

Suddenly Marchant shouted:
‘She’s sheered off, by thunder!’

A few seconds later Pengelly had an uninterrupted view of the next reach. Only too true was the gunner’s announcement. Not only had the *Bronx City* got afloat; she was no longer in the river, nor in the spacious Bahia Arenas.

‘That’s kippered the contract,’ growled Marchant, who had abandoned his post forward and had gained the bridge. ‘We ought to have scuppered her. She’ll report us and there’ll be a swarm of light cruisers and destroyers after us in less than no time.’

‘She can’t use her wireless,’ said Pengelly.

‘Never said she could,’ retorted the gunner. ‘She’ll speak the first ship she meets and get her to use her wireless. There’ll be French cruisers waitin’ for us off the Senegal, an’ Spaniards up the coast — British destroyers, too, I guess. An’ we can’t bust across to South America — we ain’t got enough oil.’

‘What do you propose, then?’ asked Pengelly helplessly.

‘Propose?’ echoed the gunner contemptuously.
'Propose — ain’t you supposed to be the skipper? If you don’t know what’s to be done, who does? Cain, of course; you’d best ask him.’

The ex-captain on his way aft heard the dialogue. He shrugged his shoulders and looked meaningfully at the bo’sun.

‘Pengelly’ll part brass rags with everyone on board afore very long, sir,’ whispered Barnard.

The *Alerte* was now ploughing across the bay. The sandy island enclosing the mouth of the anchorage effectually concealed the open sea from sight, although in a short time the entrance would afford an almost interrupted view of the offing. Still, Pengelly gave no indication of the course he proposed to pursue.

Descending from the bridge, the gunner gathered several of the hands round him. Ignoring the new captain entirely, Marchant pointed out the additional risks they were running by reason of the escape of the *Bronx City*.

‘Cap’n Cain’s our man,’ declared one of the hands.

‘No, he isn’t,’ retorted the gunner. ‘He ought to be, I admit. That horse-marine on the bridge there ain’t good for nothin’. But if Cain gets the upper hand, then some of us are in for a rough time. No, our best plan is to go in chase of the *Bronx City* and overhaul her afore she gets a chance to speak another craft.’

‘And then — ?’ asked one of the men.

‘Then,’ continued the gunner, ‘We’ll nab her, take all necessary precautions with her crew, abandon the
Alerte and carry the Bronx City across to Brazil. There’s no need to bring her into port. We’ll scuttle her and take to the boats, pitch a yarn to the British Consul an’ get sent home as shipwrecked mariners. How’s that?’

The suggestion met with acclamation. Marchant reascended the bridge ladder.

‘This ain’t a one-man show, Mr. Pengelly,’ he said meaningly. ‘It’s the wish of the hands that we recapture the Bronx City afore she lets the cat out of the bag.’

‘Very good,’ agreed Pengelly.
DEAR BROADMAYNE,
I suppose by the time you receive this you will have had a hand in sending the Alerte to her long, last home. Really, I don’t envy your job, but it will be interesting to hear how it happened when you return home, which I suppose will be before very long.
We — old Primmer and I — had quite an exciting time at Mousehole. We found Porthoustoc’s swag, but hanged if the Customs and police didn’t butt in, and we spent a night in the cells at Penzance before the admiral at Devonport got us released! I’ll tell you all about it in due course.
I’ve received the insurance money for the poor old Ibex, and I’m in treaty with a fellow at Burnham for the purchase of a smart little motor-cruiser — paraffin engines this time, so perhaps you’ll find an opportunity and help me bring her round.

Cheerio, yours ever,

ROLLO VYSE.

Sub-Lieutenant Broadmayne smiled as he replaced this missive in his pocket. The Alerte affair had already seen Rollo twice under arrest. Perhaps old Vyse would have a third similar experience in connection with the
pirate. Hardly likely, though. The *Alerte* was finished and done with. His chum was wrong in his surmise. The unenviable job had been carried out without any direct action on the part of H.M.S. *Canvey*.

The decoy-ship was homeward bound. She had put into the Canaries to pick up her mails and had proceeded. Already the famous Peak of Teneriffe was dipping beneath the southern horizon. Broadmayne, leaning over the taffrail, was in a pensive mood as he watched the water froth in the ship’s wake.

Even as he looked, the ship began to circle to starboard. There was nothing very unusual about that. Possibly she was giving way to an approaching craft. But when the turning movement continued, the Sub began to show an interest in the matter. Still more did he — as did a hundred others — when the *Canvey*, having turned sixteen points, steadied on her helm and began to retrace her course southwards.

Leaving the deserted poop, Broadmayne went forward. Groups of curious ratings were discussing the seemingly unaccountable turn. Several of the officers off duty, who were smoking on deck after seven-bell tea, were also in a state of perplexity over the business.

It was not long before the secret was out and had spread the length and breadth of the ship.

A wireless message had just been received, stating that, since nothing had been reported of the S.S. *Bronx City* following her account of the destruction of the *Alerte*, the *Canvey* was to proceed in search of the
American vessel, keeping a sharp look-out on the coast as far south as the fifteenth parallel.

‘Rotten stunt,’ grumbled the engineer-lieutenant, who was eagerly looking forward to the Canvey’s return to Devonport — to an event that would result in, amongst other things, the hoisting of a garland between the ship’s masts. ‘We were sent out here to chase a pirate, not to act as nurse to a Yankee tramp.’

‘Well, why didn’t she show up at Teneriffe or Funchal?’ demanded Allerton. ‘Sides, something must have happened to her, or she’d have wirelessed again.’

