

remarked Tony disgustedly. "Fancy a hospital ship with an escort — and being obliged to douse her lights at night. Makes you see red to think of it. There she goes, Rodman," he added, as "one bell" sounded. "Time you turned in."

"So I shall, soon. But somehow I don't feel like it to-night."

"You've got torpedoes on the brain," laughed the other. "A good eight hours' spell in your bunk will clear that away. Sleep is what you want."

"Sleep is a funny bird to catch at times. But, anyhow, I'll try." And with that Rodman stepped down from the bridge, leaving his junior in command.

A feeling of uneasiness made Rodman disinclined to go below, tired though he was. For some minutes he stood, his eyes searching the calm water for any sign of the lurking danger, which he knew could not be far away. The sun was setting redly behind them, and the slight evening breeze scarcely ruffled the surface of the water.

Still lingering, he saw the watch come tumbling out of the fo'castle, and group themselves round the cook's galley, squabbling over an old newspaper one of them had abstracted from the chart-room.

He argued with himself as to the absurdity of giving way to fancies, and had turned his face towards his cabin when a yell from Tony brought him round instantly.

"The fiends are at it again. Here she comes!"

Rodman sprang on to the bridge, and followed the line of Tony's pointing hand.

A little spurt of foam had started, about two miles distant, and was travelling towards them.

Jim dashed amidships, pulled the cord of the steam-whistle, which shrieked out a warning blast to the escort, steaming around astern of the convoy.

"A torpedo!" he shouted to the man at the wheel. "Hold at that, though. She'll pass ahead of us."

"Ahead of us!"

When he uttered the words, it was with a feeling of thankfulness that the deadly tube, now racing towards them, would miss its mark. But the next moment he

glanced over the starboard side, saw the great hull of the hospital ship, and realised the real intent of the enemy.

In such a crisis the mind works at lightning speed. The horrible nature of the impending tragedy flashed upon him.

The great liner was doomed, unless she acted instantly upon his warning. It would be impossible to rescue half the stricken men aboard her, helpless and broken in the war. In his mind's eye he saw the boat, like some huge sea monster, making her last dive, carrying with her, to the depths, hundreds of the wounded men.

Could he avert the horror? The next instant he had seen the way.

"Full steam ahead!" he yelled down the engine-room tube, and then, snatching the wheel from the hands of the astonished seaman, he began his race with the silent terror that was breaking the surface of the water.

"You're mad, Rodman!" shouted Tony's voice in his ear. "Full steam ahead! Why, you're barging slap into the beastly thing."

"That's exactly what I mean to do," growled Jim, his eyes fixed on the advancing ripples.

"But—man, you're clean crazy!" cried Tony, appalled at the words.

"Maybe I am," was the grim response. "But look at that," and he jerked his head towards the hospital ship. "There are two thousand sick and wounded aboard her, and twenty of us. That infernal thing is going to sink one lot or the other. It's them or us—and, please God, it's going to be us."

Tony glanced at the ship, and then caught his breath.

"You're right, Roddy," he gasped. "It's we that are for it."

"Then cut off and fetch 'em all on deck," snapped Rodman. "Another minute'll see it through, and it'll be a nasty jar when it comes."

The second mate hurried away, and Jim bent himself to the strangest task he had ever faced. He was racing death—not to escape it, but to meet it.

There was the chance that the liner

a horse. Under his breath he was muttering, "Pile it on! Pile it on! Let her rip! Let her rip—or she'll never do it," all the while measuring the decreasing distance between his boat and the object of his hate.

It half maddened him to feel that he was helpless; that he could do nothing but hold the *Marlan* to her course, and that, should he fail, all those precious lives would pay the penalty.

Again he measured his progress. Although he had crept past the bridge of the big ship, she could still be struck in a vital part. Nothing could save her, except the *Marlan*, which now seemed to move like a barge.

But she would do it. She must do it. Rodman marked the spot where the torpedo would cross his line, judged the distance, and knew it would be a near thing.

By this time he was oblivious of the danger to his own boat. The hospital ship was a helpless victim marked down for destruction, the *Marlan* her rescuer; and Jim drove his boat onward, like some St. George, trying to destroy the Dragon, and without thought for his own safety.

In a few brief seconds fate would decide the issue.

So close was the torpedo that he could see the blades of the propeller whipping the water. It seemed to increase its pace as it approached, and a sick feeling of despair seized him.

Dimly he heard the excited voices of the crew. Then came silence, as each man held his breath in dread suspense.

It was now a question of yards. The snake-like terror, although this might have been his excited fancy, seemed to hesitate as though the *Marlan* had attracted it, and turn towards her. Then it crept out of sight under the bows. A wild yell came from somewhere beside him; the boat quivered slightly, and then came a rending, shattering explosion; a sheet of flame leapt above the rail, the wheel was torn from Rodman's hands, and he found himself lying on his back half stunned, but filled with a strange sense of victory.

And as he staggered to his feet he heard Tony shouting, "Great Scot! I've forgotten the 'Old Man.'"

Ten minutes later every member of the *Marlan's* crew had been taken from the two boats, and had grouped themselves on the deck of a destroyer.

As the last man climbed over the side, the commander stepped briskly towards the captain of the *Marlan*, who was gazing moodily at the spot where his ship had sunk to her last home.

"I'm told, sir, that you put your boat in front of the torpedo to save the hospital ship. Although what the 'look-out' was doing I can't imagine," he added hotly. "The fools were asleep, or the steering-gear jammed. I can think of no other reason."

"I knew nothing about it, sir, until I found myself flat on my cabin floor," the "Old Man" drily answered. "Mr. Rodman, my first mate, was in charge. He might tell you."

"Is that so?" asked the officer, turning to Jim, who had been trying to make himself invisible.

"Well, sir, it—it seemed the only way out of it," stammered the first mate.

"There was another way. And hundreds of lives would have been lost had you taken it. You did a fine thing, Mr. Rodman, and I'd be proud to shake hands with you."

A week later the first mate of the late s.s. *Marlan* was standing in the sitting-room of his dingy lodgings in Liverpool.

He held in his hand a letter from his wounded brother. It was written from a London hospital, and spoke of the patient's voyage from Alexandria to England.

He came upon a passage that filled him with amazement.

"We have been told, since we came here, that a 'tin fish' tried to sink us in the Channel; and that, but for a little ship that shot full steam ahead, and took the torpedo in our place, a whole crowd would have gone to Davy Jones's locker. Personally, I hadn't a dog's chance, with my crooked leg. I should like to meet the chap who risked all that for us. He must be made of the right stuff."

A lump came into Jim's throat.

"And to think I was worrying over that rotten money," he said musingly.