‘Bows stove in by the collision,’ suggested the paymaster-lieutenant.

‘But she reported she was proceeding,’ rejoined the engineer officer. ‘Proceeding where? That’s what I want to know.’

‘You’ll probably find out, if we’re here long enough,’ said Broadmayne chaffingly ‘It’ll take six months or more to carry out orders. We can’t examine the coast in the dark. That means we’ll have to stand off every night and close the land at the same spot at daybreak. ‘Sides, there are hundreds of little harbours we’ll have to explore — ’

‘Oh, shut up, do!’ interrupted the exasperated engineer-lieutenant.

For three days and nights the Canvey ran south, speaking several vessels, none of which could give any information concerning the sought-for Bronx City.

During the morning of the fourth day, Broadmayne,
who was officer of the forenoon watch, received a report that a vessel’s smoke was to be seen on the port bow.

This was somewhat unusual, for off this part of the African coast shipping gave the land a wide berth on account of the dangerous and unlighted Lazarus Shoal. The Canvey was, in point of fact, standing in closer than prudence demanded, although in order to carry out her instructions to watch the coast in the event of the Bronx City having run aground, she had to run a certain amount of risk.

‘What do you make of her?’ asked Broadmayne of the yeoman of signals, as the stranger’s hull drew above the horizon.

‘Flying Yankee colours, sir,’ replied the petty officer, after a prolonged look through his telescope. ‘There’s a double-barrelled tally on her bows, though I can’t make it out yet. She ain’t ’arf ’opping it.’

A few minutes later, for the two vessels were approaching each other at an aggregate speed of twenty-eight knots, the yeoman of signals exclaimed:

‘Crikey, sir! She’s the Bronx City!’

Dispatching a messenger to inform the captain, Broadmayne levelled his binoculars upon the approaching vessel. As far as he could make out, there was nothing wrong with her outward appearance. Her bows were certainly not stove-in; which, considering she had claimed to have rammed and sunk the Alerte, was what the Sub had a right to expect. Her wireless aerials were in position.
Just as Lieutenant-Commander Raxworthy gained the bridge, a three-flag hoist rose to the foremost head of the *Bronx City*: INM (Chased by a privateer). Then, before the *Canvey* could display the answering pennant, the code flag over the letter E, signifying that the following words were in plain spelling, fluttered in the breeze.

‘ALE—’

There was no need to complete the name.

‘Sound off action stations!’ ordered the owner.

Raxworthy formed a shrewd idea of what had occurred, but he was too wary a skipper to leave much to chance. The approaching vessel bore the name *Bronx City*. It might or might not be her rightful tally. If, as might possibly be the case, the *Alerte* had captured the American vessel, it was quite likely that the pirate submarine had turned over her crew and armament to her prize. Or the *Bronx City* might be the *Alerte* disguised.

On the latter point Broadmayne was able to inform his skipper that such was not the case. The *Alerte*, however cleverly camouflaged, could not assume the length and lofty superstructure of the approaching craft.

In double-quick time the *Canvey* was cleared for action. The guns were unmasked and trained upon the *Bronx City*. ‘Present use’ ammunition was brought up on deck and placed beside the quick-firers, while the torpedo-tubes on the port side were charged with their deadly missiles, ready at the first sign of aggression to
deliver a mortal blow at the huge target presented by the stranger’s hull.

The *Bronx City* was still a mile off when a second vessel was sighted a good five miles astern of her. Although she, too, was evidently travelling fast, there was a noticeable absence of smoke from her funnel.

Borrowing the signalman’s telescope, Broadmayne had a good look at her. He was bound to admit that the second stranger resembled the pirate submarine. There were a few trifling alterations in her appearance since the Sub had last seen her.

‘She’s the *Alerte*, sir,’ he declared confidently.

Lieutenant-Commander Raxworthy was on the horns of a dilemma. Should the *Bronx City* prove to be manned by a piratical crew and he allowed her to go on her way while he headed off her supposed pursuer, the opportunity of laying the former vessel by the heels would be lost. On the other hand, if he stopped to examine the craft flying American colours, the presumed *Alerte* would seize the opportunity of turning tail and disappearing. Again, he was not justified in ordering a United States ship to heave to, for it might result in an unpleasant international incident between the Government of Great Britain and that sitting at Washington. Having been once tricked completely by the *Alerte*, he was doubly cautious lest there be a repetition of the ruse that had succeeded almost beyond belief.

At the captain’s orders, a signalman taking up a conspicuous position on the roof of the chart-house
semaphored to the *Bronx City*, suggesting that for her protection the American vessel should turn sixteen points to port and follow the *Canvey* at a distance of ten cables astern.

To this the *Bronx City* replied by the single word: ‘Sure.’

The two ships were now abeam of each other. The stranger in the offing had turned and was retracing her course — additional evidence that she was not an honest craft.

The lieutenant-commander of the *Canvey* immediately rang down for full speed. The chase — a stern one — had commenced.

‘*Bronx City* turning to port, sir,’ reported the officer of the watch.

‘Good!’ ejaculated the skipper. ‘We’ll drop her, of course, but it shows she’s jonnick. Ask her what she’s been doing, Mr. Broadmayne.’

The Sub told off a signalman to semaphore the *Bronx City*, which, having completed her turning movement, was dead in the *Canvey’s* wake. For nearly half an hour the exchange of messages was maintained at high pressure. Captain Adams told briefly all that was necessary — the capture of the *Bronx City* by the *Alerte*, and Cain’s considerate treatment; the detention in Bahia Arenas and the *Alerte’s* broken promise in plundering the ship.

‘Was Cain in command?’ inquired Broadmayne, through the medium of the hand-flags.

‘Guess not,’ replied the Yankee skipper. ‘A mutiny,
possibly. Pengelly was in command when we were ransacked.’

The Sub returned to the bridge and reported events. By this time the *Alerte* was less than three miles away, thanks to the superior speed of the *Canvey*; while, on the other hand, the *Bronx City*, unable to keep station, had dropped nearly that distance astern of the British decoy-ship.

Raxworthy could have sunk the pirate submarine by gunfire with the greatest ease, but he refrained. He wanted to head her into shallow water before delivering the *coup de grâce* — unless she surrendered first. He therefore ordered speed to be reduced to that of the chase, the guns to be secured, and piped all hands to dinner.

. . . . . . . .

Two bells in the afternoon watch found the relative positions of the *Canvey* and her chase unchanged. The *Bronx City*, in spite of the *Canvey*'s reduced speed, was still dropping astern.

Realising that no useful purpose would be served by the Yankee ship attempting to keep in company, the *Canvey* signalled for her to resume her former course, with the additional intimation that as the *Bronx City*'s wireless was disabled, the *Canvey* would report her position to Teneriffe station.

Almost immediately upon receipt of the signal, the *Bronx City* starboarded helm and dipped her ensign. Twenty minutes later she was hull down away northward.
The *Canvey* now increased speed. There was no need for disguise. Bravely her battle-ensigns streamed in the breeze, while her guns were again manned and trained as far ahead as possible, ready, if need be, to hurl their deadly and destructive missiles upon the already doomed pirate submarine.

It was now a foregone conclusion that the *Alerte* was doubling back to her former anchorage in Bahia Arenas. She could not submerge outside without going to the bottom, and since the depth without the bar is everywhere not less than sixty fathoms, such a manoeuvre would result in the submarine being crushed like an egg-shell under the terrific pressure of water. It was extremely doubtful whether she would fight. Her solitary six-inch gun would be hopelessly outmatched against the superior ordnance of her pursuer. Short of taking to the boats and scuttling the *Alerte*, the pirates had no alternative but to endeavour to reach the sandy bay and evade detection by submerging.

Raxworthy was playing his own game. Apart from destroying the *Alerte* by gunfire or torpedo, he could have headed her off-shore by reason of the *Canvey*’s superior speed and carried her in the good old-fashioned way by boarding. Such a measure, involving a certain risk of casualties amongst the *Canvey*’s ship’s company, would have appealed to most of the men; but the lieutenant-commander had other plans. He meant to compel the *Alerte* to surrender if it were possible. In any case, he wanted to take as many of the
pirates as possible prisoners. To slay ruthlessly was against his principles. Prisoners, even if they were pirates captured red-handed, were entitled to a fair trial, and in that event the onus of dealing with them was removed from Raxworthy’s shoulders.

At seven bells in the afternoon watch, the Canvey gained sufficiently to enable one of her guns to fire a few yards wide of the chase. Simultaneously, she hoisted a signal summoning the Alerte to surrender.

By the aid of glasses it was easy for the Canvey’s officers to see most of what was going on on the deck of the pirate submarine. Pengelly and the gunner could be discerned crouching on the bridge. On the poop were several of the crew clamouring and arguing. Some of them were evidently advocating taking to the boats. Most of them had brought their personal belongings on deck, so that it looked as if they had no intention of offering resistance.

At length the Alerte starboarded helm in order to take the deep and narrow passage over the bar. As she did so, Broadmayne noticed a tall burly figure ascend the bridge, grasp the cowering Pengelly and literally boot him down the ladder.

‘Now, we’ll have a run for our money, sir,’ remarked Broadmayne, to the lieutenant-commander. ‘Cain’s got his spoke in again!’
CHAPTER 23
CAIN RESUMES COMMAND

‘Up aloft, one of you!’ shouted Marchant. ‘See if the swine’s in sight.’

The Alerte was pitching as she faced the long Atlantic swell after crossing the bar in pursuit of the Bronx City. A few — a very few — of the crew were sober; the majority were befuddled in the transition stage between drunkenness and sobriety; while four or five, helplessly intoxicated, lay rolling in the scuppers.

One of the hands, pot-valiant, made an attempt to go aloft. Before he had ascended half a dozen ratlins he slipped. Luckily for him, the Alerte was at the limit of her roll. Instead of dropping into the sea he slithered helplessly round the after-shroud and subsided heavily upon the gunner. The pair fell in a heap on deck. The drunken seaman, none the worse for his involuntary descent, sat up and looked around as if seeking applause. Marchant staggered to his feet, his right shoulder dislocated.

Pengelly, from the bridge, saw the incident. It cheered him considerably, for with Marchant rendered hors de combat he was able to reassert his lax authority on the undisciplined crew.

A seaman, less drunk than his predecessor, went aloft. Before he reached the cross-trees he shouted,
‘There she lies — a point on our port bow.’

‘Sure she’s the Bronx City?’ inquired Pengelly anxiously.

‘Do you call me a liar?’ shouted the look-out man in reply. ‘If I says she’s the Bronx City, then she is. That’s all about it.’

With the oil-engines running ‘all out,’ the Alerte stood in pursuit of the fugitive. A couple of hours enabled her to gain on the Bronx City to such an extent that the latter was barely six miles ahead. At that rate, another hour and a half would enable the pirate submarine to overhaul her prey.

Although Pengelly had no liking for Marchant, he was forced to admit that the gunner’s proposal to abandon the Alerte and take the Bronx City over to some obscure South American port was a sound one. The question of fuel largely influenced his decision. The Alerte’s tanks were seriously depleted; the Bronx City’s coal bunkers were three-quarters full. It was on that account that Pengelly refrained from opening fire upon the Yankee vessel, otherwise he could have ended the chase half an hour ago.

At intervals, Pengelly raised his binoculars and watched the chase. It was on one of these occasions that he noticed a faint blur of smoke on the horizon at less than a degree to the left of the Bronx City.

Cursing under his breath, the pirate called to the gunner to come on the bridge. Marchant, his right shoulder swathed in bandages, complied, grumbling and wincing as every step shot a sharp pain through
the injured part.

‘There’s another vessel,’ announced Pengelly. ‘She’s coming this way, I think. What’s to be done?’

‘Done?’ repeated the gunner. ‘Why, collar the pair of ’em. We’ll make a fine haul, I’ll swear.’

‘But if she’s a warship?’ objected the other.

‘Is it likely?’ rejoined Marchant. ‘What would a warship be doing on this part of the coast? Seein’ as Cain reported us sunk — say what you like, that chap’s got a head on ’im — there’ll be none lookin’ for us. Where’s that glass of yours?’

Steadying the telescope on the bridge-rail, the gunner, groaning with the effort, bent his head and applied his eye to the instrument.

‘Tramp of sorts,’ he announced. ‘She’s flying no colours. Odds are the Bronx City’ll tip her the wink. That being so, we’ll have to send her to the bottom. Yes, hang me, if she ain’t closing.’

For the next minute or so the gunner kept his eye glued to the telescope. Suddenly he dropped the glass and sprang to his feet.

‘She’s a British cruiser, blast her!’ he shouted. ‘Put about and leg it, Pengelly. If she spots us, it’s all UP!’

Without waiting for Pengelly to give the order, the quartermaster put the wheel hard down. Round swept the Alerte, listing heavily to port as she swung to starboard.

The hands on deck, surprised by the sudden change of course, were clamouring to know why the pursuit had been abandoned.
‘Why?’ shouted the gunner. ‘‘Cause we’re being chased. No blessed Spanish destroyer this time, but a British cruiser. We’ll have to be mighty smart to dodge the white ensign.’

‘She’s spotted us!’ exclaimed Pengelly, in a high-pitched voice. ‘The Bronx City is slewing round, too. Confound Cain! If he’d crippled the Bronx City instead of just running her gently on the mud, there’d have been none of this business.’

‘We’ll be glad to have Cain on board before long,’ said the bo’sun, who had joined Pengelly and the gunner on the bridge. ‘I reckon our only chance is to submerge. Without Cain, how’s it to be done? You couldn’t take her down, nor can I.’

‘Soundings are too deep for diving in any case,’ declared Pengelly. ‘Seems to me we’re holding her, even if we aren’t gaining. What’s the time?’

‘Close on one bell,’ replied the bo’sun.

‘Time to make Bahia Arenas well before dark then,’ continued Pengelly. ‘See here, Mr. Barnard, go aft and sound that swine Cain. Don’t tell him I sent you, but ask him if he’ll take charge of the ship for submerging.’

The bo’sun departed on his errand. Presently he returned.

‘Cap’n Cain says he’ll consider the matter if you go and ask him yourself,’ he announced.

‘Then you’d better go,’ added Marchant.

‘Not I,’ said Pengelly.
While the *Alerte* held her own, Pengelly adhered to his resolution not to eat humble pie. But when, in the course of the afternoon, the pursuing vessel began to gain rapidly, he yielded to the importunities of the gunner, the bo’sun, and the majority of the crew.

‘Look here, Trevorrick,’ he began, addressing his former partner and skipper by the name by which he was known at Polkyl Creek; ‘s’pose we let bygones be bygones? Will you take charge of the ship and submerge her when we make Bahia Arenas?’

Cain looked him straight in the face. Pengelly could not bear the other’s gaze. Unsteadily he averted his eyes.

‘I’ll submerge when I’m captain of the *Alerte* again, not before,’ replied Cain.

‘Three cheers for Cap’n Cain!’ shouted one of the hands, several of whom had followed the deputation aft.

At that moment a plugged shell shrieked past the pirate submarine, throwing up a huge column of spray as it ricocheted to strike the surface of the water a good five hundred yards ahead of the ship.

Pengelly made no protest to the demonstration in favour of the ex-captain. Followed by Marchant he returned to the bridge.

‘Carry on, sir!’ shouted half a dozen of the pirates.

Someone cast off the lashings that secured Cain’s wrists. The bo’sun slipped an automatic into his hand. With a grim smile, Cain went forward and ascended the bridge ladder.
‘Now then!’ he exclaimed, sternly addressing the trembling Pengelly. ‘Who’s skipper now!’

‘You are,’ admitted the thoroughly scared man. ‘For heaven’s sake, don’t shoot!’

‘Good lead is too precious to waste on rats,’ retorted Cain, thrusting the automatic into his pocket. ‘Get down, you treacherous swab!’

Pengelly began to descend the bridge-ladder, his progress materially assisted by the application of the reinstated captain’s boot. The crew, notwithstanding their imminent peril, applauded lustily.

‘Avast there!’ shouted Captain Cain. ‘Shout when you’re out of the wood — not before. Strike and secure masts! Look lively, there!’

While most of the crew were engaged upon this task, Cain beckoned to the bo’sun.

‘Look here, Barnard!’ he exclaimed in a low voice; ‘remove the rapid-flooding valves from all the boats. Take one below; heave the others overboard.’

This the bo’sun did, unshipping a hinged plate that when secured by two butterfly nuts rendered each boat watertight. When open, the valves allowed the boats to take in water rapidly, so that their natural buoyancy was destroyed and did not hinder the submergence of the submarine. The solitary valve that was not thrown overboard was placed below, under the conning-tower hatchway ladder.

‘Well done, Mr. Barnard!’ said Cain approvingly. ‘Now, tell Cross and Davidge to go below and secure both the for’ard and aft hatches on the inside. Also tell
Cross to inform the engine-room staff from me that as soon as I ring down for stop they are to come on deck through the conning-tower hatchway with all possible speed. Is that clear?

The bo’sun repeated his instructions and went off to see that they were carried out. By the time he returned the crew had lowered and secured the masts and funnel for diving and were standing by, anxiously dividing their attention between the pursuing Canvey and their reinstated skipper’s next order.

‘All hands fall in in the waist!’ shouted Cain.

The deck hands trooped to the place indicated, with the exception of Davidge and Cross, who, acting under orders, were standing by the valve actuating gear of the ballast tanks.

Deliberately, Cain thrust the telegraph indicators to stop, gave one quick glance at the vessel in pursuit and descended from the bridge.

By this time the Alerte was over the bar and about half a mile from the land-locked shore. The Canvey, none too sure of the entrance, had slowed down, the leadsman sounding as she cautiously smelt her way in.

As soon as the men whose duty lay in the engine-room came on deck, Cain made a slight imperceptible movement with his hand. Unconcernedly, the bo’sun stepped to the wake of the conning-tower and took three steps down the ladder. There he waited.

‘Now, you treacherous, mutineering swine!’ thundered Cain. ‘I’ll give you one minute to get your life-
belts. You’re to choose between being eaten by sharks or hanging by your necks in a British prison.’

Before the astounded men could realise the significance of their captain’s words, Cain made for the only open hatchway. There he stopped, his eyes roving whimsically over the dumbfounded men, a supercilious smile lurking in his heavy bulldog features.

Marchant fumbled for his automatic. But for his injured shoulder he might have achieved his object. The pistol cracked, the bullet mushrooming on the armour-plated conning-tower.

‘Forty-five seconds more!’ announced Cain, in cold, level tones.

The next instant Captain Cain disappeared from view. The conning-tower hatch descended with a metallic clang.

With the closing of the last means of entering the hull of the submarine the spell was broken. The crew, realising the fate that awaited them, were seized with panic. Some began to struggle into their cork life-belts, others made a mad rush for the davit-boats, to find to their consternation that they were no longer capable of floating.

A shell, evidently of light calibre, struck the *Alerte* a few feet abaft the bows, demolishing the dummy forecastle like a pack of cards. It was fortunate for the men that they were either in the waist or on the poop, for no one was hit; but the exploding missile warned them that their pursuer was getting to work in earnest.
‘Lower that cursed rag!’ shrieked Pengelly, pointing to the skull and cross-bones which, on the masts being lowered, the gunner in reckless bravado had hoisted at the end of a boathook. ‘Has anybody got anything that’ll do for a white flag? No? Then, for heaven’s sake, some of you in the poop hold your hands up, or she’ll blow us to bits.’

Several of the hands did so, while the signalman, clambering on the bridge, frantically semaphored that the ship had surrendered.

Even as the message was being signalled, the _Alerte_ began to settle. In less than half a minute she disappeared beneath the surface, leaving the agitated water of the Bahia Arenas dotted with the heads of her mutinous crew.

The pirate submarine _Alerte_ had made her final plunge.
‘By the mark seven — less a quarter — by the deep six!’ chanted the leadsman as the Canvey approached the bar.

‘Starboard! Meet her at that!’ ordered Raxworthy, telegraphing for speed to be still further reduced. ‘Any signs of armed resistance?’

‘No, sir,’ replied Broadmayne; for now that the Alerte had swung through eight points, her quick-firer could be seen from the bridge of the Canvey. ‘The poor bounders have got the wind up badly,’ he added.

‘They’ll get it worse, if they don’t chuck up the sponge,’ rejoined the lieutenant-commander. ‘By Jove! If they don’t strike that Jolly Roger there’ll be trouble. For’ard starboard gun, there! One round at the enemy’s bows!’

The shell, a seven-pounder, shrieked as it sped on its errand of destruction. A flash, a cloud of black smoke and a shower of pieces of metal announced that the missile had accomplished its work. Practically the whole of the forward superstructure of the pirate submarine had vanished.

‘Black flag’s struck, sir!’ announced the gunnery-lieutenant.

‘They’re doing the arms up stunt,’ supplemented
another of the group of officers on the *Canvey*'s bridge.

The *Alerte* was losing way rapidly. A solitary figure appeared on the hitherto deserted bridge.

‘We — surrender,’ came the semaphored message.

‘Wise men,’ commented Raxworthy, as he faced aft to order away the boats containing the prize-crew.

‘She’s submerging, sir!’ exclaimed Broadmayne.

The lieutenant-commander turned abruptly. He was about to order every gun able to bear upon the pirate submarine to open fire, when he observed that men were leaping overboard in a state of uncontrollable panic. That altered matters. Had the crew of the *Alerte* been at diving stations, he would not have hesitated to hasten her departure by means of half a dozen high-explosive shells. The fact that the pirates were swimming for dear life in a shark-infested sea, compelled him to stay his hand.

‘Away lifeboat’s crews!’

To the shrill trill of the bo’sun’s mate’s whistle the bluejackets rushed to man the boats. The excitement of the chase had vanished; in its place was the whole-hearted eagerness to save life.

The *Alerte* disappeared with very little noise or commotion. Although the water was considerably disturbed, there was hardly any suction. The swimmers, although impeded by their cumbersome cork life-belts, had little difficulty in getting clear of her as she submerged.

‘What’s young Maynebrace doing?’ asked the lieutenant-commander as the loud report of a revolver
rang out, followed by three shots in rapid succession.

Broadmayne, also attracted by the reports, saw the midshipman in charge of the second cutter standing up in the stern sheets and firing apparently at some of the swimmers. Apparently several of the pirates thought that they were about to be shot as they swam, for they turned and began to strike out away from the rescuing boats.

There was a wild, almost unearthly shriek. One of the wretched men threw up his arms and disappeared. A patch of blood appeared on the surface over the spot where he had vanished. Again Midshipman Mayne-brace fired, his objective being the head of an enormous shark, just as the monster turned on its back to seize another victim.

Right amidst the straggling crowd of swimmers dashed the two boats, their crews engaged between dealing spanking blows with the blades of their oars upon the water, and hauling the terrified pirates over the gunwales.

Cain had revenged himself upon his mutinous crew. Only fifteen escaped the jaws of the ferocious tigers of the deep, and these were almost mad with the horror of the scene.

Among those who fell victims to the sharks was Marchant the gunner. Pengelly, wearing only a shirt and trousers, was one of the survivors. His hair had turned white during his desperate swim.

The late second in command of the Alerte hardly hoped to pass himself off as one of the ratings of the
pirate submarine. He realised that he was far from being popular with the crew. Sooner or later they would give him away. But the attempt was worth trying.

As he came over the side of the Canvey he was interrogated by a stern-faced lieutenant, who demanded his name and rating.

‘Smith, Tom — deck-hand,’ he replied.

The Canvey’s officer noted the particulars without comment. Pengelly went forward under arrest, ignorant of the fact that Sub-Lieutenant Gerald Broadmayne was watching him from the bridge.

‘There’s no sign of Cain, sir,’ remarked the Sub to the owner. ‘That fellow just gone forward is Pengelly. Marchant the gunner and Barnard the bo’sun don’t appear to be present.’

‘Hang it all!’ ejaculated Raxworthy, ‘you don’t suggest that three of the pirate officers, including the ringleader, are still on board the submarine? Pass the word to Mr. Hamley to send Pengelly to the quarter-deck under an armed guard.’

The lieutenant on the gangway received the message. Consulting the list he had made, he found that no one answering to that name had been received on board. He sent a message to that effect to the captain.

After considerable delay, Pengelly was found and brought aft. The moment he saw Broadmayne standing behind the lieutenant-commander, he knew that the game was up as far as concealing his
identity was concerned.

‘Where’s Cain?’ demanded Raxworthy, without any preliminaries.

Pengelly explained what had occurred, spinning an elaborate yarn that he had done his utmost to persuade Captain Cain to surrender, and trying to excuse himself for having ever set foot on board the *Alerte*.

The lieutenant-commander brought him up with a round turn.

‘Enough of that!’ he said sternly. ‘Where is the gunner of the *Alerte*?’

Pengelly shook his head. That was a question that he could not answer. He was still unaware of the fate of Mr. Marchant.

‘And the bo’sun — Barnard, I believe, is his name?’ continued Raxworthy.

Again Pengelly let his tongue run riot, dwelling on Barnard’s action in siding with Cain and going below with him.

‘For what reason?’ asked the lieutenant-commander.

‘Cain will probably try to bring the *Alerte* to the surface when he thinks the coast is clear,’ replied Pengelly readily enough.

‘Two men cannot do that,’ interrupted Raxworthy.

‘There may be more,’ rejoined the pirate. ‘I remember two hands at least going below. I did not see them come on deck again. Please remember, sir, I’ve done my best to answer your questions. I deeply regret — ’

289
‘Remove the prisoner,’ said Raxworthy sternly.

He waited until Pengelly had been taken forward, then he turned to Broadmayne.

‘I suppose you are quite certain that the Alerte hasn’t electrical propelling machinery?’ he asked.

‘There was none when I was on board, sir,’ replied the Sub.

‘I don’t suppose four men will be able to disconnect the clutches and turn the propellers sufficiently to make the submarine move,’ remarked Raxworthy, half-seriously, half-jokingly. ‘She’s there right enough. Well, I’ve given Cain a fair chance; he wouldn’t accept it. What happens now is his funeral, not mine.’

Raxworthy returned to the bridge. It was now about an hour before sunset. The sheltered bay was as smooth as a millpond. There was nothing to indicate that the elusive pirate submarine lay ten fathoms deep except a small mark-buoy that had been placed over the spot where the Alerte had disappeared.

His orders were plain enough — to capture or destroy. He had done his best to carry out the first part of his instructions. Cain had foiled him in that direction by submerging. Short of powerful salvage craft and plant there was no means of bringing the submarine to the surface and then effecting her capture. The Canvey could wireless to Gibraltar dockyard for the necessary gear, but days — weeks perhaps — would elapse before the cumbersome salvage lighters could be towed to Bahia Arenas. There was no help for it but to act upon the second
alternative — to destroy.

‘There’s one consolation,’ soliloquised the lieutenant-commander, ‘the poor brutes won’t know much about it. It’s a quick end.’

Slowly the Canvey turned until her bows pointed nearly end-on to the mark-buoy. On the starboard side of the poop was a squat-looking object somewhat resembling the old time siege mortar, its wide muzzle grinning upwards at an elevation of forty-five degrees. The weapon — a depth-charge projector — was loaded with a missile set to explode at sixty feet beneath the surface.

‘All ready, Mr. Garnett?’ sang out the lieutenant-commander to the gunner who was in charge of the apparatus.

‘Ay, ay, sir!’

The engine-room telegraph bell clanged. Almost immediately the Canvey increased speed. The mark-buoy bore abeam, a cable’s length to starboard.

Crash! went the propelling charge.

Like a gigantic salmon-tin, the missile described its parabolic flight — so slowly that observers on the bridge could see the huge canister turning over and over in mid-air.

It struck the water with a resounding thud, flinging up a shower of spray. Already the Canvey under fifteen degrees of starboard helm was rapidly increasing her distance from the mark-buoy.

Slowly the intervening seconds passed; so slowly that Broadmayne began to think the fuse of the depth-
charge had proved defective.

Then came a truly stupendous roar. A slender column of water was hurled quite two hundred feet in the air. The hull of the Canvey shook under the terrific blast of displaced air. The tranquil waters of the bay were transformed into a mass of agitated waves.

The column of upheaved water fell with a loud hissing noise. For nearly half a minute the turmoil continued. Then, in the midst of the maelstrom, appeared a patch of calm, iridescent oil spreading steadily in all directions, while multitudes of fish, killed or stunned by the detonation, floated belly-upwards upon the surface.

‘Away, diving-party,’ ordered Raxworthy.

‘With your permission, sir, I would like to accompany the divers, sir,’ asked Broadmayne.

‘Are you qualified?’

‘Yes, sir,’ replied the Sub. ‘I did a diving-course at Whaley when I paid off from the Arcturus, and I’ve been down to fourteen fathoms.’

‘Very good,’ was the rejoinder.

Broadmayne saluted and went off to make the necessary preparations.

The Canvey was equipped with two types of diving dresses, both designed and made by the firm of Siebe, Gorman & Co. One was of the common variety, in which the air is pumped through a pipe from a pump above the surface of the sea. The other was of the self-contained type; the air supply, judiciously combined with oxygen, is contained in cylinders strapped to the
back of the diver. Thus he is independent of air-tubes, life-lines and other contrivances likely to impede his movements.

The Sub chose the latter type of dress. The depth in which the *Alerte* had sunk was between fifty and sixty feet at low water, the maximum distance below the surface at which the self-contained diving-suit can be used without undue risk.

One of the seaman-divers was already being garbed in a similar suit by his attendants; the other man was preparing to don a dress with life-line and air-tube, the helmet being provided with a telephone by means of which he could engage in conversation with the above-water party in the boat.

The descent was to be made as speedily as possible before more sharks appeared upon the scene of the wreck to feast on the bodies of their less fortunate kind who had been killed by the explosion. Nevertheless, Broadmayne and his companions were warned to keep a sharp look-out while under the surface. As a rule, a shark will hesitate to attack a diver, but there have been instances in which a terrible submarine struggle has taken place between a diver and the tigers of the deep.

The diving-boats pushed off and anchored fore and aft as close as desirable to the wreck. The diver with the air-tube type of dress was the first to descend, sliding at a steady pace down the shot-ropes.

A tug on the life-line gave the attendants warning that the man had reached the bottom.
‘Ready, sir?’ asked a petty officer.
‘Right,’ replied Broadmayne.
The glass plate in the front of his helmet was screwed home. He was now cut off from the outside world as far as the air supply was concerned, and the sensation was not a pleasant one.
Unlike the first man to descend, whose helmet had been closed only when he was waist-deep in water, the Sub had to be finally equipped while in the boat. Assisted by the attendants — for his movements were hampered by the weight of his helmet, chemical-containers, chest and back weights, and leaden-soled boots, the whole amounting to 190 lb. — Broadmayne scrambled awkwardly and ponderously over the gunwale, grasped the shot-line used by his predecessor and began the descent.
In spite of the weight of the dress in air, it now had so little weight in water that the Sub had no difficulty in retarding the downward movement. Even the inconvenience caused by the unaccustomed air supply passed away after a few seconds.
Presently his leaden-soled feet touched the bed of the Bahia Arenas so lightly that he could hardly credit that he was standing on a floor of hard sand. So transparent was the water that he had no difficulty in seeing objects five or six yards off, all grotesquely distorted and exaggerated.
Grasping the second of the three distance lines, the Sub commenced his submarine walk, following the cord that the first diver had paid out. Evidently the
man had not erred in his sense of direction, for the line lay motionless on the sandy floor. All around were pieces of jagged steel-plating, copper pipes and other debris from the ill-fated *Alerte*.

Presently an enormous dark grey mass loomed up in front. It was the hull of the pirate submarine. The seaman-diver, with bubbles rising from his helmet, was standing by. His job lay outside the hull; Broadmayne’s and that of the third diver, inside.

In less than two minutes the third member of the party appeared. The first man, turning to reassure himself that his air-tube and life-line were clear of the jagged plates, worked round towards the stern. It was here that the full force of the powerful depth-charge had expended itself. Thirty feet or more of the after-portion of the submarine had been completely blown apart, together with most of the propelling machinery. There was not the slightest doubt about the destruction of the after-part of the submarine. It remained to be seen whether the water-tight bulkhead separating the motor-room from the ’midship and fore compartment had withstood the strain.

Signing to his similarly-equipped companion to follow him, Broadmayne clambered up the sloping side of the considerably-listing vessel. The ease with which he performed this feat rather surprised him.

Once again the Sub trod the deck — or, rather, what remained of the deck of the *Alerte*. The bridge had disappeared and the whole of the bulwarks and deck aft, leaving bare a full fifty feet of the massively-built
submarine hull to where it terminated abruptly in a jagged edge of twisted steel. Most of the raised forecastle had been blown away by shell-fire before the Alerte submerged, but between the rise of the forecastle and the conning-tower, which was practically intact, the false deck was still in position.

Making his way to the forehatch — it was originally the torpedo-hatch — Broadmayne tried to open it. Being secured from below, the metal cover resisted his efforts. Foiled in that direction, the Sub retraced his steps to the conning-tower hatchway. As he did so, a dark object above the rail attracted his attention. It was Cain’s ensign — the skull and cross-bones — still lashed to a boathook. When the Alerte submerged, the natural tendency of the ash stave was to float, but the metal hook engaging in one of the shrouds of the housed foremast had held it down. Even the explosion of the depth-charge had failed to dislodge it.

Drawing his knife, Broadmayne cut the emblem of piracy adrift and secured it to his belt. Then he resumed his investigations.

The conning-tower hatch was also secured and clipped from the inside. Was it possible, he wondered, that Cain and his companions were still alive in the apparently intact and air-tight for’ard compartment of the hull?

Going aft, the Sub lowered himself cautiously over the riven edge of the hull-plating, lest a sharp projection should penetrate his inflated dress. Then, signing to his fellow-diver to remain, he switched on
his submarine electric lamp and crept forward inside the hull.

The first twenty feet or so was greatly encumbered with wreckage, but on passing through the transverse bulkhead, the watertight door of which had been blown inwards, Broadmayne found that there was little damage done to the ‘midships section.

As a matter of precaution and to save negotiating the debris-strewn motor-room again, the Sub unclipped and threw open the conning-tower hatch. Then proceeding forward he found that the door between the amidships section and the bow compartment was wide open. It swung freely on its hinges, although the straining the hull had received made it impossible for the usually close-fitting door to close.

In the bow compartment, Broadmayne searched diligently for the bodies of Cain and his companions, but without success. Then he came to the door of the air-lock, by which a man in a diving suit could leave the submarine when the vessel was lying on the bottom. The door was shut. Usually six diving suits and twenty-four life-saving helmets were ranged along the bulkhead. The latter were there, jammed against the curved roof under the deck, but four of the self-contained diving-dresses were absent.

Prising back the locking-gear of the door of the air-lock the Sub entered the compartment. It was, as he expected, empty, but the hinged flap on the outside hull-plating was open.

Captain Cain had made a bid for life and freedom.
Whether he had succeeded or had been caught by the explosion before he had got well clear of the ship remains an unsolved problem.

There was no need for further investigation. Broadmayne returned to his companion by means of the conning-tower hatchway. Together they dropped over the side and found the other diver waiting by the distance cords.

In single file, the man with the air-tube leading as the attendants in the boat slowly heaved in his air-tube and life-line, the three made their way to the shot-rope.

Then came the tedious ascent. To go up quickly and without a pause was not to be thought of. The great risk of being killed by excessive blood-pressure on the brain had to be guarded against. Slowly Broadmayne was hoisted, kept hanging for several minutes and then hoisted a few feet more, until at length he felt himself being grasped under the arms and assisted into the boat. Then his helmet glass removed, he sat and gasped, gratefully inhaling copious draughts of fresh air.

As soon as the other divers were in the boat the anchors were weighed and a course shaped for the Canvey, which was steaming slowly in wide circles round the scene of the wreck.

‘Satisfactory job?’ inquired Raxworthy laconically.

‘After-part blown clean away, sir,’ replied Broadmayne. ‘All the other compartments are full of water.’

‘Any signs of bodies?’
'No, sir.'
'Did you see any?' inquired the lieutenant-commander, turning to the seamen-divers.
'No, sir,' answered the man who used the air-tube pattern dress. 'I went right round the wreck on the outside — starboard side first and then port to the full extent of my life-line. No doubt, sir, the men in her were blown to bits. There was a plate torn right out close to her bows, I noticed. That shows how strong the force of the explosion was.'
Raxworthy nodded.
'Then there's no possible doubt about it,' he remarked to the officers standing by. 'Well, our work's done. The *Alerte*'s destroyed.' He paused and glanced over the side across the tranquil waters of the bay. 'I'm rather sorry for that chap Cain,' he continued. 'He evidently was a bit of a sport. I'd like to have met him.'
Before sunset, H.M.S. *Canvey* was steaming north, homeward bound.

Pengelly was found guilty and sentenced to a long term of penal servitude. The surviving members of the *Alerte*'s company received lighter sentences, but of sufficient severity to deter others who might wish to emulate the misdeeds of the captain and crew of the pirate submarine.
Gerald Broadmayne, lately promoted to lieutenant in consideration of his services in the operations against the *Alerte*, had to give evidence at the trial. But there were two points upon which he was silent:
Cain’s real name and former rank in the Royal Navy was one; the other was the incident of the air-lock.

Often Broadmayne thought of that air-lock, especially when he gazed at the skull and cross-bones bedecked relic of the *Alerte*. It was to him a fascinating and yet unsolved mystery. Did Cain succeed in his desperate effort to escape? Or did the bed of the land-locked Bahia Arenas hold the secret of the fate of the captain of the pirate submarine until the sea gives up its dead?